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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLEIN, Kevin E., Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	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, Hon.	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, Hon.	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>	Morden-Winkler	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 20, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, Jets fans. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I would like to table the revised Estimates sequence, for today only.

Madam Speaker: Thank the minister for that.

Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Springfield-Ritchot Community Grants

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): Growing communities that are dynamic and vibrant are the backbone of Manitoba. The cream of the crop of these communities are Springfield, Niverville and Ritchot.

In fact, Niverville was declared Manitoba's fastest growing municipality and the fifth fastest in all of Canada. This growth is reflected in the funding and grants that our communities have received, which has totalled over \$211 million in the past year alone.

First is the \$110 million that was announced last fall for the waste-water treatment facility in Niverville. This facility will increase the capabilities of Niverville, Taché, Hanover and Ritchot to deal with and treat waste water in our communities.

While this may not be the most attractive investment to talk about, proper treatment of waste water is an important driving force behind sustainable growth and quality of service in our province. This waste-water facility will also benefit the recent announced movie studio and hotel, truly making Niverville the Hollywood of the North.

Springfield is also benefiting from the announced \$4.7 million toward the Springfield community recreation centre. This centre, which has been over 20 years in the making, consists of multiple spaces that are all designed for the community to come together in different ways, including our gymnasium, a full-sized AstroTurf soccer field and spaces to hold community

gatherings. This space will benefit families in our community for years to come.

Finally, I want to mention the \$300,000 our government has provided to the Ste. Agathe Arena for the replacement of their ice plant. Local rinks such as this one plays a key part of life for Manitobans. For many of us, some of our earliest memories are the local rink. Being able to contribute to the continued use of the Ste. Agathe Arena will be a benefit to families for generations to come.

The projects that I have mentioned are just the tip of the iceberg. I've had the pleasure of making-taking part in many more announcements throughout this year. It's great to see the growth that our communities are seeing, and I hope to see it continue for many, many more years to come.

Dr. Katherine Kearns and Dr. Christina Raimondi

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I am honoured to say some words of tribute to Dr. Katherine Kearns and Dr. Christina Raimondi, who recently received Medals of Excellence from Doctors Manitoba.

As any parent knows, the first few days and weeks at home with a newborn are a really special time. It can also be a stressful time. We know that families sometimes struggle with learning about infant feeding in these early days.

And that's where Drs. Kearns and Raimondi come in. After hearing many stories from families about the overwhelming challenges in infant feeding and seeing the lack of education that medical professionals receive about it, Drs. Kearns and Raimondi co-founded the Winnipeg Breastfeeding Centre in 2017.

Now, the centre has grown since then, and in addition to having five family docs providing evidence-based, diagnostic support to families, they also collaborate with pediatric surgeons. They're also in the process of training a NICU nurse to be a lactation consultant and working with midwifery students.

Now, their work also extends far beyond Manitoba's borders. They are developing the professional standards for medical education to incorporate their expertise right around the world.

And not only am I here to sing the praises of these two docs; my wife Lisa and I are also clients. When we welcomed our youngest home, it was Dr. Raimondi who was there to deliver care with expertise, with compassion and with love, if I may say so.

So, on behalf of everybody in Manitoba and all of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, please join me in thanking Dr. Kearns and Dr. Raimondi for their incredible work on behalf of families, babies and all Manitobans.

Invasive Species Awareness Week

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, invasive species are the No. 1 cause of biodiversity loss in Manitoba and the world. Mitigating the spread of invasive species requires swift action to conserve our ecosystems.

Manitoba was the first province in Canada to pass legislation to establish and designate an invasive species awareness week in 2017. This year, Invasive Species Awareness Week starts April 23rd. Our government has clearly prioritized the awareness and control of invasive species in our province.

Manitobans can help stop the introduction and spread of invasive species by following some simple guidelines of prevention, early detection and reporting; by learning as much as they can to help identify invasive species and do their part to educate others; by ensuring plants and seeds they bring home are not an invasive threat; by cleaning and drying all items that were in the water thoroughly, since even a few drops of water can transmit an invasive species to another body of water; by cleaning their boots and clothing before hiking in new areas to get rid of possible hitchhiking seeds and pathogens; and by remembering that plants, animals, insects, fruit and vegetables can all act as vectors and fomites.

Manitobans should already know that transporting firewood in Manitoba can transmit Dutch elm disease and Emerald ash borers, and that releasing aquarium fish, live bait and non-local animals can pose a significant risk of introducing an invasive species into our local ecosystems.

Some examples of local invasive species threats include zebra mussels, lily leaf beetle, purple loosestrife, common tansy and the St. John's wort.

Finally, I would like to give Manitobans a friendly reminder to spread the word and not the species.

Thank you.

Ian Graham

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): Today I rise to recognize Ian Graham for his 16 years of service as a reporter and editor for the Thompson Citizen.

Over these years, Ian has worked diligently with the Thompson Citizen and Nickel Belt News and is now moving on in the next-to the next phase of his career.

Tasked with news dissemination in our city, Ian has been helping Thompson citizens keep up with a fast-paced world. His contributions have laid a solid foundation for future journalists who wish to work at the Thompson Citizen or emerge from Thompson to go on to do greater endeavours.

Thompson residents appreciate Ian for his contributions to our community events over the years by covering local events like Nickel Days, the hot water issues at Thompson General Hospital, sports events and many other moments that brought joy to all of his readers or kept us informed on pressing matters in the North.

The impact Ian has made to the Thompson Citizen was felt throughout the North, as he helped provide a sense of connection to all communities that are not physically close. Ian's input in our city news has been impactful and will be greatly missed.

Going forward, Ian Graham will be taking on a new role as the City of Thompson's communication officer, where he will continue to serve the community by keeping us connected and informed on local developments.

I ask my colleagues to join me in appreciating Ian for covering the news in the city of Thompson and throughout—and through different governments, times and seasons. We appreciate your meaningful documentation of our ebbs and flows over the years. Thank you for offering northern Manitoba a journalistic flair that has been unique to Thompson.

Manitoba Film Industry

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): April 19th is National Canadian Film Day.

We have an exciting film industry in Manitoba, and our province has an amazing history of film accomplishments, dating back to 1898 and what is believed to be the first-ever film shot by a Canadian filmmaker, a documentary called Ten Years in Manitoba by James Freer.

Charles "Charlie" Thorson was an illustrator and animator who created the design for Walt Disney's Snow White and Warner Bros.' Bugs Bunny.

* (13:40)

In 1941, the film *the 49th Parallel* was shot on location in Manitoba. It was a Second World War suspense film about German officers who run aground in Hudson Bay and have to make their way through enemy Canada and Manitoba to freedom in the US, which was not yet—yet at war. It featured scenes of Inuit and Indigenous Manitobans and Hutterites, among others.

The Free Press wrote: Through it all, the film preaches that Canadians, be they French Canadian, Inuit, Hutterite, Indigenous, rich eccentrics, whatever, are a pretty decent bunch who have one thing in common—they don't like Hitler's Nazis one bit.

Guy Maddin's works have received international acclaim, with film critic Roger Ebert selecting his film *My Winnipeg* as one of the 10 best of the decade, and his work came out of the pioneering experimental film co-operative of the Winnipeg Film Group.

Pablo Hidalgo, a graduate of Red River polytechnic's creative communications program, is now an executive at Lucasfilm, and is in charge of continuity for the entire, sprawling Star Wars universe.

Of course, this Manitoba Legislature has been featured in films, including *Shall We Dance* and the Oscar-winning *Capote*.

I certainly want to mention the film *Women Talking*, for which Canadian filmmaker and director Sarah Polley won an Academy Award for the best adapted screenplay, based on the book of the same name by the amazing Manitoba Mennonite writer, Miriam Toews.

Sarah Polley said: Miriam Toews wrote an essential novel about a radical democracy in which people who don't agree on every single issue managed to sit together in a room and carve out a way forward together, free of violence. Polley said, they do so not just by talking, but also by listening.

We are seeing exciting changes in the stories that are being told in Manitoba, and I hope that can see more of Manitoba and our stories reflected and celebrated on the big screen, because as a province and as a people, we have a story worth telling.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Grace Hospital Surgical Capacity Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, the Grace Hospital is struggling to deliver a basic standard of care. That's according to orthopedic surgeons who work at the Grace Hospital.

Now, they reached out to this minister and to this Premier for assistance from their diagnostic and surgical task force. But not only did the Premier reject these surgeons' proposal to add surgeries at the Grace Hospital, but in fact, this Premier turned around and told these same surgeons to cut the number of surgical appointments at the Grace by 20 per cent.

Why did the Premier tell these surgeons to cut the number of appointments for surgeries by 20 per cent?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I said this yesterday, Madam Speaker, that there was a proposal that went forward from the Grace Hospital to perform 200 more surgeries in orthopedics for hips and knees, again, from the Grace Hospital. That went forward to the diagnostic and surgical task force. And that was agreed to by the task force.

So, those 200 procedures will be moving forward. So that is moving forward, Madam Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition is simply wrong. There—there was a proposal that came forward and it has been accepted by the task force, and the Grace Hospital will now be able to move forward with those surgeries.

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

Diagnostic and Surgical Task Force Health System Privatization

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier is trying to run from the cuts that she has directed; cuts at the Grace Hospital that we have tabled the documentation for in this House just this week. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: New information, however, shows that these cuts and these demands for privatization from the task force actually start at the political level. They start at the highest level.

I will table copies of the Premier's calendar and it lists the actual members for the working group of this diagnostic and surgical task force. You will note the composition of those names. There is not a single

physician, not a single medical expert in that list. They are all politicians. They are all political staff who are directing these cuts and directing this privatization.

Why is the Premier ordering cuts and privatization without even talking to the experts?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, once again, the Leader of the Opposition is just simply wrong. When it comes to the diagnostic and surgical task force, that is chaired by Dr. Peter MacDonald, who is the chair of that committee. Dr. Ed Buchel also sits on there. There are other doctors and health-care professionals who sit on there.

That is who we get our advice from, Madam Speaker. Those are the experts. We will listen to the experts, not from the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the Premier is trying to distract from her cuts by disputing information that comes from her own calendar. This calendar shows a biweekly meeting, a meeting that happens every two weeks, with the members of the working group that directs the diagnostic and surgical task force.

What she said is incorrect. This document lists that the chair is actually the Minister of Finance (Mr. Cullen). It's not the physician who she just named.

The documents that we're tabling today directly contradict the message and the talking points of the PCs, and it confirms what Manitobans have known all along: that these cuts and these attempts to privatize have never been recommended by the experts; it's always been recommended only by the Premier's inner circle.

Why is she making cuts, and why is she privatizing medical services without even consulting with physicians?

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: This shows how on top of this issue that we are, and that it is a priority for our government, and how often we meet as a group with the surgical and diagnostic task force, Madam Speaker.

The surgical and diagnostic task force is, again, chaired by Dr. Peter MacDonald; Dr. Ed Buchel is on there. There are other doctors, other health-care professionals, Madam Speaker.

So I don't know what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about. He loves to table things in the Chamber that have nothing to do and no bearing whatsoever on the points that he's trying to make, Madam Speaker.

But what he just did today, it shows all Manitobans that this is a top priority of our government.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, it's interesting that the Premier says that this is evidence of how on top of it her government is, because when you read down the list of 16 names, more than half of them have quit or been fired by this Premier.

You have the Minister of Finance (Mr. Cullen) who is quitting; you have the former minister of Health, who's already left the building; you have a number of political staff who have recently been fired or have been replaced or shuffled off to special projects and the like.

If this is who's directing the surgical and diagnostic task force, then it's no wonder that that group is failing to deliver results for Manitobans.

Why is the Premier making decisions to cut medical services or to privatize them while only consulting her own inner circle and not the experts?

Mrs. Stefanson: It's hard to know where to begin by answering the litany of false accusations by the Leader of the Opposition. But let's start with, we are making record investments in our health-care system in Manitoba, almost \$8 billion this year, a 9.2 per cent increase over last year alone, a 23 per cent increase since we took office in 2016.

Those are more investments in health care in Manitoba, not less, like the Leader of the Opposition is trying to suggest. Those are the facts.

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

Mr. Kinew: Here are the facts: Sleep docs from the Misericordia had to resign from the task force advisory committee because they were being ignored; orthopedic surgeons at the Grace Hospital—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —were told to cut surgery appointments by 20 per cent, and Manitobans are waiting longer than ever to get the surgeries that they need. And now we know why: because the decisions are being made

at the Cabinet table, mainly by people who've already quit or signalled at their resignation, but PC insiders.

Once again, why is the Premier making decisions to cut and privatize without listening to doctors, nurses, allied health-care professionals and only her political insiders?

* (13:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, a—just a couple of questions ago, the Leader of the Opposition said, there are no doctors on the task force. And then now he says, yes, there were doctors but they're resigning. The Leader of the Opposition has no credibility when it comes to this.

But I—what I will say is I want to thank Dr. Peter MacDonald. I want to thank Dr. Ed Buchel. I want to thank our entire surgical and diagnostic task force for the incredible work that they're doing because they're making significant headway at reducing those surgical and diagnostic backlogs for people in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

Yes, they are contracting some of those out. That's to ensure that more Manitobans get the surgeries that they need, want and deserve, Madam Speaker.

We will take no lessons from the members opposite.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it's the Premier who has no credibility when it comes to health care because the Premier knows that the task force working group that I'm talking about here, made up exclusively of PC insiders, does not have any physicians in it.

The physicians that I spoke of—and Hansard will reveal this—resigned from an advisory committee. The Premier of Manitoba should know the difference. The only reason that she would pretend not to know the difference would either be incompetence or to try and evade accountability questions being asked on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

Given the failures—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—of this PC government to cut wait times and to improve surgeries, why does the Premier insist on listening only to those PC insiders while ignoring the experts in this province? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I don't know where the Leader of the Opposition is going with that bizarre rant, but we do know that Manitobans are looking for health-care services and we want to ensure that, through our surgical and diagnostic task force, that those Manitobans will be able to get access to the health care that they need when they need it.

And I want to thank our surgical and diagnostic task force for the incredible work that they are doing day in and day out. They are making significant headway. A 32 per cent reduction in backlogs, Madam Speaker, across all the surgical and diagnostics in the province. That's significant headway, eliminating many of the backlogs within some of those areas. That's significant headway that is being made by our surgical and diagnostic task force.

We will continue to work with them to ensure that Manitobans get the health care they need when they need it.

Funding for Orthopedic Surgeries Public-Private Services

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, this past week, we've confirmed once again that this Health Minister doesn't think she's accountable for the current state of health care in our province.

The PCs continue to put their ideology of cuts and privatization ahead of patient outcomes and they've ignored proposals from orthopedic surgeons from the Grace to increase the number of procedures done at that hospital.

Instead, this PC Health Minister's task force actually directed the Grace to cut their surgeries by 20 per cent.

Madam Speaker, my question for the Health Minister is: Is it possible that your PC government's continued cuts and inaction over the past seven years is the reason why the public has absolutely zero trust in your government?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I can understand why the members opposite want distraction from the great results that were reported yesterday by the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force.

They also don't want Manitobans to know that the task force approved an additional 200 orthopedic-joint day procedures at the Grace Hospital, Madam Speaker. But those are the facts.

And, as the Premier stated, the total surgical backlog has been reduced by 32 per cent, Madam Speaker. Diagnostics has been reduced 31 per cent. Those are the facts.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, despite all of the evidence—the devastating evidence to the contrary, this PC Health Minister still thinks that seven years of cuts and chaos was the right thing to do.

Now they're shifting to the next stage of their plan, and this PC Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is intent on privatizing and contracting out the delivery of health-care services in our province. In the case of orthopedic surgeries at Concordia, they're sending patients out of province at a greater expense even though there's existing capacity that the PCs refuse to invest in.

Will this Health Minister tell Manitobans why she decided that it's not possible to direct funding to the front lines of our health-care system—our public health-care system—and fund orthopedic surgeries right here at home?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, 200 additional orthopedic surgeries have been approved at the Grace Hospital.

And I want to just add my voice in thanking the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force for helping our government to eliminate the backlogs in cataract surgeries, CT scans, ultrasound tests, cardiac catheterization, lab tests, pacemaker surgeries, pediatric neural-developmental assessment, urology tests, oral surgery and dentistry, echocardiography tests, cardiac surgery, Madam Speaker, and the list goes on.

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

MLA Asagwara: You know, Madam Speaker, Manitobans are absolutely correct in their assessment that this PC government cannot be trusted when it comes to their health care.

The obfuscation and obstructionism from this Health Minister are unreal. She ignores doctors at the Grace, she ignores doctors at Misericordia, she insults the nurses at SANE at HSC and she disrespects the allied health-care professionals across our province by keeping them without a contract for over five years.

When will this PC Health Minister stop the excuses, stop the inaction and accept the offers of help and

assistance from great—the Grace doctors, the orthopedic surgeons and, quite frankly, any and all of the experts who have extended help to her—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the doctors that are part of the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force and their steering committee.

I know the Leader of the Opposition hasn't looked at the list lately, but I'll start with Dr. Peter MacDonald, who's the chair; Dr. Ed Buchel, who's the provincial specialty lead of surgery; Dr. Chris Christodoulou, provincial specialty lead of anesthesia; Dr. Marco Essig, provincial specialty lead, diagnostic imaging; Dr. Amin Kabani, provincial specialty lead, diagnostic laboratory services; Dr. David Hochman, general surgery.

Madam Speaker, the list is just filled with physicians—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Manitoba Hydro International Government Decision to Sell

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Manitoba Hydro International was a successful subsidiary that provided consulting on energy projects around the world. I say was, Madam Speaker, because in 2021, the PC government ordered them to wind down their operations. This is despite the fact that Manitoba Hydro International was very profitable.

New FIPPA documents, which I'll table, show that in 2019-2020, their net income was \$6.7 million. That's millions of dollars every year Hydro is missing out on thanks to this PC government's interference.

Can the Premier explain why is she throwing away millions of dollars?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): I certainly appreciate the question coming from the member opposite.

* (14:00)

Talking about throwing away money, Madam Speaker, Manitoba Hydro currently has over a \$24 billion of debt. Part of that is because of the \$4-billion capital boondoggle overrun at the hands of the NDP. Because of the \$24.6 billion of debt Manitoba Hydro currently has, they're paying over \$1 billion a year in interest charges, money that Manitoba ratepayers have to fork

over because of mismanagement by the NDP.
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for St. James, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Sala: The PC decision to wind down Manitoba Hydro International is baffling. Their own briefing notes, which I'll table, say that, quote: MHI provides Manitoba Hydro and the province with a global reputation for innovation and success and contributes to the economic development of Manitoba companies with the resulting positive financial impacts for the province. End quote.

Rather than support MHI, which generated \$6.7 million in profits in 2019-2020, the PCs shut them down. That's the wrong approach.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain why she's standing in the way of millions in dollars—millions of dollars—worth of profits for Manitobans?

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, let's talk about the millions of dollars that the NDP have sucked out of Manitoba Hydro over the years.

Madam Speaker, we know the NDP never saw a tax they didn't like or a fee they didn't like. So what happened under the NDP reign to Manitoba Hydro in terms of the debt-guarantee fee and the water-rental fee? The NDP chose to double those fees.

Our government has taken a different approach. We've reduced those fees in half, Madam Speaker; that's saving Manitoba ratepayers \$180 million this year alone.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Sala: Since Manitoba Hydro International was incorporated in 1999, it's generated \$80 million in profits. I'll table the document now.

The Province's own briefing notes admit that MHI has positive financial impacts for Manitoba. Yet, what did the PCs do? They ordered MHI to wind down their operations. That makes absolutely no sense.

Will the Premier do the right thing and explain why she's throwing away millions of dollars every year?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, you don't have to take my word for the numbers I've put on the record. We can go to Manitoba Hydro and their current general rate application.

Clearly, in here, they talk about the debt has grown to \$24.6 billion at the hands of the NDP. That represents \$18,000 of debt for each and every Manitoban. Debt-servicing cost: \$1 billion a year; historically, up 'til this year, 40 per cent of Manitoba Hydro's revenue used to pay interest costs, Madam Speaker.

Because of the action this government just took, that fee has been reduced to 30 per cent of revenue, saving Manitoba ratepayers money today and into the future.

Apprehension of Indigenous Baby Child and Family Services Birth Alert

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): On April 14th, a healthy baby weighing almost eight pounds was born to a young Indigenous woman. The family was very excited for the birth of their newest family member. The family has a kinship clan that would see Baby come home with Mom to live with Mom's older sister or Baby's auntie.

While waiting for discharge papers and a taxi to go home with Baby, Winnipeg Child and Family Services unexpectedly showed up with hospital security to apprehend the baby. Family were threatened with police if the family did not give up Baby to CFS. Under duress, the family had no choice but to do so.

Why was Baby, only hours old, apprehended by CFS when the Province claims to have ended birth alerts?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Of course, the member knows that I'm not willing or able, nor should we be discussing case specifics on the floor of the Manitoba Legislature.

What I will say is that the general authority has been instructed to provide extreme oversight and to ensure that they are at the table with family planning immediately. And my understanding is that has occurred.

On the issue of birth alerts, it's our government, in 2020, who issued the policy change to end birth alerts, and we have seen a 70 per cent reduction in newborn apprehensions since the birth alert policy was changed.

Unlike when members opposite were in power and that—they apprehended nearly a baby a day. That is their record.

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

MLA Fontaine: Baby's family has a kinship plan in place, ensuring that Baby would come home to family alongside mom.

The family went to such lengths to meet CFS standards and criteria by moving into a bigger residence on April 2nd. Baby's mom has her own room. Baby spent months—mom—Baby's mom spent months ensuring that her baby has everything that she needs—a crib, a stroller, clothes, diapers, everything. Mom was so happy and proud.

Baby's family was never given any indication that there were some ongoing concerns or issues up until minutes before they were supposed to leave.

Why has the minister allowed a young Indigenous new mom to be separated by her—from her newborn when birth alerts were supposedly ended?

Ms. Squires: So, the member knows that I will not be discussing specifics about this case on the floor of the legislative Chamber, and that we do uphold the principles of privacy and respect for families that are dealing with the CFS system.

What I can say is that I've instructed the general authority to provide extreme oversight and family planning with this family and my understanding is, is that is occurring as we speak.

When that member—when the member for St. Johns was the special advisor to the minister of Families in 2014, they apprehended 289 babies—newborn babies—babies between the ages of zero days and three days, they had apprehended during that time when she was the special advisor to the minister of Families.

We've seen a 70 per cent reduction since those dark days.

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

MLA Fontaine: When CFS unexpectedly showed up at the hospital a couple of days ago, no explanation was given to Baby's family as to why Baby was being apprehended. The family wasn't offered any supports or allowed any advocates to be present. Mom and the family haven't been given any updates or explanation other than for the new mom to drop off some breast milk for Baby.

Mom and family have been working with the First Nations family child advocate's office, who, in their expertise, hasn't seen any concerns or issues in respect of Baby's safety. The family has the full support of the

First Nations Family Advocate Office, and mom has extensive family and community support.

So, why has the minister and this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) failed at keeping this new mom and her newborn together?

Ms. Squires: When the NDP formed government in 1999, there were 5,000 children in care. When they left office—when voters showed them the door—in 2016, there was 11,500 kids in care. That is their record.

When the member for St. Johns was the special advisor to the minister of Families, in their last year in office, they apprehended 286 newborn babies. That's newborn babies that were either a day old, one day old, two days old or three days old. That is her track record.

Our government has reduced the number of children in care, and we have also reduced 70 per cent of the newborn apprehensions since we issued a policy change to end the discriminatory practice of birth alerts.

International Student Health Care Request to Reinstate Coverage

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, in Manitoba, we should be able to quality public health care to everyone in our province, including international students that call Manitoba home. They contribute to our economy, they contribute to our society and they want to build a future here.

* (14:10)

But this government is making life more expensive for them by forcing them to buy private health care. Now, this minister—this Health Minister says that she's the minister of the possible.

So I ask the minister: Will she make it possible for international students to have access to public health care today?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I've had the privilege of meeting with a number of student groups: the UMSU group, we've met with MAPSS, we've met with CFS Manitoba chapters.

We've had some very robust discussions, including members who sit on these various committees who are international students, and what they are asking for is more comprehensive coverage. We have an ongoing discussion—and they also understand that it's fair that there is a cost to that, that health care is not

free for anyone. So they are willing to actually come to the table and have proper discussions.

I'm not sure that the member opposite has met with any of them and had these in-depth discussions. But I'd be—I would advise the member opposite to set up those meetings.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Vital, on a final—pardon me, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Moses: Now, the reality is that life is getting more expensive for international students and students across Manitoba. This PC government is making it worse. They've hiked up tuition, they're raising hydro rates, they're raising 'rench' wait-rates.

Students are struggling, Madam Speaker. And international students have to face even more costs because they have to pay for private health care because of this government's decisions.

Now, the minister has an opportunity today to do the thing, to do the right thing by international students and reinstate them on the public health-care plan; will she do so today?

Mrs. Guillemard: Again, I have had multiple meetings with a number of student groups and individual students as I've been attending events. And, you know, the No. 1 thing that every international student has conveyed to me as to why they chose Manitoba is because of our low tuition fees and that the cost of the health-care aspect is not a deterrent.

So, these are ongoing discussions, which I'm happy to sit at the table and have these discussions, and they are appreciative of all the discussions we've been having.

The member opposite doesn't know what he's talking about, and I don't know if he has a hidden agenda to increase student fees. Maybe he should come to the table and admit what his hidden agenda is. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, the minister and all Manitobans remember that Brian Pallister made a lot of cuts to health care; the cuts that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the minister and the entire PC team supported and that they continue to this very day. This includes to international student health care.

Will the minister simply admit that Brian Pallister's cuts to international student health care was wrong, and will she actually make a change to reinstate public health care for international students today?

Mrs. Guillemard: We are the lowest tuition in western Canada. We have a high standard of education here at our post-secondary institutes. Those are the factors that attract international students right here to our home province.

They are happy to learn and be educated here, and I would encourage the member—I would encourage the member—to support the students and invite more to come to Manitoba and enjoy the benefits of a great education and low tuition fees.

CFS Apprehension of Indigenous Baby Continued Practice in Manitoba

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Leaders like Cindy Blackstock and Murray Sinclair have called CFS the new residential schools. There have been times in Manitoba the last few years when there were more Indigenous children in CFS just in Manitoba than there were at the height of all the residential schools in Canada combined.

During the 2000s scoop, the number of children doubled from 5,500 to over 11,000, and we have the highest child apprehension rate in the world, including taking a newborn baby a day, every day, for years on end, and it has not stopped. A newborn baby was seized from a first-time Indigenous mother again.

Why are we still seeing newborn babies being seized at all, especially from Indigenous mothers who've never had a chance to parent?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Reducing the number of kids in care, family reunification and prevention are high priorities for our government and for the Department of Families.

And so, our government has made significant investments—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —like investments in Granny's House respite, which, I would remind the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin), who happens to be heckling at me from her seat right now, that she voted against respite dollars for Granny's House to prevent CFS involvement to ensure continuity and reunification and prevention supports for families who are struggling.

That is something that our government is investing in. That is why we will continue to invest in these measures to keep families together. That is why we've also reduced the number of kids in care by 2,000.

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

The Link Youth and Family Supports Centre Timeline for Third-Party Report

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Realistically, Manitoba has a history of treating Indigenous people worse than any other province in Canada. We talk about the harms of the past, but we're turning a blind eye to the harms of the present because governments have never stopped taking—tearing apart Indigenous families.

It's not just intergenerational trauma; it's trauma that's being created right now, affecting thousands of families. More than half the people who are homeless in Winnipeg were in CFS and we're not doing enough to support children in the CFS system or when they age out of care.

That's why when we heard from employees and Indigenous youth in care at The Link, formerly Macdonald Youth Services, that it was in crisis, we asked for an investigation.

When can we expect the full report that was promised in March?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): So, I've already answered that question that the member for St. Boniface has asked previously about our work at the Link, and that I've assured the member that there is a third-party evaluation that is being done right now.

What I can also say to the member is that, in addition to reducing the number of kids in care, our government was very pleased to announce, just two weeks ago, a formalization of the program for youth aging out of care to ensure that young people are provided with better supports and ongoing supports, even after they've reached the age of majority, so that those additional dollars have been put in place—almost \$5 million—to ensure that kids don't age out of care until they're well prepared to.

We believe that will go a long way, and I just hope that members opposite will support those investments that our department is making.

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

Diabetes Prevention Request for Action Plan

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, diabetes was declared an epidemic by Manitoba's government in 1996. Since then, consecutive PC and NDP governments have been ineffective in preventing the epidemic's spread. Diabetes prevalence has risen to now include 185,000 Manitobans.

November 2nd last year, the government committed to release a diabetes action plan later that month, as I tabled. Today, five months later, there is no action plan.

Why has the government been such a laggard in prioritizing actions to effectively prevent diabetes in Manitoba? And why is it that on the A-to-Z list of diseases and public health issues on the Manitoba Health website that diabetes is not even listed—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): We have looked in and invested monies into assisting individuals with multiple illnesses. Diabetes action plan is currently being reviewed. We're looking at the best possible solution going forward to ensure that individuals needing help will get the help they need.

Retail Sale of Cannabis Public or Private Model

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): We've always known that the NDP have been out of touch with Manitobans, and that has been confirmed this week when they blocked efforts to modernize liquor sales, allowing consumers convenience and choice. Now the NDP are threatening private cannabis retailers simply because they are not government entities.

These businesses have invested heavily in their businesses and in our communities, establishing jobs and economic investments.

Can the Minister responsible for Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries elaborate on the economic consequences of the NDP's dangerous anti-business rhetoric?

Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation): I appreciate the member from McPhillips for his great question.

* (14:20)

I am very disappointed to hear the comments by the NDP early this week about private retailers in

cannabis industry, Madam Speaker. The NDP have provided a solution that—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: —nobody wants to a problem that doesn't even exist.

I've spoken to retailers this week about it and, unfortunately, they are very concerned. It's fundamentally wrong, Madam Speaker, for a government to try—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: —to undercut and undermine private entrepreneurs in this space, and those folks are very concerned.

We know that the NDP are ideologically opposed to success, but that should not get in the way of letting our entrepreneurs be successful in this province. They say—they—the NDP—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Employment Leave for Miscarriage or Stillbirth Request to Call Bill 210 to Standing Committee

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): The estimates are that one in five pregnancies end in miscarriage. This House has already recognized that grieving families need extra time when they lose a loved one, including from a miscarriage.

And three times, including in this session, our party has put forward amendments that would provide guaranteed paid leave while families are grieving their losses.

Now that the PC government has started to call bills to committee for public input, will they call Bill 210 to committee now?

Ekosi.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, we know that miscarriages have been traumatic for many families. I've heard the personal stories from many in this House, from constituents, in my own family, as I've spoken about before.

I think it speaks well for this House that there have been two bills coming forward—one by the member for The Pas, one by the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield)—that recognize how significant that is for families.

I can assure the House that there will be a bill that will be called to committee, and that individuals can speak—*[interjection]*

Well, it's not really funny. This is a difficult, difficult issue, and I commend the House for being able to address this.

And we will have a bill at committee so that Manitobans can speak to it.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Brandon University Funding

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Since taking office, the provincial government has cut operating funding to post-secondary institutions such as Brandon University, while simultaneously increasing tuition and student fees.

(2) Brandon University is the only university in rural Manitoba and serves as an important hub for Westman.

(3) Brandon University is the largest university outside of Winnipeg with over 2,200 full-time students and just under 1,000 part-time students.

(4) Despite the important role Brandon University plays in Manitoba, the provincial government is continuing to cut the university's funding in Budget '23-24, as funding yet again fails to keep pace with inflation.

(5) Inadequate funding hurts students and the quality of education they receive as it may force Brandon University to weigh—raise tuition, cut programs and services or even both.

(6) Funding cuts also negatively impact Brandon University's faculty who are at risk of having their courses cut or being let go altogether.

(7) The provincial government has refused to explain why Brandon University's '23-24 operating funding increase falls below inflation, and why it is lower than other universities in Manitoba.

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to adequately fund Brandon University so that the institution can

avoid making cuts and continue to serve students, faculty, Westman and the province of Manitoba as a whole.

This petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read, they are deemed to be received by the House.

Provincial Road 224

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to 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.

Madam Speaker, this petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi.

Security System Incentive Program

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Cities across Canada and the United States, including Chicago; Washington, DC; Salinas,

California; and Orillia, Ontario, are offering home security rebate programs that enhance public safety and allow for more efficient use of their policing resources.

(2) Home security surveillance systems protect homes and businesses by potentially deterring burglaries, reducing homeowners' and business insurance costs.

(3) Whole neighbourhoods benefit when more homes and businesses have these security systems.

(4) A 2022 Angus Reid Institute poll found that 70 per cent of Winnipeggers surveyed believed that crime had increased over the last five years, the highest percentage found among cities in Canada.

(5) The same survey reported half of Winnipeggers polled do not feel safe walking alone at night, and almost 20 per cent of them said they were a victim of police-reported crime in the last two years.

(6) Though the public understands what the criminologists and community advocates point to as the main drivers of crime, namely the larger issues of lack of food, addictions and poverty, they support rebate programs like these as they help the most vulnerable in our community by removing financial barriers for personal protection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to work with municipalities to establish a province-wide tax rebate or other incentive program to encourage residents and businesses to purchase approved home and business security systems—of security protection systems.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people of those people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are living on low incomes.

(4) Excuse me. The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(2) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and the surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and the region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

* (14:30)

Thank you.

Afghan Refugees in Manitoba

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August of 2021, Afghan citizens and their families have been subjected to persecution and human rights atrocities because of their faith, gender and former associations with organizations thought to be friendly with the previous government and its allies. This abuse has taken the form of public assaults, kidnappings and killings.

Many Afghans have left or are attempting to leave Afghanistan to find safe refuge in neighbouring countries. This undertaking is difficult due to the Taliban's activities and their presence in countries like Pakistan.

Many Afghans who are looking to leave Afghanistan and come to Canada are educated and experienced

and, as such, would prove to be valuable assets to Manitoba, considering its current labour shortages and challenges to its economy.

Educated Afghans have usually studied for four to six years in a specific field of study and spent a significant amount of time and money for that education. However, these people still face barriers to obtaining employment in their field of expertise, as Canada has very strict rules regarding the use of that education and experience.

Many Afghans are refugees in other countries and are currently jobless, which is an added barrier for them under the current criteria of the Provincial Nominee Program.

Some Afghan newcomers who face literacy issues because they came from a non-developed country would benefit from an in-depth informational course to assist them with acclimation into Canadian lifestyles.

The Interim Federal Health Program provides limited, temporary coverage of health-care benefits to refugees who aren't eligible for provincial or territorial health insurance. However, the refugee must apply for discretionary coverage and provide a list of compelling personal circumstances in order to qualify, but for urgent medical circumstances, such as root canals, unanticipated life-threatening and emergency medical conditions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to work with the federal government to prioritize the evacuation of the immediate and extended family of Afghans who now call Canada home, and to facilitate their coming to Manitoba, including helping Afghan refugees in other countries such as Pakistan.

To urge the provincial government to expand the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program and re-evaluate the accreditation of education and jobs to ensure all immigrants and refugees can utilize their skills more easily and readily in Manitoba for work.

To urge the provincial government to have fewer rigid criteria for Afghans under the Provincial Nominee Program, and having a connection to Manitoba family members or friends should be a key criteria.

To urge the provincial government to enhance adequate acclimation services for newcomers through community-based support programs and increase their health-care coverage to meet their urgent health-care necessities.

Signed by Waheed Safdary, Naveed Safdary, Omed Safdary and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon. This House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH

* (14:40)

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): 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 Health. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): At this time, I would like to end the committee for Health and we can close things out.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you. Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions.

At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the questions.

I will now call resolution 21.2: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$18,302,000 for Health, health policy—18 billion—no, 18,302,000—*[interjection]* Okay, we'll start again. Sorry.

Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$18,302,000 for Health, Health Policy and Planning, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.3: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,189,000 for Health, Insurance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.4: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$28,572,000 for Health, Public Health, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.5: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,274,000 for Health, Performance and Oversight, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.6: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,338,825,000—*[interjection]*—okay; I apologize. We'll start again.

Resolution 21.6: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,330,825,000 for Health, Funding to Health Authorities, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.7: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$233,511,000 for Health, Provincial Health Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.8: be it RESOLVED there be—that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,483,442,000 for Health, Medical, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.9: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$442,899,000 for Health, Pharmacare, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

* (14:50)

Resolution 21.11: be it RESOLVED that there be—*[interjection]*—point one—one? Did I miss one?

Resolution 21.10: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$207,890,000 for Health, Costs Related to Capital Assets of Other Reporting Entities, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.11: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$950,000 for Health, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.12: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$288,913,000 for Health, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Hearing no further questions—[interjection]—the last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 21.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Asagwara: I move that line item 21.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Health's salary be reduced to \$33,600.

Motion presented.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): This completes—[interjection]

Resolution 21.1: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,886,000 for Health, Finance, for fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Health. Thank you.

Question to the committee of the House: I'm suggesting we take a 10-minute recess before we start the next Committee of Supply.

All in favour? [Agreed]

The committee recessed at 2:56 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:08 p.m.

SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): 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 Seniors and Long-Term Care. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): At our last meeting, I think it was on the 14th, the minister promised to give answers to some of my questions as—in little as one day. And I think I'm yet to hear from him on any of them.

Does he have all those answers ready right now?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): This is—I was kind of under the impression that Seniors and Long-Term Care would be continuing consistently in Estimates; therefore, I was prepared to offer further information to the member, but we didn't sit, as you called Health back.

So I do have further information to you; I don't have all of the information that you had asked for. As I indicated, we would supply the information that we would be able to.

So I can indicate to you—so the question that I have right now to be able to refer further information to—or, indicate further information to—was question 2 was in regards to department vacancy. We have one vacancy and we are moving to fill it. The vacancy—*[interjection]* bless you—the vacancy is a term position, junior policy analyst. So that was the question in regards to department vacancies.

* (15:10)

Question No. 3 and 4 was in regards to home-care vacancies. The home-care vacancies for staffing are as follows: There are 141 nursing EFT vacancies, a 22 per cent EFT vacancy rate. That's in home care.

There are 369 health-care aide EFT vacancies, which is a 21 per cent EFT vacancy rate; there are 31 health-care support work EFT vacancies, a 16 per cent EFT vacancy rate. This includes term and permanent vacancies.

This data was reported in February and early March 2023 and was summarized on March the 16th, 2023. That's the information that we are able to relay back to the member at this time.

And question No. 5 was—okay, I do have a question No. 5, which I am able to indicate as per the question from the member from River Heights, but I can hold that answer until the member of River Heights is ready to speak or I can answer it right now, at your wish.

An Honourable Member: Sure, right now.

Mr. Johnston: Okay. Question No. 5 was: When you are looking at the efforts for seniors and we combine long-term care and home care, it's my understanding that the allocation is about two thirds for long-term care and one third for care home. The—can the minister confirm that this—and tell me whether or not that's the kind of balance that he's anticipating in the future? That was the question.

The response that we would give the member or I would give the member: While it is correct that when combining long-term care and home-care funding to health authorities as identified in the 2023-24 Health supplement of Estimates and expenditures, the allocation is approximately two thirds for long-term care and one third for home care.

This allocation is a function of the math only and is not representative of a policy or allocation that the government is adapting in future at this time.

So that is the further question. Any other information that was requested will be coming forward as per the protocols of 45 days at Estimates.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Any further questions from the floor?

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to ask the minister if he could provide us with a copy of his mandate letter.

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, there never was formalized mandate letters to the ministers under the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) direction. It was quite clear that the mandate of the Ministry of Seniors and Long-Term Care was to certainly fulfill the needs of seniors in the province of Manitoba. The Premier determined that there needed to be a further focus of seniors, therefore created the department, a new department, which was allotted a budget of \$54 million in its initial existence.

And I am pleased to say that the increase in the budget to the Department of Seniors has gone up quite substantially: 72 per cent that our government has allotted to this department to address the needs of seniors, and that represents close to a \$40-million increase. Incidentally, that is the largest increase of any department—percentage increase of any department under—in the Manitoba government.

So we're quite pleased with the fact that our government has dedicated such a historic initiative to address the needs of seniors, and based on the initiatives that I have been mandated to address, which is, I think, two major, major initiatives: the Stevenson review, which had addressed a number of recommendations that our government has adopted, 17 recommendations. And we have fulfilled the larger percentage of them and we are continuing to work to fulfill all of them, as has been indicated several times publicly. And we're very pleased to be able to offer that to fulfill the needs of seniors in Manitoba.

The second initiative, a major initiative that the Premier mandated our department was the implementation of the seniors strategy. And the seniors strategy has been—went—was developed through a great deal of consultation with stakeholders and seniors themselves as well as many communities in the province of Manitoba to determine what their feelings are and what needs they feel needed to be fulfilled.

And the seniors strategy, I'm very pleased to indicate, has already initiated a number of things, including hearing—the hearing aid program which was very well received by the people of Manitoba and seniors. And certainly we're looking forward to appropriations being passed through the Legislature and I'm sure that the members of the opposition will ensure

that we're able to proceed with all these great initiatives for seniors, as per the seniors strategy.

As I mentioned, \$34 million so far has been initiated by this department to assist seniors in aging at home, as well as, certainly, other initiatives—as well as stakeholders—as well as stakeholders, Madam Chairman. This government had initiated a \$3-million expenditure in support for support services and many of the great stakeholders that we have in this province were benefiting by that.

So, you know, those are the key mandates that this department has been addressing and will continue to address because our seniors strategy is a living document. And not only we—are we initiating a number of issues that already—or, a number of initiatives that already have been indicated, we are—just recently we initiated the home-modification program, which was extremely well received.

And there's more to come. I can indicate to the members of the opposition that there is more to come and I'm looking forward for their support in supporting seniors in this province because that's what the seniors strategy does.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to ask the minister, with regard to the 17 recommendations of the Stevenson review, I'd like to know which ones, which of the 17 are completed and when will the last one be complete.

* (15:20)

Mr. Johnston: We're very pleased with the progress that we've made in regards to implementing the recommendations of the Stevenson report, and we have allotted \$15 million on our initial announcement in regards to fulfilling our obligation as far as being able to fund so that we can proceed with trying to fulfill the obligations of the seniors report.

If you don't allot the expenditure to be able to fulfill those goals, then you can't fulfill those goals. And that's what we did: We brought forward an announcement of \$15 million, and I can go through the initiatives that that—qualifies that.

And as a matter of fact, also, too, Madam speak—or Madam Chairman, we had also, too—further to that, I believe that \$15 million we had brought forward in an announcement in April of the year. And, subject—further to that, we also announced another \$16 million to, again, fulfill the obligations, which was, you know,

a \$31-million investment for the Stevenson recommendations.

And I would remind the member that when we brought these initiatives forward, they were budgeted, and your—the opposition voted against it. The opposition voted against all these initiatives that were brought forward to enhance seniors in the province of Manitoba, as per the Stevenson recommendations.

So that was a little disappointing, to say the least. That was disappointing that when we hear a number of initiatives that the opposition wishes our government to take and fulfill, and when we are moving ahead with them, the opposition plays politics with it and votes against it.

And then, on the other hand, they turn around and start complaining about why initiatives haven't been—it doesn't make a lot of sense, but the government itself certainly isn't going to play politics with these important initiatives. We're building the foundation and putting our money where our mouth is.

So, \$15 million to support and implement the 17 recommendations initially. This includes enhancing infection prevention and control within the long-term-care sector, which includes provincial program manager, regional leads and 50 infection control staff; more than 200 full-time-equivalent house-keeping staff, as well as the first phase of allied health staffing—which, 44 full-time equivalents.

And I remember vividly in the House, recently, the members of the opposition—Health critic—indicating their support for allied health and their indication of support for allied health. And yet, we, under the Stevenson report, were bringing forward the opportunity to phase in further allied health support; and yet, the opposition, again, voted against it. So, again, playing politics versus us trying to accomplish goals on behalf of seniors is certainly something that I'm sure that the public may not ignore.

Improvements to information, communication technologies, to better support operations and patient care; over \$260,000 in additional funding, which also strengthens the capacity for quality and standard officers, as well as Protection for Persons in Care Office capacity. This funding will also support better integration and—of personal-care homes within the broader health system, and permanently establish a personal-care-home liaison.

So that was the first \$15 million; that was the first \$15 million that the opposition didn't support. And I can—I'll get into—I notice my time is getting short, so

I've got a whole—I've got another \$16 million here that I can indicate to the record of the other initiatives that we were bringing forward on behalf of Stevenson that the opposition didn't support, and yet indicates in the House that they want to support these initiatives. So, something doesn't work somewhere.

Mr. Maloway: For the third time, I'm asking the minister: Minister, when will all 17 recommendations be completed? You've spent the whole time skirting around the issue here, telling me everything but what I ask you, which was when are the 17 recommendations going to be fully implemented? What date?

Mr. Johnston: The member brings up the Stevenson report and the recommendations coming out of the senior supports, so I think it's a very valid opportunity to continue to delve into exactly what the Stevenson report was all about and the recommendations that came—were coming out of the seniors report.

And, certainly, all the initiatives the government has taken, and the government will continue to take. Fortunately, we have a majority and we will continue to pursue these initiatives, even though the opposition voted against them.

Madam Speaker, the \$16 million, the second expenditure that we announced, was new funding which will support recruitment hiring of over 350 health-care aides to increase the amount of daily direct care provided for residents; an additional 72 new positions of registered nurses and licensed practical nurses—come on; establishment of medical leads to provide leadership and guidance to personal-care-home medical services and infection prevention and control enhancements; investment of \$1.5 million in tuition supports and direct-care staff recruitment incentives to help build and strengthen the workforce.

So, again, Madam Chairman, \$31 million allotted for—to enhance our seniors' lives is something that our government is very, very proud of.

So, as I mentioned, we have completed 10 of the 17 recommendations, and we continue to pursue and will fulfill our goals in meeting the other seven recommendations, which the department, along with Health, continues to work on. We are certainly challenged, as are all governments of this country, to come to terms with ensuring that we're able to fulfill staff obligations. And we are working very diligently to try to meet that obligation.

But in order to—it's like a house, eh? You build the foundation first and then you work off the foundation to build the rest of the building—and that's what we've

done. But, again, the opposition didn't support that. They voted against it.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: Madam Chair, it took the minister probably 10 minutes, anyway, to answer my question, which was how many recommendations have been completed as of this point, and the answer, evidently, is 10. It doesn't take 10 minutes to say that, and the question is he doesn't know when the next seven will be done.

But, you know, the fact of the matter is that if the government had done taking the actions that it should have done, given what was going on with the pandemic at the time, we wouldn't be having a Stevenson report at the moment because what happened was that when the pandemic started, it was very apparent from what was happening in New York, in Italy, on the cruise ships. We had lots of warning about who was getting sick with the COVID virus, and they were people in the long-term-care homes.

And I remember being here and I remember doing—looking at the count every day of how many cases. There were no cases in New Brunswick for the longest time. There were very limited cases in Manitoba during the first wave. And it wasn't until many, many people died in Italy, in New York, all through the nursing homes, PCH homes right across the country, right across North America.

* (15:30)

We had very good evidence about who was dying, and the question was, what was the government doing? What should have they been doing at that time? When they could see they had some lead up to this. And the fact of the matter is that it doesn't sound like they were doing much at all.

And Maples is a good example of that, where all the people died in Maples and other homes. And, in fact, we still have COVID cases in some of these homes right now.

So, can the minister tell me how many cases we have currently in homes in Manitoba—of cases of COVID? And whether they're staff and whether they are residents of the homes.

Mr. Johnston: I don't disagree with the member when it comes to his commentary in regards to hopefully being in a position to be able to plan ahead.

I mean, the seniors strategy was adopted in view of a lot of the demographic information that has existed over the last 20 years. And the previous government—this is nothing new that the seniors population is aging and needs to be addressed.

But, you know, Madam Chairman, I—when I took on this role, I looked very diligently to find out information that may have existed by the previous government to see whether or not I could utilize that and try to incorporate that information that was done through, hopefully, due diligence and incorporate that into some of us.

But I—you know what, Madam Chairman? I couldn't find any. I couldn't—I could not find—I couldn't find a seniors plan. I couldn't find anything that addressed the demographic change that was very obvious and coming forward. Their government didn't even look at it, to be quite honest.

However, our government's taken the bull by the horns, and we've initiated the seniors strategy and we continue to address the needs of seniors based on a very challenging situation. I mean, COVID and the pandemic was extremely challenging. When our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) recognized that there needed to be a full study done based on the tragedy—and it was a tragedy at Maples—that action needed to be taken. And she did take action to ensure that the seniors—the Stevenson recommendations, or the Stevenson review took place.

And that was initiated by our Premier to take action. And right now, we are in year 2 of a six-year target plan to address all of the issues of Stevenson, and we will continue to follow through. You know, there are a number of different areas that we are addressing, and I'm happy to share those. If the member particularly asks about any particular component, I will be happy to try to answer his questions.

In regards to the other question he regard—he asked, the information that he's asking for is really the Health Department's data. And there is a fair amount of data that would be considered to be somewhat exclusive to the Department of Health, and I would refer that particular question to the Health Department or we could take that question under advisement and supply the information further with—as per discussion with the Health Department.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: Well, the fact of the matter is that two wings of Bethania are in lockdown right now because

of COVID. I simply asked the minister to tell me how many other cases of COVID in the homes is active right now. Like, how many other wings of homes are being locked down?

I would think—he's the Seniors Minister; he would know this on a daily basis as to what the COVID situation is, given that all this money that he's talking about spending right now is all about trying to help with the situation with COVID, right? And he doesn't seem to know what is going on in these buildings.

You know, I would ask the minister, I know we're talking about—well, I'll just let him give me an answer on that one first as to how many cases of COVID are in the buildings right now.

Mr. Johnston: The member references that our department is charged with a number of initiatives, and the member is correct. I'd indicated a number of responsibilities, a number of initiatives, that this department is taking forward based on its budget, which was a 72 per cent increase to—our government recognizes—to help the seniors of Manitoba. And we will continue to do that.

But our government is a government of the whole. We work with a number of different departments to ensure that the needs of Manitobans are met. The Seniors Department certainly is working with Families and Housing. It's working with Finance. It's working with the Health Department.

So, we work with a number of those different departments, but as far as getting into the actual detail of those government's responsibilities, we don't always have that information. We can get that information, but the information that we receive is more of a—on a general basis.

What I can indicate to the member is that, currently, there are 25 personal-care homes that do have outbreaks as of April the 5th, and in—to get the actual numbers, I would have to again refer to the Department of Health, who is charged with the—with receiving that data.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

The question from the member from Elmwood.

Mr. Maloway: Now, seven years ago, the government of the day, or the party of the day, promised to build 1,200 PCH beds and, of course, seven years have gone by and they actually have less than—they've lost some. They don't have—not only did they not build the 1,200, but they're minus.

* (15:40)

So, the question I have is, is the government still planning at some point to build these 1,200 PCH beds?

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you. Excuse me.

Mr. Johnston: I—the question in regards to is there going to be expansion of personal-care-home beds in the province of Manitoba, the answer to that is an emphatic yes.

We, as a government, continue to review the needs of seniors in Manitoba, and we have identified and done our due diligence to determine what those needs are.

And I can indicate to the member, as I've indicated to the House on a number of occasions, that this government is in planning and design of personal-care-home requirements, and we will be certainly proceeding to fulfill the obligations of increased personal-care-home requirements and needs of Manitobans.

So, I'm indicating to the member, yes, we are going to be proceeding with expansion to personal-care-home beds in Manitoba.

As a matter of fact, when we do our due diligence, we don't only look at yesterday like I think the opposition does; we look at today and we look at the future. And we take a great deal of advice, certainly, from the government professionals who identify where needs are within the province of Manitoba. And we deliberate on those, and we proceed accordingly with the appropriate budgets and funding that we need to do. And we, as a government, will continue proceeding with that.

But as you look at the different scenarios and the different asks of Manitoba and of seniors in Manitoba and you assess what their needs are and what they would like to do, aging in place and home is a very, very significant priority for the people of Manitoba.

So, what we look at is, we not only look at establishing further supports of personal-care homes. We also look at, well, what other innovations are out there? What other opportunities are out there? What are different models that are being implemented in other places?

And so we do our due diligence when we look to satisfy the needs of Manitobans. And the member indicates—are we going to proceed with expansion? The answer to that is yes. Are we looking at innovation further to that expansion? The answer to that is yes.

So, I can tell you, I've heard the Leader of the Opposition, on occasion, indicate that—his support for further expansion of personal-care-home beds. And I'm sure that the Leader of the Opposition will be thrilled, he'll be absolutely thrilled with the innovation that we're also bringing forward with regards to further fulfilling the needs of our seniors that are looking for care. So, rather than have the opposition play politics with this initiative which will be coming forward—I can assure you of that—it's my expectation that the opposition will support it. Not play politics with it, but support it.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

A question from the member from Elmwood.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to ask the minister, then, how many—he talks about his planning and design phase that he's in right now. How many beds—PCH beds—is he envisioning in this planning and design initiative at the moment?

Mr. Johnston: As I've indicated, we are taking advice from the medical professionals who assess the needs of the people of Manitoba and the communities of Manitoba, and we are acting accordingly.

I had indicated to the member that we will be proceeding with an announcement coming forward very soon. And as I mentioned, I'm sure that the member will be very enthusiastically happy with how we're proceeding. And I'm looking forward to announcing the increase in personal-care homes and the beds in Manitoba as well as further innovation.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: Well, so, I'd like to ask the minister, then, with all this planning and designing that he's doing, is it going to be more or less than 1,200 PCH beds?

Mr. Johnston: You know, the member's asked this question several times and I thought I'd answered it in regards to taking advice from our health professionals and doing our due diligence ensuring that we're fulfilling the needs of Manitobans based on the advice that we have received.

We will be bringing forward initiatives that, again, fulfill the needs of Manitobans based on those recommendations that we have received from health professionals. And also, too, we've worked with communities to assess the opportunities that we will be bringing forward.

So, we will be making an announcement very soon and I'm sure that the member will be happy to support us.

An Honourable Member: Enthusiastic.

Mr. Johnston: Enthusiastically, as my colleague indicates.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Any further questions?

Mr. Maloway: The point is I understand the minister is in his planning and design phase. And given that they promised—his government promised 1,200 PCH beds seven years ago, I don't think it's unreasonable to expect him to tell me whether these projects that he's going to be announcing are 1,200 beds or more than that or less than that. You don't have to tell me what they are, you can just say either you're doing more than 1,200 or you're going to be doing less than 1,200.

Mr. Johnston: Certainly, there's been a great deal of due diligence in determining what is required for the people of Manitoba, the seniors of Manitoba. And we have looked very aggressively in regards to fulfilling those needs and we will be doing it.

And, as I mentioned, I can't stress enough that this is not one-dimensional; this is more than one particular answer to the question. In yesteryears, where the members may be, we're looking to proceed at other models over and above just PCH initiatives.

So we will be coming forward with an announcement that addresses not only fulfilling the goals that we plan to address with the traditional methods, but also, too, we are going to be proceeding to indicate that we are taking some very innovative steps to ensure that we continue to fulfill numbers. And I'm sure that the member will be very happy to support those numbers when we bring them forward.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

* (15:50)

Mr. Maloway: Prior to 2016, when the Conservatives were in opposition in this province, they consistently promised a new PCH home in Lac du Bonnet. And they promised that over several years. Once they got elected in the government, the PCH-home project disappeared.

Can the minister explain to me, like, just where that project is out—is at right now? Is that going to be

one of the new ones that's going to be announced shortly, or is it, like, just off the list at the moment?

Mr. Johnston: You know, the community of Lac du Bonnet is very, very fortunate. They have an excellent, excellent MLA who represents them there—Minister Ewasko—and certainly he has been very, very close to his community. And certainly he's always expressed the needs of his community to our government.

And when this government was deliberating and I had the opportunity to address this with my caucus and our Cabinet—many, many MLAs that brought forward a number of needs that they felt that their communities had—we were very forward and open to have discussions about those needs.

As a matter of fact, the member can take a great deal of peace in the fact that we only—not only looked at some of the areas that are certainly represented by our caucus; we also looked at a number of different areas that were represented by the opposition. I mean, this is not a government initiative; this is a needs initiative. And as we deliberated on the issue of need for personal-care homes, we have listened to the professionals who have been advising us in regards to those needs.

And we went through a number of consultations too, and when I did our seniors strategy, and there were a number of areas that—and opportunities for people to express their points of view, which we heard and we listened to. So, we are—we took into consideration a number of different issues and a number of different concerns and asks from—number of different communities, and we took—as we took those into consideration, we developed how we were going to proceed with an expansion of personal-care homes.

Mr. Maloway: Can the minister tell me what the current cost would be for construction on a per-bed basis for developing the new PCH homes and beds?

Mr. Johnston: I indicated to the member that there is a process. And the process that we are in currently is in regards to planning and design of establishing initiatives that we, as a government, wish to bring forward as per what we will be announcing.

But the question that the member asks is really still a part of the planning and design process that we continue to work through.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: Well, can the minister confirm that the government is committed to using a P3 funding model to build these new PCHs?

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): The Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care (Mr. Johnston).

Mr. Johnston: I would like some—little more time to answer that question.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): I apologize, a little too eager. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Johnston: At this particular juncture, I think that the same answer in regards to where we are in the process is relevant. We are in planning and design of the initiatives that we plan to bring forward and announce to the people of Manitoba.

I don't think, at this particular stage, I would commit to saying that we are and I wouldn't commit to saying that we aren't. I would say that that's part of the process in planning and design, and, ultimately, we will come to terms with how we are going to proceed.

So I can't answer the question that the member poses at this particular time because we're not at that stage.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: So, how many projects is the minister planning to announce when this big announcement occurs?

Mr. Johnston: I am extremely enthusiastic about the diligence that our department has done working with the other levels of government, coming to terms with how are we proceeding.

And to indicate, at this particular time, the communities that are being confirmed is not—is really inappropriate. I don't think I'd bring forward the information before we have further discussions with those communities that will be supporting these initiatives.

So, again, it's premature for me to identify them. The announcement, as I indicated, will be coming forward in the near future. And I'm sure that the member will be very supportive of all of these new initiatives that are coming forward by the government.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: Well, I'm going to make an assumption that the minister will be announcing a number of projects, even though he pretends he doesn't know

how many, but that they will be—some of them will look like the new model, or the model in Holland, the low-profile projects. I'm making assumptions like that.

I'm assuming that they're going to be looking at P3 models, here, but I can't be sure of that. And there's a pretty big cost to building these beds, as the minister knows; I've been told as high as \$400,000.

* (16:00)

So I don't know how many the government will actually make on its own and how many of them will be built under the P3 model, but—and I understand why the minister's holding this off because the reality is they—I guess they haven't decided when the election is going to be and they want to give the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) enough of a chance to go out and announce them one by one, I would guess. I, you know, I know how it works.

But I would expect the minister would be a little more forthright about, you know, the rough, you know, number of beds that he—that they're looking at building.

But we're just going to have to wait and see when the Premier gets around to making the announcement. So I would like to ask the member a couple more questions.

He met with Mr. Eric De Schepper on Tuesday morning, and I just wondered that—how everything went with that meeting. Eric De Schepper is a constituent of mine, and he's approached me and has talked to—you know, has met with the minister, and I'm just hoping that everything is working out fine and that he's been able to help out to solve the issue, right?

So I'd just like to know how things went on Tuesday.

Mr. Johnston: Just before I address the meeting I had with Mr. De Scheppers [*phonetic*], I would like to further address the commentary that the member had made before he asked his final question there, it's a—our senior strategy does address these—he talks about models and different, you know, different scenarios that are out there in different markets, if you will, or different environments.

And we have studied those, and within our seniors strategy, we indicate that it's our view that long term, the opportunity of creating seniors villages, campuses is very enviable. And we will continue to work toward that goal and try to ensure that we fulfill

that. I personally like the model. I think it's a great opportunity, and it creates a pathway for those seniors who are entering their next cycle of life.

I'm happily—I'm one of those folks because I'm over 65 at this particular time and I won't speculate on the member's age, but I'm sure that he's very sympathetic to the fact that there is a path of life for seniors. So we—to the member's comment is that we are looking at not only fulfilling the needs of the traditional method, but we are also too looking at innovation in regard to this whole initiative.

The member indicates a commitment financially and yes, this—it's going to be—there's no question about it, there is definitely an expense to this initiative, but we're prepared to do that and as a government, we have assessed a need and we are going to fulfill that need.

And I come back again to the opposition supporting these types of initiatives. They're very positive initiatives for seniors and, you know, it's time to put the money where the mouth is.

These opportunities are there. These—what have been discussed, and I look forward to the opposition endorsing these types of initiatives because we've talked about them a great deal.

In regard to Mr. De Scheppers [*phonetic*], I'm very—I was very pleased with the discussion I had with Mr. De Scheppers [*phonetic*]. He is a gentleman, and I indicate that very genuinely. He's a nice guy and he had some very tragic circumstances that he had to deal with, and, certainly, our government does not condone what Mr. De Scheppers [*phonetic*] had to deal with.

And in my discussions with Mr. De Scheppers [*phonetic*] I indicated that between our review of the circumstances as well as, I guess more prominently, the review of the situation with the Department of Health, there has been a great deal of deliberation and discussion to try to ensure that these types of situations don't exist.

I was very pleased with Mr. De Schepper's forthright approach and I was also, too, very, very impressed with his will to work together to ensure that these types of situations can be addressed and resolved so that they don't occur again.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: I—as the MLA for the area, the immediate area around Holy Family, I do get a number of inquiries as a lot of my members or my voters, you

know, end up moving to that facility after a certain age. And we—my office hears a lot from—especially from the families of people in that particular building and other buildings in our area.

And part of the process, I think, for—you know, we are in favour of a seniors advocate. I think that would be a good thing for the minister to consider and I know he's—claims he's got his own advocate somewhere in the process.

But I would ask him also to consider the idea of having a council, a family council within each of the PCHs and each of the homes, where you would have perhaps quarterly meetings, right, of this committee. You would have a staff member on there, you would have a representative of the personal-care-home residents, right, the—perhaps even one member from the residents themselves, but certainly the families of the residents. You could have representatives from the operators of the homes themselves.

But, in addition, I'm thinking that might be a good idea to have somebody from the department. Like, because if you have these committees meeting in the homes, that's all well and good, you know, have meetings perhaps four times a year. But if you had a staff member from your department that was assigned to show up, that would pipe you in as to what's going on in the buildings, give you a better advanced notice, particularly when COVID came around, right.

You would know right away each home—for example, Maples, you would know that they're—how many outbreaks are in there and you would get right to the bottom of the problem, I think, a lot easier, as opposed to listening to the owners of Revera, in that case, but the management of a home and the conflicting views that you will—probably would have got from them during that time. Because there was hysteria everywhere during the—during that COVID outbreak.

So that might be something you would consider, in addition to doing whatever you're doing in terms of the advocate. The advocate has some advantages and the fact is—but they're in a separate building, far, far away, right. You need troops on the ground.

And if you've got some sort of structure within there involving the management, involving the representatives of the families and one of your own people to show up there to the—at least once in a while to the odd meeting, you would know right away what was going on in there.

* (16:10)

So I would hope he would consider that idea and it could be worked on. I'm—I don't know whether you need legislation, because that could be arranged too, but whether you need legislation or not, or whether you could just simply do it through the ministry.

But it would cut down, I think, in some of the calls that my office gets, you know, and my assistant is here, so he could tell you how many calls he gets. And, I mean, obviously, since COVID came about, we're getting more calls than we were before, you know. So for many, many years, we would hear from the families about what was going on in the Holy Family Home and, you know, most of it was good; there was the odd, you know, the odd bad comment.

But we weren't, like, being forced into intervening, as has been the case since COVID came about. You know, the people are very upset in there because, you know, we—there's a downside to putting people into isolation. And right today, we have evidently two—yes, two shutdowns or two lockdowns in one of the homes in northeast Winnipeg at the moment, right? So—

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Member's time has expired.

Mr. Johnston: I'll take the member's suggestion under advisement. You know, as I recognize—as I think the member does—that as we went through the pandemic challenge, there were a number of areas that—support areas that can be reviewed and enhanced.

It would be my understanding that currently, right now, that there is regulation in place that does indicate that there has to be councils that are established within personal-care homes. Those councils—the makeup of those councils aren't exclusive to families. *[interjection]* Yes, it's residents of the facility that are usually on the councils or make that up.

But there's no structure requirement. The requirement is that there are councils that represent the residents. So—but in—but to your point, I will, you know, I'll take that into consideration.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maloway: I would like to give the chair to—or give the time, 15 minutes' time to the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

And he's ready.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question is, in the funding allocation which the minister has

received this year, is there money for additional staffing for personal-care homes? And in the vacancy rate that was provided, if there was additional staffing, is that vacancy rate before or after allowing for the additional staffing?

Mr. Johnston: Answer to the member's question is that the money that had been allotted does include the vacancy rate. The extra money that is being indicated would be over and above.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the vacancies, I presume, are in staff in personal-care homes.

And that being the case, where there is a vacancy, can the operator of the personal-care home use that money that's sitting there and is meant for a staff person? Can the operator use that money for other purposes?

* (16:20)

Mr. Johnston: I'm interpreting the member's question is that the allotment of money through Stevenson, as indicated by the staffing announcement or the funding announcement, does get allocated to staffing.

That also, too, may, in fact, include agency staffing. They would have the discretion to be able to fulfill their needs based on that.

But I think where the member was going was that is that money that's being allotted going to staff versus some other initiative. And the answer is through Stevenson, it's going to staffing in the different components there, the different criteria that has been presented.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the minister mentioned that there's 25 personal-care homes with outbreaks as of April the 5th. I'm curious as to the current policy.

Is the—somebody who's been in contact with a case of a person who's had COVID, is there any quarantine steps, and does this result in a shortage of staff, in some instances, because people have to quarantine because they've exposed to a person with COVID?

Mr. Johnston: In answer, there are protocols that are in place in regards to how personal-care homes deal with outbreaks, deal with their residents that do—have wound up with COVID or, for that matter, influenza.

That would be quite significant and quite serious, as I'm sure the member realizes.

So I would answer that based—his question based on that—assuming he's talking about personal-care homes and are there protocols in place to deal with outbreaks that occur within those. Yes, there are protocols that do exist.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gerrard: The reason I had asked that is that, when we were in the heat of the COVID pandemic, that if somebody had been exposed, a staff person had been exposed to a patient with COVID, then there was a requirement that the staff person go quarantined for a while, and that resulted in shortages of staff. And I was just wondering whether that's changed.

I want to just switch slightly and focus on the Stevenson report, and I'd like specifically to ask you about the recommendations which are not complete as of today. And if you could list those recommendations and tell us what the plans are to complete those in each case.

Mr. Johnston: I'll address the quarantine issue that the member brings forward first.

There are protocols in place in regard to how the Department of Health directs quarantine for staff. It's my understanding that there isn't any quarantine issues right now with staff.

Does that compromise the overall operations? I would say that it's fair to say that there are some challenges that are brought forward based on staff not being able to do their jobs because they have been infected by viruses, but I can't indicate what the actual numbers are, although, I'm of the understanding that there isn't any significant situations that exist right now in personal-care homes where staff quarantine is a significant issue.

In regard to the Stevenson recommendations, as I think I indicated to the member of Elmwood, we are proceeding to address the recommendations that are not fulfilled right now. I would indicate to the member that the primary challenge that we have in regard to implementing the recommendations is based on staffing ratios, and that's due to, again, the challenge to be able to bring a staffing implement—a full staffing implement forward.

We are currently continuing to address those needs, and we are climbing. And I think, as the member has asked me in the House a couple of times,

are—in regard to the hours resident ratios, and—I can indicate to the member that we initially started out on a 3.6 basis and now, consistently, we are at a 3.7. There are some venues that are up to the 3.8, but that's not—I wouldn't indicate with accuracy that that is across the board right now because it's not. But there are some personal-care homes that do have a 3.8 ratio.

* (16:30)

So it's our goal—it was our department's goal to try to come to terms with the 3.8-resident-hour ratio by the end of this year, and we are on track pursuing that goal. But I can't confirm that our forecasts indicate that we're going to get there by the end of the year, but that's our goal.

I would indicate to the member that further to—I'm sure his question will be, is the department interested or is the department trying to fulfill a standard of ultimately a four or a 4.1 ratio. And we're in the second year of a four—of a six-year program or a six-year initiative to satisfy the needs of the Stevenson report. And it's our plan to get to a 4.1 within six years.

There's a lot of variables that may be—may affect that. And, again, if we can get there earlier, then, ultimately, our goal would be to get there earlier.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you.

Mr. Maloway: I was noting in my notes here, but not only the notes, but I know the minister did announce a version of the old Critical Home Repair Program.

And I remember, back in 1976—so it probably started around '73, something like that—but up until at least '77, when Sterling Lyon government won, the government of the day had a—we called it critical home repair, and it was, I think, up to \$3,000 per senior. And a lot of the homes were in the North End, you know, and they—it was for steps and things like that, to keep people in their homes longer.

And I always thought that was a wonderful program, but it—then it disappeared under Sterling Lyon. And then, of course, it came back under Neighbourhoods Alive! And then it disappeared again, I guess when Brian Pallister came around.

And then, surprise, surprise, miracles do happen; here it comes back. And the minister's calling it something else, but it's essentially the same program. So it's kind of interesting how, you know—there's really not too many new ideas out there, you know? We just simply borrow them, change them a little bit, call them something else and reintroduce them as our own.

So if the minister has some comments on that, go right ahead. And, otherwise, I think we're ready for the final resolutions.

Mr. Johnston: The member's right. A good idea is a good idea. And home modifications to help seniors age at home longer is certainly something that our government is extremely supportive of.

We recognize—again, I'd indicated earlier that we recognize, based on all the consultations that we've done with seniors and stakeholders, that people want to age at home as long as they can. That's very apparent.

And, therefore, there's a number of initiatives that our government is proceeding with to try to accomplish that, and the home modification program that we've announced works towards that goal. As well as partnering and working with Habitat for Humanity, we announced a support of \$450,000 in working with Habitat for Humanity for—that program was more for lower income Manitobans. The home modification program that the member references is for not only low-income Manitobans but middle-income Manitobans.

So we—I agree with the member; I think we're both agreeing that it's a good program and other governments have done it of all colours, and we're hoping that the people of—seniors of Manitoba utilize it to the degree that they can.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Thank you, Minister.

Minister—or the member from Elmwood.

Mr. Maloway: I move that—[interjection]—oh, sure. Okay.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Okay. Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question.

I will now call resolution 34.2: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$92,577,000 for Seniors and Long-Term Care, Seniors and Long-Term Care, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a)—excuse me—the minister's salary, contained in resolution 34.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Maloway: I move that line item 34.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): I hear a nay.

All those opposed—or, I hear a yea, only. [interjection] Okay.

All of those opposed, please—[interjection] Oh.

Voice Vote

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): All of those in favour, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Okay, all of those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion is accordingly defeated. Thank you.

* * *

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): This completes—[interjection]—not quite? Okay. [interjection] Okay.

Resolution 34.1: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$694,000 for Seniors and Long-Term Care, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

The hour being 4:39, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

The Acting Chairperson (Cathy Cox): Committee rise.

ROOM 255**TAX CREDITS**

* (14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Tax Credits.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): No.

Mr. Chairperson: No? That's okay. We thank the minister for that.

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

Okay, no. Seeing nothing, we thank the member for that.

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

Okay, according to our rule 78(16), during the consideration of the 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.

Seeing no questions, we will move on to resolutions. And there's one resolution.

Resolution 33.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$105,885,000 for Tax Credits, Tax Credits and Fees, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates of Tax Credits.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for Emergency Expenditures.

EMERGENCY EXPENDITURES

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): As previously stated, this section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Emergency Expenditures.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): No.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for that.

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

We thank the member for that.

At this time, if the minister would like, staff can 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.

There is no questions, and we will move on to resolutions.

Moving on to resolution 27.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$100,000,000 for Emergency Expenditures, Emergency Expenditures, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of Emergency Expenditures.

ENABLING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): As previously stated, this section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of enabling expenditures. Does the—I'm sorry. I'll start that again.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Enabling Appropriations.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): No.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for that.

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

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): No.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the official opposition critic for that.

At this time, again, we will ask the minister's staff to join the table, if needed.

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.

There is no questions. We will now move on to resolutions.

Resolution 26.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$948,911,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Internal Service Adjustments, Contingencies and Limited-Term Funding, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$40,000,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Green and Carbon Reduction Fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$215,238,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Capital Assets – Internal Service Adjustments, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$107,395,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment – Contingencies, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of Enabling Appropriations.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Families.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the opportunity to prepare for the next commencement? *[Agreed]*

We will recess.

The committee recessed at 2:48 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:08 p.m.

FAMILIES

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): 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 Families.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Families.

Ms. Squires: So, I'm pleased to introduce the '23-24 Department of Families budget. Before I begin I want to acknowledge the work of the Chamber staff, the Hansard recorders and the technicians who are supporting us today. You are critical to the smooth functioning of this committee, and we thank you for your efforts.

I want to recognize the tremendous staff in my department. These are people who are supporting and reaching out to vulnerable Manitobans who are often in the most difficult of circumstances. It is demanding work, requiring dedication and care, and I want to say what a privilege it is to be working alongside each and every one of you.

Manitoba Families is responsible for a wide range of programs and services that keep Manitobans' individuals, families and communities safe and secure, while supporting personal development, self-reliance, well-being and social inclusion. I'll take a few minutes to highlight some of the historic investments our government is making to support the department in its work for Manitobans.

This year's budget includes over \$50 million in new funding to support the Province's first homelessness strategy called A Place for Everyone. To support the strategy, we are expanding the capacity of the housing support services team and increasing the number of support staff within Manitoba Housing. Transitional housing is a key tool, and we will work with—and this work will help with new investments in transitional housing programs, such as investments at RaY's Emergency Shelter and Transition programs, and Astum Api Niikinaahk.

* (15:10)

In our consultation, community partners said new housing was critical to ending homelessness. With this year's investments we will add 400 more units to our rent supplement program and support the development of a further 300 new units of social housing.

Manitoba Budget 2023 also provides funds for housing support programs for Manitobans in need, such as the Manitoba Rent Relief Fund, which is an eviction prevention loan program to bridge a temporary interruption of income or unexpected expenses that cause rent or utility arrears and a pending eviction.

The Manitoba Tipi Mitawa program provides forgettable down payments and subsidized mortgage payments for housing within Winnipeg purchased by qualifying Indigenous first-time home buyers. The portable housing benefit provides low-income individuals with a mental health disability who have an unstable housing situation. And the Rural Home Ownership Program helps low- to moderate-income households purchase underutilized single and semi-detached homes in select rural communities.

I want to mention the Rent Assist program, a unique program made in Manitoba which has been commended by jurisdictions across the country. Rent Assist provides benefits for households who receive provincial income assistance and have shelter costs, as well as low-income Manitobans renting in the private market who do not receive income assistance.

Budget '23 invests \$11.6 million to index Rent Assist in July based on benefits that reflect 77 per cent of median market rent for households in receipt of income assistance, and 80 per cent for low-income households not receiving income assistance.

Budget '23 also provides a framework for better services to clients as well as better supports to staff who are delivering these vital programs. The employment assistance program continues to work—its work in modernizing income assistance supports through a number of key initiatives, such as the supportive planning incentive, the Families' justice communities supports program, which our request for proposals was recently launched for up to \$2 million seeking partnerships with community organizations to design and deliver innovative programming, often help to intensive and personalized wraparound supports to persons receiving income assistance and who are involved with the justice system.

We also established the community bridge fund to support vulnerable Manitobans facing significant barriers that impede their ability to access income assistance, particularly those with complex mental health issues or those experiencing homelessness. This bridge fund delivered by community agency partners, will provide short-term benefits to persons not enrolled on EIA, as well as wraparound supports to help get them through the application process.

We also are investing in the ready, set, work program, a diversion program for employment-ready individuals without dependent children, and training for EIA counsellors, as a larger strategy to strengthen client service delivery. It is a training and development series for staff, delivering income assistance support in effort to equip them with the resources and skills to support the complex needs of clients.

In April of 2022, our government announced a new funding model for shelters under the Family Violence Prevention Program that focused on building staffing capacity to ensure quality service. The first phase began last year with a \$3.2-million investment to support staff and salary increases at all shelters. Budget '23 adds a further \$1.6 million in—as part of its three-year plan.

This year our government introduced new funding models for the remaining program sets within the Family Violence Prevention sector. The annualized funding increase includes \$2 million for our women's resource centres; \$890,000 for second stage programs; and 439 for specialized programs.

Budget '23 also provides funding for three new low-barrier family violence programs, includes \$1.5 million in annualized funding to support Velma's House; \$216,000 for the Chris Tetlock Place, which is run by the North End Women's Centre, and \$394,000 for west central women's centre 33-bed transitional housing program.

Our government remains committed to child welfare transformation that focuses on the needs of children, youth and families. An investment of \$27 million, the majority of which is net new funding in Budget '23, will support the Child and Family Services sector, including \$11 million in one-time funding to address retroactive wage pressures, recruitment and staff retention.

This funding includes ongoing increases of \$13.9 million to address rising costs of providing care, as well dedicated funding to First Nations authorities to support national standards outlined in the federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, which are focused on the best interests of Indigenous children.

Provision of Child and Family Services and prioritize in placement of children with family, kin and community. In January, Manitoba signed the first ever co-ordination agreement with Canada and Peguis First Nation, marking a significant step not only in the

provision of child and family services but toward reconciliation.

Our government committed an additional \$4.6 million for youth exiting care through the extension of the Supports for Young Adults Grant. This funding enables CFS agencies to provide funding, supports and services for young adults up to the age of 26 to help prevent young people from experiencing negative outcomes as a result of aging out of care early.

We will provide a total of \$708,000 in annualized funding to Indigenous-led programs that include the Community Helper Program, co-ordinated by Wahbung, Andrews Street, Mount Carmel Clinic, Blue Thunderbird Family Care and the Winnipeg Boldness Project to provide Indigenous-led 24-hour in-home supports to families in crisis to avoid involvement in the child welfare system.

We've also committed to funding for Granny's House—a second Granny's House, run by Blue Thunderbird; a Super Dads program; \$510,000 to the United Way Winnipeg for continued operations of the 211 Manitoba access service.

And we are also committed to families with disabilities and, in Budget 2023, included a historic investment of \$103.5 million in new funding for the CLDS and Children's disABILITY Services, for a total commitment of \$640.4 million annually toward services for the disability community.

Of the \$103 million in new funding, \$79.7 million will be used to increase the baseline-funded hourly wage from \$15 to \$19 for direct-service workers who provide residential day and respite services.

In addition, the baseline-funded hourly wage for supervisors and shift staff of group homes will increase from \$16 to \$20.90. An additional \$21.4 million will be used to expand capacity in the CLDS services to support new entrants into the program; \$8.1 million in new funds for the Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities program; the new income assistance program for persons with severe and prolonged disabilities.

Manitoba supports will be the first income support program in Manitoba that is indexed to the rate of inflation. In January of 2023, we saw the transition of 7,700 EIA disability clients to Manitoba Supports, and the program is now eligible to—all eligible Manitobans are able to apply.

As the Minister responsible for Accessibility, I'm please to provide an update on the implementation of

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. We've enacted accessibility standards for customer service, employment and information and communications. Each standard was developed with representatives from the disability community and others. Two additional standards are being developed for accessible transportation and the design of outdoor spaces, and we anticipate these two remaining standards will be in place this year.

We also launched the Manitoba Accessibility Fund, which I will explain and elaborate on in a subsequent time when I have.

We've also see a 52 per cent increase in translation services on the Francophone Affairs side of things and completed a record number of active offer training modules.

I have so many more good things to say about what the department has been doing, but that concludes my opening remarks. And again, thank you, a big thank you to all my staff.

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

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

No? We thank the member for that.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered from the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 9.1(a), contained in resolution 9.1.

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

Ms. Squires: It is with absolute pleasure that I introduce my remarkable team to this committee. Seated to my left is Michelle Dubik, the deputy minister of the Department of Families; also seated at the—against the wall is Elizabeth Debicka, the assistant deputy minister for the new department responsible for Indigenous governing bodies support branch.

* (15:20)

Brenda Feng is joining us. She is the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Administration and Finance Division. John Mikula is the acting assistant deputy minister responsible for the Community Service Delivery Division; Christina Moody is the assistant deputy minister responsible for child and family—Child and Youth Services Division;

Carolyn Ryan is the acting chief executive officer for Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation; and Heidi Wurmman is the assistant deputy minister responsible for Corporate Services Division and acting assistant minister responsible for the Technology and Transformation Division. Oh, and—pardon me, Melanie Maher, my special adviser.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those introductions, and we welcome you all to this committee.

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.

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I have a bunch of questions, but I think what I'm going to do is something maybe a little bit different, is—I want to kind of go over these key initiatives and just to kind of understand a little bit more about each of them.

And so, I think I'm just going to kind of go down the line of questions that I have and some of the things that I would like us to kind of explore further. So, I'll kind of go chronologically in respect of those key initiatives.

So, I'd like some more information in respect to the Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities and the new income support program for Manitobans with severe and prolonged disabilities. I suspect that the minister has probably received some emails already—or perhaps staff—that there is some concerns about some—this new programming that some Manitobans with disabilities are left out.

And so—and, in fact, just this past weekend, I actually had an—two individuals, actually, had come up to me and had brought this up with me. But it wasn't—it was kind of not the place to kind of chat because it was really busy. But I did say to them that I would follow up with them and that I would actually talk with the minister just to get a better sense of some of their concerns.

And as I said, their concerns were that some folks wouldn't be able to apply for this new kind of regime. So, if we could kind of explore that, I think that would be great.

Ms. Squires: So, I thank the member for her question. And, certainly, my office is available to answer any

specifics that her constituents may bring to her attention on a case-by-case basis.

But what this new program will do is, on January 1st we took 7,500 EIA clients—who are severely or having severe—that have severe and prolonged disabilities—we took them off the EIA program and put them specifically into this new Manitoba supports program. And now they don't need to go back and require annual reassessments, and to come back into the EIA office and to make their claim over and over and over again. Now they are permanently into this program until they tell us otherwise, and they are in that category with enhanced benefits.

The other category that has been newly created is the medical barriers to employment. And in order to receive the medical barriers to employment benefit, there is an assessment that will be required, and the assessment tool that has been developed for these purposes was developed in conjunction with community. And there was extensive consultation on the development of this assessment tool.

We think that the assessment tool is really important to ensure that everybody who has a disability and no other income to support themselves can receive these benefits under the medical barriers to employment.

And so, the assessment process has begun, and we've also opened up applications. We onboarded the 7,500 current cases from the EIA disability program into the new Manitoba supports program for those with severe and prolonged disabilities. That is now open to any applicant. And the medical barriers to employment is now onboarding people into that program upon completion of that assessment.

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate that.

So, we know that—and even on the website here, it says that some Manitobans will be instantly eligible, and we just spoke about that; moving those folks, those citizens, from EIA directly into this new program. And the—and from what the minister just said, there's no longer the requirement to do an annual review of that particular citizen's file, or whatever it is. Okay.

But why are there some other Manitobans with long-term disabilities, severe or long-term disabilities, that are then required to apply. So, what is the difference there? Is that citizens who have—I'm kind of confused on that. And I think that that was, as I shared on the weekend, that was some of the concerns of these folks that now have to, kind of, apply and weren't automatically put onto this.

So I'm trying to understand the two differences.

* (15:30)

Ms. Squires: So, I appreciate the member's question.

So, out of the other individuals, the other class that wasn't as easy to onboard onto the severe and prolonged disability category, those who are experiencing medical barriers to employment—pardon me, let me back up. The people that were—that are currently on the disability income support program need to be reassessed to gain entrance into the medical barriers to employment. And they will need to make a new application.

What we are doing is ensuring that there is a long process for this to occur, because, No. 1, we don't want everybody to be going out at once to seek a certification from their doctor, and thereby overwhelming the health system. We are working in conjunction with our health partners to ensure that the system isn't overwhelmed.

So, we are phasing this out over a longer duration to ensure that if you're currently receiving a disability benefit, and you're now being encouraged to reapply to the medical barriers to employment program, that there will be an assessment that you will have to undergo, and this assessment tool will ensure that we've got fairness and consistency in that process. And then they will be determined whether or not they were or are going on to the medical barriers to employment category or the general assistance category.

Of course, this process is going to be—we're taking a longer approach to implementing this, because, as I'd said before, we don't want to overwhelm the health system, but we also don't want to overwhelm the clients who have been receiving this benefit and catching anybody off guard, and not ensuring—or ensuring that they are aware of the next steps that they need to do to ensure that they get the disability benefit.

But the program is set up so that anybody who has a disability, whether it is severe and prolonged or whether it is a disability that is preventing them from obtaining employment, that they will be onboarded into the new program.

And of course, with all of our programs, there is the consistent and—consistent assessment process, and then there's the appeal process if they're unhappy with the results of that assessment.

MLA Fontaine: So, is there a gap in between—because you said it a couple of times that this is a long

process, you're taking a long time to kind of—so, I'm confused.

Like, is this—is there a gap between folks who are being encouraged to then get assessed and potentially go into the medical barriers from employment stream, I suppose? Like, are they—is there an opportunity for them to not have any income? Or, like—if that can be just kind of explained a little bit longer, especially the part about, like, you're taking a longer time to—I just want some clarification on that, please.

So, for instance, let's just say, like, I'm on EIA. So, Nahanni Fontaine's on EIA—no, the member for St. Johns is on EIA. And—but now, the member for St. Johns is being encouraged to do an assessment. What would that process look like?

Ms. Squires: Okay, I can assure the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) that if she did apply, she would be—she probably wouldn't pass the criteria for getting onto the disability income support program.

But if anybody who's currently on the disability income support program today, they will be receiving a letter in the next—maybe they have already received a letter or they'll be receiving a letter in the very near future telling them about this new program, and they will be invited to do their own self-assessment and send that back into the office.

There may be a requirement for a physician's note, and there will be dialogue between the applicant and the disability—the Manitoba supports agency. There will be an adjudication process, and then there will be a decision made. This—and then once the decision is made, within two to four months after that decision is made, then that applicant will then transition into whatever category of assistance they are eligible for.

And so what I can completely understand is that there would be some concern with a person who would be on the disability program, the legacy disability program, receiving a letter saying you now need to reapply because we've changed the program.

What I can say is that anybody who is on disability right now who receives that letter, their benefits will not be impacted or adjusted. They will be not reassigned into any of the three categories that we've now created, whether that be the severe and prolonged disability category, the medical barriers to employment category or the general assistance category until all of these steps have taken. So that includes the self-assessment, the physician's recommendation, the dialogue with the Manitoba supports worker, the adjudication,

a decision and then a time period at the end of every decision, which I think is something that's been standard with the Department of Families that whenever a decision is made, when we've made substantive changes to a program benefit, to ensure that there's time for onboarding or offboarding, if that may be the case.

MLA Fontaine: So there's three different categories that a person with disabilities, a citizen with disabilities, three categories in total, that folks can—citizens can—okay. I'm curious as to why, like, the reasoning and the rationale in respect of these new processes and then in respect of that, like, did that come from, again, the reasoning, but also, was that something that the community had engaged with or had been in—consulted with? And, again, like, just the rationale for this new system here.

* (15:40)

Ms. Squires: Yes, thank you for that.

And stemming back to the 2019 election, you'll recall that there was a campaign spearheaded by disability vote matters that had specifically called on all political parties to implement a new program for people with disabilities to move them off of EIA. The rationale was that it was more dignified, in the sense that it included more enhanced benefits, actual dollars in their pocket on a monthly basis, but it also was—reduced the need for them to continuously justify their disability.

And so that was a direct call from a community that our government responded to with the creation of this new Manitoba supports program.

And I should also state that it probably went back even further than the 2019 campaign. I just quoted that one from memory because I do recall them specifically asking for that and I remember sitting down with disability vote matters.

After making that campaign promise, we did consult broadly with the community on the creation of a new program and—where we landed on having these three different categories—the general assistance category, the medical barriers to employment category and the severe and prolonged disabilities category—was after consultation with community. In all—in both of the disability categories, there are fewer requirements for an assessment, whether you're in the medical barriers or the severe and prolonged.

So, it's obviously less of a constraint on the health system, but it's just a lot more dignified to be able to

say to someone, here's your benefit, and we're not going to be calling you in three months, asking you, are you still afflicted with your injury or your disability or what have you. It's a lot less interaction from—with the client in regards to assessment. So that's the genesis of the entire program.

And then, also, the assessment tool, which I explained earlier, is really key in ensuring that there is a consistent approach because the severe and prolonged category, it was easier to on-board people in that category. Anybody who's in receipt of Community Living disABILITY Services, anybody who's in receipt of the CPP pension—disability pension—they are automatically enrolled in this program.

The medical barriers program, of course, is more nuanced and certainly requires that other process of going through the self-assessment and seeing a physician. But once they do get into that program, they will have fewer interactions with the Manitoba supports office in terms of, you know, calling every few months to determine whether or not they're still eligible for the program or not. The eligibility is much longer.

And then it is also providing more dollars. And we did recently just increase the dollar amounts in both of the categories to reflect the costs of inflation as well as laundry, telephone and transportation was added—no transportation—laundry and telephone was added to these categories, just to provide extra money for the applicants.

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate that answer.

So that was—actually, I was going to ask, in respect of dollars and cents, so there's going to be a couple of questions in here.

So, overall, how many folks are—how many citizens are currently enrolled or utilize EIA? How many folks, how many citizens are currently—and again, I recognize that some folks will be transitioning to medical barriers to employment, but how many folks of the totality would you say fit within, you know, the severe or prolonged category and the medical barrier category? So kind of, like, three questions there.

And then that was actually going to be one of my questions was, you know, do—are citizens who, you know, fit within this criteria, do they get additional dollars? So in those categories—but also in general assistance—you know, the rates, what were they? I know that you've said that they've increased, certainly, for medical and severe and prolonged, but overall, as well.

So I'm kind of looking at the rates, what they were, what they've increased to.

* (15:50)

Ms. Squires: So a current snapshot right now with the EIA program is there are 39,000 recipients. And of the 39,000 recipients on—in the EIA, sort of, legacy program, if you will, in the former disability EIA category, there's 21,000. We have moved 7,500 of those already, on January the 1st, over to the Manitoba supports program because they didn't need the assessment. And so those are the ones in the severe and prolonged disability category; no assessment required, we just moved them from one category into another on January 1.

And April 1 is when the migration of—if you will—of the other remaining number of disability EIA clients will begin the process of reassessment to go into the severe and prolonged category, or the medical barriers to assistance.

In regards to the amount of assistance, in the general assistance category we increased the amount last fall. It was the first increase to the general assistance category since 2004. And so, currently, someone in the general assistance category would receive \$936 as a monthly benefit. Compare—in comparison to the amount that someone would receive in the medical barriers to employment disability category, they would receive \$1,152 a month. And applicants in the severe and prolonged disability category receive \$1,271 a month.

And what we've also done, for the two categories of—for disability supports, we have increased the number of exemptions; that means number of other benefits that they would be receiving are exempted—more exemptions in those two categories than any other. And we've also increased the amount that they can earn.

We know many—particularly, I'll speak of the CLDS clients in the severe and prolonged disability category—many of them have jobs that they really find very fulfilling, and are participating in the labour market and we increased the amount that they can earn every year to \$12,000 per year before any impact on their benefits.

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for that; that's very, very helpful.

And so, medical barriers to employment and severe and prolonged, those citizens can earn up to 12,000 additional dollars in both of those categories?

What about—and also for general assistance, what's—how much can they earn above and beyond?

Ms. Squires: So, I do need to correct the record. I did misspeak in my last answer.

So, Manitoba supports, the medical barriers category, they can do \$12,000 annual income that they can earn without it being—before it impacts their benefits. And that's an annual amount and it's not assessed on a month-to-month basis.

The medical barriers category is treated similar to the general assistance category in that it is calculated on a monthly basis, and what they're entitled to earn before it impacts their benefit is \$200 plus 30 per cent of their net earnings.

So, for example, if you made—if you were in one of these categories, on a monthly basis, you're entitled to make \$1,000—or, if you made \$1,000, the first \$200 would be exempt and then 30 per cent of that remaining \$800 would also be exempt and then the remainder would be calculated as income that would impact your benefit.

MLA Fontaine: Okay. Let's just say that I was making an additional \$200 a month, just for simple math. There's no consequences to the dollars. Okay.

Okay, miigwech for all of that. That's very, very helpful.

I do want to kind of explore or understand a little bit more about the—this piece, and I'll just read it out here.

So EIA will introduce the supportive planning incentive in April 2023 for persons enrolled in the new medical barriers to full employment category, who are unable to work due to challenges related to medical circumstances but are not eligible for Manitoba Supports for Persons with Disabilities. Individuals will be entitled to receive an extra \$25 monthly benefit if they choose to participate in supportive planning intended towards the quality of life—da, da, da—supportive planning, range of activities, relevant education and training programs with the goal of supporting clients with disabilities to move forward in their journey of independence.

* (16:00)

So, I am curious a little bit more about that. What are some of those activities or planning—like, what does that look like?

And then the amount of \$25. Like, certainly, I'm sure that the minister can appreciate that \$25 doesn't seem like a lot, particularly right now. So, I'm just

trying to understand, like, where that dollar figure came from and whether or not there's any plans to increase that. And then, I guess, ultimately, you know, the last sentence: to move forward in their journey to independence, you know, is this ultimately to get them off whatever category that they are on?

Bunch of questions in there.

Ms. Squires: So, this is a brand new benefit, and we are going to take the year to assess it and to see how our clients feel it is—whether or not it is effective or not before we determine whether or not we'll increase the benefit. But certainly open to looking at that, as well.

So, this \$25 monthly benefit for supportive planning lives alongside that volunteer benefit. We've had a historical practice of investing between \$50 and \$100 to any of our clients who volunteer. It is a bit of an incentive for them to engage in community and work in that capacity.

So this one is designed to live alongside that. And, really, it encourages people to engage in literacy training or pre-employment training programs, the Single Parent Employment Program, which is developing those life skills.

It is—there's other initiatives: Indigenous and cultural programming, and many other community-led programs that would qualify as these—that would qualify as the program that they could take to receive the Supportive Planning Incentive benefit.

And, really, it's—we recognize that it's not a life-changing amount of money, but it does provide them with, perhaps, extra money for coffee on a daily basis if they are taking place—taking training in a program and they want to go and have a daily coffee and conversation with the co-applicants, that they would have those few extra dollars to do that. This is also in addition to the up to \$100 that they would receive for the transportation costs that we provide as an additional benefit for anyone who's engaged in supportive planning and training.

These are purely incentives. There are no work expectations for anybody in the medical barriers to employment category, and this is just, really, to help them explore if they do want to look at engaging in planning of this sort and something that, you know, I can speak from personal experience.

I remember when I was on EIA and had a grade 10 education and was really looking at what initiatives might be available to me, and I participated in a life

skills program for expectant teenage moms. And at that time, it wasn't a \$25 extra benefit, but there was some incentives to take this program, and it was a 12-week summer program that I'd engaged in, and it certainly changed the trajectory of my life because it helped me get on the path to going back and obtaining my grade 12.

Mr. Shannon Martin, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

And so this was really designed to provide those pathways for other EIA clients.

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for that, Minister.

I'd like to chat about the plan of closure of the Manitoba development centre and to—because I know that it was earmarked for, like, March of 2024, so I'm curious where we're at on that path and, you know, what that community-based placement, what does that look like? What is the department currently looking at in respect of this closure and how that will impact on families. Have families been engaged in that process? So, some of that.

Ms. Squires: So, with the closure of the Manitoba Developmental Centre, plans have been in place. As the critic had pointed out, two years ago, we'd announced the closure slated for March of 2024, and we have already moved some residents out of MDC into community, and currently, there are 83 remaining residents living at MDC. They all have individualized personal plans for their leaving MDC and moving into community. All of them—all these care plans have been in—developed with the engagement of the family, and we also have an advisory committee that has been established to really provide consultation and advice for these families as their—and loved ones to help them determine the best path forward for the resident.

We've also invested in a workforce transition program and are funding retraining for any of the staff that are at MDC because our commitment has always been that as long as there is a resident calling MDC home, that there would be adequate care and the delivery of service that they depend upon.

And so, keeping staff in place, yet working with them, as we move towards that closure date has been very integral to this whole process, and that is running very smoothly, and we anticipate that the deadline will be met where all 83 of the remaining residents will find their place outside of the Manitoba Developmental Centre and that we will be able to successfully close that.

* (16:10)

And one of the reasons why we moved forward with stabilizing the Community Living disABILITY sector this year with that historic \$104-million investment—which, most of it went to wages to ensure that we have a healthy Community Living disABILITY sector, that we have group homes in place and that shift-staffed homes are operating, so that as these residents are moving into community—and so many of them are embracing living in community after years of being in an institution—that they do have a functioning community and a well-staffed care home to move into; that their needs will be met.

And some of them, of course, have complex needs, but those needs are being met, because we do have—made the investments in a secure CLDS sector.

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for that. So, seemingly, on the path to full closure by March of 2024.

I'd be interested to know what some of those community-based supported living arrangements look like.

How many—what—how many places are we looking at? How many folks live in each of these different community assisted-living areas—arrangements? And then, the \$104 million is specifically going to support those, or are some of these private?

So, some of those questions on that.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

So, currently, right now, there are 8,000 CLDS clients living in community. And so, moving an additional 83 clients from Manitoba Developmental Centre into community certainly isn't a large influx, and there is capacity and there certainly will be capacity for each client as they transition out.

So the residential options that are available for all the Manitoba Developmental Centre clients—there's three categories of options that are available to the clients coming out of MDC. One is the shift-staffed home, which is—the predominant number of people living in community live in what is classified as a shift-staffed home, which is operated by an agency and have staff who are there 24-7 to provide services and supports to the residents. And you see these homes will generally have more than one client living in the home. I've been to some community members' homes where there have been as many as eight or nine folks living in a shift-staffed group home, and some

have been as few as two or three. But that—so that depends.

And inside these shift-staffed homes are the employees who work and provide that service and support. So when I had mentioned earlier the \$104-million increase in the budget, that goes to support the wage increase for those folks working in the shift-staffed homes. They were currently making \$15 an hour; \$15.11 was their wage. And we increased that up to \$19 an hour because we needed to bring stability to that sector, to make sure that there are more people in this sector, that they will be able to recruit and retain people so that we ensure that there is round-the-clock coverage for all the residents that are living in shift-staffed homes.

We also did want to recognize the good work that many of the individuals who work in shift-staffed homes do and did during the pandemic. There was a great urgency to ensure that they continued to go to work day in and day out at these shift-staffed homes during our pandemic and certainly wanted to recognize the good work that they did. And ultimately—and their decision to continue to go to work day in and day out saved lives during the pandemic, and we're very grateful that there were very few outbreaks that impacted—that had adverse impact on our residents living in the shift-staffed homes.

So that is the main—the bulk of the clients—CLDS clients live in shift-staffed homes, and they are supported by 94 CLDS agencies. So the Department of Families has service purchase agreements with 94 of these agencies who then, of course, manage and provide the operations for these shift-staffed homes.

Home shares are another living situation in which individuals will share a home and they receive the support and assistance from the host family or individual.

And there's what's called purpose-built homes that are customized homes built to a higher construction standard than typical homes. And as you can imagine, some of our clients coming out of MDC really need to move into a purpose-built home because they have higher complex needs, and these homes need to be operated by an agency that allows individuals with these complex needs to be supported to live in community while reducing the risk of harm to themselves.

And so we're in—currently in construction of three purpose-built homes to ensure that those clients with the highest needs have a place to call home. And those

are in various stages of construction. One is complete and the two others we anticipate being complete before the last resident calls MDC home.

MLA Fontaine: So the shift-staffed homes, there's 94 agencies that you've got. Okay, so perfect.

The home shares, how many do we have there? And then the purpose-built homes, on top of the three that are—or two, I suppose, that are still under construction, how many do we have there? And then how much staff would be at each of these?

* (16:20)

Ms. Squires: So there's approximately 10,000 staff in the sector. That includes part time and full time. And then there's 1,100 home shares in the system.

And in regards to purpose-built homes, there's only three. This is a brand new initiative. We just started doing purpose-built homes when we announced the closure of MDC, because this was now taking clients with that—complex needs and moving them out of an institution and into community. So these are brand-new initiatives and the first one opened and the other two, like I said, are on deck to open up very soon. But when it opened it was the first in Manitoba's history.

And you'll also note that we did redesignate St. Amant. It is no longer a developmental centre. So what this means is that in March of '24 when MDC finally closes its doors for good, there will be no developmental centre in the province of Manitoba, which is a historic shift. It has been over a century since we can say we've not had—or, that we are free of having a developmental centre in our province.

And so I can anticipate that there will be future needs to create and build more purpose-built homes, but for now, this—these were built with some of the clients that we knew would be leaving MDC and would be needing these requirements.

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate that.

So there's going to be three in total. There's not three now and then an—okay, perfect.

So, geographically, I would imagine that these are all over Manitoba, but I am curious how many we have in rural and northern Manitoba.

An Honourable Member: I just want to add to that question—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. Johns.

MLA Fontaine: I just want to that as well—miigwech—I just want to add: Is it possible to get a list of all of

these three different criteria—or, categories of—that might be easier.

An Honourable Member: Categories of?

MLA Fontaine: Well, the shift staffed—yes, all—the three categories, if I can get a list of that, would be great.

Ms. Squires: So, I will definitely table for the critic's review a listing by region in terms of where our homes are located. I don't have that at my fingertips.

But what I do have is the breakdown of our clients by region. So, for example, in central Manitoba, we have 784 active CLDS files, so you can anticipate that there would be a 'commesurate' amount of care homes in that region: in Eastman, we have 760 files; and 430 in Interlake; 241 in northern Manitoba; 157 in Parkland; 582 in Westman; and 4,738 clients living in Winnipeg.

And, absolutely, I will provide the member with that list of the breakdown between the three different categories: shift-staffed, purpose-built and home shares.

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate that, thank you. And I appreciate the regional breakdown. I think that that's very helpful, as well.

In respect of, you know, all three different categories that the Province has, how does oversight work? So, I'm interested to see what the infrastructure is to ensure that each is—each of these different three categories are being run in a good way, in a safe way. So, what does that look like?

* (16:30)

Ms. Squires: So when it comes to ensuring that there is safety and financial accountability with all of our residential—our shift-staffed homes and purpose-built homes, we have residential care licensing that oversees all of the operations of the shift-staffed and purpose-built homes.

There is definitely a higher degree of monitoring and accountability and oversight in regards to ensuring that the services being delivered are adequate. They—we have community-service workers within the Department of Families that make routine visits and are engaged regularly with the licensed residential-care provider or the purpose-built provider.

And then we also have an agency accountability unit that ensures financial oversight to protect the integrity of Manitoba's investment, to ensure that the terms are being met and that the services are being provided to the clients living in these circumstances,

or—whether it be in a resident—shift-staffed home or a purpose-built home.

When it comes to the home shares and also the independent living arrangements that many clients choose, there is definitely less oversight from the Department of Families. There are community-service workers, and they do have a point of contact into the department, but they're not directly managed by the Department of Families with a SPA, and they're not licensed.

So, the service-purchase agreement is really the integral document that the Department of Families has signed with these agencies. When they come into the 94 CLDS agencies, they all have service-purchase agreements, which outline in detail their—the requirements for having that service and those funds from the Province of Manitoba. And it also requires them to be licensed and commit to the terms that we set out with the monitoring and the oversight.

MLA Fontaine: Okay. Miigwech for that.

I want to move on to the bridge program for children and youth, the \$8-million project that was given to New Directions. I know that in here it says that the department is continuing to evaluate the program.

I'm curious what's currently going on with the program. Is the pilot project finished? If it is finished, I'm curious how many citizens or families that that \$8 million went to support, that's run out of New Directions, and whether or not there's any plans to continue a similar project, but with other community-based organizations, right?

So, getting that respite out of CFS and into the community and if there's additional plans to do that.

Ms. Squires: Certainly, this was an important program and much needed from communities. So we set up two different programs to ensure that there was that intensive respite for children and adolescents with developmental disabilities.

And it was really about ensuring that children who had no protection concerns were not being brought into the CFS system simply to acquire more access to respite.

And so these two initiatives are enabling families to stay together and yet also be supported when they're dealing with children and youth with complex needs.

So St. Amant has opened up two new homes. The first home opened doors in February of 2022, and the second home in Brandon opened doors in May of 2022,

and so they've been operating for not quite a year in Brandon and just over a year in Winnipeg. And evaluations are being undertaken right now, but I can say that there is definitely a very high demand for this, so that \$4.8-million investment is being evaluated right now, but I anticipate ensuring that we've got an ongoing—that this remains an ongoing initiative for the many families.

I don't have a number of the families that have—oh, I do have the number of families—59 referrals were accepted in St. Amant in the last year since they opened doors in Winnipeg and last eight months since they opened doors in Brandon. And we know that there's definitely a demand for this service.

And so—and then in regards to the New Directions \$8-million initiative that was announced a year ago, we underwent an RFP process—well, we started off by calling it the \$8-million bridge program; we did the RFP process; New Directions received that bid and they have been establishing the program. They're about to start imminently; they're just waiting on licensing from the City of Winnipeg. As soon as they receive their licence, they will open doors and start receiving kids in that program as well.

And in regards to whether or not there's plans to make this—to annualize these investments, I certainly will be looking at this and ensuring that there's longevity for these long-term respite programs.

MLA Fontaine: So, just a clarifying question: so, 59 referrals, is that both Winnipeg and Brandon? And why—I'm curious why New Directions, that only operates in Winnipeg for the most part, why they got almost double the amount of money that two different sites got.

And to add to that, like, what is the anticipated number of families or referrals that New Directions is potentially going to have for double the amount of money that two other sites have?

* (16:40)

Ms. Squires: So, to clarify, the \$4.8 million to support the two St. Amant respite homes is an annual amount, whereas the \$8 million for the New Directions is \$8 million for two years because the New Directions bridge program was established as a pilot, and so we provided \$8 million for two years; it's not part of the annual budget cycle just yet, not like the St. Amant initiative.

And also, in regards to the clients that New Directions will serve, they are certainly youth and—

kids and adolescents with higher needs; more complex challenges. So, providing that respite service would potentially cost more than some of the clients going into St. Amant. So, it's definitely more complex needs for the New Directions kids and youth. And they will be operating three homes; two in Winnipeg, one in Portage.

MLA Fontaine: Okay, so in respect of this—these two programs, initiatives, there's none up north. So is there a plan to have some in the North, in The Pas or Thompson? So that's one question. What the heck was my second question—just give me a minute, just give me a minute. Oh, got it.

I'm not sure if you have access to this information, but I am curious. Out of the folks that are—or referrals or the families that are accessing this respite—and then, of course, New Directions is just in the process—but is there a sense of, you know, how many of the families would be Indigenous, how many of the families would be newcomer families, how many of the families would be, you know, Euro-Canadian? Is there a sense of those demographics of folks that are accessing those programs?

Ms. Squires: So, as this pilot is dealing—it's a new initiative, and we're working with two agencies that have got, certainly, a lot of history and expertise in delivering these services, St. Amant and New Directions.

When we're evaluating this—these pilots, we certainly will be looking for resource building and capacity building to offer the services up north. Unfortunately, we don't have that service available right now in the North, but it's certainly something that we're looking towards enhancing capacity and establishing a program such as this in northern Manitoba.

And in regards to the demographics and the breakdown of the demographics, any child or youth receiving services from one of these respite initiatives would certainly be a client of children and disability services, which we don't report on their demographic or ethnicity, so I don't have those figures—or, those numbers—by demographic.

MLA Fontaine: Yes, I was thinking that perhaps there was, but—because it's keeping it out, so—but that's okay.

Okay. Well, I'd like to move on to CFS. So, in respect of right now, children in care as of today, what is the number of children in care? But, more specifically also, if that could be broken down into authorities, agencies if you have it, but if not.

Ms. Squires: So, we report the numbers on an annual basis, so the last reported number that we have is March 31st, 2022. And so, we are in the process right now of gathering the data, and we'll be reporting imminently with the new numbers that are reflective of March 31st, 2023. But keep in mind that these numbers are now a year old, but they're the most latest that we have.

So, in the northern authority, we have 2,920 kids, and there is a breakdown of the six, seven, eight agencies; did you want that? Okay. Awasis has 722. Cree Nation Child and Family Caring Agency has 602. Island Lake First Nations has 552. Kinosao Sipo Minisowin has 360. Nikan Awasisak Agency has 232. Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation has 283, and Opaskwayak Cree Nation has 169. So that gives us our total of 2,920 in the northern authority.

In the Southern First Nations Network of Care we have a global figure of 4,257. And going by agency: Animikii Ozoson Child and Family Services is 350; Anishinaabe CFS, 562; ANCR, two—I'll clarify that in a moment; Dakota Ojibway, 717; Intertribal CFS, 80; Kinonje Abinoonjiag, 41; Peguis, of course, zero; Sagkeeng, 374; Sandy Bay, 297; and Southeast, 1,232; and West Region CFS, 602.

* (16:50)

Moving on to the General Authority, we have CFS Central Manitoba, 57—oh, pardon me; the global number for general is 926 kids. So Central Manitoba has 57; Western Manitoba has 74; Eastman, 126; Interlake, 63; Jewish family—Child and Family Service, 14; Northern region, 31; Parkland, 23; and Winnipeg Child and Family Services, 538.

And then the final authority is the Metis Authority, with a total of 1,093 kids. And the Metis CFS, 838; and Michif Child and Family Services, 255 kids—for a global figure, for all the kids in care at the end of March of 2022: 9,196.

An Honourable Member: One hundred and?

Ms. Squires: Ninety-six.

MLA Fontaine: So I know that I want to—and we discussed it a little bit the other morning. I—or, no, the other afternoon—I guess Monday or Tuesday—we were talking about these co-ordination agreements and moving towards self-determination for First Nation communities. And I know we just briefly spoke about it in the 45 seconds that we had to ask a question and answer a question.

So I'd like to kind of explore that a little bit more, and just hear a—in greater detail those negotiations that are ongoing. And then, now that Peguis has entered into its own co-ordination agreement, what is the role, or—is that the end of the role for Manitoba CFS in Peguis's Child and Family?

Ms. Squires: So, in regards to the provincial relationship with Peguis, now that they've signed their co-ordination agreement, there is no oversight from the provincial government; none at all.

When it comes to intake—so, for example, a child who is from Peguis comes in through ANCR or co-ordinated intake, there is an agreement in place so that, right away, that child—if that child's identified as belonging to Peguis, it immediately moves over to Peguis CFS.

We do have a reciprocal agreement, so if Peguis intake receives a file or an application and they are now working with a family that is not from their jurisdiction, they will provide that care until they transfer that child over to the Province. Likewise, if we receive a child into our system, or a family into our system, we'll ensure that they receive the service until they are received by Peguis to ensure that there is continuity of service.

And Jordan's Principle, of course, is the rule of law, if you will, in ensuring that no child falls between the cracks. But, ultimately, there's no oversight—we do provide services for Peguis kids on invitation, if you will. For example, if there is group care that Peguis doesn't have the capacity for or there's a youth living in group care and they wish to remain in that setting, of course, we will provide those services, but it is only on invitation by Peguis.

So, that is what happens when a First Nation, an Indigenous governing body signs that co-ordination agreement and that is how our laws are being drafted and—as we speak with the bill before the Legislature right now to ensure that our laws are reflective and supportive of the First Nations law, which is paramount.

So, as I stated, on January 31st of this year, Peguis First Nation signed its co-ordination agreement with the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada. And we have negotiation tables that are active right now with other Indigenous governing bodies and we are hopeful that the Manitoba Métis Federation will sign its co-ordination agreement very soon. It is imminent; we are in the final negotiation

stages and hope that that agreement will come into place and be signed this year.

We have an active negotiation—or, an active co-ordination table with Island Lake Tribal Council, which includes the communities of Garden Hill, St. Theresa Point, Wasagamack and Red Sucker Lake. And certainly supporting them in the development of the path towards their co-ordination agreement.

We are also co-ordinate—negotiating with Opaskwayak Cree Nation and First Nations in Treaty 2 Territory. And all those First Nations have not been identified as to who will participate in the First Nations in Treaty 2 Territory Indigenous governing body. So if you're a Treaty 2 First Nation, it is your chief and council who will ultimately make the final call as to whether or not you want to establish your own Indigenous governing body and have your own co-ordination agreement or if you want to be a part of the Treaty 2 Indigenous governing body and its 'ancillary' co-ordination agreement.

And then the final First Nation that we are in active negotiation with is Tataskweyak Cree Nation. And we have future co-ordination agreement tables with at least another dozen First Nations that are in, I would say, a rather early stage of negotiation.

MLA Fontaine: So, how—miigwech for that.

How does it work for funding now? And it's, you know—we understood that Peguis was entering into these agreements and it—but it's actually quite something to hear that there's—like, to hear it from government's mouth that there's literally no oversight and it's—like, as an Indigenous woman, first and foremost, it's actually quite extraordinary to hear that.

But I am curious in respect of—because that is—it—I would imagine that's considered a tripart agreement, then. So then, how does the funding work? Because all other funding models work on block funding, so how does—how do these pots of dollars work in respect of, let's just say Peguis right now, as that model for a co-ordination agreement?

Ms. Squires: So, my commitment to—at the time, it was Chief Hudson at the beginning of the—when we were coming to the end of the negotiation. My commitment to him was to ensure continuity wherever possible, and consistency.

So what we did is we simply pulled out the amount—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

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

CHAMBER

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): 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 Advanced Education and Training.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I do, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the Estimates of—for the Department of Advanced Education and Training. Budget 2023 includes historic investments, creating new opportunities for all Manitobans to participate in post-secondary education and thrive and succeed in our community.

Building on our Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy we are investing in key areas that will help create pathways to employment and better economic opportunities for all Manitobans.

By strengthening our collaboration with post-secondary institutions and businesses, we are able to identify and train for the skills needed to meet Manitoba's labour market needs.

Post-secondary education plays a critical role in helping Manitobans gain the skills and the knowledge required for labour market success. Manitoba will have more than 114,000 job openings over the next five years, and nearly 60 per cent of those jobs are going to require some post-secondary education and training.

In Budget 2023, our department is increasing our investment in post-secondary education to \$820 million. That's a 15 per cent increase from the previous year.

Our post-secondary institutions have provided valuable feedback to ensure we are strengthening outcomes for students and building the skilled workforce needed to drive Manitoba's economy.

We have heard that historic help for Manitobans means taking historic action to quickly match the skills that we need with the people who want to learn them. We are committed to helping students translate their education into meaningful, high-paying jobs right here in Manitoba. That's why our investment in

post-secondary education includes \$10 million to support the creation and expansion of programs to address our priority labour market shortages. To this end, the department will continue to work with our post-secondary institutions to create or increase training seats in key sectors.

To date, we have already committed over \$50 million to increase training for nurses. We've also taken action to expand our inter-provincial training agreement with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan to increase the number of seats for Manitoba students.

As minister, I will continue to collaborate with post-secondary institutions, businesses and industry stakeholders to facilitate a nimble and relevant post-secondary and training system that designs, delivers and adapts programs to equip students with the range of skills and experiences needed to succeed in Manitoba labour market.

We are a government that understands the needs of students. They want quality post-secondary education that remains accessible and affordable for all Manitobans. We are working hard to keep all of our students studying and working in Manitoba while also attracting students from across the country.

We're committed to supporting access to higher education by keeping tuition affordable for students. In 2023-24, university domestic tuition fees will be capped at an increase of 2.75 per cent, and college tuition will be capped at an increase of \$133 per program. Manitoba still maintains the lowest tuition in western Canada.

We understand these needs because we listen. We have been listening to our education partners as we continue to develop a new tuitions fees and student fee policy based on the insights of Manitobans. We listen as we work to build stronger communication pathways between education and industry partners that will allow post-secondary institutions to identify and connect training to the developing needs of Manitoba businesses. Our government is committed to continuing to listen to Manitobans as we provide access to affordable, quality education.

We know the value of providing multiple training pathways for Manitobans to fill critical roles in the labour market. In collaboration with Employment and Social Development Canada we are working to promote skilled trades as an esteemed career path by supporting apprenticeship programs via the Skilled Trades Awareness and Readiness, or STAR program.

Supporting students to access and achieve their education goals remains a priority for our government, and that's why Budget 2023 commits an additional \$1.4 million to the Manitoba Bursary program. This represents a total increase of \$13 million since 2017-18.

The Manitoba Bursary provides upfront grants to assist eligible lower income students and Indigenous students pursuing higher education. We know how valuable this support is to so many Manitobans who are working hard to lift themselves up and need some support to get them through those challenging school years.

Manitoba student loans continue to be interest free, and additional staff have been added to ensure a better client experience and timely processing of applications. To make it easier for borrowers to manage their loans, we have begun the work of streamlining and simplifying the administration of student loans. Through the Canada-Manitoba loans integration project, we are improving services for more than 47,000 borrowers.

Advanced Education and Training is committed to making education work for all Manitobans. The department is working to enhance the adult education system through a new adult education strategic plan. This plan will modernize and prioritize developing pathways to upskilling, attending post-secondary and finding jobs here in Manitoba.

Our support to adult learning and literacy programs provides Manitobans the skills and education needed for personal and professional advancement. The department provides funding support to 33 adult learning centres and 26 literacy agencies to administer adult learning and literacy programs. These programs allow all Manitobans to pursue education pathways to develop the skills needed to strengthen our community and participate in our growing economy.

Budget 2023 invests \$21.2 million in adult literacy and adult learning centres across Manitoba, including Adult Learning on Lombard, a full-time literacy program servicing clients primarily on Employment and Income Assistance.

* (14:50)

Our department is taking concrete steps to demonstrate our commitment to working collaboratively with our Indigenous partners. In response to the truth and reconciliation Calls to Action Nos. 6 to 12, to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Manitobans, we are developing a strategy to work in partnership

with First Nations, Métis and Inuit to advance post-secondary outcomes and provide full opportunities for Indigenous students to participate in post-secondary education.

This includes continuing discussions to recognize and support programming for Indigenous learning in all aspects of our education system, supporting Indigenous Manitobans through the Manitoba bursary to access post-secondary education opportunities and increasing the number and total amount of awards available to Indigenous students in Manitoba, including the continuation of the Helen Betty Osborne memorial fund in partnership with The Winnipeg Foundation.

Equally, Calls to Action Nos. 18 to 24 are acknowledged by the Province supporting a diploma in practical nursing at the University College of the North, where their student population is more than 70 per cent Indigenous, in order to provide valuable training close to home to support increasing Indigenous and northern health needs.

Like all of us attempting to understand the collective truth of our history and current context with First Nations, Métis and Inuit, we continue to address Call to Action No. 57 by providing opportunities for departmental staff to understand these histories, cultures and heritages.

Manitoba has world-class higher education pathways, making our province a preferred learning destination for students throughout Canada and across the globe.

As we look towards the many opportunities ahead, we remain committed to listening to all of our stakeholders so that together we can create a skilled and talented Manitoba that provides high-quality education and training for all.

The future of Advanced Education and Training is very bright. I look forward to taking questions from the committee.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I appreciate the opportunity to ask the minister some questions today and possibly over the next couple of days for the department of post-secondary and advanced education.

I think it's important that we recognize a little bit of the history of this government's actions towards post-secondary institutions over the last number of years, especially since I've been the critic. And I think it's—you know, it goes without saying that it's been a difficult time for a lot of the post-secondary institutions under this government.

Not only has there been challenges around funding for many of post-secondary institutions because of cuts to funding by this government—not only that, but I think it goes without saying that you can't really talk about post-secondary and this PC government without talking about the two major strikes that we've had that both coincided with—under Brian Pallister's tenure and the current Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) tenure.

And I think that's indicative of the type of respect that this government has had for post-secondary. And so I think that, you now, I think, rightly so, just given the track record, a lot of people involved in the post-secondary institutions are leery and concerned with the actions this government takes towards universities, colleges.

And I'll point to a few examples. We'd look at the introduction of bill 33 last year—a couple years ago—which simultaneously potentially threatened students and student unions and their ability to collect fees and sustain themselves and do their action to rightfully voice the concerns of students. And also, the fact that it brought in the potential door for things like post-secondary performance-based funding into post-secondary landscape and tuition differentiation.

And with that taking place and being on the table with bill 33, people looked and said, what does this government want to accomplish with post-secondary? What sort of vision do they have for universities? Is it one where, you know, universities are simply a tool to get, you know, people into the labour force, or is it actually going to be a landscape that encourages people to have higher learning and grow in their educational journeys and create themselves and help to create for our community better atmospheres, a better ecosystem for people to thrive in and for people to build community, build better, more equitable societies?

And I think there's a lot of concern there because we then saw the minister take some action and consult on performance-based funding, throw out models like Tennessee, throw out potential areas where they might be looking to have metrics that might determine funding for universities.

And we looked at, you know, jurisdictional scans and saw that there are very few jurisdictions that have actually—almost no one jurisdiction that had successfully done this, where they created performance-based models that actually were beneficial for students, for universities, in terms of long-term approach and, oftentimes, didn't meet any labour market needs. So we're very, very concerned with that type of approach.

Only for the minister to undertake all this work for many months over a year, and the minister did not show anything for it, not put any report forward in terms of performance-based funding. The previous minister, previous to this current minister, said that he was going to put forward a report to discuss new funding models or funding a strategy for performance-based funding for universities and colleges, specifically regarding the performance-based funding, and he didn't do so.

And so I think it's important for the current minister to discuss this government's approach to performance-based funding and where they currently stand, whether they're going to release information on that consultation process, or whether they, you know, have discovered, you know, the error in their ways in that approach and are moving forward.

And just to go back to the bill 33 and the aspect around students—it was because of student advocacy and student outcry that the government did make an amendment to their own piece of legislation because students rose their—raised their voices and spoke out against a bill that would have been very detrimental to student unions and student advocacy in this province.

I also want to touch on a couple other areas today and say that, you know, it's important for us to really state the landscape of adult education and adult literacy. It's a very important area that often doesn't get the type of focus that it should. Many people who are looking for educational opportunities, but need—but maybe didn't complete their high school through the K-to-12 system, or need to make sure they have that type of opportunity to get educated—those folks are looking for options. They're looking for opportunities, for possibilities.

And, unfortunately, that system—that adult education system—hasn't had the type of funding which would allow them to successfully meet the demands that we're seeing here in Manitoba. There are many people who are trying to access adult education and can't. They're facing barriers.

And so we want to make sure that we can—that I can successfully advocate for those people and urge

the minister to do more to focus on adult education, literacy for people. Because, if we want them to be serious about entering into the labour market or going further in their educational journey, they need to be literate. They need to get through programs like adult education, and I think that's critical to our success, and so we need to focus on that.

I think, also, it can't go out with saying that education tuition has increased by over 18 per cent over the first six years of this government's mandate.

Additionally, we've seen, at the same time, we've seen that there's been cuts to services for students, and namely, I talk about international students' health care. This is something the minister—we, you know, discussed this earlier today during question period, the importance of health care for international students.

And I would urge the minister to look seriously about the approach that this government is currently taking, with not having international students on the public provincial health-care plan and really evaluate whether that's the right approach.

We know that international students are essential to our province's future. We know that immigration is essential part to our province's future. We know that we ought to be taking more steps to encourage immigration and international students here in Manitoba, because they are valued, because our labour market needs them, because we all, as a community—a Manitoba community—need those people in our province.

And so, for this government to take an approach that doesn't encourage international students to be here by forcing them to pay over \$1,000 a year for private health coverage, which often, in many cases, doesn't cover them in the same manner, in the same, holistic manner that the provincial health-care plan would, it's very discouraging.

And I think, regardless of what the minister might stay with regards to—with respect to tuition, international students feel the effects of paying for private health coverage, and it's something that I hear all the time directly from international students.

And so I'll close out my remarks by saying that we—my initial comments—by saying that we're—continue to advocate on behalf of students, administration, faculty, community members and all of Manitobans who are concerned with our post-secondary system.

We'll continue to make sure this government is pushing for an equitable post-secondary landscape.

* (15:00)

And I want to make sure that those students who reach out to me and with regards to problems with Student Aid, who reach out to me with questions around performance-based funding, who reach out to me regarding the fact that there are less nurse—nursing—training seats and the international student health care and the fact that tuition is rising and that funding has been cut many times over the past few years, that we're going to continue to voice their concerns, continue to help to push this government in the right direction.

And hopefully through our discussions today, we'll be able to move forward positively.

Thank you.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 44.1(a) contained in resolution 44.1.

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

The honourable minister, to introduce her staff.

Mrs. Guillemard: I'm happy to introduce my special assistant, Kaitlyn Gyles; my deputy minister, Eric Charron; my ADM, Melissa Ballantyne and my other ADM, Joe Funk.

Mr. Chairperson: Would the opposition critic wish to introduce their staff?

Mr. Moses: Yes, this is our staff person, researcher Rylan Ramnarace.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister and the critic for those introductions.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Moses: I'd like to ask the minister if she can undertake to provide a list of all technical appointments in her department, including names and titles.

Mrs. Guillemard: The two appointments that have been made in the last year have been my SA, Kaitlyn Gyles, as well as my EA, Kristan McCallum.

Mr. Moses: Can the minister give a list of all current 'vacancies' in her department?

Mrs. Guillemard: Okay, so our overall vacancy rate for the department is 9.7 per cent. And a bit of a breakdown there, then, that equals 6.9 FTEs in Student Access and Success and 7 FTEs in Advanced Education.

Mr. Moses: Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees and all program areas?

Mrs. Guillemard: I would just actually point the member to page 14 of our supplement binder here. That actually does have the organizational structure of the department broken down into the various sections. So, the information—there, if he wants me to read from that page, I can—no? Okay. But that is where the information he's looking for is.

Mr. Moses: Can the minister explain whether her government has any plan to reinstate health-care coverage for international students, which was discontinued in 2018?

* (15:10)

Mrs. Guillemard: I know that we've had a brief discussion in question period about this topic already. I think that I have to reiterate that, you know, I've been meeting with student groups. Obviously, they are well-educated, well-articulate in this particular arena.

And we've had some fulsome discussions, including me sharing my experiences living abroad. My family and I—well, at the time, it was my husband and I and our first-born, who was two months old at the time—had to pay for health-care coverage. Our cost, out-of-pocket, Canadian equivalent, was \$1,500 each person.

The students I've met with who are international students, many of them, you know, have shared from their own experiences in various countries studying.

Some of them, this isn't the first international experience they've had to study, have also acknowledged that there are other costs for health-care coverage in various other jurisdictions.

I know that, in my questions of the department and my learning over the last couple of months in this

new role, that we're not out of line with other jurisdictions in terms of health-care coverage and the cost to students.

And it's clearly not one of the barriers of attracting international students here to Manitoba. We've seen an overall increase in the winter term just recently of international students. So, they are advised well in advance of the various costs and the coverages.

I know that one of the topics that was raised in a meeting with MAPSS, or Manitoba association of post-secondary students, was their concern that maybe some of the students didn't understand the different levels of coverage.

They are offered three different levels of coverage—that was University of Manitoba who negotiated the three different choices that they have of varying degrees of expenses, from \$600 to, I believe, \$1,300. And that would have varying degrees of coverage.

So, one of the things that I committed to in those meetings is that I would be happy to sit down and talk to administration at post-secondary institutes to talk about what is that process look like for them negotiating, sort of, coverages and maybe encouraging them to fully inform students ahead of time so they know what they're choosing. It's not just, you know, the cost to take into consideration but what each coverage level offers for medical care. Those discussions are ongoing.

I know the various student groups that I have met with have been encouraged after our meetings that they can put together some suggestions, some solutions.

They're eager to meet, as well, with the administration at their respective post-secondary institutes, and I encourage them to continue to do so. And I will be a part of that process, working with other departments who would be involved in some of these policy discussions and considerations and I'm committed to continuing that discussion.

Mr. Moses: So, by listening to the minister's response, I'm getting a sense that she does not have a plan to reinstate health-care coverage for international students.

And I'm wondering, given the need for more migration into Manitoba and the fact that many university students who come here from international 'countries' to study are looking to set up a place—Manitoba as a place to call home.

And given the need that we have in Manitoba and given the need that labour markets and private businesses are looking for well-educated, well-skilled people in Manitoba to, you know, fuel our economy, does the minister think that providing public health care to international students would be an incentive to encourage them to come to Manitoba?

Does—is that what the minister thinks, even though maybe she doesn't have a plan? Could she at least agree that that would be an incentive to encourage international students to come and choose Manitoba?

* (15:20)

Mrs. Guillemard: I think I first want to really make it clear that there is health-care coverage; every international student who comes to learn in Manitoba is required to have a health-care-coverage plan.

So, I just want to clarify that because the member has now stated twice that there's no health-care coverage for international students, and that's inaccurate. And I think that that would be very misleading and I don't want to make any students who might be considering coming to Manitoba afraid. That's not what our government focuses on doing to students.

Now secondary, the member has asked, you know, if he feels that, you know, covered cost of universal health care would attract international students.

Again, I can list a whole bunch of things that would probably attract international students. If we paid for accommodation, if we paid for all of their food, we could offer a whole bunch to attract a whole bunch more international students.

However, the evidence right now is not showing that the current system or policy in place at post-secondary institutions are a detriment to attracting international students. And I think I pointed out in the previous answer that we've seen an increase overall in international students and we've surpassed the 10,000-student mark already.

So, right now I think that they're attracted by multiple factors, and if there were indicators that we saw a decline in that ability to attract international students, absolutely, we'd be looking at a number of different ways that, you know, we could alter some of what's offered here.

But, clearly, what we are offering is attracting international students. They are coming for multiple reasons: the high excellence of education that they

receive here in Manitoba; the lifestyle that they can achieve here in Manitoba.

We have low cost of living compared to other jurisdictions and we have the lowest tuition fees in western Canada.

I think those are all quite strong incentives to attract international students. We have no plans to alter any of those attractive elements and benefits. So, if the member opposite has information that we don't have, in terms of he feels that, you know, we're going to see a decline at some point, then I'd be open to seeing that evidence or documents that he might have.

Mr. Moses: I thank the minister respectfully for her response. I do want to clarify that I think the minister full well knows that I'm referring to a public health-care plan for international students. And I think international students know that as well.

They know it when they have to write the cheque for it. They know that when they have to put the credit card bill for it. They know that they have to pay for private health-care coverage because they are the ones who are spending the cash to do so, cash that they would have otherwise spent on, you know, their tuition or buying extra books or helping to make their life more affordable, because minimum wage has been fairly stagnant in this province for the better part of the last decade under this government.

They would have used that extra thousand dollars to help them, I don't know, maybe help to pay for transportation costs, because those haven't—those have risen far greater than many other costs. They would have maybe had to pay for higher rent that, they know, there's been cuts from this government to rent subsidies by—under this government.

So, you know, that extra thousand dollars, I think, international students would have—would know and do know full well that I'm referring to the private health coverage that international students are now paying for each and every year under this government.

And they know that they used to, as up to 2018, used to have a public provincial health-care plan that was—provided them very good-quality coverage and it—very distinct different from the policy under this government.

So, I think international students fully understand the difference and I think, as is very clear today, that international students also understand that this government has no plan on reinstating them into the public plan for health-care coverage and that the government is sufficiently content with over—as she's

mentioned—that the minister mentioned—over 10,000 international students in Manitoba not being part of our public health-care system but having to pay for health care separately; pay for it themselves; pay for it privately.

And, you know, in many cases, international students have to feel the effects of that. They feel the effects of that by health-care providers not respecting, not understanding their health, their private health insurance and, in many cases, either denying them access to service or in asking them to pay upfront for that type of care, and this leads to international students, in many cases, not seeking the care in a timely fashion.

And it has real impacts on their lives. And so maybe the minister doesn't have plans today but hopefully after she's had a chance to think about it, maybe she'll re-evaluate and have—decide to make a plan for this tomorrow. And so I would urge the minister to do so.

But I will move on, since it seemed quite clear the minister has a direction on this, so—even though I urge her to reconsider.

So, I will ask the minister this question: Why is the department's target for post-secondary education participation rates in 2023-24 lower than it was in 2022-2023? That's a 41 per cent versus 40 per cent.

* (15:30)

Mrs. Guillemard: Yes, so, in answer to the member's question—and we're looking at page 20 right now—so, he will note that there are some explanatory notes underneath the chart that he's looking at.

And, you know, these performance measures, this is a projected number based on the total population who might be eligible for post-secondary education, 18 to 24 years in Manitoba, and these are targets for the department to aim for, obviously, to look at encouraging them to pursue some sort of post-secondary training and education. So it's always a projected number.

Now, you'll note that there wasn't a target for '21-22 because that was when the former department was sort of formulated and there wasn't sort of a scorecard created at that time. So that's an actual number of 38 per cent.

So, obviously, for year over year, you look at trying to stretch and, you know, build on that number. We'll also note that there was a pandemic that occurred within this time frame.

So, taking a number of issues into factor—for instance, some institutions went fully virtual; some were hybrid, virtual and in-person, but there was a lot of different options available to students that made it, I think, in some ways more accessible. And then other students who kind of rejected the aspect of fully virtual, it didn't quite work out for their learning styles.

And so, taking into factors all the learnings that we made through those years and some of those challenges, setting the target at 40 per cent reflects that most post-secondary institutes right now are focusing on that back-to-in-person learning. So, it's a reasonable target for us to aim for and set up policies around.

And now, these are indicators that we look at that if there's a significant sort of actual number that falls far under that, that it may be indicators that we are missing some barriers to education that we have to address through the department.

So, these numbers are not, sort of, you know, we've got to meet these levels every single year, but rather it's a measuring mechanism so that if there are significant jumps one way or the other, that we can be aware of what is happening and what is affecting students and young adults in their choices for post-secondary education.

Mr. Moses: So, since the minister put the target down, does she think that there will be an overall drop in enrolment or participation in post-secondary institutions, whether it's colleges or universities or any of the variety of programs?

Does she think that the number will decrease—the actual number will decrease for the upcoming year, actual participation rates?

* (15:40)

Mrs. Guillemard: I would respond to the member and say quite the opposite. We anticipate that there will be more involvement for students seeking post-secondary, especially after our large investments in the budget this year, including an extra labour market fund where we're going to be targeting the labour needs within industry to match those educational levels and jobs.

So, again, this number is not, sort of, a target we reach and then we sort of give up and shut the door on students. It's just a rough estimate so that we can keep an eye on trends to see where students are choosing to

go and if they are choosing post-secondary and areas that we can, sort of, improve that encouragement.

I do also want to note that the 41 per cent and 40 per cent—I mean, there's always going to be, sort of, 40 point three, four or 40.6—and then you're rounding up, rounding down.

So it's roughly around the same number; it's not a huge discrepancy there, but we had to take into consideration that there have been challenges over the last couple years.

We're coming out of those challenges. Students are learning to adapt and learn in a new model. I think a lot of students, especially in the third year of university or post-secondary right now, this is their first opportunity to learn in person.

So there's been a lot of changes and, for some, that worked out really, really well for their learning styles. For others, that was more of a challenge. So there's going to be sort of a transitional time in there, and we need to reflect that in accurate numbers, and that's what our department has done.

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the response. But it just seems a little bit unusual that the minister would say that there, perhaps, could be increased amount of participation rate in post-secondary education, but yet that she would set a target that's lower.

And we have the actual from 2021-22 at 38 per cent. We don't have the actual for 2022-23 listed in the Estimates. Perhaps the minister is aware of the number; I'm not sure if she is or not, but the target for that is 41 per cent.

Now, she's then projecting a target for 2023-24 that is lower than 2022-23, and it makes me think that, reasonably, the trend might be heading down if she's setting a target that's a little bit lower.

So, for her to say that the opposite might be happening, it makes me wonder which one is the reality. Is the target that she put here lower, the reality trend that we're looking at? Or is what she's saying, that the trend might be higher, the reality?

So, I'll just maybe—clarification. I don't want to go into much on this; I just wanted to see—it just seemed to—like it didn't make sense.

Mrs. Guillemard: And I know that I've already, sort of, shared some of the challenges that have happened over the couple years. I know the member opposite is well aware of those challenges that have impacted

students and, essentially, everyone around the globe, and that was that pandemic.

In order to calculate, the formula that we use to calculate these numbers are not just pulled out of the air. They are used with previous year's numbers, right, so it's a projected number.

So, obviously, we did see some challenges, some interruptions, during the COVID years. Those are the numbers that have been used to then calculate the percentage projected this year of that aim for targets.

So, every single year, that number is going to be based on, sort of, the previous year's numbers to influence what the overall formula spits out as the projected participation rate.

This is not a hard, fast number; and, of course, next year, you're going to see reflected—the formula's going to look at this current year's enrolment and participation rate to influence what the number's going to be for next year.

So, I know that the member's well aware of those challenges, certainly can understand when you're projecting numbers you can't guarantee what the future holds. You're making a best guesstimate based on historical data that we are now collecting, and then watching for trends.

And, year over year, that doesn't create a trend. It'll be multiple years that will determine whether there's, sort of, a blip in, you know, participation rates, or whether this is just the normal, you know, ebb and flow of student interest in post-secondary education, and where they're choosing to learn.

Mr. Moses: On page 39 of the Estimates book, it says that the department is continuing to develop a new tuition fees and student fees policy.

Can the minister provide a timeline for this initiative? Will this be released before the upcoming general election?

* (15:50)

Mrs. Guillemard: So, yes, in answer to the member's question, you know, we have three pillars when we're looking at the student fees and assessing some of the aspects that are important to students and making sure that Manitoba remains affordable for those seeking post-secondary education. And those three pillars were affordability, sustainability and predictability.

Consultations happened last summer—fall—*[interjection]*—in the spring, sorry; spring 2022.

So, the groups that were met with were post-secondary institution presidents, faculty associations, First Nations education directors, student groups that represent thousands of key stakeholders, and they all participated in targeted consultation activities. And I actually do want to thank them for contributing to the process.

In addition to that, we had 607 general public responses on the EngageMB.ca survey. The What We Heard document is posted publicly, so the member is free to peruse that, find some direct responses that we had from all of the key stakeholders but also the general public.

All of those fed into the decision-making through this budget process. And out of that, you know, we were able to really target into that affordability and sustainability.

The students indicated that they, you know, were concerned about student fee increases, so they wanted to see that number capped or even reduced, and we did respond to that by a full percentage point and—even at the college level, going from the maximum increase of \$250, we brought that down to \$133 maximum increase for student fees.

Students also, obviously, are a higher educated sort of population within Manitoba and all jurisdictions. They recognize, too, that there's a need for sustainability of post-secondary institutes to keep the education level high and excellent.

So, we felt that this struck a balance for the sustainability and, within the budget, we recognize that that meant to also increase operating dollars to reflect the potential loss of student fees or tuition fees to post-secondary institutes. So that was reflected in the recent budget that was revealed. So, that was a good balance there.

Now, the last pillar that we will be working on and looking for that sort of sweet spot for students and post-secondary institutes is that predictability. So, year over year, what can we predict will be something we can anticipate for not only tuition fees but also what the needs of post-secondary institutes are for costs.

Mr. Moses: So, the minister points to the consultation and the work that was done by the department to action that was taken in this budget.

In the Estimates, it also says that it's a key initiative, so is the work still ongoing? Is there still more consultation being made on—to re-evaluate student-

fees policies and student tuition, is it still ongoing? Or is all that work done and reflected in this budget and is no longer ongoing?

Mr. Shannon Martin, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

And to—and I ask this so that—I want to understand if students and faculty and administrators and presidents should be expecting further changes to the way tuition and student fees are laid out.

Mrs. Guillemard: So, yes, just to be clear, it was a very extensive consultation process that we consulted with a number of stakeholders, opened it up to the public, anybody who wanted to contribute their feedback and give feedback for this process were able to do so. And I think there was actually a—quite a good participation rate that we had for this particular process.

So, the one element that I had indicated in my previous answer was that predictability. And I think that the member can agree that this last year has not been reflective of a typical year, especially when we're looking at inflation rates.

There was a lot of unexpected jumps in the inflation rate, and to base some of the decisions or projected numbers on this last year's inflation rate jumps would've been irresponsible.

* (16:00)

So that's the last element that we have to consider. We did get all of the feedback through the consultation process that was necessary for some of the decision-making, and in a unique period of really unexpected inflationary rates, it was not going to be the right time to set policy based on that.

So we'll see how the year turns out. We've already seen some of those rates starting to decline; we hope that that trend continues. And that will help us to better anticipate what the actual costs are going to be, year over year, in the post-secondary arena.

Mr. Moses: Does the minister—does she, as part of a consultation, have plans for any performance-based metrics or formulas to be used for funding?

And I ask this because I know that at least part of a consultation was to evaluate the prospects of that type of strategy used in Manitoba.

And so I ask whether this is an idea, or this is still part of the government and the minister's office's plans coming—moving forward for post-secondary in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mrs. Guillemard: Yes, and first, I just want to, really, provide a little bit of clarity here. We're talking about the Post-Secondary Accountability Framework. So, you know, the references that the member is making to another acronym or another sort of model is not what the government has sort of communicated.

And I think a little bit of clarity, as well, that this is separate from the tuition fee consultation process. That's a completely separate process that had its own consultation organizational aspect to it and will have its own outcomes. This is separate from that.

So this is—although, obviously, there's similar stakeholders that will be involved in the consultations, we are still in the midst of the consultations for the Post-Secondary Accountability Framework, and we continue to meet with stakeholder groups. And I think that we are in the process of now organizing to meet with the Indigenous stakeholder groups to give feedback on the model.

And, again, sort of to give a little bit of that background, the genesis for this process unfolded after consultation, obviously, with the office of the Auditor General. And, certainly, the member opposite is familiar with the report that did highlight that there needs to be more focus on the governance structures and oversight to post-secondary institutes and—including the accountability to the taxpayers. So being more transparent on where the funding—which is taxpayer funding—is going, what's being invested in, what are the outcomes.

In all of my meetings with leadership within post-secondary institutes, all of them agree that this is very important, that they agree that there needs to be accountability, there needs to be transparency. There is absolutely no hesitation for their participation and agreement that we need to put into place practices that the general public can also look in on the activities within post-secondary institutes. What programs are being grown and invested in, and then how is that, you know, connected to jobs in general. I think the students would be interested in that too, making sure that what they are investing in for their education is going to ultimately, you know, result in an opportunity to work and earn funds and build their life around that education.

So I just—I wanted to really provide a little bit of clarity, a little bit of that background.

I have had meetings and listened to the feedback that had come out of the initial consultations in this

process. It was loud and clear that the one area—and I'm sure there's other areas that we'll continue to discuss through the consultations—but this one particular area of tying in the funding to the accountability measures didn't sit well and for a number of different reasons, and the post-secondary presidents were able to articulate those reasons why there may be some problems to some of the models out there.

I'm going to be meeting with some of the faculty associations, as well. I think they'll be happy to hear that we are no longer going to be including that as part of the consultation process. It's not going to be a discussion tying to funding for various programs; that we will continue to focus on the elements of accountability in governance, which they are happy to participate in.

* (16:10)

And that is a reflection of us listening to the office of the Auditor General and the recommendations. The government does need to have more participation, more collaboration with post-secondary institutes and provide that transparency for the taxpayers here in Manitoba.

Mr. Moses: I just wanted to thank the minister for the response. I understand that she just said that they're continuing with the Post-Secondary Accountability Framework, but they're removing the aspect of tying that accountability directly to funding for post-secondary institutions.

But they're continuing on with the framework for the lens of still trying to achieve some other goal, and maybe she can articulate what those other goals are. I know it's tied to, as the minister mentioned, the Auditor General's report, which did call for more accountability, without being prescriptive of what that accountability—or, you know—accountability should look like.

Many people have talked about greater transparency through institutions, greater transparency in government working relationships with those institutions, or what that transparency would look like for our funding over multiple years as ways to increase accountability.

And so I wonder, since she's now removed the funding piece of—out of the post-secondary accountability framework, meaning there wouldn't be funding tied to performance-based measures, what does the minister, you know, intend to do and move forward with the Post-Secondary Accountability Framework?

Mrs. Guillemard: So, first, I kind of want to break down the answer into sort of two different parts. We've mentioned the office of the Auditor General and recommendations. We've already sort of implemented some of the concerns surrounding some of that governance, and giving some government, sort of, not directives, but sort of an overview of some of the areas we would like post-secondary institutes to focus on.

So that was included for the first time ever in their budget letters. We gave four pillars that are not prescriptive, but they do provide a direction for post-secondary institutes to look at enhancing their programs for students. These four pillars are: No. 1, access, affordability and student success; another pillar is strengthening alignment between post-secondary education and the labour market needs; a third pillar is promoting truth and reconciliation; and then the last pillar is advancing Manitoba skills, talent and knowledge strategy.

What effectively this did, and we had positive feedback from all post-secondary institutes that they were thankful to have what they kind of lovingly referred to as a mandate letter. So it's not just simply, here's an increase to your funding and, you know, good luck, you know, in your endeavours, but rather, a we recognize your autonomy as a post-secondary institute to decide the programming and how that is applied in your institution, but please keep these areas in mind when increasing programming or enhancing it or creating new programs.

Because we recognize industry has asked educational institutes to really prepare students with soft skills. And that's sort of a directional change that I think most post-secondary institutes have been well aware of and have been already enhancing those soft skills. But this just gives an opportunity for government to be involved and at the table and sort of partners with the post-secondary institutes.

* (16:20)

Now, secondary to that, we have an ongoing consultation process for the Post-Secondary Accountability Framework that hasn't concluded yet. And one of the important meetings left is with the Indigenous rights holders, and they have a very unique and important world view and experience that needs to influence and educate, overall, this framework before we sort of come with outcomes.

So, you know, the member's looking for, well, what do you want to get out of this? What do you anticipate? What are your aims? What are your goals?

Our goals are to hear from all the stakeholder groups, including the Indigenous rights holders, to inform overall the strategy and a strategic plan moving forward that universities and government can follow with an understanding of student needs, post-secondary institute needs, the sustainability of that, and then a reflection of the labour market needs.

So those are, in general, the goals, that we're all on the same page, that we all understand next steps and how we're going to work together based on a lot of the recommendations from the office of the Auditor General. And I think that we are working in a collaborative fashion, and I think the member opposite can understand why we feel it's important that we don't list a bunch of metrics we think is going to come out of this consultation period because that would be preempting the feedback we'd get from a very important Indigenous rights-holders community.

Mr. Moses: Does—since the minister said that she heard in feedback that, you know, there were issues with the funding being tied directly to any performance measures or the accountability framework, so she has decided to move in the direction where the funding is not tied to that.

Does she agree with that feedback that funding shouldn't be tied to performance measures or to the accountability framework?

Mrs. Guillemard: I think that the member opposite understands that government really is the funder of post—well, the taxpayers are; the taxpayer dollars come into government and then the government determines the portion of taxpayer dollars that go to post-secondary institutes. There's always going to be an element of funding for each institute, but it's not going to be tied based on these particular metrics.

And I think that the difficulties that post-secondary institutes had, which faculty associations articulated as well and pushed back about, is their concern that, you know, if you're looking at graduation rates as the only metric then there are some programs—and especially for Indigenous students—that may not reflect, you know, the expectation of a four-year graduation rate, and their concerns of other, like, arts degrees, and how student learning happens.

It would be hard to do a one-size-fits-all in terms of the funding. They understand that the funding that institutes do receive—post-secondary institutes do

receive—they understand the accountability aspect of—that their job is to make sure that they're training students, preparing students, that there are jobs available for them, and finding that balance as well.

So they understand that, through this process, obviously the funding is going to be separate from that, that the metrics used to determine success are not going to include the funding attached to those metrics.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to participate in Estimates in this particular department. It's of great interest to those that are educators because, as you know, education thing is it goes on throughout our lives.

It's important to note, Mr. Chair, that there are approximately 192,000 Manitobans right now that don't have the literacy levels to fully participate in our economy, an economy that is rapidly changing, rapidly evolving, due not only to outside or international pressures, but also because the work itself is changing.

I would like to ask, respectfully, the minister: What is the status of the comprehensive review of adult ed in Manitoba that is being undertaken and is articulated on page 22 of the Estimates book?

Mrs. Guillemard: Appreciate the question from the member opposite.

And, certainly, our department understands, you know, the link between literacy rates and, you know, the opportunities that—available to individuals. And without the ability to read, it's very difficult to then pursue education and then enhance skill sets in order to make your way out of poverty, really, and to reach your levels of potential.

So I do appreciate the member bringing this up and I know that our department has been working very hard on the adult education strategic plan, and that's what he referred to on page 22.

And we are in the midst of consultations right now with the 59 learning centres throughout Manitoba. So, the staff, or, the departmental staff is reaching out and going to be collecting that feedback and the learnings from that.

* (16:30)

And after that feedback is collected and compiled into recommendations, I will then be briefed on it and be able to then look at ways that we can enhance and support adult learning and, certainly, enhance literacy

rates to improve the situation of many individuals here in Manitoba.

Mr. Altomare: Part of this is having the data at hand with regards to the number of adults that are currently enrolled in adult ed programs and adult literacy programs.

I'd like to ask the minister, how many people are currently enrolled in Manitoba in these programs, and if they can provide some of the data since 2020 regarding this. Enrolled—sorry.

Mrs. Guillemard: I got to be careful with raising my hand here. I know that that can confuse both the Chair and the pages here, so I'll try to come up with different acknowledgements there.

Yes, to answer the member's question, we don't have our finalized numbers for this year yet to provide. That comes later in the year. Our five-year average, however, is approximately 8,000 enrolments year over year.

Now, we did see a dip during COVID. So, when you consider that adult learning really targets—well, it's in-person learning, first of all, so that was very much disrupted over COVID.

And then a number of people who are seeking this type of education are not coming from, sort of, certain segments of the population. They struggle. They may not have access to technology for remote learning, so those options would not have been available to them and therefore they would not be able to access the adult learning programs as they exist and are offered.

So we did see a dip during COVID. I know that the member opposite would be well aware of a lot of those challenges and then the difficulties in making sure the accessibility was available to those who are seeking this particular training.

So, I guess, overall, we don't have the exact numbers at this point of the year. They haven't been finalized yet. We hope that we're going to see a little bit of a bump up from the COVID numbers because now we do have in-person learning again and open and available to those who are seeking this extra training. And I guess that's the answer.

Mr. Altomare: I just—I know the minister is aware that this is a—an untapped resource and that Manitoba right now, we're experiencing labour shortages and many areas that are critical to not only the care economy, but also the service economy and all the other pieces that businesses, that government is struggling to find.

I did hear the minister say that accessibility, Mr. Chair, is an issue to adult ed. programs.

My question would be: Is the department looking into dealing with accessibility so that people can actually access adult ed. as they need?

So, for example, providing a hub model where child care is available, where counselling services are available, because we know that our jails, Mr. Chair, are filled with people that are illiterate, unable to participate.

We know that we have segments of our population that don't have the literacy levels. And it's going to take, I think, a really—during a point of inflection that I've been on record as saying that we're at right now, where these are opportunities presented to us that are going to require some innovative thinking.

* (16:40)

So, if the minister can provide a bit of an overview of what they're doing to meet this—or to tap this untapped resource that we have here—right here in Manitoba to deal with our labour shortage, to help people feel really good about who they are, not only as learners but also as contributors to our communities.

Mrs. Guillemard: So, yes, the member raises some very good points in terms of some of the barriers to learning that adult learners may face.

And that's why we are doing the consultation, that we are meeting with the various centres that provide adult learning; and learning about what some of those barriers look like, how we can really adapt and create some wraparound services to support that adult learning.

So that's going to be some of the elements that do come out of the consultation period and the feedback that we get from those who are providing the learning to individuals. They are probably the best skilled to give feedback about why some of their students either are doing very well in the program or are struggling. They would be more familiar with some of the personal struggles maybe and some of the limitations that each individual learner would face.

So, based on those consultations and the feedback we get from each of the centres that are throughout the province—we have a number of different centres, I think that I had said there's 59 centres throughout Manitoba—and a lot of those are small communities, sort of hub centres, which I think is an important element, too, that it's located relatively close to where

the individuals will live and can access but also creates more of that intimate learning centre, that we know that if it's a larger centre, sometimes can be a barrier. Some people might feel intimidated by the larger groups.

So we're going to learn from those who are providing the courses and providing the education about ways that can be improved and then how we can provide those services, whether it is child care or whether it's something else that might be preventing learners from attending class and completing their courses. We need to understand that in order to address it.

I think that one of the challenges through COVID was that children were at home. So some of the adult learners were not able to attend classes or participate because they had to provide that child care or oversight for their children in their own learning experiences.

So, obviously, seeing that children are back in school now freed up some of the time for some of the adult learners as well.

So we are constantly learning about how to improve the program, the areas that need more attention and more supports, and I do look forward to the feedback that comes out of this consultation time with the learning centres.

Mr. Moses: Speaking—sticking to the topic of adult education, the minister mentioned in—a five-year average of approximately 8,000 adult learners, but the last report we had was from the '19-20 year. So we don't have any specific numbers since then.

Can the minister provide, in the years subsequent, even of—if she doesn't have the current year, so can she provide the learners from '20-21, followed by the years '21-22? And if she doesn't have those on hand, I'd like her to undertake to provide them to us.

Additionally, the—a budget line for adult education, specifically for adult literacy programs and adult learning, is not provided in the budget.

So I was wondering if the minister would be able to provide the amount of funding for adult learning and literacy programs in the last two fiscal years, since the last report, which was the '19-20 year.

So I'm meaning, specifically, that's the years '20-21 and 2022, and if she has an estimate for the 2022-23 years; and then, of course, the 2023-24 years, which is the Estimates that we're in right now. Thank you.

And as well, just to clarify that if she doesn't have that information on the budget line, if she could undertake to find that information and provide it as well. Thank you.

* (16:50)

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the patience as we gather the requested information that the member has asked for.

So, the member mentioned that he already had access to the information for 2019 year. And I do want to point out that this information is accessible publicly.

If the member wants to further dig in and look for, you know, our annual reports, they are always publicly available to members of the public or

members opposite, and certainly I know that he has access to, you know, his staffing team, who can look into it as well.

But I'll help out by letting you know that the year 2021, funding levels were \$20.3 million. The enrollment was 8,200—so, a little bit above the average of 8,000 that we see in the five-year average—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The time being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 20, 2023

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