

First Session – Forty-Third Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 22, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 217—The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): I move, seconded by the member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram), that Bill 217, The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act, 'commeration' of days, weeks and months act amended; Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation à la santé mentale des hommes, be read for the—now read for the first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Lagassé: Tattooed to my daughter's arm in my handwriting is, it's okay not to be okay. This statement was originally part of my first speech to this House when I shared my mental health struggles. Since that day, I've had lots of people approach me with their

stories. Each of these stories has become a part of why I wanted to bring this bill forward.

I look forward to sharing some of those stories I have heard with this House to highlight the importance of this bill. I would like to thank Doug Mackie from Men Shed for being here and thank him for the work he does for men's mental health.

With these brief words, I would end this with the full quote that I put on the record: It's okay not to be okay; what's not okay is to go through it alone.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Committee reports?

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [Agreed]

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Sixth Report

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Chairperson): I wish to present—Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Tim Abbott): Your Standing Committee on Social—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Sixth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 21, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 208) – The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Journée de visibilité bispirituelle et transgenre (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)**

- ***Bill (No. 212) – The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur le mois du patrimoine Asiatique (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)***

Committee Membership

- *Mr. BLASHKO*
- *Mrs. COOK*
- *MLA DELA CRUZ (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *MLA LAGASSÉ*
- *MLA MOROZ*
- *Mr. OXENHAM*
- *Your Committee elected Mr. BLASHKO as the Chairperson.*

Substitutions received during committee proceedings:

- *MLA CHEN for Mr. OXENHAM*
- *Mr. OXENHAM for MLA CHEN*

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record:

- *MLA BEREZA*
- *Hon. Min. FONTAINE*

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following 15 presentations on Bill (No. 208) – The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Journée de visibilité bispirituelle et transgenre (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs):

*Adam Donaghy, Private citizen
Mikayla Hunter, Private citizen
Luca Gheorghica, Private citizen
Alex Rana, Manitoba 2SLGBTQIA+ Student Action Coalition
Jackson Unger, Private citizen
Reece Malone, Private citizen
Charlotte Nolin, 2Spirit Manitoba Inc.
Kai Solomon, Private citizen
Kristie Schertzer, Private citizen
Jude Yallowega, Private citizen
Dieth de Leon, Bahaghari Pride Manitoba
Kristine Barr, Canadian Union of Public Employees
Caleb Clay, Private citizen
Davey Cole, Sunshine House
Ashley Gawne, Klinik Community Health*

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following four written submissions on Bill (No. 208) – The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Journée de visibilité bispirituelle et transgenre (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs):

*Aimee Rice, Private citizen
Chris Allinotte, Private citizen
Sara Tarrant, Private citizen
Abiola Agbayewa, Private citizen*

Bills Considered and Reported

- ***Bill (No. 208) – The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Journée de visibilité bispirituelle et transgenre (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)***

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- ***Bill (No. 212) – The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur le mois du patrimoine Asiatique (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)***

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Blashko: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Radisson (MLA Dela Cruz), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: The motion is accordingly passed.

Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Emma Cloney

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I rise in the House today to honour a Wolseley constituent, Emma Cloney. Emma serves as the vice-president of Lipedema Canada and president of Lipedema Manitoba.

Emma is a nurse, a musician and someone who lives with lipedema. She has been instrumental in bringing together leaders from almost every province and territory to collaborate on resources and advocate

to remove barriers to care. Lipedema Canada was incorporated as a non-profit in January of this year and launched their website in April.

Lipedema is a connective tissue disorder characterized by a type of fat tissue that builds up over time.

Lipedema causes swelling and easy bruising. Found most often in the arms and legs, the tissue is painful and can feel like hard lumps beneath the skin. It's a progressive disease, and lipedema can lead to mobility challenges, extreme fatigue and mental distress. It can affect one's ability to work, relationships and quality of life.

Lipedema almost exclusively affects people assigned female at birth and may affect up to 11 per cent of women worldwide.

While the cause of lipedema remains unknown, genetics are believed to play a role and the condition is not affected by dietary intake or activity level.

People with this disease frequently experience body shaming and judgment, even from medical professionals who don't understand the condition.

June is Lipedema Awareness Month, an excellent time for members of this Legislature to learn more about the condition. Please visit the newly launched Lipedema Canada website and join me today in recognizing Emma Cloney for her efforts and all the other members of Lipedema Manitoba who are in the gallery with us today.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler—*[interjection]* Oh, sorry. The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

MLA Naylor: Honourable Speaker, I ask for leave that the names of my guests be included in Hansard.

The Speaker: Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Emma Cloney, president; Angel Anderson, vice-president; Amanda Young, secretary; Sandy Lopes Williams, treasurer; Kelly Fehr, director; Emma Worley, director

Acknowledging Morden-Winkler Fire Departments

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Today I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to the heroes of Morden, Winkler fire departments. They were not able to attend in person but are watching online.

Comprised mostly of volunteers, these dedicated individuals put their lives on the line to protect our communities. In moments of crisis and danger, it is

the selfless and—selflessness and bravery of these first responders that truly shine.

* (13:40)

Honourable Speaker, I had the honour of growing up in a home with my dad being a volunteer firefighter. My dad, John Schellenberg, was dedicated and committed to serving and keeping others safe; he was my hero.

Volunteer firefighters are the unsung heroes of our society. They juggle their responsibilities at work, their commitments and their—to their families, and still find the time to undergo rigorous training and courses to enhance their skills and knowledge.

These individuals are driven by a profound sense of duty and a desire to serve their communities, often going above and beyond the call of duty to ensure the safety and well-being of others.

The Morden fire department, led by Fire Chief Andy Thiessen and supported by 38 volunteers. These men and women have a wealth of experience with some fighter fires—firefighters serving for over 30 years. Each volunteer has undergone training and have received at least a level 1 certificate. This dedicated team ensures the safety and protection of the community with their skills and commitment to serve.

The Winkler Fire Department, under the—under Chief Paetzold's leadership, operates with 37 volunteers, three part-time positions. With an average response time of four minutes and four seconds within the city of Winkler, the department exhibits efficiency and dedication to its citizens of Winkler. Ten volunteers have dedicated over 30 years of service, showing a commitment to the community and to serve—to their safety.

I'd like to thank all the firefighters in my constituency of Morden-Winkler and to all the dedicated firefighters in the province of Manitoba. Your commitment and experience are invaluable, and I thank you for your service.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Riel—*[interjection]* Oh.

The honourable member for Morden-Winkler.

Mrs. Hiebert: I'd like to ask that the names of the firefighters be entered into Hansard.

The Speaker: Is there leave to enter the names in Hansard? [Agreed]

Alan Derksen, Abe Dueck, Lorne Enns, Ernie Froese, Chris Kalansky, John Klassen, Terry Nelson, Peter Neufeld, Peter Peters, Marvin Plett, Garry Reimer, Tim Reimer, Paul Warkentine, Ken Wieler, Tina Wolfe

Awasisak Meskanow Greenway

MLA Mike Moyes (Riel): I rise today in honour of Awasisak Meskanow Greenway, a phenomenal organization working to maintain and promote the biodiversity and health of the Awasisak Meskanow trail.

Awasisak Meskanow Greenway has spent 23 years working to establish a nature corridor, rich in plants native to Manitoba along the four-and-a-half-kilometre long trail that runs from the Red to the Seine River.

The group has undertaken several projects, including a campaign to plant over 120 trees and the creation of an urban food forest, all while actively working to promote awareness and appreciation of the area's natural and historical legacy.

Having served on the board of directors for the organization, I can attest to the community-minded nature of the members involved. Their dedication to both human and wildlife communities is reflected in everything they do.

Recently, I was able to attend the Awasisak Meskanow Greenway annual cleanup. It was wonderful to see so many people from Riel and beyond come together to care for our urban ecosystem.

And while the greenway trail has always been a testament to environmental action, it now stands as a testament to reconciliation as well.

I am proud to say that both the trail and street, formerly known as Bishop Grandin, has been renamed. Now, our much-beloved nature corridor is known as Awasisak Meskanow, with the corresponding street being named Abinojii Mikanaah.

This is an important step in honouring the legacies of Indigenous peoples across Manitoba and in promoting a prosperous future for all community members.

I am honoured to be part of a community that cares for one another and for the ecological well-being of our province, a community that brings everyone together as one Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, I'd ask that everyone join me in thanking the team at Awasisak Meskanow Greenway for their tremendous work.

Marcus and Paige Dueck

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to recognize an outstanding La Vérendrye farm family. Marcus and Paige Dueck of Four Oak Farms near Kleefeld are Manitoba's newest Outstanding Young Farmers. The eastern Manitoba couple was named the 2024 recipients of the award this past March.

Manitoba's Outstanding Young Farmers program recognizes excellent operators between the age of 18 and 39. Provincial winners then vie for a chance to be named Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers.

Four Oak Farms is an 800-acre dairy, mixed grain and hay operation. The dairy, which milks 50 cows using the only tie-stall robot in western Canada. They are also winners of multiple milk-quality awards and production farm awards.

This operation primarily grows and mills its own feed on the farm. Along with their dairy operation, cash crops include corn and soybeans, as well as forage and grass production for the horse hay market.

The couple have been stand-out farmers for many years and aren't new to the nomination for outstanding young farmer. The nomination process is intense, and the last time they were nominated was in 2016 when very new in running their farming operation. This year, with eight more seasons under their belts, they entered the competition as seasoned young farmers, which Paige noted allowed them to be much more comfortable.

The Duecks' farming success could not be possible without their team-effort approach, each understanding the value of their talents while working together for the common goal.

With the national award being presented in November, I would like to wish the Duecks the best of luck representing Manitoba farmers at the national stage.

Please help me congratulate Marcus and Paige, who we have with us in the gallery today, for their well-deserved recognition.

Brielle Dueck, Sutton Dueck.

Keira's Law

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I rise this afternoon to speak to the importance of putting Manitobans first, because, sadly, this is something our new government already needs to be reminded of.

Bill 209, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, otherwise known as Keira's law, is being halted in its tracks because this government's partisan politics.

This bill is in tribute to Keira Kagan. Months prior to Keira's tragic murder, her mother, Jennifer, sought an emergency motion to suspend her ex-husband's access to their four-year-old daughter.

There were fifty-three court orders in three years describing Keira's father as abusive, erratic and having escalating behaviour. However, the judge found the evidence compelling, but not urgent, and adjourned the motion.

Bill 209 expands judicial education to include topics of intimate partner violence and coercive control.

This bill, while guests were in the gallery, passed second reading unanimously, but this NDP government is now refusing to allow it to go to committee.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to remind the government that all political stripes, Liberal, NDP and PC, have supported this legislation federally and provincially.

And it should be noted, in Ontario, the PC government supported an NDP opposition bill to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic in the province.

Honourable Speaker, this government's behaviour is anti-democratic.

We have presenters from all over Manitoba signed up to speak at committee: friends and family of Keira's; health-care providers; representatives from shelters, resource centers, community groups; and individuals who have experienced first-hand how desperately this legislation is needed, and this government won't even allow for them to come and speak at committee.

Honourable Speaker, I am calling upon this provincial government to do the right thing before the House rises for the summer.

* * *

Mr. Narth: I'd ask leave to have the Duecks' children's names added to Hansard.

The Speaker: Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

So a couple of things before we get to oral questions. One is just a reminder to all members that just during your members' statement, if you just add at the end, before your time is up, please add the names of my guests to Hansard, then you don't have to ask for leave. It makes my life so much easier.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: At this time, I'd also like to introduce guests in the gallery before we move, just in case they have to leave.

We have with us Taylor Allen, who is the guest of the honourable member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram).

I would also like to draw attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today Sathya and Bindhya Amilla *[phonetic]*, who are guests of the honourable member for Morden-Winkler (Mrs. Hiebert), and Helen Hildebrand, who is the mother of the honourable member for Morden-Winkler.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

Further, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today Gregory Wowchuk of Toronto, Gloria Dzikowski of Midland, Ontario. Gregory is the president of the Professional Engineers Ontario and is in Winnipeg for the annual meeting of Engineers Canada. And they are the guests of the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

* * *

The Speaker: And one very important thing to carry out is, as is our tradition when pages are coming to the end of their term, I'm going to introduce you to Liz Deacosta. Liz has been a great—Liz had a great year as page. Although she wishes her time at the Legislative Assembly was longer, she is grateful for the opportunity.

Liz will be attending the University of Manitoba for political science, to complete a four-year bachelor's program with plans of getting into law school. Joining us in the gallery is her mother and father, Liza and Arthur.

On behalf of all of us in the Assembly, I want to wish you the very best in the future and thank you for your amazing service to us over the last year. You really are a part of an important team that can allow us to do our work in the Chamber, so thank you and the very best to you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Political Parties Election Rebate Government Priorities

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Welcome to all the guests in the gallery, and thanks to Liz, and all the best in your summer and everything else that's along your poli-sci and lawyer path.

This NDP government is failing at the basics. One of the basic expectations of Manitobans is that their provincial government maintain their roads and highways. And this NDP government, of course, is getting an F on that. Honourable Speaker, 18th Street in Brandon was just named as the worst road for 2024 in CAA's most recent survey, yet the Premier and the Infrastructure Minister thinks, hey, it's all good.

In Budget 2024, the Premier's doubling his taxpayer-funded political subsidy but cutting \$164 million from the Infrastructure budget.

Why is the Premier prioritizing his taxpayer-funded political subsidy over proper maintenance of Manitobans' roads and highways?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I want to take this moment to congratulate Liz on your achievements to date and to say to you and your parents, I hope you had an awesome learning experience here. Please take the good things out of the Chamber; leave the heckling behind. You won't get away with that anywhere else. All the best in what's next.

When it comes to the point raised by the member opposite, 18th Street was at the top of this list in 2022-2023 under their government. The difference this time, we're going to fix it; we put the money in the budget to do so. And I'm glad that the member opposite took the provincial roadmaps that I tabled to familiarize himself with a location outside of the Perimeter.

I'll table some further documents, these ones from S&P Global today, which gave Manitoba good reviews on Budget 2024. Specifically, this important credit rating agency said, and I quote: We believe the new government is committed to—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Regarding 18th Street in Brandon, on April 4th, 2024, the Minister of Infrastructure said, and I quote: "All the potholes had been filled on that stretch of our highway going through Brandon." End quote.

But Manitobans surveyed, everyone driving on the road and repair shops throughout the province, they know the truth, Honourable Speaker. Not only are Manitoba roads and highways worse than ever, there's less money committed to repairing them. Meanwhile, the Premier is doubling his taxpayer-funded political subsidy.

The only question I have to the Premier is: Why are you doing that?

Mr. Kinew: Well, you know, tradespeople, construction workers, so many Manitobans were out of work when the PCs were in power. Because they—what they liked to do was to cut, cut, cut. What we like to do on this side is to build, build, build.

And that's why in this year's budget, we've got the funds to fix 18th Street. We're putting people to work right now who are at work in Brandon.

We're putting people to work building health-care facilities. We're putting people to work, putting people to work building schools across the province.

But you know what the most important news of the day is? It's that S&P Global has weighed in on Budget 2024. And of course, they know that what's coming from the member opposite is nothing but noise. And I quote, S&P Global says, we believe the new government is committed to fiscal sustainability in the long term. End quote.

We're getting things done, we're making life more affordable and the rating agencies agree.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, I appreciate the Premier handing out the maps the other day so that he could familiarize himself with anything outside of the city of Winnipeg.

So let me refresh his memory: 18th Street in Brandon; Leila Avenue, Winnipeg; Provincial Road 307 in the Whiteshell Provincial Park; Kenaston Boulevard; Provincial Highway 26 in St. François Xavier;

Empress Street; Pandora Avenue; Saskatchewan Avenue; Grant Avenue; and Munroe Avenue; Inkster Boulevard in Winnipeg; and Richmond Avenue in Brandon.

CAA also found in their survey that 88 per cent of people surveyed just want their roads and highways repaired.

But there's less money. We've seen it in the budget. There's less money on infrastructure this year.

The Premier is doubling his taxpayer-funded subsidy to his own political party.

And again, he's not going to answer this question, Manitobans, but the question is: Why is he doing that, sir, when we've got all these roads to repair?

Mr. Kinew: Well, Manitobans know that wait times skyrocketed under the PCs. Wait times in emergency rooms, wait times in health care, wait times for health cards kept going up and up and up.

But now we see that even the wait times for a comeback has ballooned to 10 days under the member opposite. So nothing new from the PC government.

What we do have that's new in the province of Manitoba, in addition to investments in roads and improving services, is from S&P Global, and I quote, our expectation in the next two years: healthy economic growth and a renewed focus on fiscal sustainability will result in modest operating surpluses and steadily falling after-capital deficits. End quote.

The question for the member opposite is: If our team has a renewed focus on fiscal discipline, what was happening during their time in office?

The Speaker: Order, please.

Stop the clock for a minute, please.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I just have to introduce some kids in the gallery that are going to be leaving before we're done with oral questions.

So we have, seated in the public gallery from Anola School, 25 grade 4 and 5 students under the direction of Karen Burr, and they are guests of the honourable member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé).

Agency Nursing—Validation Process Impact on Health-Care Services

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Agency nurse spending continues to rise under the NDP. Yet, despite campaigning on drawing nurses to the public

system, the NDP has provided no incentives to entice nurses to do so.

We know mandatory nurse overtime hours are high, a problem pointed out by HSC nurses who declined ratification just this week.

Last week, the Premier haphazardly announced his intentions to validate nursing agencies, an announcement that came with no details on what that program would actually look like and no transparency on how these delays might impact health care for Manitobans.

* (14:00)

Can the Premier please be transparent with Manitobans about how this process may impact their health-care services?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): When you asked nurses about what does it take to fix health care in Manitoba, they'll tell you that they need better nurse-to-patient ratios so that they can spend more time with each patient. They will ask for an end to mandatory overtime, which skyrocketed under the PCs.

And they will tell you that they want work-life balance. They want to be able to spend time with their families, while also working in a rewarding setting. All of these issues became crisis points under the PC time in office.

With the tentative agreement that we arrived at with the Manitoba Nurses Union, we've put a financial incentive in place to draw nurses back from the agencies, which will give us the health human resource to be able to chart a course toward the end of mandatory overtime, to be able to improve nurse-to-patient ratios.

And guess what? I look forward to providing great detail on this all afternoon in the Committee of Supply.

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

Nurse Recruitment and Retention Incentives to Work in Public System

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): As we saw this week, MNU nurses were split down the middle on ratification. A WRHA nurse told the media that despite promise of change from the NDP, she, quote, didn't think that's what's going to happen from this contract. End quote.

Nurses still cite pay gaps, rotations, violence in the workplace, mandatory overtime, burnout and forcing full-time hours as key issues. Other provinces have put forward real incentives to bring nurses into their public systems: 30K to work in rural BC, 50K for Saskatchewan, up to 15K in Alberta, and some provinces even advertise flexible hours.

Why is the NDP doing nothing to incentivize nurses into our public health-care system in Manitoba?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We've got all of those incentives and more in the tentative agreement. The thing that we don't have is the PC obsession with cutting health care.

You see, under health care when it was run by Heather Stefanson, when it was run by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), we all know what happened. Emergency rooms were closed and nurses lost their jobs. They were forced to run into the basement of the Health Sciences Centre and jostle against one another to sign up for a new position against competition from their former workers.

What we have in the tentative agreement today, however, is a \$12,000 financial incentive for nurses to take up full-time hours. We've added resources to provincial float pools here in Manitoba, so that a nurse could be onboarded after leaving a private agency to join the public system within 48 hours.

We have a whole suite of incentives to ensure that the conditions to ending mandatory overtime and improving nurse-to-patient ratios will be added to the system. I look—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Robin, on a final supplementary question.

Agency Nurses—Work Requirements Incentives to Work in Public System

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I'm going to table a page from the contract document provided to MNU members. It mentions something the Premier neglected to mention in his response.

It clearly states that agency nurses are now prohibited from working in their own employment organization. For example, a nurse who works shifts for an agency and also keeps a casual position at St. Boniface to better control her own hours now can't work in the WRHA at all.

She'll have the choice of cutting her hours, dropping the flexibility of an agency or being forced to wait for a full-time position to come up. This, combined with the loose thread of validation without any timelines, sounds more like the NDP are forcing nurses into the public system rather than listening to their concerns and drawing them back in.

My question is simple: Why?

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): We've got a compelling incentive for nurses to join the provincial float pool and to leave the private agencies behind. We're not doing this with mandates, like the PCs did. We know that they loved mandates, and they love to mandate Manitobans of all walks of life.

Instead, what we're focused on is creating an incentive structure that makes the public health-care system a better place to work. The days of emergency-room closures are over. We're reopening emergency rooms. The days of attacking physicians and nurses is over. We're liberating them and encouraging them to speak freely.

And the days as a mandatory overtime and nurse-to-patient ratios deteriorating are over, because you have a Health Minister that is listening to the front lines and putting together a path to fixing health care in Manitoba.

Better health care is on the way. We look forward to working with nurses to get it done.

Manitoba Hydro Plan to Address Capacity Needs Implementation Costs and Energy Forecast

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Yesterday I asked this Minister of Finance (Mr. Sala) if he could tell Manitobans what the plan is for creating more energy in this province, and his reply is, we're developing the plan.

Well, under the previous PC government, there was a plan. And the now-current CEO calls that plan the north star of a guiding document, the first of its kind in Manitoba.

At committee, this minister and the current CEO and board chair all committed to getting the House the cost associated with the creation of these strategies, along with a forecast of how much energy Manitobans are going to use in the next five years. They committed to getting that within three weeks. It's now been 14 weeks and they haven't provided anything.

So the question is simple: What is the minister hiding from Manitobans?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Honourable Speaker, we were in government for two months—two months—and we brought in \$500 million of investment in Manitoba Hydro, partnering with the federal government. That's our record.

To the member's question, we are developing a plan to ensure that we have the energy we need going forward. We will work to ensure that that energy is reliable and affordable for Manitobans, something that for years Manitobans had to deal with the opposite: a government that was working to make life more expensive.

We're going to make life more affordable. We're going to create the energy we need, and we're going to build a better Manitoba.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Whyte, on a supplementary question.

Manitoba Hydro Future Energy Needs Request for Plan to Address Capacity

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): For those keeping track at home, that is now question 61 this minister has not answered from me.

However, I will answer a question the minister asked me yesterday. The minister asked me, do you know how many megawatts that was developed in the seven and a half years previous? The answer is simple, and I will answer it for him: 695 megawatts of capacity was previously created under the PC government. To put that into perspective, that's enough light—that's enough power to light up Brandon.

That is how you answer a question. Maybe the minister can try answering a question for once.

The question is simple: Will the minister tell Manitobans what his plan is for creating energy in the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): The plan's forthcoming, Honourable Speaker. We look forward to revealing that to Manitobans in due time.

But what I do know is that that plan—what it's not going to contain. It's not going to contain a focus on what the previous government did, which was to find new and creative, novel ways of raising hydro rates on Manitobans. Again. What did they do? They used a BITSA bill to include a 2.9 per cent hydro rate

increase on Manitobans in the middle of a pandemic. That was the first time in our province's history that a government had legislated a hydro rate increase.

That's their focus. What's our focus? Building more affordable, reliable energy. That's what Manitobans can expect from our government.

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

Manitoba Hydro Rates Increase Inquiry

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): I'm going to try a really simple question for the minister here, and I'm going to use his own quote so it's even simpler for him. We are committed to delivering on a hydro rate freeze, this minister said. I'm also going to table a press release from this Premier (Mr. Kine), where he says, we are also going to freeze hydro rates.

Well, it's been seven months and there is no hydro rate freeze in the province of Manitoba. Another broken promise by this NDP. Not only did they not freeze it, they are going to increase your hydro by 4 per cent, and they snuck it through in the BITSA bill.

Since the minister has a hard time answering questions, this is a real simple one: Will the minister simply admit today to Manitobans that he has broken his promise and he's going to increase hydro rates in the province of Manitoba, yes or no? It's that simple.

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Honourable Speaker, the member opposite wants to talk about what we're doing to improve affordability. Let me enlighten him a little bit.

Some of the lowest fuel prices in the country—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The member for Fort Whyte will come to order.

MLA Sala: Let's do it again: lowest fuel prices in the country. Lowest inflation in the country. Lowest food prices in the country.

* (14:10)

That's the work our government is doing. We're making life more affordable each and every single day, and that's what Manitobans can expect when it comes to our energy plan. We're going to make sure that we develop more energy because we know we need it, but we're going to do that in a way that ensures

it's reliable, it's affordable and Manitoba Hydro stays public.

Apprenticeship Training Request to Restore 2:1 Ratios

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, I have heard from my constituents that this government's actions are directly impacting their businesses.

Throughout Manitoba we have young people training to pursue careers in the trades. We made them a promise. We asked them to consider careers in the trades, and now, without notice, the NDP have cut the ratio and kicked out half the apprentices out of the program.

This minister has a chance to do the right thing and keep these young people in the workforce.

Will they restore the two-to-one ratio as industry is asking for today?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources): Honourable Speaker, I appreciate the question from the members opposite, and what we're focused on is ensuring that we have high-quality training for apprentices in Manitoba.

And what we're doing to make sure that that's a reality is investing in more training seats. An additional \$1.5 million is being spent on apprentice training seats this year, which means more Manitobans have opportunities to get into the skilled trades.

We're excited about the future of Manitoba, and we know that those apprentices are going to be part of building that future.

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

Mrs. Hiebert: Honourable Speaker, this isn't about safety; it's about control. These supervisors are professionals. They live a life of culture, of safety on the job site every day and they pass on to this to their apprentices. Two-to-one ratios allow multiple young Manitobans opportunities and help us to offset employee losses to retirements in a safe way.

This minister needs to trust the professionals and let them do their jobs.

They—will they bring this back, the two-to-one ratio, today?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, as we know, the NDP build, build, build. And we do so in a way that trains Manitobans up to get those jobs. And in that

training we make sure they have high-quality training, that they have safe training and safe places to work.

We will stand up for workers each and every day. Our investment of additional \$1.5 million into apprentice training 'sheats' mean that more Manitobans can work in the skilled trades right here in Manitoba to build a better future.

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

Mrs. Hiebert: Honourable Speaker, businesses in my community are worried. They want to work with Manitobans to train them as apprentices, but this government has cut, cut, cut the potential apprentice programs back-spaces in half.

This is denying young Manitobans the opportunity to pursue meaningful and productive careers. It is denying Manitobans the training they need to provide for themselves and their families.

Will this minister reverse this decision today?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, we know that investing in training and education for young people in Manitoba is how we build a stronger economy, how we build for our future. That's exactly what our government has done. An additional \$1.5 million into our apprenticeship programs means that more Manitobans have high-quality training and more safe training.

That's how we build a Manitoba that works for all of us for today and well into the future.

Green Team Program Funding Manitoba Agriculture Museum

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Honourable Speaker, cuts to Green Team funding have had negative impacts across the entire province. In my own constituency I've had many organizations and non-profits reach out expressing frustration and disappointment in either the decrease or a cut to their funding. These cuts include local municipalities, golf courses, summer day camps and daycares.

Honourable Speaker, the Manitoba Agriculture Museum received zero dollars in Green Team funding this year.

Will the minister commit today to restoring funding for the organizations in my constituency today?

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations): We are a listening government. We meet, we listen and we act. So we met with the Camping Association. We met with folks affected by

the Green Team. So we're here to announce now a further \$300,000 to Green Team program and to support youth employment. Important Green Team initiatives—*[interjection]* There you go. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Important Green Team initiative, the important programs. We're listening, and we're acting on behalf of Manitobans across all this great province.

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

Ms. Byram: Not only did Manitoba Ag Museum receive zero dollars, but many others, like Fort Dauphin Museum, received zero dollars.

The Manitoba Agriculture Museum is a non-profit charitable organization located in Austin, Manitoba. They offer school programming, popular public events, tours and preserve many historical artifacts in their collection that honours the rich agriculture history of our province.

Can the minister assure that Manitoba Agriculture Museum will receive their Green Team funding this year, and can he announce that today?

Mr. Bushie: Again: meeting, listening, acting. Honourable Speaker, \$300,000 more invested in the Green Team program and in youth employment all over. And then specifically to Agassiz, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada, Austin, town of Carberry, municipality of Westlake-Gladstone, Heartland Recreation Commission, Valley View Bible Camp, ArtsForward, Beautiful Plains Recreation Commission, Tiger Hills recreations—all in the constituency of Agassiz.

We're committed to supporting members all over this great province.

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

Ms. Byram: Honourable Speaker, I've highlighted only a couple organizations, but many more were impacted by the cuts made by this NDP government. These cuts have forced community-based non-profits to scramble and look for volunteers, share resources and for some, perhaps, shut down.

Can the minister opposite assure me that Manitoba Agriculture Museum will receive their Green Team funding today?

Mr. Bushie: Honourable Speaker, when they talk about cuts—the members opposite—\$800,000 for Manitoba Camping Association cut by that previous

government. And then they have the audacity to stand up here and talk about support for Manitobans in Green Team projects. We met with the Camping Association. So again: we meet, we listen, we act.

Honourable Speaker, \$300,000 more invested in Manitoba Green Teams so that we can have camps open, we can have baseball played, we can have opportunities all over the great province with support from our government. We work in partnership with Manitobans, not divide.

Transportation of Agricultural Products Request for Labour Action Exemption

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Last year, agriculture and the wider Manitoba economy was threatened by work stoppages at BC ports. This strike had an 'enormist' impact on Manitoba agriculture producers.

Honourable Speaker, today, railways are facing the threat of labour action which will keep grain in silos and cash out of farmers' pockets. Bulk grain handling at ports is currently exempt from labour action under the Canadian Labour Code. Agriculture groups across Manitoba and Canada are calling for similar exemptions for an-agriculture products at all stages.

The Minister of Agriculture must join producers in asking the federal minister of Labour for an exemption to Labour Code.

Will he do it, yes or no?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): Well, thank you so much, Honourable Speaker, for the member opposite asking a question about agriculture. It's been a few weeks. And it's my great opportunity to get up and first and more most, let's show appreciation to the agriculture producers out there today trying to do—*[interjection]*

There we go. We talk about the importance of what the agriculture producers do and what the industry does for the province of Manitoba. We talk about 9 per cent, 10 per cent of our GDP.

* (14:20)

I want to personally thank—as we see from our side of the House, nobody clapped from that side of the House, but I want to show appreciation to the agriculture producers of what they provide to our province and what the industry—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

MLA Bereza: And I guess that was a no. Agriculture products and crop inputs are transported 12 months a year. There is no slow season. This is why we need a robust and reliable transportation network.

The risk to producers, our reputation and economy is too great to take a hands-off approach. The risk of Manitoba producers is that this government will prioritize organized labour as they have done with bills that they tried to hide and force through.

Will the minister take action to ensure the trains keep rolling to support our agricultural producers, yes or no?

Mr. Kostyshyn: And yes, I've had the honour of speaking to the federal government, talking about the importance of the rail and grain movement across Canada and to our province as well.

We continue to work on the betterment for the agriculture producers as it's an important time of the year as always, 365 days a year. As you will remember, it's not part of our responsibility, but we work in partnership with the federal government of the opportunity.

But I want to talk about the opportunity. The past seven and a half years the members opposite choose not to withstand supporting farmers in a lot of respects, and obviously, I think you know one subject that I love to talk about, but the members opposite choose not to have this come forward.

But I want to ensure—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The government bench needs to come to order.

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

MLA Bereza: I was waiting for it; didn't get it. The fact of the matter is that we, as a society, consider transport of grains and other ag products as essential services for only a portion of their journey. Manitoba feeds the world and our agriculture industry feeds our economy. Producers are already hurting with the punitive carbon tax hike that this government is supporting.

Will this Minister of Agriculture finally get on side of farmers and commit to supporting any and all action to ensure that our agriculture products make it from farm gate to plate?

Mr. Kostyshyn: And obviously I'll take no lessons from the critic across the hallway here about how to run agriculture. Let's just talk about, conscientiously, 15 MASC offices were closed under their watch.

They want to talk about the opportunity of saving agriculture producers dollars. We want to talk about the fact of Crown lands.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Honourable Speaker, it's so great to hear our support about the choices that that previous government chose to make—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Legislation to Combat Intimate Partner Violence Presentations to Committee re: Bill 209

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, Bill 209, The Provincial Court Amendment Act, or Keira's law, is an integral bill to combatting intimate partner violence. This has been recognized in numerous jurisdictions.

This NDP government, however, has halted the bill and has chosen to silence presenters from all over Manitoba by not allowing them to come to committee and share their presentations.

Does the government believe that this is democratic?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): I want to say miigwech to the member opposite for that important question, and raising the issue of expanded training to judges.

As the member knows, on this side of the House, we take the expanded training of judges very, very seriously, and we strongly agree that we need to be looking at expanded training for judges and other justice officials, like JJPJs.

That's why as soon as our government came into force, our Justice Minister has been working with folks in his department and other folks consulting on how to strengthen Bill 209, and that's what our government plans to.

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question.

Request for Non-Partisan Support

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, this government has had nine months to introduce any similar legislation to this, and this Justice Minister has not introduced this legislation.

This legislation has been passed at both provincial and federal levels here in Canada. All political stripes—Liberal, NDP and PC—have supported this legislation.

Will this government rise above partisan politics and explain why they will not work across party lines?

MLA Fontaine: I want to take a moment just to acknowledge Rona Ambrose, who first introduced an act to amend the Judges Act and the Criminal Code sexual assault back in 2017. In fact, it took four years for that act, bill C-3, to actually receive royal assent back in 2021.

And so I want to lift Rona up for the work that she did, but I also want to take this opportunity to lift up all of those Manitobans that are on the front lines of dealing and addressing intimate partner violence, and those that are on the front line wanting to strengthen legislation to ensure that when Manitobans go to court, that they are heard, that they're listened to and that they're given the best access of justice.

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

Presentations to Committee re: Bill 209

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, this NDP government supported this legislation at second reading. Numerous individuals, including Keira's family, health providers, survivors and representatives from shelters, resource centres and community groups have all signed up to speak at committee.

Our province has the second highest rate of intimate partner violence across Canada, yet this NDP government is not prioritizing a bill that is taking tangible actions to help survivors now.

Does the minister have a message for those who are wishing to speak at committee, but are being silenced by this NDP government?

MLA Fontaine: So I just want to take a quick moment to just say miigwech to our colleague, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe), for undertaking this

review and this engagement to strengthen judicial training.

But I also want to remind the member for Tyndall Park that both she and I, I three times, and I can't remember, maybe two first—*[interjection]*—okay; two times, or I don't know how many times she introduced that similar bill.

But actually it was members opposite that blocked that bill. The member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), Heather Stefanson, when she was the Justice minister. I don't know where she is now. But members opposite, while they're clapping for the member for Tyndall Park, stood and didn't give royal assent to our bill. And now all of a sudden they're the champions of intimate partner violence.

They need to stay out of this one.

Provincial Finances Credit Rating Update

MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia): Honourable Speaker, in 2017—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

MLA Kennedy: —the former PC government received a credit downgrade after tabling their second budget. During their time in office, they continued to cut, tried to destroy our civil service and were not transparent with Manitobans. Manitobans rejected their chaos and cuts to services.

Can the Minister of Finance please tell the House about our most recent credit rating update from S&P Global, and how our government is charting a responsible path for today and the future?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): I'd like to thank my colleague for that excellent question. S&P released their first report card on our government's fiscal management, and we passed with flying colours. That's an A+ stable credit rating.

Let me share from the report, I quote, quote: The new government is focused on fiscal sustainability. End quote. And the report goes on to quote, the stable outlook reflects our expectations that in the next two years, healthy economic growth and a renewed focus on fiscal sustainability will result in modest operating surpluses and steadily falling after-capital deficits. End quote.

* (14:30)

S&P was clear that the PCs' Budget 2023 resulted in sharp deterioration in the province's finance but our Budget 2024 is getting the province back on track.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Disability Support Workers' Wages Funding Concerns in Budget 2024

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we will always stand up for survivors of intimate partner violence, and I thank the member from Tyndall Park for bringing forward this important bill.

This Minister responsible for Accessibility spoke at length about commitments to increasing disability support worker wages but in reviewing Budget 2024, this NDP is only doing 20 per cent of what our PC team did in 2023.

When will this minister release the priorities of accessibility and start prioritizing for vulnerable Manitobans?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): One of the greatest privileges that I've had as the Minister for Accessibility is to meet with so many amazing Manitobans that are involved in advocating in the disabilities community for a wide range of supports. I just want to take this opportunity to say miigwech to each and every one of them for the important work that they do on behalf of all Manitobans.

And I would share with the House that Manitoban-Manitoba has taken a lead in respect of accessibility. Across the country, we're one of the few jurisdictions that actually have an act.

And so I think that we are doing good work here in Manitoba—

The Speaker: Time has expired.

The honourable member for Midland, on a supplementary question.

Accessibility Act Review Update Implementation of Recommendations

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, in December the accessibility review and the AAC released 27 recommendations to this minister.

Can the minister provide an update for the House on whether any of those recommendations have been implemented to date?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Accessibility): Our Manitoba Accessibility Office, which is made up of phenomenal staff who are doing just phenomenal work, is actively working on the recommendations and in partnership with those community organizations that are on the front lines of accessibility.

So I want to assure the member opposite and Manitobans that are watching today that our team is working very, very hard. We've already passed four of the standards for accessibility, including our latest one on transportation.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

The honourable Opposition House Leader?

Mr. Derek Johnson (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on a point of order.

Point of Order

The Speaker: The honourable Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, you had to call government benches to order numerous times and I feel there would have been time for one more question. I humbly ask you for that question.

The Speaker: I would indicate that I do not believe the member has a point of order. I will, however, caution the members of the government bench that excessive periods of clapping and carrying on may very well lead to extra questions being allowed.

However, today, I didn't believe that it was that excessive but please keep in mind—please keep in mind going forward—that you will be watched. And we'll keep that in mind. *[interjection]*

Order.

* * *

The Speaker: Petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The Speaker: As agreed to in the leave request yesterday, the House will now dissolve into Committee of Supply. *[interjection]* Excuse me, the Speaker is trying to speak and trying to be heard.

The House will now resolve into the Committee of Supply to consider Estimates from the following departments: in the Chamber, it will be Executive Council; in room 255, it'll be Families; in Room 254,

Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care; and the Deputy Speaker will now take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH, SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

* (14:50)

The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott): 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 Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I do.

The Chairperson: We—*[interjection]* The honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care,

MLA Asagwara: I'm pleased, on behalf of the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, to present the financial Estimates for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

This is a historic budget with a record investment into health care. With it, we are delivering on our commitment to Manitobans to clean up the mess of the past over seven and a half years and begin the work of fixing Manitoba's health-care system. It is, indeed, a new day in Manitoba.

This budget is the first in the Legislature in a long journey for us as a new government, but in undoing the work—the damage, rather, done by the previous government. This budget is a great first step with tangible, ambitious targets that are undoubtedly moving us in the right direction and ambitious targets that reflect the ambition of Manitoba's health-care workers and communities who count on a government being ambitious to repair damage done over two terms of a previous government.

Fixing health care is our government's No. 1 priority, and we are demonstrating that with a record investment of \$8.2 billion. That is an increase of \$980 million, or 13.5 per cent. We're investing \$309.5 million in staff retention and recruitment, \$635 million in capital and \$65 million toward reducing emergency wait times.

These investments demonstrate our commitment to providing quality care where and when Manitobans

need it. It reflects the growing need for health-care services as Manitoba faces both a growing and increasingly diverse and aging population.

Patients are at the heart of every decision made in this budget. As a psychiatric nurse myself, this is a fundamental principle in how we implement improvements to health care. Patients are at the heart of health care, and it is care and passion for patients that motivates Manitoba's health-care workers, whether they're nurses, allied health-care professionals, doctors, support staff. That's what motivates them to show up every single day, providing the care that they do to Manitobans.

And ensuring that health-care workers have the proper tools to care for their patients is paramount. A sustainable and respectful workplace environment is crucial in creating the best possible health outcomes for Manitobans. And that's why this budget, beyond making historic financial investments, puts more resources on the front lines, reduces bureaucracy and works toward the goal of changing the culture in health care. This budget recognizes that solutions are found on the front lines and it prioritizes that fact.

This work is a calling. I know that because I had the same one, and answering that calling is a remarkable thing. These vocations deserve admiration, gratitude, trust and respect. This budget hires more doctors, nurses, increases staff and patient safety within our emergency departments and other sites and invests in human resources.

Addressing the staff shortages in health care is the first step to repairing our system. That means making Manitoba a place where health-care workers want to work again. And that's why we're making recruitment and retention an absolute top priority.

And we're doing that by: opening a new health-care retention and recruitment office; expanding the nurse float pool, including a \$291,000 expansion in northern Manitoba; increasing medical residency spots by 38 per cent; investing \$3.9 million in provincial nursing stations; adding 30 new seats to the University of Manitoba's undergraduate medical education program; incentivizing medical students to enter family medicine and streamlining their training process; establishing satellite medical school—a satellite medical school, rather, in Brandon; increasing funding for the nurse diploma program in Neepawa; and bringing back rural paramedics to the front lines of health care in their communities and empowering them on the front lines.

We're also increasing funding for interprovincial training agreements by \$625,000 for a total amount of \$8.2 million. This funding will support the training for health-care workers who want to come to Manitoba.

When we talk about reducing emergency room wait times, it's important to note that, in our budget, we commit \$65 million toward reducing those wait times and ensuring better and faster patient care. At the heart of this is retaining and recruiting staff and ensuring our emergency departments are safe spaces for all staff and all patients.

* (15:00)

We also know that we need infrastructure, and so we're adding 151 new acute-care beds across the province. For years, cuts to acute beds across Manitoba created shortages and exacerbated wait times for patients. This is something that we've heard all too long and know all too well first-hand for Manitobans.

It's important to note that we are also improving patient flow through our hospitals with new lower acuity beds. This will open up more critical-care and acute-care beds for Manitobans. This way, patients most in need of acute care will get the care that they require faster.

We're also investing \$6.9 million in ensuring patients can get home sooner by increasing weekend patient discharges, addressing the weekend effect, as noted by front-line health-care professionals. Patients will no longer have to wait until Monday to get home.

With an increase in allied health-care worker hours, we can increase bed availability and get patients who are ready to go home back to their families sooner.

Our government is investing \$4.2 million in establishing 10 community paramedicine units to increase advanced levels of care throughout the province. We gathered with dozens of health-care workers outside of the Victoria general hospital to announce increased investments, including the reopening of the emergency department at that hospital.

We are restoring critical-care capacity by establishing permanent funding for 30 ICU beds with a \$25-million investment. We know that we need permanent ICU capacity to get Manitobans the care that they need, a component that has been neglected and cut-cut terribly—over recent years.

So let's talk about seniors. It is a new day in Manitoba for families and seniors. Our government

has worked hard to secure investments from the federal government and to ensure that Manitoba seniors get the quality care they deserve.

We're investing over \$21 million of new funding that enables Manitoba seniors to stay in their homes if they so choose. And our new safe and healthy home-safe and healthy at home program will increase hours of home care.

We've also announced a 95-bed personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet. This is the first of four personal-care homes that our government is building. And we're creating a long-overdue—the long-overdue seniors advocate office—Independent seniors advocate office, which will identify, review and analyze issues facing Manitoba seniors.

So Budget 2024 is all-encompassing. With investments in minor injury clinics and increased training capacity, more Manitobans and their families will be connected to a doctor and primary care and team-based care.

Our \$50-million investment in a new healthy system innovation capacity fund will help build surgical capacity here in Manitoba. Our investments in CancerCare increased, including increased access for cancer drugs and plans for a new CancerCare building, are steps toward making sure more Manitobans hear those four magic words, you are cancer free.

With our investments in paramedicine services, MRI access, doctor recruitment, transportation improvements and capital investments including the Carberry and Eriksdale emergency departments, we're ensuring better care for rural and northern families. And as we implement better culture across Manitoba and work through partnerships with groups like Aboriginal Health and Wellness and Ka Ni Kanichihk, we're delivering on our commitments to improve health outcomes and provide better care for Indigenous families.

With a \$37-million investment in the front lines—in front-line organizations—we're also improving access to preventative care.

These are just some of the high-level broad strokes of Budget 2024, and I want folks to know that we are committed to bringing care closer to Manitobans in their communities, investing in capacity, hiring, training, retaining more health-care workers, reducing emergency and surgery wait times and building new capital. This budget makes good on these commitments to Manitobans.

Budget 2024 has laid out our government's vision for health care in Manitoba.

And so, to close, I want to thank the nurses, doctors, allied health-care professionals, physician assistants, support staff, facility staff, the CAs, all the folks working in our system, the civil servants who work tirelessly—work tirelessly—to deliver care to Manitobans each and every day. And I want this budget to serve as a message to Manitobans that wherever you are—whether you're in the south of Winnipeg, Thompson, Carberry, in the North, rural areas, in the suburbs or urban centres—you deserve quality health care where and when you need it, and you deserve that care close to home.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

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

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I only want to extend my thanks ahead of time to both staff and clerks and the pages who are here to assist us with this process but also to the deputy minister and other departmental staff. I know this process is a lot of work for you, and I appreciate it. And it's an important part of how we get a budget through this legislative process, as I know you know. So thank you for all of your work in advance.

And then I would like to just get straight into questions.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 21.1(a) contained in resolution 21.1.

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.

MLA Asagwara: All right, so first, I want to say thank you to these folks for not only being here today but just for their outstanding work from day one. We are so fortunate in the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care to have absolutely wonderful human beings doing this work in the civil service but just rock-star professionals, hard-working, super smart, responsive people. And I feel very, very grateful to not only be at this table with you folks, with

these folks, but Manitobans are fortunate to have this kind of leadership in the civil service.

So we have deputy minister, Scott Sinclair; Suzanne Gervais, who is the associate deputy minister. We have Sandra Henault, who is the assistant deputy minister and EFO; J.P. Fradette, assistant deputy minister. We also have Alissa Brandt, director of ministerial affairs; Raina Loxley, a special adviser.

Thanks.

The Chairperson: Thank you, member.

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.

Mrs. Cook: I'm going to start with some questions just to get kind of a baseline on where things are at in the department.

On page 33 of the actual budget document, there's a reference to something called the 4, 3, 2, 1 staffing plan. I haven't seen a reference to that anywhere else, and so I'm just wondering if you can elaborate on what that is.

* (15:10)

MLA Asagwara: I thank the MLA for Roblin, the critic, for that question.

So, the 4, 3, 2, 1, that you're referencing, that you're referring to, that is a commitment that our government has made to hiring 400 doctors, 300 nurses, 200 paramedics and 100 health-care aides.

And so, in our capacity, for quite some time—actually predates forming government, but certainly since forming government—we've been very clear with Manitobans that our No. 1 priority in being able to successfully move health care in the right direction is going to be rooted in staffing. It's going to be about our ability to retain, recruit and train the number of health-care workers that need to be across our health-care system.

The 4, 3, 2, 1, those are numbers that are directly related to areas where we saw previous cuts in health care.

So we know that, for a few years, it's been reported that Manitoba has a shortage of 400-plus doctors in the province. We knew that 300 nurses had

been previously deleted, fired from the health-care system; 200 paramedics were lost across the system—almost 90 alone in rural Manitoba were cut previously.

And these are important targets to make sure that we are moving health care in a direction where we're stabilizing staffing.

Think it also really reflects to Manitobans that our government recognizes the value in recruiting and retaining and training diverse demographics of health-care workers. So we've talked about team-based models of care.

You know, when we embarked on our listening tour, the decision to make sure that those spaces were welcoming to all health-care workers—front-line health-care workers—I think really reflected that. So making sure that whether you are a nurse, an allied health-care professional, health-care aide, doctor, facility staff.

It's been really interesting, actually, to be on the listening tour and hear from hundreds of health-care workers, but what's been really great—and it brings—it brought me back, the first stop that we had really brought me back to how I started my nursing career on a multidisciplinary team, where everybody's expertise was valued. And so, whether you were a nurse, a doctor, housekeeping staff, you worked in the cafeteria, everybody's voice and observations in terms of health care, mattered.

And so, being on the listening tour and seeing folks show up from all disciplines in health care to contribute their voices has been really great because I think that people are seeing that our government really respects the diversity of health-care professionals who contribute to the care that Manitobans count on.

And so the 4, 3, 2, 1 plan speaks to the targets that our government has set in order to ensure that we're moving health care in the right direction; that we, you know, can staff the investments that we're making and that we can action what it is that we're hearing from the front lines from health-care workers.

And we've heard really plainly that this is a top priority for everybody. This isn't a decision that was made or an approach undertaken by our government that was done on a whim. This really reflects what we heard for years, and it reflects that we heard on the doors, and it reflects what we continue to hear from Manitobans: that they want a government that's committed to taking a really dynamic approach to

retention, recruitment and training, getting as many voices heard as possible, contributing to the ways in which we're going to work together to strengthen health care. And so, that's reflected in the 4, 3, 2, 1 approach.

It's interesting as well, I want to note, that we outlined that in our budget to make sure that Manitobans see that our budget—you know, in terms of investing \$309 million into retention, recruitment and training, it's important for Manitobans to see that consistent message around what our targets are. Continues to be a priority for our government that we are accountable to Manitobans in the ways we've made that commitment.

And so, whether it's embarking on a listening tour, whether it's making those specific investments, you know, talking to health-care workers each and every day, they hear very consistently from us that our priority is making sure that we are addressing the health-care human resource challenges in the health-care system.

And outlining that 4, 3, 2, 1 plan really allows for Manitobans to easily grasp what our government's message and aspirations are. And again, it allows for Manitobans to also check in with our government and hold us accountable to where we've landed on each of those points.

The Chairperson: Thank you, member—thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Okay. Thank you for that answer.

Can you tell me, then—I'm—these are separate, then, from the 1,000 health-care workers promised for this year.

So what is the timeline on those overall numbers that you just mentioned?

* (15:20)

MLA Asagwara: You're not even—they're not even ready. I'm kidding; I'm sorry. Okay, so you asked for a time—the member asked for a timeline. And so that commitment was over a five-year period; so the 4, 3, 2, 1 was over a five-year time frame, timeline.

And so, I know that—because I've had this conversation with some folks in terms of what does that mean, you know, with the thousand-health-care-worker target and the investments that we're making. And so I do think it's important to flag the work that's being done to achieve that.

And so the target that we've set in this budget, the way that we've invested in the thousand-health-care-worker target, is really, really ambitious. It's very, very aggressive. But it's a target that was set based on the work we've been doing in partnership with colleges, with organizations, health leaders, front lines, recognizing that it's a really—it's an all-hands-on-deck approach, that the way in which we're going to be able to successfully retain, recruit and train people requires a unified approach in this matter.

It's part of the reason why it's been really wonderful to go out and talk to Manitobans and explain the approach here, but to do that alongside, you know, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Doctors Manitoba, the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, college of registered psych nurses of Manitoba, licensed practical nurses of Manitoba, PARIM, College of Family Physicians. You know, these are all organizations that do a tremendous amount of outreach and work with their members and have a good understanding of what's going on the front lines in sort of a grassroots way, in many ways. They're also responsible for regulations, policies, et cetera, that we have to work in partnership with them in order to advance policies that support our ability to meet these targets.

And, you know, there's a few things that I think are really important to note, to highlight, because, you know, health care is challenged across the country. It's a national challenge that we're facing. But Manitoba—there are good things happening in Manitoba. There are great things happening in health care in Manitoba, and it's really important that we say thank you to health-care workers and we celebrate them.

And I think it's also really important that we share the positive impacts of the relationships that we're building and that we're repairing with health-care workers. It's reflected in some of the outcomes that we're seeing now. So a good example would be being able to create a new mentorship program—nurse mentorship program—in partnership with the colleges, so that recently retired folks have the option to return to practice if they'd like.

I met a woman in rural Manitoba—Lac du Bonnet, actually—she was really, really excited to state that she recently retired and was actually very excited for the opportunity to return to practice in Manitoba and that she appreciated pathways being made easier to do so.

And she wanted to make sure her voice was heard in ways that we can work together and learn from folks like her to make that pathway even easier, taking

steps like training the first cohort of institutional safety officers in Manitoba's history, getting these folks trained to get them onsite to protect workers and patients in health-care settings.

I've had conversations with health-care workers across the province, be it in Winnipeg or in rural settings, northern Manitoba, who are, quite frankly, relieved that ISOs are finally going to be on location, in several locations already are.

And so it's taking steps like that that show Manitobans and show health-care workers and patients that working together gets things done.

Something I think it's important to highlight, because it is part of our 4, 3, 2, 1 plan as it pertains to physicians: we increased medical residency spots in Manitoba by 38 per cent. And we did that to attract more doctors from out of province to finish their training and secure good jobs here in Manitoba.

Now, we have done something collectively here in Manitoba that's pretty special. We have the highest number of spots that were successfully filled in Canada: 173 seats. All of those spots filled in our province, which is something to be really, really proud of; 48 per cent of those folks are going to be in rural and northern Manitoba, which is significant. And so, out of 18 new seats that were added, 11 of those seats are in rural communities, and that's huge. We know that when folks train in rural settings, they're more inclined to stay and practise in those settings.

And so, we're going to continue to do more work; the work is by no means done. We're still doing a lot of heavy lifting alongside our partners, but we're certainly seeing the benefits of partnerships and respecting front-line health-care workers having an impact in the system. So more work to do, but Budget 2024 gives us the tools to do that work.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I'll put that on the record: that was a very long answer to a short question. That was impressive.

Okay, so I just want to make sure I have this right. We've got two different sets of commitments here.

We've got the 4, 3, 2, 1 commitment, which is over a five year period: 400 nurses, 300 doctors, 200 paramedics, 100 health-care aides.

Then we have the Budget 2024 commitment, which is 210 nurses, 100 doctors, 90 paramedics and 600 health-care aides this fiscal year.

For both of those sets of numbers, are these net new positions to the system? Are these filling existing vacancies? What's the breakdown there?

MLA Asagwara: I thank the MLA for Roblin for that question.

So we are looking at those numbers being a net gain to the system.

* (15:30)

I think that you asked something really, really important though: is it about filling vacancies, like, what is it. And it's an all-of-the-above approach. You listed one item, but there's really—it's an all-of-the-above approach. So it is going to be about retention, and I've said this already, but I'll say it again: it is about retention; it is about being able to train people—that's a big part of it—and it is about being able to recruit.

So there are a couple of areas that are particularly interesting because other jurisdictions have really leaned into those opportunities, whereas Manitoba hasn't particularly been in that space historically. And so one would be, I guess, just as an example, advanced-care paramedics. That's a good example.

So advanced-care paramedics have been able to practise in Winnipeg. I know that the critic knows that. But for the past several years they did not have the ability—they weren't allowed to practise in rural Manitoba, which is a challenge. We lost—it was almost 90 paramedics in rural Manitoba, but there weren't the same opportunities in rural communities for them to practise to their full scope as ACPs.

And so, you know, adding training capacity right away, supporting folks, being able to access that training, making sure, as the member has indicated, that we're taking steps to fill vacancies, and supporting those opportunities is really key, not just for paramedics, but for other areas of health care as well.

You know, a big part of the reason why we stood up the recruitment and retention office is because folks—and I think a part of why is because they felt like they had to protect their own space or their own lane, but many folks were just operating in these silos, not really working in a connected manner.

And so standing up the retention and recruitment office allows the opportunity for a centralized cohesive approach, allows the opportunity for folks to have a spot they can go in, office that they can work with, to do a lot of this work. It's an approach that will support, no matter where people live across Manitoba, will

support folks in being able to access expertise to successfully retain, recruit and train folks.

One of the areas—one of the other areas—that Manitoba hasn't really historically been as engaged as other jurisdictions is around encouraging people who have—may be born and raised in Manitoba, but have left to go practise elsewhere or do residencies elsewhere, to come back to Manitoba. That's a space where there had been a gaffe. And so the recruitment and retention office, you know, also doing work around that and finally getting Manitoba into the language—get into the game isn't the best language, but, you know, getting Manitoba into that space and speaking to our own folks who, we know, many of which want to come back to Manitoba, but it's being able to reach out to them and say that we have an opportunity here. That's really, really important.

And so, you know, the way that we're going to achieve these really ambitious targets is going to require a really dynamic and nimble approach, and by working in collaboration with folks across the health-care system and listening and learning from people who have direct lived experiences in these areas.

And so, you know, a good example would be Carberry. Getting that emergency room reopened, enhancing access to primary care, and folks heard it directly from the mayor of Carberry; they heard it directly from the health action committee; they heard it from council members; they heard it from the nurse practitioners, nurses alike. That was a team effort. That wasn't government going in and saying to Carberry, this is what's going to get done and how. It was government extending a hand out and saying, we're here to listen. It was Carberry coming to government and saying, we need you to listen.

These are our issues and we want to work together. It was Prairie Mountain Health; it was the health action committee volunteers; it was everybody coming to the table focused on solutions, focused on relationship building and working together to make health care stronger in their community.

And so that approach is the approach that is going to best benefit this work and best benefit Manitobans, and the ability for us to have a net success is going to be rooted in that. And it's a good way. It's a good way to do this work. And so I feel pretty grateful in the willingness of Manitobans, be it health leaders, community members, experts, front-line folks, to do that work collaboratively.

Mrs. Cook: I just have a couple more questions about these staffing targets.

Of the numbers for both the overall five-year target and for this year's target, are these, you know, for example, 210 nurses. Are these 210 FTEs? Or is this, for lack of a better word, 210 bodies, whether they're in a casual, part-time or full-time position?

The Chairperson: Thank you, member.

MLA Asagwara: Believe the word was people, that you were looking for. People. Yes, it is people.

And that's typically the way that it's been, I believe, structured historically. That's just the approach in terms of counting those numbers of, you know, net benefit or attrition, et cetera.

The reality—I mean, health care has changed a ton. The critic knows this. It's changed a lot. And so people's needs have changed. Their desire for particular positions has changed. And allowing—creating the opportunities for that flexibility is really important.

I remember when I graduated nursing school and was looking for a job, everybody—at that time, everybody was competing for full-time work. It was a fight to get into a particular setting and use your skills, but it was also a fight to try to find that full-time FTE.

And things have really changed. Folks are looking for different ways of practising. I know, myself, I worked full-time and part-time for the entirety of my front-line career. And that worked really well for me in my life and my lifestyle and balance. I really enjoyed it, and I had good diversity of practice, which was wonderful.

And we're seeing that from folks. We've met with—we've heard from students at our front-line listening tour who are really interested in not just front-line practice but also research and innovation.

* (15:40)

Gosh, I met a nurse the other day at the listening tour who was a psych nurse and is becoming a physician assistant, I believe, which I thought was really cool—really, really cool. And so health-care workers are increasingly looking for diversity of practice, but they're looking for work-life balance, stability, flexibility that meets their needs.

And so as we work in collaboration with our partners to do the work of retaining, recruiting and training and creating opportunities that meet health-care workers where they're at, it is important that we

allow ourselves the ability to be flexible and be a listening government that can adjust where needed and make sure that we've got opportunities available for folks that reflect the increasingly diverse needs of the workforce.

And to me, you know, supporting the diversity of the workforce is what contributes to innovation in health care. I shouldn't say to me; that's science and data and evidence tell us that, and shows us that. Diversity in the workplace leads to innovation and fosters environments where more and more people feel safe to receive care and have improved outcomes, and so, you know, getting—increasing the numbers of folks on the front lines is also attached to an approach that, you know, we believe needs to be rooted in supporting a diverse front line, diverse—diversity in health-care teams, multidisciplinary teams.

And really doing this work in a way that is constantly checking in with folks on the front line so we have a good sense of what their needs are. And so I try to reassure folks that this listening tour is not just for seven months or for one year; this listening tour is going to be ongoing. And listening tour sometimes happens in the grocery store, sometimes it happens, you know, at the park with my nephew, you run into people at Home Depot and they want to talk about health care, and they want to talk about how we can make health care better.

And so we're always listening and always working to find ways to not only have a net benefit to the system of people, but have a benefit to the system that allows for a diversity of people to practise in the capacities that they identify really meets their needs.

The Chairperson: Thank you, honourable Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that answer.

Can you provide—can the minister provide the current nursing vacancy rate, by RHA, in Manitoba?

MLA Asagwara: So for the WRHA up until March 31, 2024, the rate was 14.7 per cent.

If the member would like the—it's going to take us some time to get the other ones. But yes, so, we'll start with that. And would the member would like additional SDOs, or?

Mrs. Cook: Feel free to take it under advisement and get it back to me. That's fine, I don't need it today.

* (15:50)

MLA Asagwara: I will take that under advisement for the member. Yes.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you, I appreciate that.

I just want to move on to a couple of questions about departmental staffing. So page 11 of the supplement indicates a reduction in core staffing within the department from 749.3 FTE to 703 FTE, and I'm just wondering if the minister can elaborate on what those positions are.

MLA Asagwara: Okay. I'm going to sort of walk the member through some of this if that's okay.

So the total number that she provided—a portion of those were unfilled, never-filled contract task force positions. So these were temporary positions that were created—my understanding—for that purpose but were never actually filled.

There's additional 15 that were COVID related that were also unfilled, so they were temporary positions that were specific to COVID work. And as that work, I guess, was concluded, those positions were no longer existent, actually. So they were actually vacant roles, and they were specific, temporarily, for COVID.

And the others were related to seniors, so the seniors—previous seniors department. And so when that consolidation occurred, those roles were—they ended up being duplicated—duplicate roles. So those folks are still working, but—and in roles, obviously—but there is duplication there because of the consolidation.

So that totals up the number that you provided.

Mrs. Cook: Can the minister just provide the actual breakdown?

They mentioned 15 COVID-related positions, which I take it are the 15 public health positions that were eliminated. I think I saw that somewhere in the supplement. If I'm wrong, please correct me.

Specifically, I'm looking for the number of vacant task force positions that they referenced and the number of seniors-related positions that they referenced.

MLA Asagwara: So, in regards to the positions, I do think it's important to note that in the months that we've been in government, you know, the priority being to staff the health-care system, to repair relationships with health-care workers, to invest in adding back capacity to the health-care system, recognizing that, you know, Manitobans have all been through an incredibly difficult past several years—we all lived through a global pandemic—and, you know,

our priority in strengthening health care is to create a health-care system that is responsive, that is proactive, that is able to respond to the needs of Manitobans wherever they have health-care needs that need to be met.

* (16:00)

And you know, it's interesting, because when we look at the opportunity to do that work—so, specifically, you know, positions around COVID, we know that, you know, these positions in particular were meant to be temporary positions that address COVID. Thankfully, we are long, now, out of the thick of COVID, thankfully. But also recognizing that what we learned from COVID is that we have to prioritize making sure that we have a resilient, supported front-line health-care system that, no matter what happens, folks are 'available'—available and able to respond.

And so recognizing that, although there may be situations where temporary staffing resources were needed, that what we learned from that is that it's better to be focused on adding capacity. And that our priority cannot be creating chaos in a health-care system; it cannot be cutting jobs from the health-care system. Has to be retaining, recruiting and training folks of diverse health-care backgrounds.

And so necessarily, you know, some steps were taken during the pandemic, across not just Manitoba, but other jurisdictions as well. Health-care workers were—thankfully, they rose to the challenge of COVID, and you know, now our government's responsibility is to rise to the challenge of creating a health-care system that really supports them being the best that they can be on the front lines of health care.

And so, you know, I think that's important when we talk about what staffing used to look like during these times where—that were very difficult, it also does have to inform the approach that our government takes moving forward.

And so investing in long-term capacity—not just stabilizing the health-care system now. Our government is focused on, yes, investing and retention, training, recruitment, all that for right now, and working really aggressively in terms of timeline to do that work and set these ambitious targets and achieve them.

But we're thinking long term about what does a health-care system in Manitoba need to look like, long term, so that should we have a challenge of an endemic or pandemic or what have you, that we're well positioned to respond; that we're never again in a

position where Manitoba has some of the worst outcomes in North America, some of the worst outcomes in Canada; that instead, Manitoba is a leader in health care in ways that positioned us—positions us really well to provide the care that Manitobans count on when things are tough.

So in reflecting on, you know, some of those positions that were specifically, temporarily for COVID, think it's important to talk about what we learned, what we should've learned from COVID and how we apply that to our staffing approach moving forward.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Okay, so I'll just—I'll ask the question again. I'll be clearer this time.

So of the 46 reduced positions in core staffing within the department, the minister indicated 15 of those were COVID-related positions. So I'm looking to confirm that those are the same 15 positions eliminated from public health on page 39 of the supplement. That leaves 31 remaining positions.

How many of those are from the task force, and how many of those are seniors-related positions that were eliminated because they were duplication?

MLA Asagwara: Okay, so I thank the member for that question, and for clarifying that question. I appreciate it.

And so the seven—as I stated before, with the change in departments, so that was a consolidation of those positions; they were moved elsewhere in other departments.

The public health positions—so those were specifically for COVID; those were temporary roles that had been vacant for quite some time. So my understanding is for many, many months, actually, there was nobody in those positions. They had done work specific to some data entry that was related to COVID that was concluded quite a while ago. Like early, maybe, 2023, somewhere there.

And the task-force related—so the '24 performance and oversight; those were all actually—those were never filled. Task-force-related contract positions. So we've talked a lot—I think we've talked a lot—we've talked; our government has talked about reducing bureaucracy and redirecting resources to the front line. And this would be a really good example of that.

And so, here you have unfilled, vacant positions, been vacant, unfilled for quite some time, that were

meant to be temporary, specific to COVID and other challenges, and reducing bureaucracy means being able to identify vacancies like that. The task-force ones, specifically, I think are really interesting, because those were meant—those were created for contractor roles that—but were never utilized.

And so those changes were made as part of our broader approach, to make sure that we are redirecting the resources that we have directly to the bedside, and to the front lines of health care.

And I hope that clarifies the question for the member.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I just need to go back, I apologize. I skipped a question that I intended to ask. Back on the staffing targets.

Of the numbers that were provided for the overall five-year staffing target and the fiscal '24 staffing target, where will these staff be located? Like, for example, of the 210 nurses that the government is aiming to hire this year, where in the system will those nurses be located?

And same question for doctors, paramedics and health-care aides.

* (16:10)

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for that question. I think it's a really good question, an important one in terms of what is our approach going to be and where do we, maybe, hope these folks will go.

We recognize—I certainly recognize—that, I mean, we'll hire as many folks as we can and we will hire them wherever they would love to work, right? We want to make sure that all across Manitoba, be it in Winnipeg, rural and northern communities, that we are supporting folks in being hired absolutely everywhere across the province.

We also recognize, and I'll reference Carberry again as a good example that there are specific areas, regions, parts of the province that maybe have unique challenges in staffing, and so making sure that we are taking a nimble and targeted approach, understanding the needs of particular communities is key in order to make sure that we can successfully hire and recruit and attract folks to these particular areas.

So, if we were to look at paramedics as one example, you know our primary area of staffing is in rural Manitoba. That's really what we're responsible for in terms of staffing paramedicine. Theses are rural

communities, which is why it's so important to make sure that rural paramedics have access to practice to their full scope and ability, access to advanced-care paramedicine training, access to the opportunities to practice to their full scope across rural Manitoba.

If we take a look at nurses, specifically, that—the target of nurses that we intend to bring into the system, attract into the system and retain, our government in this budget is adding 151 new beds to the health-care system. Those are acute-care beds, those are lower acuity beds, those are cancer-care beds, those are psychiatric beds. There's a diversity of beds that are being added to the system. And we all know that a bed is just a bed without staff.

And so, taking an approach that ensures that we are working with our partners, utilizing really innovative approaches in Manitoba like the nursing float pool. Investing in the float pool is investing in innovation in Manitoba.

And our investment in the nursing float pool is to allow for nurses to work across rural Manitoba, in northern Manitoba, in Winnipeg, to work not only full-time but part-time as well, to give them the flexibility to participate in a model of service delivery that allows for work-life balance, gives them flexibility, incents their capacity to work, builds cohesion and collegiality in terms of the relationships they form with other nurses who are practising through the float pool, allows for these folks to contribute to pensions, allows for these folks to pick up in the public system, which we've heard loud and clear from nurses they want to do. They just needed a tool that was flexible enough to support the ways in which they wanted to do that.

And so, working with nurses, working with doctors, working with leaders, working with folks across the system to make sure that we are being strategic about how we hire is really important. You know, the recruitment and retention office allows us this really wonderful opportunity to work directly with communities to better understand their needs and to have a line of sight into how it is that we can work with them to develop a long-term, sustainable approach that works for them.

It is something that folks have already articulated has instilled hope and confidence in their ability to really work with government as a partner. And it allows for us as a government to plan long-term. Certainly, the goals that we've outlined speak to Budget 2024 and into '25, speaks to 4, 3, 2, 1 over five years. But really, it's about, what do we do in this

budget that sets the tone and establishes a strong foundation for what we do every year after that and that will benefit Manitobans long-term across the province.

And so, we will hire health-care workers of all stripes absolutely everywhere across the province, and as many as we possibly can. But we're going to do that in partnership. We're going to be strategic, take a targeted approach to make sure that where we see areas of increased need that we're working in creative ways and innovative ways to meet those needs, investing in strategies like the float pool to enhance our ability to support nurses in having unique ways to practise in the public system.

And investing in making sure that the beds that are actively coming online, that are adding back capacity that was cut from the system, are staffed with people who are dedicated to providing quality care at the bedside that Manitobans deserve.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you.

The minister mentioned the float pool. How many nurses have signed up for the float pool?

* (16:20)

MLA Asagwara: I thank the member for that question.

The float pool is an innovation specific to Manitoba that is garnering envy from other jurisdictions. Again, I think it's so important that we celebrate the good things that are happening in health care in Manitoba and that we are not quiet about them. I know that, perhaps, maybe we're more humble than Ontario, or Winnipeg's more humble than Toronto, or there's, you know, debates about that.

But I do think it's important for Manitoba to flex a little bit in terms of the things that we're doing here that are innovative that we're seeing positive impacts as a result of, and the float pool is certainly one of those areas which is a significant reason why our government has invested in expanding and enhancing the float pool and supporting nurses in having the opportunity to practise via the float pool if they so choose. It is a great tool for strengthening the public health-care system, for bringing nurses back to the public health-care system, and doing so in a way that isn't just rooted in incentives or things like that, but it's rooted in collegiality.

And I mentioned that before, because when I had the opportunity and as I've had the opportunity to learn about how the float pool has evolved and what investing in the float pool allows for the folks who are doing the work around enhancing it to do, it's incredible to see how it's really evolved into a tool that equips nurses with the partnerships and resources that affirm that working in the public health-care system is the place they want to be.

And so the fact that we have 150 nurses in the float pool is a great success. And it's something that we are continuing to grow. It is a number that reflects the appetite of nurses to return to the public system.

You know, previously, under the previous government, there were hundreds, literally hundreds of nurses who wanted to be a part of the float pool but it—they lacked the capacity to onboard these folks, and they lacked the capacity to establish an approach that, you know, afforded nurses flexibility around part-time capacity and working in specific other regions.

And so our government using Budget 2024 to invest in enhancing and strengthening the float pool has had tangible results. In the last two months alone, we've seen a thousand hours, a thousand—sorry, a thousand shifts filled by the float pool. That is an impressive number when I believe the total number is somewhere around—maybe 3,500; somewhere around there.

So in the last two months, we're seeing the benefits of our investments already paying off. You know, we have communicated consistently with float pool leadership that this is a priority, and to action the enhancements, to work together to communicate to nurses this opportunity. And we're seeing the benefits of that.

And so we're going to continue to make targeted investments, like, into the float pool, that afford nurses the opportunity to have flexibility and work-life balance. We're going to continue to onboard nurses as assertively, in terms of timeline, as we can, into the float pool, and to find increased ways for them to work across the province.

So, you know, expanding the capacity of the float pool under our government resulted—has resulted in Prairie Mountain Health, in Southern Health being able to utilize the float pool, which has been a wonderful, wonderful tool for them; great lever for them to pull in terms of making sure that they've got folks working in the public system through the float pool.

And it really allows for regions that have unique challenges in staffing to have another way that they can staff at the bedside and on the front lines and know that the nurses, through the float pool, also have the benefits of that structure. Again, being able to contribute pension, being able to pick up part-time, being able to be part of a network of nurses that are supporting one another in this framework; it's unique to Manitoba.

It's something that we should be really proud of, and it's certainly an area that we're going to continue to strengthen to the benefit of patients and to the benefit of nurses who want to come back to the public system.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: Thank you for that. I'm going to shift gears just a little bit.

So I think we all agree that reducing reliance on agency nurses is an important goal. But in order to measure performance in that area, you have to know where you're starting from. So I'm sure the department has this answer readily available.

I'm wondering if the minister can provide the current agency nurse hours by RHA, to the most recent month available, I guess.

* (16:30)

MLA Asagwara: Thank the member for that question.

I'm just going to go by region. So WRHA, \$43,973; Prairie Mountain Health, three-forty-\$340,515; Southern Health, \$120,739; Interlake-Eastern, \$184,848; Northern, \$146,664.

I will do the quick math for the member and say that totals \$836,664, and that was as of December 2023.

And so, I think it's important to talk about—to contextualize this a bit and so—you know, what we have heard, what I have heard really plainly from regional health authorities are that they have been facing some very obviously significant challenges over the years, but certainly, that they also want to reduce the over-utilization of agencies in Manitoba.

It is a challenge across the country but certainly here in Manitoba, we have an important opportunity to strengthen public health care, to attract health-care professionals, nurses back into the public system which is why, again—and I'll keep talking about it because it is a very important tool and investment that

we've made in the float pool. Not only to reduce the use of agencies, it's certainly—economically, it makes sense to invest in a float pool and have nurses return to the public system, but it is also about strengthening care in ways in the system, as well.

We know that the public health-care system is a fundamental Canadian value to have public health care, to have a strong public health-care system, and Manitobans count on consistency, quality care, nurses who have the opportunity and the time to build relationships with their patients, with their families, with communities, and nurses who have a strong work-life balance so that, you know, they're able to show up to work and know that their plans to be there for that shift are going to be honoured and that they have control over their schedule.

And the float pool allows nurses to have that control and it allows for consistency in the quality of care that's being provided. And it's a great tool here in Manitoba that we will continue to strengthen and invest in so that we have nurses returning to the public system, moving away from this over-reliance and dependency on private-for-profit agencies and, ultimately, this benefits Manitoba patients.

Certainly, I can appreciate that regional health authorities in previous years didn't have a willing partner at the table to work with them. They didn't have a government willing to work with them, invest in strategies that allowed for them to not increase their reliance on agencies and so that work and that culture change around the approach to staffing health care is going to take time, but making the decision to invest in enhancing the float pool—making the decision which we have shared more recently with the public to make sure that we've got some quality controls in place when it comes to agency use in Manitoba is really important.

And so we're doing something that has not been done in this space in the province, where we are taking steps to move health care in a direction which we haven't seen in the past seven and a half years, to strengthen public health care, to have greater fiscal accountability in health care, which Manitobans have entrusted us to do, recognizing it's going to take us time to move things in a better direction.

But, certainly, you know, Manitoba—we look at our demographics and population distribution, per capita details—makes no sense that we have the number of agencies in our province operating in relation, for example, to British Columbia who, I

mean, we've got—I'm not even sure maybe it's five times as many agencies as that jurisdiction.

So there's work that we are doing to make sure that we are supporting quality of care in Manitoba, that we are taking a more fiscally responsible approach and that we're supporting nurses and health-care workers in having a good work-life balance in the public system, which is what we've heard loud and clear they want.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I appreciate the answer and the context around it, and I do appreciate the value of the float pool in helping to reduce agency use.

I'm just wondering what specific other incentives have been offered to encourage nurses who have left for agencies to come back to the public system?

MLA Asagwara: Yes, that's a really, really good question.

* (16:40)

Certainly, again, the float pool is a part of a larger approach. It is—it's been fascinating, kind of heart-breaking, quite frankly, at times, to hear from nurses on the front lines that they have felt unheard and ignored for years—for years—and as somebody who worked on the front lines in acute care, in long-term care, in mental health, in addictions, with youth, adults, seniors, I know what it means when you have leadership that values your voice.

And I also know what it means for nurses if you do not have leadership that values your voice. You know, I was a front-line nurse, working in an acute-care setting and in community, back in 2016, and pretty quickly saw some shifts that made it more difficult for us on the front lines to provide the standard of care that we showed up every day at work counting on being able to provide our patients. And what I've heard from nurses on the front lines are stories of frustration, of not being heard over the past several years.

But I've also heard stories of hope. I've heard inspired ideas, optimism from people who know that they have leadership in government that wants to hear from them directly. And I'm not exaggerating when I say I'd speak to health-care workers every single day of the week, at all hours. Shift workers work at all hours, and so, you know, I make myself available for when folks are available.

And I think there's a real generosity of spirit here in Manitoba, where health-care workers will go out of their way and above and beyond to share their ideas and their concerns and their hopes and want to be a part of moving things in a better direction. And we can't take that for granted.

And so the float pool, yes, is one area we've invested to really enhance work-life balance, attract folks back to the public system and a myriad of other things. But certainly the listening tour has been a really great opportunity and mechanism for us to learn from the front lines, to listen to their expertise, to meet them exactly where they're at, provide some coffees, some muffins, you know, and sit in a space where they have the opportunity to share what they have not been able to get across for some time.

And then to keep those relationships going, you know, having the online platform EngageMB, where folks can share in that way if that's their comfort level. You know, creating opportunities for job opportunities—in the health-care system, looking at ways in which we can support folks being trained in their own communities. You know, we are investing in communities like Neepawa so that LPNs can be trained in rural communities.

These are all ways that our government is investing in nurses across the province: listening, employment opportunities that provide work-life balance, training opportunities so they can get the education that they want in their home communities and stay and practise in their home communities. We know how important that is to folks. There was a nurse here, Tamra, a couple of weeks ago, for Indigenous Nurses Day, for national nurses week, and it was incredible to see this nurse who we advocated with while we were in opposition, born and raised in Manitoba, First Nations, Indigenous nurse, to be able to practise in her own province without the barriers that were in the way.

And that advocacy in that work, we do that work in government now in partnership with colleges, with folks like Tamra, so that they can be successful in practising in their own communities, which is—it's incredible to see that she's able to do that work now.

And so we build those relationships. We invest in the grow-your-own approach in communities. We get to the bargaining table, right? We don't shut people out for four and five and five and a half and six years from the table where we're supposed to meet them where they're at and try to come to a solution in terms of folks having agreements that work for them.

And so, is it all absolutely perfect? No. We're a listening government. We're open to learning and adapting and being flexible, but we're committed to doing that work with folks and we're seeing the benefits of that, recognizing there's still a lot of work to do, but we're going to do that in collaboration. We're going to do that work together.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Cook: I appreciate that the minister is always talking to health-care workers; I believe it.

I also talk to health-care workers, because they call me. And that was the genesis of the—my question in question period today, where I tabled a document that had been sent to me by a nurse who was concerned, didn't like what was on offer in the collective agreement.

And so I want to ask about, when it comes to agency nurses, what is the meaning and intent of that clause in the proposed collective agreement?

And I'll just—I'll read it, so that it's very clear which one I'm asking about. It reads: preclusion that clearly prohibits agency nurses working in the same EO that they hold a position in.

I want to ask what the meaning and intent of that is, specifically.

* (16:50)

MLA Asagwara: Yes. Can the member table that? [interjection] Sure.

Mrs. Cook: Yes, we'll get that to table.

While we're getting that, I'll divert to a different question.

The—last week, the Premier (Mr. Kine) mentioned that the government plans to validate nursing agencies, which I know the minister has already touched on as a quality management measure.

But I'm just wondering if the minister could provide more details around how that will work, the timing, when agencies can expect to have to apply or whether this will be done through an RFP, RFQ process, and most importantly, how the minister expects that to impact health-care delivery in the short term.

MLA Asagwara: I will take a moment just to highlight all of the places where nurses are working via the float pool, and then I'll follow up on the member's question about agencies.

And so the northern regional health authority, there are nurses via the float pool working at Thompson General Hospital, Gillam Hospital, in Northern Lights Manor, St. Anthony's General Hospital, The Pas Health Complex, Lynn Lake hospital, Flin Flon PCH, Flin Flon General Hospital, Northern Spirit Manor, The Pas Home Care, Snow Lake health centre, St. Paul's PCH, Flin Flon Home Care and Leaf Rapids.

In the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, float pool nurses are working at Pine Falls Health Complex, Beausejour Health Centre, Selkirk Regional Health Centre, Ashern hospital, Stonewall and District Health Centre, Sunnywood Manor PCH and Eriksdale PCH.

In Prairie Mountain Health, Dauphin health centre, Dauphin PCH, Brandon Regional Health Centre, Swan Valley Lodge, Minnedosa health centre, Swan River PCH, Benito PCH, Glenboro health centre, Birtle transitional-care PCH, Gilbert Plains PCH.

In Southern Health, which is one of the more recent, so Prairie Mountain as well, one of the more recent but in Southern Health, float pool nurses are working at Portage district hospital and Boundary Trails Health Centre.

Think that's important to note, those are a number of health-care sites, personal-care homes, that would otherwise be dependent solely, likely, on utilizing agency nurses. I think it's important to reflect on something that I've heard from folks in terms of why does it matter in Manitoba? Why is it important that we change the approach in terms of the utilization of agency nurses and for-profit agencies in the province?

The obvious one that stands out, I think, to most Manitobans is the fiscal burden that it places on our system, when agency nurses are being utilized in the manner that they are.

I've also heard from front-line nurses, from health-care workers, that the approach, in terms of utilizing agencies, has become so quick, in terms of folks accessing the agency versus taking an approach that would, first and foremost, work with nurses in the public system on the front lines. And so, being able to support nurses working in the public system, be it the float pool, being able to work with regional health authorities to change the culture around the approach to staffing is really, really crucial here.

You know, these regional health authorities—I said it earlier—for years—and I've heard this from folks—didn't have a partner in government. I am always surprised when I visit a hospital or sit with a

board chair and I hear from them that that's the first time they've ever had a conversation directly with the Health minister.

That, in the last seven and a half years, they never got a phone call, they never had a meeting, they couldn't get face time, that their voices were not heard, I think speaks to a culture in health care that needs to be addressed, that our government is working to address. Will take time to really shift it in the right direction, but we're, every single day, working with our partners to do that work and working in supporting of front lines to do that work.

And so making sure that we are implementing an approach to agencies that ensures that we actually have a line of sight into how decisions that are being made in terms of how nurses are deployed, as one example; because I've heard—and maybe the critic has also heard—I'd be curious to know—from folks who—there have been situations where, you know, an agency perhaps has deployed or sent out a nurse who actually doesn't have the full breadth of expertise that one would expect for that particular area of need.

And we've got the best people in health care right here in Manitoba. We have the best nurses in the country working in health care in Manitoba. But certainly, as a government, there's more that we can do and that we should do in making sure that we have a line of sight into how agencies are operating in this province.

It can't be a free-for-all. It just can't be. It's been a free-for-all for the past seven and a half years. It can't—it's not sustainable for it to be that way in Manitoba, long term. Manitobans expect more responsible fiscal approach. They expect nurses to be motivated to work in the public system, and supported. And they expect consistency in the quality of care.

And so taking the approach that we will be moving forward, we'll support all of those areas.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

The honourable member for Roblin, you have the document there?

Mrs. Cook: Yes, I'd like to table the document I referenced earlier and just restate my question.

What is the meaning and intent of the clause regarding prohibiting nurses working for an agency from working within that same EO?

The Chairperson: Order, please.

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

ROOM 255 FAMILIES

* (14:50)

The Chairperson (Robert Loiselle): 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. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Okay. Aaniin. I am pleased to introduce the 2024-2025 Department of Families Estimates of Expenditure. This is my first as the Minister of Families.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge the work of Chamber staff and the Hansard recorders and the technicians who are supporting us here today. I'm sure all of our colleagues are well aware that they work so hard to keep our committees running smoothly, and we say miigwech for your efforts.

I've said before and I will say it again, the phenomenal work that goes behind the scenes in this building is not well understood by the public, but it is so important to the legislative process.

So every opportunity that I have, I always want to say a heartfelt miigwech to our team in my Department of Families. It's a privilege to work alongside of you, and I recognize your level of expertise and your commitment and your dedication to Manitoba families.

And as I have said many, many times, Families is a huge department, and Families is one of the departments that works with and is responsible for some of the most marginalized and vulnerable of Manitobans. And it is a role and a responsibility that I take very seriously. And as I have always said since 2016, this is sacred work, and none more so than when you are a minister responsible.

And so I would be lost without our team, and I'm so honoured to work with each and every one of you. So I say miigwech and I acknowledge you for all of your work and dedication.

As the Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, I'm happy to begin with an update on the amazing work that we're doing in WAGE Manitoba. The legacy and continuation of colonialism, racism, sexism, misogyny, patriarchy and exclusion, creates and exacerbates systemic and structural violence against Indigenous peoples. As a result, Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited peoples face additional barriers

and experience higher rates of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence and sexual violence, not only here in Manitoba—which, I would suspect that everybody around the table understands Manitoba's particular context—but certainly across the country.

I'm proud to share Budget 2024 includes an investment of \$20 million to a new MMIWG provincial strategy, which is focused on making Manitoba safer for Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited. I want to say that the \$20-million investment has not been done across the country, specifically in respect of MMIWG2S.

Other provinces and territories, and I would—you know, we can talk about Yukon. Yukon was actually one of the first jurisdictions across the country that came out with a strategy after the national inquiry, and there was some dollars attached to some of the programming or some of the policies that they wanted to look at.

But this is the first time that there was a significant investment specifically for MMIWG. Our strategy—or our, you know, I'm wanting to change the language so our healing and empowerment strategy will be guided in partnership with myself and the special advisor on Indigenous women's issues, Cora Morgan, and our matriarch council, as well as the MMIWG and Gender-Based Violence committee of Cabinet.

The matriarch council, again, is something that hasn't been done in any other jurisdiction across the country, and so it's an opportunity to reclaim and take up space in this building to not only, you know, look at a vision and a strategy to, you know, to prioritize the protections of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited, but the healing and the empowerment and the liberation. And so we have extraordinary women that sit on the matriarch council and I'm so grateful that they all agreed.

In 2023, Manitoba entered into the national plan to end gender-based violence. It's a four-year bilateral agreement, which includes an investment of more than \$22 million. And Manitoba is focused on supporting community-based and Indigenous-led initiatives, allowing for unique and effective service delivery designed by our unique population here in Manitoba.

And the other thing that I want to share in respect to the N-A-P dollars is that Manitoba—we're just speaking about this this morning—Manitoba is also taking a lead across the country in respect of the national action plan. Some other jurisdictions are just sending RFPs or they're just, you know, putting it

towards, you know, programs that they already have. But we're doing really innovative and decolonizing work here, so something that we can all be proud of.

We've analyzed funding to Klinik Community Health, which will support the Hummingbird Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence Crisis Response Program. The Minister of Health and I announced three folks that will, you know, co-ordinate the development of a provincial strategy for all of Manitoba, including the North. That's something that we're very, very excited about.

And we're looking forward to being able to work collectively to ensure that Manitobans who, you know, experience sexual violence, will have the supports when they need it and where they need it so that they can access that, and ultimately so that they get justice. Because this is also about getting justice, and you want folks to be able to have those supports to be able to pursue that.

As I've said many, many times, our government is committed to decolonizing and transforming child welfare in Manitoba. We're supporting Indigenous rights holders, working towards the restoration of Indigenous jurisdiction over Child and Family Services. And we are going to introduce significant legislative amendments to adapt the provincial system to ensure that Manitoba is moving towards jurisdiction and that legislative framework will support that.

As we know, you know, transferring jurisdiction to First Nations rights holders is also part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and so I'm very honoured to be a part of that. As most folks know, we just hosted a round table in which First Nations leaders signed on to a declaration which was, essentially, our commitment and our promise to pursue jurisdiction with rights holders. And that's a living document that we're actually going to be taking throughout the summer to different First Nations and have signing ceremonies.

We are—we've got collaborative efforts with our authority partners and their mandated agencies aiming to target resources to essential enhancing outcomes. Budget 2024 allocates more than 400 annually to Child and Family Services and almost two thirds of this allocation is dedicated to providing care for vulnerable children, youth and families.

We've also—we are moving towards a customary and kinship agreement so we're moving and supporting that work so that agencies can enter into kinship and care—customary and kinship agreements, so that

more children that are coming into the system can be placed with family and community and within their nations.

* (15:00)

We know, by every social determinant, that children do better when they are with their families and in their communities, surrounded by their culture and their language and their land. And so I'm very pleased about the work that we're doing towards customary and kinship care.

We are also looking at continued supports for adults that are transitioning out of care. So Budget 2024 commits over \$4.68 million to the continuation of supports for young adults. We are doing a lot of work in respect of looking at the supports that we need to put in place for Manitoba citizens who are aging out of care, because we know the system is, in many respects, when we have folks aging out of care, that it's a pipeline to homelessness, it's a pipeline to mental health issues, it's a pipeline to the correctional justice system. So we're attempting to provide those supports for youth that are the most vulnerable, that are aging out of care.

I see that I have only 23 seconds.

Budget 2024 is also investing in the well-being of children and families, with \$172,000 for new annual funds for the InSight Mentoring Program, increasing the program's annual investment to \$1.65 million, which supports pregnant people and parents who use substances to address challenging life—

The Chairperson: The member's time has expired.

We thank the minister for those comments. Merci, miigwech.

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

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I do, and thank you.

The Chairperson: Pardon me, the member for Midland.

Mrs. Stone: I want to thank the minister for those opening comments. And this is also my first Estimates as a critic, so please bear with me as I go through this process for the first time.

But I do look forward to the opportunity to get into specific details of some of the programs and supports that the minister has spoken to and some of those funding reallocations that she has referred to in the House.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to pass along a message of thank you to the staff of the department. I know that you all work very hard under very trying circumstances. I know when I certainly hear very difficult stories, that's—those are things and those are conversations that you're having every single day, and those aren't easy conversations to have. And I just want to thank you for all the work that you do do in this very, very difficult and complex department, so thank you.

You know, we have all, unfortunately, heard about the terrible tragedies that have occurred to vulnerable children and youth in our province and very public tragic circumstances, in particular, over the past six months. So I'll certainly be taking some time during Estimates to ask questions regarding some of those communications processes with the children and the families who reach out to their CFS workers and the timeliness of those responses.

I do want to take a quick moment to just recognize the recent declaration of pledging the transfer of jurisdiction over child welfare to Manitoba First Nations. The former PC government did introduce bill 41, and that was a significant first step towards repatriation of Indigenous children to their community and a new era for child welfare, and this declaration is just another step in that right direction.

I'd also like to take time during Estimates to explore a relationship between the Families Department and health-care services, specifically on the delivery of EIA programs.

And as we're about to enter into accessibility awareness week, which is next week, very interested to hear about the programs and initiatives related to accessibility for the province of Manitoba and some of the recommendations that were put forward in December on accessibility review.

So I know that there's still more work to do. I'm committed to standing up for vulnerable Manitobans. These are issues that I am incredibly passionate about, and I do not take my role as critic lightly. And I want to ensure that vulnerable Manitobans do have the support that they need from all of us as legislators, from all sides of the House and from all political parties.

I look forward to working together and ensuring the safety and best interests of our children, our youth, our most vulnerable people and our marginalized populations. They are of our utmost priority and should be as legislators.

So I want to thank you for the opportunity to make a few comments in my opening statement, and I look forward to getting into questions.

The Chairperson: We thank the member. Merci, miigwech.

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

Would the Minister of Families like to introduce her staff?

MLA Fontaine: So I'm very pleased to be joined by Michelle Dubik, the deputy minister for the Department of Families; Brenda Feng, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Administration and Finance Division; Jason Lacasse, assistant deputy minister responsible for Community Service Delivery Division; Christina Moody, assistant deputy minister responsible for Child and Youth Services Division; Elizabeth Debicka, assistant deputy minister responsible for Indigenous Jurisdiction Transition Office; Heidi Wurmann, assistant deputy minister responsible for the Corporate Services division; Ernest Kwan, assistant deputy minister responsible for the Technology & Transformation Division; and Jamie Carnegie, executive director for Women and Gender Equity Manitoba.

The Chairperson: Miigwech, Minister.

Before we begin, according to 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.

Mrs. Stone: I'd just like to start with some kind of general administrative questions.

Can the minister confirm that the organizational chart in the supplemental Estimates is complete and up to date from when we received it a couple of months ago?

* (15:10)

MLA Fontaine: So this is correct in respect of the budget when it was printed. Operationally, though, it is not, so I'm going to explain a couple of things.

Where am I going to begin? I'm going to begin with community service delivery. So we've got assistant deputy minister, Jason Lacasse, and what we've done is we have the policy of EIA and disabilities, which has now moved into under Corporate Services, assistant deputy minister, Heidi Wurmann. So we've moved that there.

We have moved women and gender equity all the way up to the deputy minister, Michelle Dubik. So WAGE reports directly to the deputy minister.

Going back to Corporate Services, Corporate Support and Social Innovation Office, now those two have moved under Digital, Organization and Strategy under assistant deputy minister Ernest Kwan.

And I believe that is that.

We'll provide an updated version of this to the member.

Mrs. Stone: Okay, thank you, I would appreciate to get the updated flow chart that reflects those recent changes.

Can the minister please provide a breakdown of all political staff that work out of the minister's office or within her purview and the position and title of each staff member.

MLA Fontaine: So the political staff that I have is; Alex Krosney, who is my director of ministerial affairs, who works so incredibly hard. And I just want to give a shout out to Alex, who is often here early, early in the morning and late, like, nine, 10 in the evening, and I have to sometimes tell her to go home. So I want to acknowledge and say miigwech to Alex for her important work. So that's the director of ministerial affairs, which is also known as DOMAs. So I just wanted to share that with the member.

And then I have my executive assistant, and that is Temi Olantudae [*phonetic*]—no, I just butchered that. If Temi is watching, I'm so sorry, Temi. Temi is an extraordinary young woman who comes from, actually, media. She was actually working at—and I feel like this is a fair story to tell. She was actually working at CTV News.

And we were at an event, the opening of the 'pitiway'—yes, oh, God, I can't speak today. Anyways, the—what is it again? Skateboard park. Just such a great skateboard park, because it is—it's for, you know,

the LGBTQ2IA community, which didn't find a home or a safe space anywhere in the city, and so they opened up this skateboard park at Portage Place. And Temi happened to be covering that—the opening of that skateboard park.

And she came up to me, and we just started talking. It wasn't to interview me, it was to talk. And she was so extraordinary, and I remember saying, oh, that's my executive assistant. I just knew that as soon as I met her that she was an extraordinary young woman. So that's my executive assistant.

Jennifer Chartrand is my special assistant on Families, more specifically, in respect of jurisdiction. Jennifer Chartrand comes from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs First Nations Family Advocate Office. And she's only just started in the last, I don't know, maybe month or so, and also deserves a little bit of acknowledgement here as well. She is currently doing her master's research on jurisdiction on Indigenous laws. And I had approached her when I first was appointed minister, and she said no, because she wasn't entirely sure if she was ready to come and work in government. But I just knew that if I waited, if I just held out, that eventually she'd come, and then eventually a couple of months later, she did agree. So I was very, very happy that I waited and held out for her.

And then we have Cora Morgan, who is our special advisor on Indigenous women's issues and the secretary to the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited peoples and Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet. That's a very, very long title, but Cora comes with just a breadth of knowledge and expertise and experience. She used to be the First Nations family advocate office for—or the advocate for the First Nations Family Advocate Office, and basically built that family advocate office from the ground up. I think she was there for about seven and a half years. And so I'm so grateful to her that she also agreed to come and work alongside myself in the Department of Families.

I'm really happy that, you know, we have a diverse political team. We represent, you know, we look like and represent Manitobans, and that's so important. And I think that since the NDP government assumed office, you can see, just even in the building, that the folks that are walking around the building are more representative of Manitobans, and I think that that's something that we're very, very proud of.

Sorry, I keep going like this just to see the clock, so, miigwech, thank you.

The Chairperson: All right, miigwech.

Mrs. Stone: The minister had noted DOMAs, or director of ministerial affairs. As this is a new position or new title, can the minister explain the duties of this specific position?

* (15:20)

MLA Fontaine: Before I answer the member's question, I do have a more accurate, updated—I don't know how I'd give this to—I would like to table it. Okay.

And in respect of the member's previous question, DOMA—so, our DOMAs act as a liaison between the minister and the department and they also act as liaisons between the minister and central government. Our DOMAs provide political advice. Our DOMAs direct other political staff. And our DOMAs support the execution and accomplishments of our ministers' mandates, of which we've done quite a few already. We've gotten through quite a few of our mandates, I'm pretty proud of that.

DOMAs support central government in understanding issues and concerns and the day-to-day related to the Department of Families or any other departments that we have DOMAs. DOMAs are a key role in the intersection of the minister's office and DM's office. And then, of course, DOMAs provide direction on departmental priorities.

And as I said, our DOMAs work incredibly hard, as I've said, and it's honestly quite extraordinary to see the work that Alex puts into the Department of Families and the level of expertise that she has in executing her duties. And it was not an exaggeration when I said that sometimes I have to direct her to go home and to spend some time with her family and her dog, Judy. So there we go.

Mrs. Stone: Are there any special—or paid special advisers to the minister?

MLA Fontaine: No, I don't.

Mrs. Stone: Thank you. I'm just going to shift gears and go into a different topic set of questions.

Could the minister please provide an update on how many children are currently in care in the province?

MLA Fontaine: So, as of March 31, 2023, which is the most updated numbers, there are 8,990 children in care.

This is defined as under the age of 18, with a legal status of permanent ward, temporary ward, under a

voluntary surrender of guardianship, under a voluntary placement agreement or under apprehension, who were placed by a Child and Family Services agency in substitute care, and whose care needs were financially supported by government.

Children in non-paid care with family members have been excluded since March 31, 2017. The number of children in care is determined collaboratively through consultation with our partner CFS authorities: 2023 showed a decrease of 206—or 2.2 per cent—children from the prior year of 9,196.

Peguis Child and Family Services are excluded from the total number, as the agency provides service under Peguis First Nation's Child and Family Services law, and is not under a provincial mandate.

The department plans to proclaim voluntary kinship and customary care agreements, focusing on providing Child and Family Services agencies with additional tools to avoid court, maintain parental guardianship and place children with family, kin and community.

* (15:30)

The department continues to work with CFS agencies, CFS authorities and Indigenous partners to finalize the timing for proclamation to ensure they are implemented in a way that provides children and their families with the support they need to thrive.

Anticipated implementation is this coming summer. Kinship and customary care agreements are expected to increase over time, including expected transition of some children currently in places of safety, foster and group-care homes.

The new agreements will be tracked and reported to help monitor implementation and support increased use. The department acknowledges the importance of ensuring children in care remain connected to their families and communities to achieve the best possible outcomes. CFS authorities, their agencies and a variety of community-based organizations provide prevention and early intervention approaches to support vulnerable families, continued child care and parental child reunification.

Child apprehensions, about 1,992, decreased in 2022-2023 by 8.4 per cent from the last fiscal year of 2,175. And so, again, I think it's important. I know that the member has heard me talk about customary and kinship care. As was noted, these are expected to increase because the—we know that children do best and fare best and have the best possible outcomes when

they are with their families, in their communities and with their nations.

And so, we're looking forward to the proclamation. I've had many, many meetings with First Nations rights holders and our PTOs and everybody is supportive of customary and kinship care agreements, understanding and appreciating that it's important to keep our kids with our families and in our communities and with our nations.

Mrs. Stone: On page 45 of the Supplement to Estimates of Expenditure, Winnipeg Child and Family Services reflects a cut.

The minister in the House has indicated that some of those dollars have been reallocated, so can the minister specifically provide an explanation of where those dollars have been reallocated to?

MLA Fontaine: So I want to be clear, as I've been clear several times in the House, there is no cut to the department. So I'm going to do my best to explain what the member is seeing.

As I said in QP, we continue to evaluate and adjust funding allocations across the CFS system to support Indigenous jurisdiction—jurisdiction, the movement of cases and the implementation of the national standards, which is also one of the pieces in bill C-92.

Dollars moved last year, under the previous government, and will continue to move in order to support Indigenous jurisdiction and the national standards, including to support the proclamation of customary and kinship care agreements. I cannot be explicitly clear—any more explicitly clear that no funding is being taken out of the system. We continue to invest over \$420 million in CFS authorities and agencies.

The department is increasing funding to Indigenous agencies to support the implementation of customary and kinship care agreements in '24-25 and also to address the inequities within the system. So, the—which, you know, includes dollars that are flowing to the northern and southern authorities and the Métis authority.

So I'm going to do my best. Again, no dollars were taken out of the system, they've just been reallocated, and I'll give you a really good example here. We've moved about \$10.5 million from maintenance, we've reallocated it, so: \$5.21 million of new dollars to the southern authority; \$4.03 million of new reallocated dollars to the Northern Authority; \$315,000

of new reallocated dollars to the Métis authority. And that comes out of the maintenance.

* (15:40)

So, while it looks here like it's a cut, it's not. It's just been reallocated to support customary kinship agreements—care—customary kinship agreements and the inequities within the system. And those letters went out last week to the authorities, and I don't know when it was last month, or whenever that was, had calls with the Grand Chiefs and let the Grand Chiefs know that there were those dollars that were going to be reallocated to support customary and kinship care agreements and the inequities.

So, once again, no—there's been no cuts to the system at all. It's just reallocated to support jurisdiction, to support the national standards, to support customary and kinship agreements and to support or to attempt to address the inequities within the system.

Mrs. Stone: Yes, I thank the minister for answering the question on where those allocated—reallocated dollars have gone to.

Can the minister please provide the chart that references those reallocations?

MLA Fontaine: So no, I'm not going to disseminate that. That's got information that is confidential for the department. What we will attempt to do is provide something for the member in respect of that. But it's not going to be that, because that's departmental information; that's got information that I don't want disseminated or can't be disseminated.

Mrs. Stone: Can the minister please provide how many vacancies are there within CFS authorities currently, in terms of employment?

MLA Fontaine: So, we don't have that information, and it's not appropriate for us to be asking the authorities and, you know, Indigenous agencies for that information. As the member should be aware, we—several, many years back, Manitoba entered into devolution of child welfare, and part of that devolution of child welfare as it existed back then was the—*[interjection]*

So, as I was saying, the member should know that the history of Manitoba here was that several years back we entered into what is devolution of child welfare, and that comes from, was predicated upon the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry and the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry implementation commission. And from there this devolution path or process created the authorities.

And so the authorities are a part of that devolution, and so it's not appropriate for me as the minister to be asking what—how many vacancies there are, but what I can do is I can say that—I can advise the member that the general authority is funded for 20.5 FTEs; the Métis authority is funded for 24.5 FTEs; the Northern authority is funded for 28 FTEs; and the First Nations network of care—or Southern authority is funded for 33 FTEs.

Mrs. Stone: I do have some questions about the transfer to Indigenous agencies. So Peguis First Nation has been in its own co-ordination agreement for I think it's roughly a year now.

So can the minister just speak to, you know, how that's going, how funding is flowing, you know, what type of supports the department is providing to Peguis currently, as this transition continues to take place?

MLA Fontaine: So when we had the MACY committee, the member asked—member and some of her colleagues had asked several questions in respect of jurisdiction and what is clear, not only in respect of the member's questions that were asked and just this last question, but what's abundantly clear just in general is that folks don't understand what jurisdiction really means.

And so I did my best and even though, you know, I think some members got upset that I was trying to answer some of the questions and trying to, you know, provide some education in respect of what jurisdiction is. But it's really important for folks to understand that when a First Nations right holder enters into a co-ordination agreement, when they have jurisdiction over child, their children, their citizens, there is no role for the Province.

And I know that the member opposite during MACY had asked questions and then all of a sudden there was other questions about oversight. It is paternalistic to ask whether or not the Province has any oversight or any relationship or anything when a First Nations rights holder enters into co-ordination agreement and has jurisdiction over their child welfare. It is paternalistic. We will—we do not have any oversight because those relationships are based on a nation-to-nation-to-nation agreement. It's a nation-to-nation nation agreement between Canada, Province and First Nations.

When the member or any folks ask, you know, if there's going be oversight, what the equivalent of that question is, is myself as the Minister of Families, that question is the exact same as saying to me, well you

as the Minister of Families should have oversight of the United States of America's child welfare system, or you as the Minister for Families should have oversight over Saskatchewan's child welfare system. And even that's not an accurate depiction because it's really, again, it's nation to nation. So I—we will not have any oversight of any First Nation rights holders that enter into co-ordination agreement.

* (15:50)

And let me be even more 'explicit'—explicit. The history of colonization on these Indigenous lands has been always to attack predominantly Indigenous women and create a narrative in which Indigenous women are not capable or Indigenous peoples are not capable of raising their own children; they're not capable of being parents. And so the state, the colonial state, has always come in and used Indigenous children as a means of executing colonization over Indigenous people, always.

And what jurisdiction is, is it's putting a stop to that. It is decolonizing child welfare. It is saying, we are taking a step back from the colonial harm that has been executed over Indigenous peoples for generations over generations over generations over generations. That's what jurisdiction is doing. Jurisdiction is recognizing that Indigenous people have always been able to raise our children, but the colonial state, in the—as a means of colonization, has taken children and said that you cannot raise your own children. And that's what jurisdiction is doing.

So I know that when the member asks about jurisdiction and whether or not there's going to be any oversight for any of the First Nation rights holders, there will not be; it is a relationship. It's a relationship between one nation to another nation and another nation, and it's as simple as that. There are dollars that flow. We have a responsibility, obviously, as does Canada. We've got those dollars and those relationships that dollars will flow. But I, as the minister and any other minister that comes after me, will not have a paternalistic oversight of any of our First Nation rights holders.

Mrs. Stone: And I know what the minister is referring to from when her own NDP colleague during the MACY review brought up some questions.

But my question, and perhaps I should be more clear, is how is the transition going with other jurisdictions, and what does that process look like? Is it a bunch of case files that are just put on a board table and handed over, or how is the department helping to support that transition as the jurisdiction takes over?

MLA Fontaine: So, again, the—what the member is asking is not the way that I had said it happened. We have a whole team within the Department of Families. We have—which is led by our ADM, Elizabeth, here—an amazing team at the Indigenous Jurisdiction Transition Office.

So we have folks that are charged with working with First Nation rights holders to advance jurisdiction in respect of the development of their laws, to support that work in the development of their laws. And some First Nation rights holders—in fact, I was just at KTC today, and KTC was saying that they've got their laws that are written in Cree and Dene.

So we've got First Nation rights holders across Manitoba that are engaging in their own process at what their laws will look like. So, for instance, Island Lake. Island Lake is doing a lot of work in the development of their laws, which is, you know, sitting with the elders, sitting with the community.

In fact, almost every single one that's engaged in jurisdiction or the pursuit of jurisdiction is sitting with elders and their communities to talk about what Indigenous laws look like; what the, you know, the act of caring for our children, what does that look like? And so there's a variety of different First Nation rights holders that are engaged in that process, actually, for a couple of years now since bill C-92 was—received royal assent and was enacted.

And so it, you know, it looks different across the province, but our role—and it looks different. And the other thing, too, is that, you know, we must respect and work in partnership and collaboration at the pace that First Nations rights holders want to work at.

And so, you know, we are—I've had many, many meetings with First Nation rights holders at—ensure that they know our priority as our government is to—is jurisdiction. Should that First Nation rights holder want jurisdiction, we—I as the minister will not stand in the way, and I am there to support that work. I've let those folks know that we have a team in the department, that their sole job is to be able to support jurisdiction, and they're so good at their job and they're dedicated to doing that work.

And as we move towards co-ordination agreements—and so, in the co-ordination agreements we've got case transfers. It will map out how case transfers work. It will map out how information is shared. It maps out emergency service co-ordination, and then it also maps out in-kind provincial services.

So the co-ordination agreement is basically the relationship. It lays out the relationship between Canada, Province and First Nations. But, like I said, it's—everybody's at different places in that journey. Some are a little bit closer; some are a little bit further away. In fact, we've had a couple of First Nations say that they're not ready yet, and that they know it's going to be a couple of years until they're ready. That's okay. We're willing to work with everybody—or we're willing to work with and support where people are at and where First Nations rights holders are at in respect of pursuing jurisdiction.

I said earlier that I've got my special assistant Jen [*phonetic*] Chartrand, who also works on behalf of myself as well with First Nations to ensure that they understand that we've got that relationship and that open relationship for their pursuit of jurisdiction.

I think that's—well, not it, but, I think, for that answer.

Mrs. Stone: So, what I've heard is that there is department staff helping with the transition that's currently undergoing, which was exactly what my initial question was all about.

So can the minister provide how many jurisdictions are currently engaged in the pursuit of taking ownership of their own jurisdiction?

* (16:00)

MLA Fontaine: I'm going to give the member the most comprehensive, up-to-date status. I don't think I'll be able to answer it in one five-minute session. So if the member wants, I can do it in two, but it will be, I'm assuming, incomplete.

So before I start reading this off, I have to share that, you know, as I said, this has been one of my main priorities in our government's commitment, and it's been, you know, meeting after meeting after meeting with First Nations rights holders.

And one of the things that's happened that's been abundantly clear, because every time we meet with them, you know, the—what we hear is, we're so thankful and grateful that the government changed because now we have a relationship and we have the opportunity to advance jurisdiction and have a respectful, equitable relationship. And so I'm really happy with that, and I think that that culminated in last week's round table where we had 28 chiefs that signed on to our declaration; again, this relationship as we advance jurisdiction. And so many folks have been saying that there wasn't a relationship there.

In fact, the leadership council—I think I've already held two leadership councils; we've got another one scheduled—the grand chiefs have made it explicitly clear that it was so difficult to get meetings and that they didn't really have a relationship with the government in respect of child welfare.

So I'm really proud of the work that we're doing. It's an equitable, respectful relationship. And so I think that what you'll see here, is the fruits of that and the fruits of our Indigenous jurisdiction transition office that's doing really good work.

So this is a status of nations exercising jurisdiction in Manitoba. So, Peguis First Nation as we've already spoken, the status, that it's complete. We signed a co-ordination agreement on January 31, 2023. Manitoba provided funding for the 2023-2024 fiscal year and has been approved for funding for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The Manitoba Métis Federation, it's active, it's like on the cusp of signing. We—MMF had provided notice on November 2, 2019. There's a trilateral co-ordination agreement and those negotiations are in the final stages, and everybody is hoping that that final co-ordination agreement is like June, July, hopefully, which will be so amazing, and they've done—they've worked so, so hard at advancing jurisdiction, and it will—I regularly talk with President Chartrand and we can't wait and say that this is going to be a great celebration when the Métis have jurisdiction and the care and control over their citizens; it's going to be very, very exciting.

So also, the member may not know that we've actually—have relationships with Ontario First Nations because, of course, there are Ontario citizens, children, here that are in care, as well.

And so Win [*phonetic*] First Nation, which is based in Ontario, so that's active. That notice was provided October 2022. And I actually, just a couple of—I don't even know; maybe that was last week—just signed a memorandum of understanding with Ontario nations, and that memorandum of understanding was that my commitment as Minister of Families was that I would work with Ontario First Nations to ensure that their children—that we're working towards ensuring that their children and their laws are respected. Of course, I'm, you know, they knew that our priority is Manitoba, but we've entered into a memorandum of understanding. That was a beautiful ceremony with many phenomenal individuals.

Fisher River Cree Nation, which is hands-down one of my favourite First Nations in Manitoba, they're—it is active. I just met with them maybe two months

ago, I think. We hosted them here, and they're, you know, looking forward to, hopefully, being done by—I think one of the things that they had said was November; I thought December.

So we kind of have a little back and forth on who's going to be right—if the co-ordination agreement's going to be ready, hopefully in November or December. We'll see. But that's active.

Brokenhead Ojibway Nation: We went out to Brokenhead Ojibway Nation—

The Chairperson: The minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Stone: Can the minister please finish reading her list?

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech. I appreciate that, to the member.

Brokenhead Ojibway Nation provided notice to Manitoba and Canada August 15, 2023. The table started November 30, 2023. Elizabeth and myself and some other folks travelled out to Brokenhead. It was incredibly beautiful to have everybody around the table. The feds were there. We were there. Obviously, leadership was there. But their elders were there. There was exchange of star blankets. It was a really good day. So they're well on their way.

I regularly speak with Chief Bluesky, who's a phenomenal leadership, who is actually a '60s scoop survivor and often talks about that. So I think it's quite poetic that here's this '60s scoop survivor that has come back. He was actually adopted out in the States and came back home and is now the chief and just was re-elected by acclamation, I just think, like, a—last month, I believe. And so it's quite poetic that now he's charged with advancing jurisdiction.

Red Sucker Lake is on hold at the request of the First Nation.

Island Lake: So Island Lake is Garden Hill First Nation, Wasagamack First Nation, St. Theresa Point—or, Red Sucker Lake, sorry—Red Sucker Lake.

We have had so many meetings with the leadership and the community, including Grand Chief Scott Harper. I've hosted—I don't even know how many meetings—like four or five. I don't know how many phone calls we've had.

As I said, they're in the process of developing their—in fact, I just got a text late last night from Grand Chief Scott Harper saying that they're almost finished their laws and when can we meet again to look at jurisdiction in the co-ordination agreement. And they've

been doing so much work in each of their First Nation communities, meeting with the elders and the community in the development of their law.

So we're close-ish. There's still a lot of work. But we're looking forward to working with them.

Sioux Valley Dakota Nation is on hold right now at the request of leadership. First Nations in Treaty 2 is on hold, but they were at the round table. And, again, this is, you know, two or three questions ago, again. This is about doing this at the pace that First Nations are ready. But this is at hold-on hold-right now, but they were at the round table. And it's interesting because the discussion at the round table was that some communities, you know, they don't want to be rushed. They want to take their time to do it, and that's great. We're good with that. We're at everybody's pace.

Some people, like Fisher River, they're like, no, November. We're going to be done. We're good with that as well. So we're super flexible on where everybody is.

Black River First Nation provided notice on June 13, 2023, and they're starting community engagement sessions in the near future as of November 2023. Again, we're still looking at reaching out and seeing where folks are.

Also, I've let all of the chiefs know that my door is always open, that I'm willing to meet and to have these discussions with myself and, of course, our team.

* (16:10)

Chemaway [*phonetic*] provided notice on July 12, 2023. Dauphin River First Nation provided notice on July 12, 2023. Dauphin River First Nation provided notice on November 24, 2022.

Lake Manitoba First Nation provided notice February 1, 2022, and we just got a call—Jennifer Chartrand, my special assistant, just got a call from Chief McLean, who invited me out this weekend to go to their powwow—this weekend, yes—and they want to sign the declaration.

So we're looking to—unfortunately, it doesn't work for me to head out this weekend, but we're looking at another date to come out with the declaration, which is a living document, to sign.

Little Saskatchewan First Nation provided notice on November 24, 2022. Long Plain First Nation, we just met with them, I think last week or two weeks ago; I can't remember, but literally in the last two weeks. We had them-hosted them in my office with

Chief David Meeches. And they signed on to the round table. They provided notice on February 21, 2023. And, oh yes, we met with the chief on April 26; the departments met with them on March 6. They were at the round table. Chief David Meeches is really anxious to get going; they're working on their laws, and they've done a lot of work as well.

The Chairperson: The minister's time has expired.
[*interjection*]

Sorry. The member for Midland.

Mrs. Stone: I'll allow the minister continue to finish her list, but as quickly as possible, please, because I still have some more questions to get to. Thank you.

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate the member's patience. There's 63 First Nations, so I'm trying to go as fast as I can here. But I appreciate that. *Miigwech.*

Marcel Colomb First Nation provided notice June 8, 2022. Marcel Colomb—Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, pardon me, provided notice on August 15, 2023. There's been some preliminary meetings with Canada and—held in September 2023. Pine Creek First Nation provided notice February 7, 2024, and I know there's been some conversations with Jen [*phonetic*] Chartrand and Cora Morgan with the chief. There was a preliminary meeting with Canada and the First Nation that was held February 2024.

Misipawistik Cree Nation provided notice on April 7, 2021, and I've met with the chief several times—we've had several conversations—and the chief was at the round table and signed the declaration. And they're advancing their Indigenous law as well and looking forward to that.

Opaskwayak Cree Nation provided notice on May 14, 2020. Unfortunately, they rescinded it on June 16, 2023, and we're—and now the current update is they're drafting the law as of just this past December 2023. And as I've said, we are here whenever they're ready.

Pimicikamak provided notice on November 26, 2020. Pinaymootang—sorry—provided notice on November 24, 2022. Poplar River First Nation provided notice on May 20, 2021. There was a preliminary meeting that was held on January 2024.

Tataskweyak Cree Nation provided notice on August 22, 2023. We met with them just recently and had some really good conversations about that they are—they're wanting to move ahead and move forward with jurisdiction, so we're here to support that work.

And then Waywayseecappo First Nation provided notice on April 8, 2023, and I'm meeting with—and Waywayseecappo was at the round table and signed on to the declaration, and I'm meeting with Chief Murray Clearsky, I believe next week, or the week after, I believe; I'm pretty sure it's next week. But we're meeting to discuss their pursuit of jurisdiction as well. And, like I said, he signed it.

And so, just so—for the member, when I said they provide notice under the bill, you have to provide—a First Nations rights holder has to provide written notice that they are wanting to enter into a co-ordination. So, as the member can see, we've received many notices from First Nation rights holders that have—is the clear indication that they're wanting to exercise jurisdiction.

But, again, the pace and what that looks like, also depending on, you know, when you look at child welfare in Manitoba, other jurisdictions, you know, are very different from Manitoba. So we have some child welfare or CFS agencies that have, like, 11 First Nations under them, or nine First Nations, or—and so it looks a little bit different on the pursuit of jurisdiction, but the pursuit of jurisdiction can also be done through treaty groups. And so there are some that are looking through treaty, there are some that are looking through tribal council.

So it's going to look a lot different and it's going to take different times and points in time for Manitoba here. And I think that's that.

Mrs. Stone: Yes, I just want to thank the minister for providing that comprehensive list and update, and I'm excited to hear more about MMF. Being so close I know that they've worked for the past couple years very, very hard on this, and you know, as the minister has mentioned, you know, each jurisdiction is at different paths, different times and timelines with taking over the transfer and taking over jurisdiction. And I think that's why it's so important that children in care need support right now because this does need to be done right, and I would think that the minister would agree with me on that.

I do want to shift gears a little bit, and I do have a few questions regarding Spirit Rising House. And I'm wondering if the minister could please provide a—answer as to how many children have been moved out of Spirit Rising House.

MLA Fontaine: All of them.

Mrs. Stone: Can you please provide the exact number of children that were moved and are now in different placements, to clarify?

MLA Fontaine: Thirty-four.

Mrs. Stone: And how many of those 34 children and youth are currently still in emergency placements?

MLA Fontaine: None.

Mrs. Stone: Are there children in independent living facilities, and if so, how many?

* (16:20)

MLA Fontaine: Older youth ages 17 and 18 were placed in independent living and have additional supports. Five youth ages 17 and 18 moved to independent living programs. Independent living placements are typically for older youth closer to the age of majority, as youth live independently with supports.

Housing may be an apartment, a room-and-board situation or a shared housing arrangement. Examples of supports and programming would include one-to-one support staff who support life skills, relational connections and connections to culture. Other supports could include apartment searching, financial competencies, 'drob' training or educational planning and supporting a young person meeting goals.

Many youth from Spirit Rising House were placed into existing group care, foster care or specialized placements that were culturally appropriate. Some youth were reunified with family. Some were placed with CLDS with supports.

And I just want to take this opportunity to share—I know that the member had asked questions in QP, and the ages that the member was trying to ask was not accurate. And so, just to ensure I'm providing that information, to know that we are talking about 17- and 18-year-old youth.

Mrs. Stone: I asked the minister a very concerning situation yesterday in question period regarding a claim that—or youth from Spirit Rising House that had been moved out have now gone missing.

So I'll take this opportunity to ask the minister again if all those 34 youth are accounted for.

MLA Fontaine: So as I've said a couple of times in QP and maybe some conversations, I'm not sure: As soon as it came to our attention that spirit rising—I always want to say spirit rising horse—Spirit Rising House—which is a cartoon. I know, I've got to get that straight, you guys. Spirit Rising House—as soon as we found out that they were distributing drugs without a prescription, without authorization and putting children at risk, we took immediate action.

And I wish that I could explain or I wish that the member could have been a part of those daily meetings to see our team immediately step into action, but also, the response from the community, the response from agencies and from community, and from our team, to ensure that we were prioritizing children that were at Spirit Rising House, who—a lot of these children have incredibly complex needs—increibly complex needs. And so the team worked together. Everybody pulled together—everybody pulled together to ensure that these children were safe.

They—all of the children were successfully moved out of Spirit Rising House with individual—individualized plans that responded to their complex needs with the additional supports that these children need. And the reality is that these children still have these complex needs; they still have these complex needs. These children come from incredibly, incredibly traumatizing situations.

And so our team, here, in the department, but also agencies, you know, work with programs like Safe Ride, which provides youth who are missing from placement with a safe outlet for returning to their placement. Safe Ride have provided 2,208 safe transports to youth in care. We're working with the Winnipeg Police Service to embed missing persons liaisons into their Missing Persons Unit. This will allow for an early detection of missing youth to implement prevention strategies, triage responses to ensure that youth in care who are missing are diverted away from law enforcement response when not required and connect youth to community-based resources.

Youth are connected to StreetReach. The StreetReach program which—I believe I've shared that StreetReach was in response to, back in 2007-2008, my predecessor, who was the minister for Child and Family Services, Gord Mackintosh, instituted like, an engagement process into Tracia's Trust.

I, at the time, was the director of justice for Southern Chiefs' Organization, alongside, like, 40 other stakeholders, had a PATH session and we had so many different engagements. And out of that vision was StreetReach.

So StreetReach was this opportunity or this program that could connect with youth who maybe are, you know, high risk and at risk for going missing and risk of exploitation.

* (16:30)

So that research or that program exists, so the street reacher—StreetReach program is a rapid response to locate missing, high-risk youth, and again, that are at risk of exploitation, and victims of violence.

The StreetReach team continues to develop partnerships to increase those wraparound supports to youth, including mental health clinicians and a nurse practitioner that's been added to the team. And in 2023-2024, StreetReach Winnipeg located youth about 1,230 times and about 197 times in the North.

So as I said, our team responded quickly—

The Chairperson: The minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Stone: I would just say that the minister's answer is incredibly concerning, that we cannot get a clear answer as to whether all 34 of those youth that have been moved out of Spirit Rising House and are now under the minister's watch are not accounted for. And I think that that is incredibly concerning.

I—just going to shift gears here a little bit, as I know we're running low on time, but I will come back to Spirit Rising House on another day.

It is now close to the end of May and we are still waiting for recommendations from the internal review of what happened to my constituent, Myah-Lee Gratton, back in February, and the tragic—the tragedy that unfolded within Carman.

So can the minister please provide an update as to when specifically a date would be great, as to when those recommendations will be made public?

MLA Fontaine: So, let me just say, and I've said this in the House, and again—when you say it in the House when you're answering a question, you've got 45 seconds. It's literally no time.

What occurred in Carman was an absolute tragedy. It was an absolute tragedy and my deepest condolences go to the family and to the community, and to all Manitoba. Like, it was absolutely shocking and disheartening. Myself, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) and the Premier (Mr. Kineo) went to the RCMP "D" Division for the briefing on Carman, and it was devastating.

Everybody—and we were there with Grand Chief Cathy Merrick. We were there with our—some of our staff. We were there with RCMP members. It was devastating, and I think that all of us around the table can appreciate how devastating that is. As a mom, like, it's just devastating. It's devastating. It's so devastating. And so, I just want to convey—because we

don't have the opportunity when we're in QP. Like, I know she was your constituent. I know that those were—

So I want to acknowledge you. I know that this is—feels and hits differently for you. I get that. I really do. So I want to just take this opportunity to say that. And I think that all of us around the table can agree. Like, that was so devastating—so, so devastating. So I want to just preface that.

And what I have to share, though, is that—and, again, immediately after—immediately afterwards—almost immediately afterwards, when we found out—potentially—I ordered a section 4 review. Like, immediately. So I need the member to know that.

And the review is currently still taking place. I know that originally—I think when it was announced, we said maybe at the end of April. But it's important that the review not be rushed. And there're still—and it's a comprehensive review. I can assure the member that it's a comprehensive review.

So maybe that initial timeline was maybe understanding, like, okay there's, you know, I'm just going to say, like, maybe 20 interviews. I don't know what the initial analysis was. But, actually, it turned out that there was so much more interviews that need to take place—that are actually still going on as we speak.

So my job as the minister is to ensure that the review is thorough and comprehensive, and I'm sure that the member would agree to that.

Now, I know that the member is asking if I'm going to make it public. I need the member to understand that by law, I cannot. So I will not commit to making it public. I cannot.

But what I can say to the member is this: that review will be thoroughly reviewed by myself—by our department. The recommendations will be reviewed and implemented. But the second piece to that is—and this is really important—the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth has the legislative mandate to review the death of a child or young person under the age of 21 years in Manitoba. And the Advocate for Children has a broad mandate to review services, and that report can be public, right. So while I, as the minister, under law cannot, the advocate has the authority to review a death and then to release that report and make that report public.

So I just need—the member can, you know, take what I'm saying in—and also, I'm committed to reviewing, as all MACY reports—all of them—obviously, this one as well. So to know that that is—

The Chairperson: This minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Stone: Yes. Thank you.

And I just want to thank the minister for those comments and the condolences about what happened. I know it hit us all very hard.

And, you know, it is my understanding that even with a section 4 review, that recommendations can still be made public or certain recommendations. So I look forward to exploring that more.

But I'm going to cease my time now to the member for Tyndall Park, as I know she has a few questions as well.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and I'd like to thank my colleague from Midland for negotiating some time with me here this afternoon to allow me to ask some questions.

Can the minister share with the committee how many of the Auditor General's recommendations related to the foster homes report have been implemented to date.

* (16:40)

MLA Fontaine: So, it's important for folks to recognize that the 2019 OAG report—the landscape at the time is entirely different than what it is now in respect of child welfare. It has changed drastically.

So, as I have spoken many, many times, obviously, with the advent of bill C-92, the focus on jurisdiction and transferring jurisdiction has changed the landscape of child welfare. We're in an era where we're decolonizing and dismantling the child-welfare system. And, you know, one of the pieces of that, which is, you know, the work that we're doing, is we are advancing and proclaiming customary and kinship care agreements. You know, for so many years we've had families that, you know, take on the responsibility of, you know, grandchildren or nieces or nephews or—and there's never been any support from the system for families to be able to step in and to care for their, again, you know, grandchildren or nieces or nephews or cousins or whatever it is.

And so the landscape has changed. We're leaning into customary and kinship care, because as I've said, even just as we started earlier today, we know every social determinant of health states that children fare better, they do better, they do better in life, they do better in their totality, when they are with their families, in their communities and in their nations.

And so we are leaning in towards customary and kinship care. We've allocated, as I shared with the

member for Midland (Mrs. Stone) earlier, and some of the, you know, O-I-G recommendations, one of them is about updated funding allocations. I explained earlier—I won't do it again—but we did reallocate some dollars; no dollars have been taken out of the system. We've reallocated dollars to the northern authority, the southern authority and the Métis authority to be able to support customary and kinship agreements and to address some of the inequities, financial inequities, in the authorities and in the agencies.

And so, you know, we're working with First Nations to support jurisdiction as we move to dismantling the system. And, again, as I said during the MACY committee, when we had foster parents come and present, not necessarily on the legislation, because that's not what they presented on, but I made it explicitly clear, and I've said it in the House many times, that, you know, when Manitobans, or Canadians in general, but Manitobans—we're talking about Manitoba—when Manitobans take in children into their home and they offer to be foster parents, that's sacred work, and I am so grateful to each and every foster parent for the incredible work that they do—the heart medicine, as our people would say—that they do in helping to take care of children. And that's important work, it's sacred work. It's an incredible sacrifice. And, you know, so I want to, you know, make sure that I am taking a moment to just say miigwech to each and every one of them.

As I said, the OAG report back in 2019, the context at the time is entirely different as we are in 2024 and we are actively, actively engaged in pursuing jurisdiction. We are in a different time period. We're in a time period of reconciliation and actioning, really, the dismantling of child welfare, which has been so, historically, just so harmful in the lives of Indigenous children, in the lives of Indigenous families and certainly in the lives of Indigenous peoples.

MLA Lamoureux: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer, and I just want to be abundantly clear here: the department—I'm walking away, what I am taking away from this is the department is not going to be implementing any of the Auditor General's recommendations. Is that correct?

* (16:50)

MLA Fontaine: Sorry, I should've been clear.

The recommendations are ongoing. I apologize. I should've been a little bit clearer. I was—I ran out of time, very, very quickly. So the recommendations are ongoing, as we speak.

MLA Lamoureux: Can the minister share if there are any specific recommendations at this point in time that the department has decided not to pursue?

MLA Fontaine: So a couple of things: I've been minister for seven months, something—I'm not even entirely sure how long I've been minister—seven, seven and a half months. I haven't given any direction for any of the recommendations to be off the table.

So let me be explicitly clear there. I don't know what the previous government did in respect of, you know, what their recommendations, or their commitment to the OAG report. All I can talk about is myself, as minister, right now.

So I have not given any direction to my team that any of those recommendations are off the table. Having said that, again, the landscape has changed. And you know, I'm not—I'm concerned with some of the recommendations that they're not aligned with the national standards.

Again, bill C-92 did two things: it established national standards for Indigenous children that are in care, and it established the legislative framework for jurisdiction. So, the OAG report in 2019 wouldn't have—that's not the context in which that report was written and, certainly, submitted.

So I'm concerned with the alignment of some of the recommendations in respect of, more particularly, the national standards for children, Indigenous children that are in care. And, again, you know, five years later, the landscape has significantly changed.

So I think that's the—you know, we're looking at—one of the recommendations is places of safety, a review of that. I've—as I've shared previously, we're doing a review of places of safety. So that's one thing that we're looking at. But nothing is off the table right now.

But, again, the landscape looks very different today than it did in 2019.

MLA Lamoureux: Just for the sake of time this afternoon, I'm going to jump to a new topic, but I will return to this line of questioning next time there's an opportunity.

I was hoping that the minister could share how many children are reported missing on average every week.

MLA Fontaine: I don't—I can tell the member how many children are missing today. I don't necessarily get that information every single day. And I can share with the member that 15 youth are currently missing.

I want to share with the member that, as I've shared previously back in 2000 and 2008, again, I go back to that because it was that engagement and that re-visioning of Tracia's Trust. And, again, through that process with community and the former NDP government under Gord Mackintosh, at that time, we had developed this new vision for Tracia's Trust. And out of that was StreetReach.

And I spoke earlier when I answered the member for Midland's (Mrs. Stone) questions about the work that StreetReach—the very, very important work that StreetReach does at ensuring connection and locating youth that are at risk and are at risk of sexual exploitation. You know, I know several folks that work in StreetReach; of course, as minister, I've met with the team—and actually, I think we're going to be meeting with them again in the new—near future.

Those folks that are on the front lines of, I'm going to say, working with and developing relationships with children that go missing is quite incredible to witness. And you know, the youth trust StreetReach and trust the people that they—maybe not all of them. I'm not going to generalize and say that all of the youth trust the folks that work at StreetReach.

But they sure do work really hard to establish that trusting relationship, so that StreetReach can, you know, engage with other folks to say, hey, do you know where—I can't say names here—do you know where Sharon [phonetic] is? Do you know where, you know, whoever. Sorry; I'm trying to be very careful that I don't inadvertently say anybody's name by accident, here, that's at the table. So they work really, really incredibly hard to establish those relationships.

Around the same time—I don't know if people know this history—but around the same time that there was this, you know, engagement in respect of Tracia's Trust, around that same time the Winnipeg Police Service, their missing persons unit, they kind of revamped the way that they did this work as well. And so they established a new way of—you know, they identified the most prolific at-risk youth who chronically went missing and kind of developed a new way of doing that work as well.

And so I want to—and so you've got StreetReach, you've got Winnipeg Police Service, who kind of really re-shifted the way that they work with and they tried to care and tried to locate children who go missing. Prior to that—

The Chairperson: Order, please.

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

CHAMBER

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:00)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Executive Council.

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I thank everybody who's here for our government's Committee of Supply. The Estimates process is always an interesting experience.

And certainly it's been the great honour of my life to serve as the First Minister and President of the Executive Council. I think everybody in our government feels the same way. We come to work each and every day to try and make life better for the average Manitoban, do so with great humility and with a sense of responsibility to do right by people from every corner of this province and every walk of life.

When we were first elected, the top priority that we had focused on during the campaign was health care. We focused a lot on affordability as well and we were very happy to cut the provincial gas tax on January 1st of this year. That is a move that the statisticians and economists credit with reducing inflation here in Manitoba to the lowest rate across the country.

We've also brought, in this year's budget, a series of investments into health care which are going to help repair the damage that was caused by the previous PC administration, which closed emergency rooms, cut positions in health care and created an adversarial culture within the workplace that post-focused with an emphasis on bureaucracy at the expense of resources at the front lines.

We've clearly articulated a plan to fix health care with a focus on just the opposite: focus on the front lines. Focus on the nurses, physicians, health-care aides, health-care practitioners and, of course, to de-emphasize the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy has an important role, but it exists to support the front lines. And that's what we're focused on.

Our government has, in our first budget, put forward the money to scope the new emergency room at the Victoria Hospital, new emergency room for Eriksdale, has put in measures to hire 1,000 new health-care workers.

But this afternoon I wanted to talk in particular about the incentive structure that we're putting in place to draw nurses back into the health-care system publicly in Manitoba. The use of agency nurses in the province is something that has created greater cost for the health-care system and a lot of uncertainty for people, particularly in regions like Prairie Mountain, which has seen the use of agency nurses skyrocket. But agency-nurse usage has crept across the province and is pretty widespread in areas like Southern Health and Interlake-Eastern as well.

This occurred under the previous PC government, and when you talk to nurses themselves about why, they say that it is because of the working conditions, the lack of work-life balance, the mandated overtime, the unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios that were created by previous health ministers like Heather Stefanson.

In the tentative agreement that we've arrived at with the Manitoba Nurses Union, we've put in a plan to fix the skyrocketing use of agency nurses in the province. The tentative agreement with the Manitoba Nurses Union has an incentive that will draw nurses back from private agencies to working in the bedside within the public system.

The tentative agreement we have with the Manitoba Nurses Union has an incentive structure that, when we get those nurses back into the public system by way of the provincial float pool, will allow us to chart a path towards ending mandatory overtime within the province, will allow us to chart a course towards safer nurse-to-patient ratios.

We know, for instance, in the intensive-care units, the nurse-to-patient ratio that is safe is 1:1, and that's what we want. There's other nurse-to-patient ratios in the ERs, in the ward beds, in the personal-care homes and other health-care settings, and we want to work with nurses to be able to get to those safe staffing levels.

We also know that when it comes to issues like culture in the workplace, addressing questions around safety and violence that nurses are facing, that these require additional staff. And so what the tentative agreement that we've arrived at with MNU does is it creates an incentive structure to bring those nurses back into the public system.

The chief mechanism for us to be able to do so is for us to first have expanded the provincial float pool, which we were happy to do within our first few months of taking government, to include the City of Winnipeg, which includes large hospitals which serve

people from across the province, including Health Sciences Centre, St. Boniface and the Grace—significant because they're the hospitals with intensive-care units.

Beyond that, we have also, within this collective agreement, come to an understanding with the MNU so that there would be a full-time incentive paid to nurses who increase the number of hours worked from their baseline position to include the provincial float pool.

So, previously, the incentives for nurses to go full-time would be if they went from say, a 0.4 or a 0.5 to a 1.0 working within the same setting; for instance, within a personal-care home. If they would go from 0.5 to full-time in the personal care home, they might receive a top-up payment.

This tentative agreement would allow the nurse to keep the 0.5 within that personal-care home, but then pick up the other 0.5 worth of hours within the provincial float pool. They would receive a \$12,000 financial incentive, which is pensionable, which would allow them to receive benefits with respect to those hours worked.

What this does is it puts work in the public system on a par, in terms of attributes that some nurses are looking for, with what the nursing agencies are offering. The reason why nurses left over the past seven and a half years under the previous government for the private agencies, was because only—many felt, anyways—that only through the private agencies could they control their own schedule, could they have work-life balance, could they be able to work in the settings that they were comfortable with.

And what we're doing now, within this new tentative agreement, is saying that we're going to allow you control over when you work. We're going to guarantee, through the provincial float pool, that you're going to work in the settings in which you're qualified and comfortable to be able to deliver the best quality of patient care. And when you do so, you will be able to get this \$12,000 full-time incentive.

So when you look at it from the perspective of the individual nurse, there's an incentive that makes sense for them because working in the public system now offers the same work-life balance, a competitive pay scale and incentive, financially speaking, which is comparable to what's on offer with the private nursing agencies.

But when you look at it from the perspective of the public system, once we've incentivized nurses to

join the provincial float pool, we are also ensuring that the public health-care system in our province, when they need to staff up a rural emergency department, when they need to staff up a personal-care home, the first call that they make won't be to a private agency at great cost to their provincial taxpayer. The first call that they'll make is to the provincial float pool and they'll now be able to draw on this ready-made pool of talented nurses with a ton of qualifications who are being well compensated to be able to come in and address the staffing issues.

So I'm really grateful for the Manitoba Nurses Union for proposing this innovative solution to help create an incentive to draw nurses back into the public system. This is one important step towards the broader goal of fixing health care in our province.

I recognize that, due to the frustration of working under the previous government, nurses are dealing with a lot right now. They've had to deal with closures, with layoffs. They've had to deal with a pandemic and an adversarial relationship with their employers under the previous government.

But we've sent a clear message. We're serious about fixing the culture within the workplace. We're serious about ensuring that pay and benefits are competitive. But perhaps most importantly of all, we are committed to the broader system reform so that a nurse is safe in the workplace; so that a nurse can deliver the kind of patient care that they signed up to be able to deliver; so that a nurse is going to be able to see their family and be at the T-ball games, hockey games, extracurricular activities, birthday parties, while still working full-time hours through flexible scheduling arrangements that work for them.

So I'm very excited about the prospect of us being able to move forward with nurses. I thank those who've engaged in the information sessions and who've been engaging in conversations with their representatives. I look forward to the day when we'll be able to move this forward.

I also want to point out that, on the side of flexibility, that though the incentive that I'm describing is \$12,000 for a year, it will actually be attainable for a nurse for every six-month period. That way, there's even more flexibility. If, let's say, you turn 40 or your spouse turns 40 and you take the trip of a lifetime, well, you'd still be able to qualify for the full-time incentive for the other six months of the year, even if you took additional time off.

So again, flexibility, responsiveness to the needs and the work-life balance concerns, a path towards ending mandatory overtime, a path to improving nurse-to-patient ratios and a balance between both the needs of the individual nurse with the needs of the provincial health-care system.

* (15:10)

This tentative agreement is something positive for the people of Manitoba and I'm very happy to share information about it this afternoon. Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for those comments.

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition have any opening remarks?

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): So before we begin, I just want to touch on what an honour it is to be sitting in this seat as interim Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and of the Official Opposition. That's what the decision was of Manitobans back almost eight months ago, and so I'm going to take this position very seriously and I look forward to the next few days.

I'm glad that we finally got started on the Estimates process and here to be able to ask questions to the Premier since the election—and some very serious questions. And, of course, with, as I said, the provincial election being just about eight months ago, it's time. And I'm glad that, you know, like I said, we're finally getting into the Estimates process. The budget was brought forward quite a few months ago and so it'll give us an opportunity to ask questions to the Premier about his government, about his budget, and the direction that this government is taking our provinces—the province so far, the decisions that have been made.

I'm hopeful that over the next quite a few hours, considering, I guess, we have a total of—all three rooms—100 hours to ask questions. And, again, with a short amount of time leading into June 3rd when the rise of session happens, we do have just a few hours before us, but I'm hoping that we'll have a bit of a different tone than in question period, where we'll be able to get some answers from the Premier about some of his decisions that he's made over the last almost eight months.

The budget has been and was fairly disappointing. I think the NDP is going in the wrong direction. Some of the questions I'm going to be asking on is the fact that in Budget 2024, they're raising taxes, they're

driving up debt. Doesn't seem to be—doesn't matter which department we ask questions on; there seems to be a lack of plans.

I know that in the opening statements the Premier (Mr. Kineew) mentioned specifically health care. It's interesting to hear some of his plans, but we haven't seen any actions yet. We haven't seen any plans on growing the economy to help staff the health-care system. We know that there's been some words put on the record in regards to amount of health-care providers.

I've had the privilege and the honour of representing the Lac du Bonnet constituency now into my 14th year and I've seen many decisions back when we were in opposition in the first place under the NDP, under Greg Selinger—who heavily endorsed today's Premier, the MLA for Fort Rouge—the lack of action on various different things in regards to health care, infrastructure, education, various other topics and, of course, family services, as well.

So I look forward to being able to ask some of those questions. We saw that Budget 2024 again panders to some of the union bosses. We've seen cuts to roads and infrastructure, clean water, seems to be defunding some of the justice system. We've seen the cuts to education, the rise of taxes to your own personal homes. We've also seen this Premier and his government try to take some credit for the increased in training seats, some of the good work that our government had done over the last seven and a half years previously to this NDP government, which never was done under the Selinger government.

And, I guess, part of it—and I've mentioned it before, that the Premier, the MLA for Fort Rouge, is going to be able to reap some of those rewards of the good work that we did in the seven, seven and a half years of planting those trees—trees that should have been planted in regards to professional occupations quite a few years ago, but we took it upon ourselves to do that. So part of his health-care staffing so-called plan is basically to stand there and take the credit for the work that we've done.

We know that in Budget 2024, Manitobans are going to be paying more.

I know that the Premier pats himself on the back for the temporary gas tax holiday. And we will get into some questions, and I'm sure he'll bring that up multiple times, as he has in question period.

I don't know how many questions I've asked him on the taxpayer-paid political subsidy to his own party, but I think we're at about five sets, so we're—we've

must have hit close to 15, 18, 21 questions on that without getting an answer as far as why they would try to hide that from Manitobans and not take it into committee and allow Manitobans to chime in on that.

So we're quickly seeing that over six months, we're starting to see some of the true—the truths, I guess, in regards to the fact that the NDP government really doesn't have any plans. And so, over the next few days, the next few hours, we're going to, as the official opposition, continue to hold the Premier to account for his words during the election, his words when he was in opposition and his words now that he's in government.

So on crime and public safety, with less funding, we know that not only in the Premier's constituency but in others all across Manitoba, crime is increasing and, again, no real plan for solving that or even coming close to it. On health care, where they've had targets, got no plans. And on Families, we know that they're cutting CFS funding.

So I do have questions about the way that this Premier is choosing to govern Manitoba. But additionally, of any—of equal importance, I'll be asking some questions today about the—how the NDP are governing themselves. I want to get into those questions and hope the Premier's eager to get to some of those answers. They will have a bit of a different tone from question period, and so, I guess, all I can do is ask some—ask those questions and hope that those answers will be forthcoming.

And so, with that, honourable Chair, I conclude my opening comments.

The Chairperson: We thank the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Ewasko) for those remarks.

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 resolution once the official opposition critic indicates the questioning has concluded.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and we ask that members please introduce their staff in attendance.

Mr. Kineew: I'm joined by two remarkable individuals with a ton of horsepower and a deep understanding of how government in Manitoba can serve the people in a good way that advances the public good and advances the public interest.

To my right is Sarah Thiele, who is the Clerk of the Executive Council. She is a career civil servant who

has come up through many important posts within the public service and I'm very honoured to be able to work closely with to help advance the projects that our government's focused on: making life more affordable, fixing health care.

* (15:20)

And then to my left is the senior political staffer, the Chief of Staff to government, Mark Rosner, but long-time viewers of the Estimates will know him as the Tories' worst nightmare. That's how I've introduced him every single year that we've sat in Estimates. When I introduced him that way in the last Estimates committee, Heather Stefanson scoffed and said, no, I don't think so. But now, she's, you know, obviously pursuing other career opportunities today. So, really appreciate the high level of insight and capacity that Mr. Rosner brings to the table.

And with that, I'll indicate that we're supported by a ton of other great political staffers and we work closely with civil servants across all departments with respect to their expertise and in a shared goal of doing right by the people of Manitoba.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Premier (Mr. Kinew).

Mr. Ewasko: So, introducing to my left is Braeden Jones. He is our Chief of Staff and I'd say one of the secret weapons that we have on our side, and I don't believe necessarily the worst nightmare to the NDP because I think some of those nightmares are embedded within their own party, honourable Chair, so I wouldn't give Braeden necessarily that title.

I know—but I would like to welcome both staff, Sarah and Mark, also to the Chamber. And I've had the pleasure over the last almost 14 years—maybe not quite that long—but getting to know both of them, as well.

So, honourable Chair, I look forward to some of the back and forth, the questions and hopefully some answers from the Premier's side over the next, you know, many hours that we're going to spend together in the Chamber.

Thanks, honourable Chairperson.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that.

And with that, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ewasko: So, right away, I mean, whether it was the Premier's opening statement or his introductory of the staff, I mean, he mentioned—he put it on the record the ton of staff that he has.

So just how many staff is that?

Mr. Kinew: The question is worded in a very vague fashion and so I'd ask for the member opposite to clarify what kind of staff. Are we talking about the thousands of civil servants who work in the public service here in Manitoba? Or are we talking about some other form of staff?

I'll tell you the one thing that we have been working quite a bit on lately is nurses. These are a significant staffing component of our public health-care system and in the opening statement I wanted to walk the people of Manitoba through some of the high level components within our tentative agreement with the MNU, but I wanted to dive into a bit greater detail.

So the tentative agreement that we have includes a few components. The tentative agreement—if we want to talk about the main agreement per se—includes a lot of the provisions that have been reported in the media to date. We're talking about general wage increases which are comparable to other collective agreements that we settled; we had a lot of work to do on that front coming into office after the former PC government, who was very adversarial to the average working person.

We got the special adjustments, salary steps, salary scales, you know premiums for working evenings and weekends, things like that. Premiums to work in certain settings, health-spending accounts, income protection, personal wellness days—all those things I believe have been described at least at a high level publicly in the media.

But the tentative agreement also includes a memorandum of understanding between the provincial service-delivery organizations in health care and the Manitoba Nurses Union. And then it includes a further letter of agreement between the government of Manitoba and these provincial SDOs.

The MOU is a document that spells out the full-time incentives I was talking about that are going to act as a bright beacon to draw nurses back from the private agencies and into the public system via the provincial float pool. The letter of agreement is an understanding that charts the path towards safer nurse-to-patient ratios and a path towards the end of mandatory overtime in the province of Manitoba.

So you've got these, sort of, three components. You've got the core agreement itself, then you've got the MOU and then you've got this LOA.

When we dive into the details of the MOU, it begins with a preamble, which acknowledges a severe

nursing shortage, and it says that this is creating a hardship to the health-care system because of all the overtime that's being mandated and agency use, but also that there's a critical role for nurses and they need to be looked after.

So beginning in April 1, 2025, the interim period being used to set up a new scheduling system to be able to accommodate all of this new float pool human resources and, of course, all of the additional scheduling requirements to give nurses that sort of work-life balance and flexibility that I was talking about. Then, this incentive structure will kick in. So April 1 next year, nurses will be able to join the float pool and get a full-time incentive.

Again, this is a pensionable incentive that goes towards nurses who work 2,015 annual hours and, as I said, that will be calculated within two subsequent—two separate six-month periods. And so each six-month period, if a nurse works a thousand and seven and a half paid hours, they qualify for the full-time incentive.

But crucially, they don't have to work within the same setting within the health-care system. They can join the float pool. So you can work the 0.4 within the existing hospital where you have a full—or a part-time—employment arrangement right now, and then you can add the 0.6 in different settings where you're comfortable working through the provincial float pool.

What this also does, though, is it throws the doors open for young nurses, people who have just graduated nursing school, who don't have a full-time gig yet. And perhaps they've picked up, let's say, a 0.8 within one setting or even a 0.2 within setting, just to get their foot in the door. Up to now, they haven't been able to qualify for a full-time incentive.

Under this MOU within the tentative agreement, they will. That new nurse will be able to just grab the part-time position to get their foot in the door and then join the provincial float pool and pick up the rest of the hours to not only get full-time pay, the job satisfaction that comes along with that, but also that incentive payment, \$12,000 annually.

So this is significant, and it will help to address agency nurse use in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: That was a long diatribe over—just to ask the clarifying question, which is, actually, the quote that I mentioned is exactly how he put it.

So I, basically, was asking the Premier (Mr. Kinew) to clarify that he said, when he was introducing his

staff, Sarah Thiele and Mark Rosner, that he said, and I quote, a ton of staffers.

And so I guess I will be a little more clear to—when I asked him what did he mean by that, is that—how many staff does he have? Technical officers and the OICs?

It's interesting that the Premier carried on talking in regards to health care, but he knows—and this is how I'm hoping that this isn't going to go. We're going to try to keep the Premier on topic.

And when he mentioned a ton, I know that he probably was not being literal and talking about a classification of weight. We're talking about a number. So, a number of staff. How many staff does he have—technical officers, order in councils—whether that's directly in his office, in the Premier's office?

* (15:30)

Mr. Kinew: I thank the member for clarifying his question.

Again, we know the technical officer has a broad definition that also includes deputy ministers, so when we talk about the Executive Council, you know, there's clerk of the Executive Council; there's chief of staff, there's the principal secretary; there's the deputy chief of staff and others who work with us.

And they're doing great work, fixing health care after years of not just PC mismanagement, you know. Dr. Peachy was very clear that the PCs were mismanaging what they called consolidation and the normal people of the province called the closure of emergency rooms. But also just like an acrimonious and aggressive posture towards the health workforce in the province that led to many leaving for private agency nurses—nursing agencies, rather.

And so the LOA, which is the third component of the agreement with the Manitoba Nurses Union, is another important piece of trying to rectify this situation. We'll be able to certainly answer the member's question in due course but I do think it's important that the people of Manitoba who take the time to watch this committee have an understanding of what's part of the tentative agreement here.

This tentative agreement is a pathway towards fixing the problems that nurses themselves have been identifying in the health-care working environment. So the first piece that I was talking about, about the incentive built within the MOU to allow folks to get full-time incentives to rejoin the public system, that combined with an expedited process for people leaving

nursing agencies or adding time within the provincial float pool to their employment schedule, we've accelerated that timeline from—which was quite lengthy under the previous government—to 48 hours.

So if you hear about this tentative agreement being a good move for you once it gets approved, then, on April 1 of next year, and you wanted to step out of a nursing agency, within 48 hours, you'd be able to join the provincial float pool in the public system.

But the other important issue is the unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios. We know that nurses who left the system quite often brought expertise with them when they left, which means that we lacked the ability to staff up every aspect of the health-care system under the previous government in an adequate fashion. And it's the patient who always ends up suffering in that situation.

So the letter of agreement that we included in this tentative agreement sets out a path towards minimum nurse-to-patient ratios. This would apply in team-based care settings, primary care, hospital-based care, long-term and residential care, the personal-care homes—that's what they're commonly referred to in Manitoba—as well as in community and non-hospital care settings. We know that there's excellent nurses who work in home visits, as one example.

And so what we're going to do under this LOA is to establish a joint nursing council with representatives from government, from the Manitoba Nurses Union and from the employers, which is the health-care service delivery organizations. And they're going to develop the pathway in great detail towards improving nurse-to-patient ratios. What this means is more time at the bedside for each patient. And it's going to be accomplished by taking a look at the overall needs and skills required to provide that care to patients, the complexity of said care, the acuity, the multidisciplinary approach that could be marshalled across such a team.

And we'll also set about the way that these plans get evaluated and the way that they get monitored so that we can guarantee that not only do we work towards these nurse-to-patient ratios but also that we can maintain them over the long run. Maintaining improvements to the health-care system is going to take continued dedication.

We have an excellent Health Minister who comes from the front lines themselves. We have a team who's

committed to a health-in-all-policies approach to government, and starting to fix the nurse-to-patient ratios is an important path towards that.

This is also the pathway towards ending mandatory overtime when you take the LOA and the MOU together, because if you have a greater human resource and stronger nurse-to-patient ratios, those settings will be adequately staffed and therefore not forced to rely on mandating nurses to work overtime to meet their basic staffing needs.

There's a comprehensive suite of measures here that are going to lead to real improvements for patient care in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: It looks like the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has set the tone for how Estimates are going to go and that's with, again, avoiding and dodging the questions. This is nothing new, but I was hoping that we'd be able to get him back on track, to stay focused, I know it's difficult for him. I've a chance to know him a little bit over the last eight years, a little bit longer than he was elected, before he was the star candidate, under the Selinger government.

I guess I'll be a little more clear in my question. So the question that I have is: The number of OICs, orders-in-council, that have been appointed for Executive Council—the Premier's office and the Executive Council.

If I can also get a copy of the organizational chart that I know that the Premier has in his hands at this moment.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I think we'll be providing a ton of answers in due course to the member opposite. But it's always good to take a trip down memory lane first.

Time was, you know, spent many hours on this committee with Brian Pallister, a few hours with Heather Stefanson, as well. We had some memorable moments, some unparliamentary words that were shouted by the—by Mr. Pallister in my direction. Some good reading in the CBC archives for people who want to brush up on recent political history.

And I would say that we often ask these same sorts of questions and typically, each year, they'd be taken under advisement. And, you know, there wasn't a ton of follow-through under Mr. Pallister or Heather Stefanson when it came to matters taken under advisement in the Executive Council Committee of Supply, so I think we definitely want to hold ourselves to a higher standard than them, and we have, and that's why the election outcome, I think, you know, was the way it was last year.

But, again, that takes an ongoing commitment and so we'll certainly not only meet but exceed the, you know, precedent set by Mr. Pallister and former premier Stefanson.

But I do just want to say that having the opportunity to speak about the tentative agreement with MNU is important, you know, because of the nature of the bargaining process and the ratification process we haven't been able to really speak about it and I just think it's really important for nurses and for the general public to understand what's being brought forward here. And so that's why I would—I do want to take some of the time sincerely at this committee to be able to put words on the record and to explain it in great detail.

At the end of the day, anything we want to do in health care starts with staffing and it starts with the human resources. And so over the past many years we've been listening to those on the front lines of the provincial health-care system and we've been putting together a plan. And early on in that plan was the need to address mandatory overtime, was the need to improve nurse-to-patient ratios, was the question of how are we going to draw staff back from the nursing agencies.

And so thanks to the hard work of our Health Minister and the rest of the team who's worked on some of the policy questions here, and thanks also to the folks who've been directly at the table, from the service-delivery organizations and from the nurses union themselves, we have a comprehensive plan here.

* (15:40)

And, specifically, this is a plan that came from the front lines. This is a plan from the front lines that will allow us to fix health care by drawing nurses back into the public system from the agencies. This is the plan from the front lines that will chart a course towards improving nurse-to-patient ratios and ending mandatory overtime.

The change that we seek within the provincial health-care system is not going to be accomplished overnight. It is going to take years to fix the damage that we've seen. However, this tentative agreement is an important tool that will allow us to make up a lot of that ground.

This collective agreement, this tentative agreement, is an important tool that will allow the nurse to have greater control over their own lives when it comes to work-life balance, greater control over their careers, but it is also going to allow us to have the

financial flexibility and the scheduling flexibility to be able to surround them with more colleagues, to be able to make them safer when they're working because they'll no longer be working alone, in many settings.

You combine that with the moves that we're taking in other areas to put out an RFP to put in some health and safety requirements around the use of agency nursing in Manitoba, and you have a comprehensive plan towards bringing nurses back from the agencies and into the public system. That's an important step and it's one that anyone who's invested in health-care improvement should pay attention to.

Certainly, this is a top priority for our government and we know it's a top priority for the people of Manitoba. But at the end of the day, this is about the patient, this is about the nurse and this is about listening to the front lines. And so we're going to be able to work with the folks on the front lines to do what we share in common, which is to focus on you, the patient, and I'm very happy to bring this forward.

Mr. Ewasko: So there goes the Premier (Mr. Kinew) again, he's going and using language that he doesn't necessarily mean, putting some misinformation on the record, misusing the terminology of tons again. I tried to correct him a little bit just to guide him, but he wants to stay focused on the word tonnage.

It's interesting because I sort of knew where the Premier was going to go on—well, the start to the potential question that I had—not the potential question, to the question that I had a few minutes ago. And then, of course, he went off-topic again because that's just what we're going to be doing, I guess, for the next few days is—but again, this—he's starting to show—he has started to show, but more and more Manitobans will see how he deflects and dodges and puts misinformation on the record. So I knew the way he was going to start his answer to that last question I had.

And so I went back and took a look at the various Estimates process of when he was in opposition, asking questions, and I did check to see if the information that he had requested when he was the Leader of the Opposition—still the NDP for—or, the NDP MLA for Fort Rouge at the time. But I did read and take a look—the fact that all of his requests during those Estimates were actually satisfied and had been sent forward to him.

I know that he was sitting here in the Chamber with the organization chart in his hands, and then he put on the record that he was not going to fulfill any questions or requests that I had had.

And it's unfortunate because I thought maybe the Premier was going to put forward a, you know, a bit of a turn-the-leaf type of thing from his predecessor, the—Premier Selinger and the Selinger government. But it's looking like, once again, the MLA for Fort Rouge, the Premier (Mr. Kineew), is again dodging and just avoiding some of the questions.

So since he wants to talk about nursing—and he's going to be thrilled, because he set the hook and I'm going to go there for a little bit, to take a fishing terminology. I don't know if the Premier enjoys fishing, but—I know he enjoys wrestling—but we'll talk about nurses for a little bit.

So he wants to talk about nursing. So far, Darlene Jackson with the—from the MNU—78,000 total hours of overtime under the NDP watch so far. So I'll repeat that: 78,000 hours—I know the Premier's writing it down—not tons, hours. And Darlene said—Ms. Jackson said, and I quote: We are still seeing lots and lots of overtime, both mandated and voluntary. End quote. And more—and, quote: more agency-nurse usage than ever before. End quote.

Again, the Premier's taking his amount of time, allotted time for Estimates, and putting misinformation on the record. He's not answering the questions already, and I think we're almost 50 minutes into Estimates.

So I'm asking again: Will I get a chance to see the organizational chart before the beginning of next week so that we can carry on with Estimates?

And just ask, also, the OIC, the order-in-council, the number of staff that the Premier has on Executive Council, and if I can get a copy of the organizational chart, which he had in his hands today.

Introduction of Guests

The Chairperson: Before the Premier has a chance to answer the question, I'll just introduce in the public gallery, students from Melita School, 24 grade 8 students under the direction of Leanne Bugg, guests of the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk).

* * *

Mr. Kineew: I love the banana belt. So I think it's great that you're able to come and visit your building, the people's building, the Manitoba Legislature. We're temporary residents here, but this building will always belong to you.

And so when you're old enough to vote, I hope that you practise the democratic right that previous

generations fought for, that the veterans served overseas to protect and that is your birthright. And serving here is the great honour of my life, and I hope that you have the opportunity to put your name on a ballot and come here in the future as an MLA, if that is your wish, or that you simply cast a vote and participate in our democracy and pursue your education and career goals as you see fit.

So, sincerely, I would like to welcome you to the Legislative Building, and on behalf of all of my colleagues, I hope you have a great time here.

When we get to the questions of staffing—as I said, it's always good to go down memory lane, so I'll go down the memory lane of the previous answer, which is when I said I would give the answers in due time. And so, of course, you know, the member opposite will have the opportunity to peruse an organizational chart and compare orders-in-council, which are posted publicly, of course. We can help folks on his side of the aisle access public records if they like. You know, something we were always happy to do in opposition.

I would say, though, one of the first decisions that I took as Premier was to shrink the size of Cabinet. I thought it was important for Manitobans to have a focused government in the early days of a new administration, a government that was focused on meeting the needs of the people, rather than other political considerations that may have led other government decision-making prior to my time being elected as First Minister. I'm not familiar what those were.

* (15:50)

So just as a basis of comparison, the former government had 19 ministers in Cabinet, and our current team since election day, if you include myself, has 15 ministers. There's 14 members of Cabinet, not counting the president of the Executive Council, which is another title that I have the opportunity to serve under.

And one of the things that was really important, I think, was to focus on gender balance within those appointments. So we're very happy that half of the folks at the table are women and non-binary people and that we also have representation of a broad cross-section of Manitobans around the table, including people from different regions, different walks of life, different sorts of work experience and people who come from different sectors—folks who come from the finance industry, people who come from the educational sector, folks who come from community voices and other important work that's been done out there in the community.

At the same time, we know that staffing up a political organization after an election is an important undertaking. It requires balancing a skillset, implementing a mandate, having the horsepower to respond to unforeseen situations as they arise. And so these are the sorts of appointments that we've been making. I believe that in the first few months of the PC administration, there were about 86 order-in-council appointments.

So we have fewer political staff than that. We know that there is an org chart here. Typically, when we would ask for something and have it taken under advisement, we'd plant the grass seed on our front lawns. We'd water it, water it again, wait for the rains to come. We'd launch numerous freedom of information requests. We'd go out and check the grass, maybe adjust the aeration, soil composition, maybe lay down another layer of grass seed. And then several months after that, we would get a response.

So I'm proud to say that we'll expedite the PC wait times in this respect, as well, too.

Mr. Ewasko: It's nice to—thank you, honourable Chair. And it's nice to hear a little bit of a lesson to—on what the Premier (Mr. Kineew) does and how he deals with his lawn care. I'm assuming the member doesn't take care of his own grass. I'm sure he's—pays for that service. Getting to know the Premier over the last eight years, it might be a little beneath him. So it's interesting that he was able to shout out a few of the steps to growing some grass.

But I look forward to seeing the org chart and, yes, some of the orders-in-council.

It's interesting to see if he would put some of that—those words on the record. But he won't. You know, instead he pats himself on the back for shrinking Cabinet, dropping a whole department dedicated to seniors.

And when you have departments, and especially if you've got one specifically dedicated to seniors, when you drop that, you also drop a deputy which then focuses on the topic.

There's other departments that he decided to drop. What did he say earlier, he said something about de-emphasizing bureaucracy. Well, that's interesting, and I know that we're going to have quite a few hours together in the Estimates and in the Chamber here. And I think we will get to the fact on that even though he dropped the department of seniors, cancelled it, dropped the deputy, dropped some other very important whole departments—addictions. So Cabinet's smaller.

But how about political staff? How many political staff does the Premier have in the NDP government currently?

Mr. Kineew: One of the things I've noticed about the members opposite and the PCs is that they can't say the name of Brian Pallister, even though he's the reason that most of the members opposite were elected into government.

The reason why I bring him up at this juncture is, you know, there is a sort of a soft attempt at a hit there about shrinking the size of Cabinet, but any sort of criticism in that respect would apply equally to Brian Pallister. So I'll leave it to the members opposite to explain away whatever contortions they want to tie themselves into.

But I will say that our team is very strong. We have a lot of bench strength on our team as well, too. And there's a lot of important considerations that go into building a strong team, and I'm very proud of our Health Minister. Health Minister is somebody with a ton of horsepower who, again, I've said time and time again, if I have even some small measure of their capacity, I'd feel very honoured at hearing that said about me.

So we have the ability to deliver, and part of the reorganization of government was carried out with two twin considerations: one is continuity within the civil service so that people who are carrying out important functions, such as road clearing or doing works within our parks or, you know, approving mineral development, that they be allowed to continue on with their important work and not spend a lot of their time printing new business cards, which is what happened in 2016.

But, at the same time, we recognize that the previous government's approach was not working, particularly in health care. And so we took a strategic approach to reconstituting government within a few targeted areas. It's a fundamental belief of mine that if you focus on too many things at once, you will do nothing at a high level.

And so, as a result, when it came to Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, we looked at what is happening in the streets of Winnipeg, of Brandon, Thompson, many communities across the province, and we said the current approach is not working when it comes to homelessness.

So we talked to the experts and we said, how are we going to be able to improve this situation? And they said, well, one, we need to get people off the

street and into housing, but at the exact same time we also need to wrap them around with the supports necessary to be successful within that housing.

Housing first programs, which focus only on the housing, typically haven't been as successful as we would like them to be. People with addictions issues or other mental health issues end up leaving those housing environments and then seeing similar challenges.

So what we decided to do is, well, why don't we just model within our government the approach that we want to see within the not-for-profits, the private sector actors, the other levels of government who are active in this space. Why don't we just have a no-barriers approach to marshalling one common response?

And so, under one government department, Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, we brought the resources and capacity to stand up new social housing and incentivize the first few steps of the housing spectrum above social housing, and then all the wraparound supports for mental health and addiction services so that somebody could be successful within an environment like that.

So our minister, Minister Smith, is doing an excellent job, and in addition to having a lot of capacity and smarts, she also has a lived experience that people within the sector respect and that she brings a credibility to those conversations, which is really, really important.

Similarly, in the Department of Health, it was important, after years of cuts and chaos in the health-care system, to bring clarity and to bring to bear a single vision across the service delivery organizations. This is a monumental task that we've asked our Health Minister to do, but they're doing an excellent job.

* (16:00)

We are seeing the early stages of reforms to health care and improvements to outcomes for patients, and there are many early-stage ideas which are being actioned today and have already been implemented in areas like HIV care and seniors care, which are very, very positive moves. And they're made possible by the strategic reorganization that we've brought forward to government. Of course, we also brought gender balance to the deputy minister's table as well, which is important in and of itself.

The Chairperson: I'll just remind all members that in the Committee of Supply, we still refer to other members by their constituency or their portfolio.

Mr. Ewasko: So, obviously, my question was too difficult of a question, but I am going to assume that the amount of political staff that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has in the NDP government is too many to count. I know that when we look back at the NDP's record on education, it's not a good one. It's not a good one.

And when we look back to, as the Premier mentioned, being able to say certain names, it's funny how those that live in glass houses, such as the Premier, throw stones. And he shouldn't, because we know that there is many a time that Premier Selinger, and then shortly after, when he was running in the 2016 election, had to guide his young star candidate, the now-MLA for Fort Rouge. And it was interesting that it wasn't long after, we saw, again, some true actions by this Premier, the MLA for Fort Rouge, and how the proverbial knife in the back of the one who put his hand on the Premier's shoulder, back in 2016.

And Manitobans will see, as time rolls along—we're seeing it already, coming up to the eighth month of this Premier, the MLA for Fort Rouge's reign, here, in the province. So when we think back onto memory lane, we have—Brian Pallister had one assistant, one principal secretary. Now, we checked the OICs, like the Premier suggested. And it's always nice to know some of the answers when you're asking some of the questions, just to see if—what type of misinformation the leader of our province is going to put on the record.

So in his office, he has a correspondence secretary, he's got a chief of staff—we're joined by, today—he's got the deputy chief of staff, he's got a principal secretary, director of human resources, two special assistants, correspondence assistant and an office co-ordinator, who just so happens to be his party president. Interesting, interesting. And, again, Manitobans will see the real character of this Premier, the MLA for Fort Rouge.

As we saw earlier, a few weeks—well, about a week ago, I guess, we were asking questions about the fact that even in his own constituency, there are businesses shutting down due to the lack of action by this Premier, his Justice Minister, his government, failing Manitobans on safety and crime. We saw that he was a little agitated, like some other times we've seen, little agitated with the fact that he's unable to help some of his own constituents, and then how is he going to be able to help the rest of the province, when he can't take care of his own backyard? Besides the grass, of course, which, I'm sure, he'll pay for that service.

So again, asking if there's any more orders-in-council that I possibly missed, he'll have to reference back to Hansard because I didn't see him taking notes.

So doing just some quick math, he's got \$1.2 million in his office alone and so I'm not sure if he is definitely echoing the ways of his predecessor, Greg Selinger, but it's sort of the—looks like the way he's going.

So is there any more OICs or Executive Council members?

Mr. Kinew: The answer is yes, there are some OICs that the member opposite didn't reference. He also has some facts wrong when he describes some of the good people that we work with. So, more research to be done, for sure, on their side, but I'll make the job easier for them.

So we're about, well, seven, not quite eight months into office since the election. We have 78 order-in-council appointments. During the same period, the PCs had 86, so perhaps we could appoint a further, you know, group of people to do some more good work. We got a lot of folks out there bringing people together with initiatives like the Public Safety Summit.

It was pretty amazing to see members of the Winnipeg Police Service, the RCMP, community groups, voices who are critical of us as government coming to the table, folks who were cheerleading community initiatives to prevent crime and to improve public safety. It was a super-positive day and I cannot thank the staff who pulled that together enough for their important work for hundreds of people who came together from every region of the province.

We had the rural southern municipal leaders alongside First Nations leaders alongside community activists alongside folks who walk the beat, so to speak. Amazing conversations. People were saying, look at that business leader sitting next to that young person sitting next to that law enforcement officer, and they're strategizing together on important topics like retail theft, like prevention at a community level, ensuring that more young people can stay on a positive path. And that's not the first time we've brought people together to strategize as your government to bring an approach together on community safety and public safety.

Of course, members opposite, they would rather sow fear and division. They would rather divide Manitobans, try to pit one group of people or one neighbour against another neighbour. We choose to take a different approach, which is to bring people together.

One Manitoba is the title of the budget and it's an article of faith. We believe that Manitobans are hungry for a message of unity. We know that the pandemic

was very divisive and very difficult on the mental health side for everybody, some folks more than others. And I think the average person out there is ready to turn the page on that sort of division and to start talking about solutions.

So we got a lot of great folks in the civil service whose expertise we respect and who we acknowledge the professionalism of. I know that after the 2016 election, it seemed to be like an exercise under that PC government to try and paint the civil service in a negative light to justify expenditure reductions.

* (16:10)

But we look at it differently. We recognize that the civil service are the professionals who are going to allow us to do good things for the people of Manitoba. And they're going to implement the vision that the people of Manitoba have, through their democratic will, invested us the great privilege of being able to fulfill.

Political staff assist in that endeavour. They're able to engage with community and with—across various departments to pull together planning and strategic exercises, such as convening the Public Safety Summit, which, not only being a high-quality event which is now going to be replicated in other regions of the province, but is leading to real solutions to help us bring forward initiatives around prevention and community development and safety.

Done some important steps in the budget already; we've delivered on election commitments. Members opposite try to diminish the security-camera rebate, but that allows some people to buy three security cameras for their home, hook them up to Wi-Fi, then all of a sudden be able to monitor what's going on. It allows some folks to be able to invest in a doorbell cam. These are not insignificant. They're important.

Mr. Ewasko: So, I guess—so the Premier (Mr. Kinew) put on the record 78 political staffers to—you know, versus we had 86 OICs.

I guess part of my question is: are they, in fact, paid more? Because from what I'm looking at through his orders-in-council and just doing some quick math, definitely the 78 political staffers and OICs, which also, you know, accounts for potentially coms, policy, tours, outreach and all of that, and—oh, you know what, I almost forgot. I did need to mention—and the Premier—I appreciate the Premier putting this on the record as well, the one political staffer that I referenced as the Premier's party president—that's right, actually—that individual's no longer the party president because

the Premier realized that he made an error—I'm assuming, made an error—in appointing that individual in order-in-council, whilst the individual still was the party president.

And, just recently, at the NDP AGM—and he's correct, they actually elected a new party president at their recent AGM, the same AGM that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) decided to, you know, possibly jeopardize years and years of work with other provinces and decided to violate a court order about divulging information about certain court orders. So, that's interesting.

We look at a lot of the, you know, ministerial staff that is serving under the Premier, their starting salaries have more than almost doubled. So again, you know, I'll let the Premier sort of correct the record on some of the things that he's put on there, and just if he could verify a lot of those numbers.

And then I've got some more questions for the Premier. I know that we're just getting started. I guess we're only, you know, almost an hour and 15 minutes in. And we've seen that the Premier has no appetite to actually answer any questions; he's going to deflect and dodge and avoid questions.

So, I guess, my question is, the Premier put on the record in regards to the one political staffer who is no longer party president. Okay, I admit that that changed as of their AGM. They've got 78 orders-in-council. I'd like to know: are they all paid more money? And is, in fact, the ministerial staff starting salaries were almost double of what we were paying.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to ask the member opposite to sometime watch the phraseology he uses. It's not always clear what he's asking for.

But I think the answer that he's seeking is for me to confirm that the amount that political staff are paid now is equal to what was happening at the end of the Stefanson government, and I can confirm that: \$7.4 million, I believe, was what the former premier Stefanson was paying her political staff, and current payroll is about the same.

I do want to point out, however, that former premier Stefanson made a mistake when it came to her political staff. She didn't actually ensure that their pay was pensionable. Some sort of administrative oversight that was typical of the PC administration. And so, actually, one of the important things that we're doing in this year's budgetary process is we're taking a magnanimous approach, and we're going back retroactively and ensuring that the previous government's

PC political staff will be able to qualify for their pensions.

We believe that every worker deserves a good pension, and even if folks line up in the election campaign in a different-coloured jersey than us and we go out onto the gridiron, so to speak, politically, and contest that. But at the end of the day, those folks are still workers, and even if their former employers didn't do the proper due diligence in ensuring that they could pension their incomes, that we're not going to let them fall through the cracks.

So you can imagine there may have been some groans around the table when I explained to our team that the right thing to do would be to explain to the—explain that the PC staffers who were writing those talking points, we should do a nice thing for them. Once people saw the situation for what it was, we decided to proceed, because again, partisanship is one thing, but at the end of the day, we're all Manitobans. We're all doing work here and we all deserve to be treated fairly.

So Budget 2024 has at least one important measure that PC political staff from the Stefanson administration can be happy with, which is that they will, in fact, qualify for their pensions because of our Manitoba NDP government once again cleaning up the mismanagement of the former PC administration.

But when we're talking about that process of repair, like, I do feel compelled to point out that when the PCs took office, there were 14,876 civil servants in Manitoba. When we took office, there were 12,054. It's a reduction of 2,822. It's a reduction of 19 per cent.

* (16:20)

And again, I'm sure the PC team would be proud of putting Manitobans out of work. But when I look at that, I draw a straight line to the people in rural Manitoba who've been complaining about snow clearing; Manitobans who've been complaining about any number of public services in parks and on highways; conservation officers whose positions are made that much more dangerous by short-staffing situations; the challenges that we see in many, many areas of the public service.

So Brian Pallister set out with a specific agenda in this regard but the piece that was lacking was a rationalization that balanced the need to deliver public services. We take a different approach. We respect the public service. Public service are professionals who allow us to do things like clear the roads, open the parks, be able to deliver the health care that Manitobans are

counting on. So we're happy to work with them, we're happy for their service and, of course, we're going to do right by them.

When we came into office we were confronted with, well, one strike was in full effect and we were confronted with the prospect of a few others. We were able to quickly and equitably bring those situations to a resolution and now with the nursing tentative agreement, which I'm describing here today, we hope to be able to take another significant step forward and again ensure that Manitobans get the services they need in an efficient way, but in a way that's also robust and meeting their needs. Because at the end of the day, it's not about politicians, it's about you, the people.

Mr. Ewasko: So the information that—some of the information that the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) put on record again, you know, fails to get close to the question that was asked.

And so I'm going to ask a very simple question, a short question, take up only few more seconds.

So I've got the email: premier@manitoba.ca. Is this the Premier's only email address?

Mr. Kinew: Yes, you know, the email question's an interesting one, with a colourful history under the former PC administration.

There is, of course, former premier Brian Pallister, who claimed not to check his email and, of course, as a result, folks close to him had their email accounts subject to FIPPA and other things like that.

You also had former premier Heather Stefanson go to quite some lengths to have a government email account neither be confirmed nor denied and was the subject of a lot of FIPPA activity and appeals and ombudsman complaints, perhaps, and really, no degree of transparency there.

And then, you know, in something that's almost like an absurd length for a government to go to try and combat the opposition, I recall that in the first year of the pandemic, when most people were asking the PCs to add intensive-care-unit beds—a call which, had been heeded, perhaps could have avoided some very negative outcomes later on in the third wave, to be specific—the PC administration of the day decided to force the then-opposition to migrate to a different email server. And it decided that the leg.gov.mb.ca email server could only be for the government benches, and then we'd have to, as the then-opposition, migrate to a different @mbleg.ca series of addresses.

Again, I think around the same time, they decided to dive deep into the management of office space around the Legislative Building.

Not sure the public review of the COVID situation will go to that level of detail, but I'm pretty sure the average Manitoban would say that that government should have spent more time on hiring nurses and creating ICU beds rather than worrying about email servers and office space in the Leg. But that's sort of, you know, the 'incontraversverte' facts of the matter.

Member asked a yes-or-no question; the answer is no. Obviously, there's many email addresses, including personal email addresses, that I use.

We'll follow the same FIPPA rules and guidance and standards set by the previous PC administration, a constituency email address, and so on. We'll be happy to provide transparency, at least to the same standard as Heather Stefanson or Brian Pallister.

* (16:30)

In fact, I think you're seeing over the course of this afternoon a higher degree of standard in matters that were previously, under the last administration, taken under advisement. You know, perhaps it's not as fast as the member opposite would like, but these answers are being provided here in the committee. There's no need for me to go out and rake my lawn myself while waiting. Rather, you know, we can provide these answers in short order.

But it is important to put some things on the record, like the details of the nursing agreement. I hope the folks are able to review those details.

Also, I'm looking at a list of names of people who were PC Party presidents and campaign directors who were made order-in-council appointments. I'm not going to say the names on the record just because, you know, no sense bringing folks into this unnecessarily. But we do know that the PC administration appointed people from party president roles, campaign director roles, into order-in-council positions. Some of those folks are very active on social media, so wouldn't want to get tweeted about, I guess, is what I'm saying on that.

But I do think there's one element that I'll take out of this Estimates process and repeat in question period tomorrow, which is that the member opposite said about me, and I quote, he's correct, end quote. Said that on a few occasions, so I'll be sure to remind him of that, the fact that he's acknowledging the accuracy and veracity of the information being shared here.

So, again, it's important exercise that we're going through. We've set a high standard with respect to transparency, and we'll continue to maintain it.

Mr. Ewasko: So, you know, in the—it's nice to hear the Premier (Mr. Kinew) is going to be talking about transparency and accountability, because I'm not sure if Manitobans are seeing or hearing that, really, from this Premier, and it's going to be interesting.

I guess sometime in the future, that's what he's committing to, some—that I will get a list of these other emails. Can he ballpark it? And then, what I mean by that, just for clarification, because I know his sport isn't baseball—it's more wrestling—but ballpark it. What I mean by that is, can he give me a—estimate, or an exact number, of how many other emails he uses either personally or his staff has access to on his behalf?

Yes, I think I'll leave it at that. Can he—can the Premier give me a number? Since sometime between today and the future, I'm going to get a list of these emails, according to what the Premier has said. In light of transparency and accountability, can he at least tell me the number of how many email addresses the Premier has, whether personally, as the Premier, or that his staff has access to on his behalf?

Mr. Kinew: No.

And the information that the member opposite is sharing, the way he's characterizing my answer is incorrect, and anyone reviewing Hansard will see that.

Previous answer was a response to a yes-or-no question; I answered that.

But in so doing, I also pointed out that the previous government vociferously guarded the former premier's email address or addresses, citing personal privacy as a reason. They refused to confirm or deny even the existence of some of these emails.

And so we'll do the same or better when it comes to transparency, but again, there's a standard that was set for the last premier. I take seriously concerns around security and safety for my colleagues, and so I'm not going to make any sort of characterization about the decision that was undertaken by the previous government in that respect, and I'll simply point out that we are going to maintain the same standard or better.

That said, you know, when it comes to freedom-of-information requests, we had an amazing FIPPA team doing research on our behalf. And one of the important things that they did is that they did a ton of appeals through FIPPA co-ordinators and to the

ombudsman in Manitoba, and they actually set a number of high standards around the disclosure of information. And one of the things that that means is that the precedent that we set in opposition, as folks petitioning and applying for FIPPAAs, are now standards that we are going to abide by in government.

And so we'll always respond to these requests and certainly expect over the many, many years in opposition to come for the PCs that they'll file many, many FIPPA requests, and we'll respond to all of them seriously through the appropriate channels, through the appropriate FIPPA co-ordinators, and ensuring that, of course, when the people of Manitoba have standards around a freedom of information and personal privacy act, that those things be respected and taken seriously.

Again, some of those other interludes into email world were probably, under the previous PC government, were more akin to Hillary Clinton-email-type controversies and less befitting of a serious administration in Manitoba. But, you know, that's what they did. When we're talking about forcing people to change email servers during the first year of the pandemic or claiming not to have access to an email account when you're in some southern locale—I can't remember if it was in the US or a jurisdiction further south of that.

But yes, certainly, we'll do better than that administration did. So just wanted to clarify some points for the member opposite, because he seemed to be characterizing things in an inaccurate fashion. Just want to ensure that it is being characterized accurately for those folks who now have to go back and take a look at the records to see what is, in fact, being taken under advisement.

And so, the question that was just posed, you've received a yes-or-no answer to, just like the previous one. And I'm offering context here to explain how this is consistent with past practice in the provincial government here in Manitoba. And even as we sit here and listen to questions from the opposition, I'm handed more papers of more people who were appointed from PC Party staff to order-in-council appointments under the former PC government. So, certainly, it was something widely practised under PC administration.

* (16:40)

Anyway, so that's a bit about the past practices on email. When we come back to the nursing tentative agreement, I do think it's significant for the people of Manitoba to have time to digest this.

And I'd be happy to walk through various scenarios that may arise. I know that for the average young nurse out there, this is going to provide job security, a pathway towards full-time employment. For the nurses who are thinking about, potentially, retirement, it's going to ensure that any earnings worked in the float pool are pensionable.

And then, of course, our hope is that for nurses as a whole, as a collective, this is going to provide greater resources and support for them working at the bedside. And so there's a lot of good work under that tentative agreement.

Mr. Ewasko: Again, so I ask the question: is premier@manitoba.ca the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) only email address? He's saying no.

Will the Premier disclose other emails that he personally or his staff has access to on his behalf? Premier said no.

So much for transparency and accountability, honourable Chairperson. He is saying that there's the FIPPA information and all that type of wonderful stuff, freedom of access. We know what happens when you do that with the—any NDP government. He's obviously taking a page out of his predecessor—one of his mentors, Greg Selinger—on the redacting.

And that's what he will be doing. He won't provide the straightforward information that's been requested of him. You know, how many emails, he couldn't even answer that, Honourable Speaker—or, honourable Chairperson.

So I just wanted to put that on the record. I know that the Premier talks about characterization and those types of ideas. I'm not sure if he really wants to get into the words on character and history and go down that road just yet. So I'm hoping that he'll just be able to straight-up answer a couple of questions.

But he's right. I did ask him a couple of yes-and-no questions and he straight-up on the record said that no, he will not disclose the answers to my questions. And so we will go through the process to ask for that, so, hopefully, he doesn't go ahead and start scrubbing the information like I know that previous NDP governments did.

So when we talk about communication devices, some of the relevant policies and protocols, and he talked about policies and protocols, so in regards to relevant policies and protocols with regards to communication, electronic devices and network usage, does he follow those relevant policies and protocols, and does his office?

So it's a two-part. Hopefully, he can stay on track and focus, because I know he has difficulties doing that. We've seen the history. But, hopefully, he can stay on focus and talk about, does he follow all relevant policies and protocols with regards to communication, electronic devices and network usage? I know that's a yes or no. And does his office, yes or no?

Mr. Kinew: Trouble focusing? I talked about health care every single day of the election campaign. Every single answer here this afternoon, practically, I talked about health care as well. So, yes, I guess, perhaps I should focus more on health care, talk more about the tentative agreement with nurses. Be happy to spell out more of that.

Answer to the two questions posed is 'yeth'—yes and yes.

But when it comes to health care, I really do want us to be able to get to yes to all the questions that Manitobans have. Are you going to fix health care? Yes. Are you going to produce the results that we deserve? Yes. Are nurses and physicians and health-care professionals going to be treated with respect? Yes. Are they going to be able to speak freely if they're criticizing government or policy changes, things like that? Yes. Absolutely.

We've made changes in health care already to reduce bureaucracy and to focus on the front lines, and we've continued to work with folks who were on the other side of those decisions and perhaps arguing for a different course to be taken. We've allowed them to criticize us publicly, and we're still working with those folks because we recognize that having a dissenting opinion is not disrespectful. In fact, it can often make the process stronger. And when we're talking about something as important as health care, it's important to have that diversity of opinion so that we can arrive at a robust, strong path forward. And it's that sort of process that led us to this tentative agreement with the nurses.

We were able to have a lot of conversations with people from the front lines to identify what the issues were. And when some solutions came from the front lines, we were more than happy to bring those forward. And where we may have had a proposal to put in an incentive to bring nurses back from the agencies, we're able to bring resources from government, whether that's on the civil service side or analytical capacity from political staff to be able to develop that up into a fully formed policy that is reflected through the MOU and the LOA and the tentative agreement.

And I think it's important for nurses and for the general public to know that that background—because this is not some plan for health care that was cooked up in a boardroom or that was drawn on a whiteboard. This is actually a plan for health care that comes from the front lines, and it's evidence of the collaboration that our government is willing to bring forward. If you got a great idea—you're bringing it from the front lines—we're happy to help. We're happy to put the resources necessary to develop that into something that's ready to be implemented in all of its complexity.

So again, I think a lot of the public reporting so far is focused on some of the general wage increase and salary scale adjustments and premiums and health spending account and wellness days sort of considerations—all of which are important. But this afternoon, I really do want to underline for folks out there that the memorandum that we have to create this full-time incentive combined with the flexibility of an expanded provincial float pool is going to be an important tool to bringing nurses back from the private agencies.

Similarly, the letter of agreement sketches forward the path to us working together to improve nurse-to-patient ratios and also consequently path towards reducing overtime and then eliminating it as a regular human resource tool.

Again, mandatory overtime came into existence, you know, for situations where perhaps there was some emergency—some dramatic situation outside of the norm in which you had to have nurses and other health-care professionals stay on beyond their shift. And most nurses and health-care professionals will tell you, yes. When there's a situation like that, you don't even have to mandate us. We're just going to stay working alongside our colleagues until the work is done.

But where that emerged as an extreme situation under the PC government, it became the de facto approach to staffing up health care. And one of the reasons nurses are leaving the front lines towards the private agencies is because they've had the experience of showing up to work so often and being mandated to work overtime. And there's a desire for that to change. And so nurses under the previous government were speaking as a collective by leaving in large numbers. And it's my hope that with this new tentative agreement, nurses will speak again as a collective and say, this is an important tool to fix the issues that we've been worried about for a long, long time. I can see that happening. But, of course, it will only happen with continued commitment from all parties.

Mr. Ewasko: So we've heard over the last few weeks, of course, and read and had our hearts ache over hearing certain things.

* (16:50)

There was an internal review into Myah-Lee, and recommendations should have been out middle of May. March 7, CBC, and I quote: Get me out of this place. End quote. And in quote: In the days and months before she was killed, 17-year-old Myah Gratton told friends and family she feared for her safety and asked to be removed from the—from Carman, Manitoba, the house that she lived in with four other victims and the man now charged with murder in their deaths.

Myah Gratton's mother, Juliette Hastings, has sent a series of audio recordings and text messages to CBC News saying they show the child-welfare system and the family and friends failed to protect her daughter when she asked for help. She was ignored, Hastings said.

So, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) said he was open to a public inquiry. Why hasn't one happened, and why is he keeping information a secret?

Mr. Kinew: What took place in relation to this family from Carman is so dark. It's a tragedy when you think of the young lives. And I want to begin by sending my condolences and also to acknowledge the suffering of the family members and their grief.

I've had the opportunity to speak to many of them, including Juliette, the woman that the member opposite is referring to. I've spoken to other family members, people who knew them, people who just knew them from the community, landlords, employers, all sorts of people.

One of the things that really stood out to me about attending some of the events in Carman was the community response. Folks in the community, you know, they could have responded in many ways, but the fact that they responded with a tone that indicated they viewed these folks as their own kin, their own family, it meant a lot to me to see that. I think it meant a lot to everybody across Manitoba.

And after putting a call out for folks to pray for the victims and for the mourning, I was very moved also to see how many Manitobans stepped up—church people, spiritual people from other walks of life—to say that they took time out to pray over what had happened and to offer support for the people of Carman and the families.

It goes beyond a political issue, in my estimation. I was the first person to talk of an inquiry, and so any accountability questions the opposition wants to ask, they're free to do so. They should do so in the light of the fact that I was the first person to raise the prospect of an inquiry. There's an internal review going on right now. It's more complex than originally estimated in terms of the number of people that are being spoken to, so the process continues.

I also want to say, as somebody who is concerned with justice in the largest possible interpretation of the term, vis-à-vis its meaning in our society, that it's important that we respect the process that is before the courts. The person who's alleged to have done these terrible things is in custody and will be facing a trial, and whatever we do should not compromise the sanctity of that important process.

And so, I've said this directly to the mother that is being referred to, who I've spoken to. I've said this to other family members. Let's respect the trial process with the greatest of respect for your pain and suffering. And where there are questions unanswered through those hearings and through the internal review that is currently going on, if there are questions unresolved, then yes, we would proceed with an inquiry.

It's the thing that I said on day one of being asked this question. It's the thing that I'll continue to say. I know that our team feels the same way. Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) is doing important work in this respect. And one of the conversations that we had following this terrible tragedy and just speaking about some of the other awful things that have happened with respect to child welfare over the years in Manitoba was, let's show respect for the families; let's show respect for the community; let's memorialize what took place here. But let's also take action.

And there has been a series of recommendations going back to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, which also looked at the child-welfare system, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada final report, the final report to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, two-spirit+, number of reports from the children's advocate, and they outline a series of recommendations that we are going to pursue in the interim.

And, importantly, one of them is about ensuring Indigenous jurisdiction over child welfare. So we made a commitment to First Nations leaders in the province just over a week ago that as soon as nations are ready to move in that direction, we will expedite the process.

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate, of course, the sensitivity and the horrific—and, of course, the thoughts and

prayers go out to the family, the community and anyone else throughout the province and the country and the world that has to go through anything like this.

And I appreciate the Premier (Mr. Kinew) putting on the record, talking about sending the prayers out to the family and the community. And it wasn't that long ago, prior to the election, that the Premier—and I know that there's many times the Premier put on the record that he said himself during opposition that he either misspoke or didn't know what he didn't know when he was in opposition during the election, and now after the election where he led ridiculing of some of our ministers and members in the Chamber of sending thoughts and prayers out to family members. And he stood and he ridiculed those members for talking even about prayers and thoughts. And today, he mentions praying. I'm glad that he's turned the leaf again.

But I'd like to end with this question, and then the Premier will have a chance, too. He says that the review—the internal review—isn't quite finished. And it was supposed to be out the middle of May. And he said the public inquiry, he was open to that. So, I guess, does he have a timeline on when those recommendations and the review are going to be presented publicly?

Mr. Kinew: I want to table an org chart of the Executive Council prior to committee wrapping up this afternoon. Again, we're setting a new bar here and look forward to maintaining it over the years to come.

With respect to the specific question, I'm not able to give a specific date at this time, but I'll ask after that answer. I don't actually know a specific date. Otherwise, I wouldn't—I would provide it. But the reason for the additional timeline is because more people are being interviewed. I take this as a sign of the seriousness with which this is being undertaken.

And then, of course, I think we can expect that in addition to whatever additional interviews would be conducted, there will have to be time to process and to consider that information and to synthesize it into a report. But this is in the public interest, so we will be sharing updates with the people of Manitoba as we go.

The Chairperson: Order.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 22, 2024

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		
Introduction of Bills		Manitoba Hydro
Bill 217—The Men's Mental Health Awareness Week Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)	2005	Khan Sala
Lagassé		2013 2013
Committee Reports		Apprenticeship Training
Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development		Hiebert Moses
Sixth Report	2005	2014 2014
Blashko		Green Team Program Funding
Members' Statements		Byram Bushie
Emma Cloney	2006	2014 2014
Naylor		Transportation of Agricultural Products
Acknowledging Morden-Winkler Fire Departments	2007	Bereza Kostyshyn
Hiebert		2015 2015
Awasisak Meskanow Greenway	2008	Legislation to Combat Intimate Partner Violence
Moyes		Lamoureux Fontaine
Marcus and Paige Dueck	2008	2016 2016
Narth		Provincial Finances
Keira's Law	2009	Kennedy Sala
Lamoureux		2017 2017
Oral Questions		Disability Support Workers' Wages
Political Parties Election Rebate	2010	Stone Fontaine
Ewasko		2018 2018
Kinew	2010	Accessibility Act Review Update
Agency Nursing—Validation Process	2011	Stone Fontaine
Cook		2018 2018
Kinew	2011	ORDERS OF THE DAY
Nurse Recruitment and Retention		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS
Cook	2011	Committee of Supply
Kinew	2012	(Concurrent Sections)
Agency Nurses—Work Requirements	2012	Room 254
Cook		Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care
Kinew	2012	Asagwara Cook
Manitoba Hydro Plan to Address Capacity Needs	2012	2019 2021
Khan		Room 255
Sala	2013	Families Fontaine
Manitoba Hydro Future Energy Needs	2013	2033 2034
Khan		Lamoureux
Sala	2013	2045

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