



Second Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 14, 2025

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 and 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 233—The Lyme and Other Tick-borne Diseases Awareness Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I move, seconded by the member for Agassiz (Ms. Byram), that Bill 233, The Lyme and Other Tick-borne Diseases Awareness Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Cook: Here in Manitoba, reported cases of Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases have increased significantly, but when it comes to ticks, the best offence is a good defence.

Greater awareness of the cause and symptoms of tick-borne diseases will help Manitobans take precautions to minimize their risk of infection and severe illness. Observing Lyme and other tick-borne

diseases awareness month will promote awareness and education about these serious diseases.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development
Fourth Report**

MLA Carla Compton (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Tim Abbott): Your standing committee on Social and Economic—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 13, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 11)** – *The Oil and Gas Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le pétrole et le gaz naturel*
- **Bill (No. 22)** – *The Environment Amendment and Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement et la Loi sur la réduction du volume et de la production des déchets*
- **Bill (No. 232)** – *The Victims of Impaired Drivers Commemoration Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)/Loi sur la Journée de commémoration des victimes de conducteurs aux facultés affaiblies (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)*

Committee Membership

- Mr. Blashko
- MLA Compton
- MLA Dela Cruz
- Hon. Mr. Moses
- Mr. Nesbitt
- Mr. Schuler

Your Committee elected MLA Compton as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. Blashko as the Vice-Chairperson.

Substitutions received during Committee proceedings:

- Hon. Mr. Wiebe for Hon. Mr. Moses
- Hon. Mr. Moses for Hon. Mr. Wiebe
- Hon. Min. Moyes for Hon. Mr. Moses

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Mr. Balcaen

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 11) – The Oil and Gas Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le pétrole et le gaz naturel**:

Kristin Rennie, Tundra Oil & Gas Ltd.
David McGuinness, Corex Resources Ltd.

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 232) – The Victims of Impaired Drivers Commemoration Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)/Loi sur la Journée de commémoration des victimes de conducteurs aux facultés affaiblies (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)**:

Karen Reimer, Private citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 11) – The Oil and Gas Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le pétrole et le gaz naturel**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 22) – The Environment Amendment and Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'environnement et la Loi sur la réduction du volume et de la production des déchets**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 232) – The Victims of Impaired Drivers Commemoration Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)/Loi sur la Journée de commémoration des victimes de conducteurs aux facultés affaiblies (modification de la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

MLA Compton: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member from Waverley, that the report of the committee be received.

The Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton), seconded by the honourable member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz), that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development be received.

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

The motion is accordingly carried.

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Fifth Report

MLA Shannon Corbett (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Your standing committee on—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Fifth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 13, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 10) – The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (2)/Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation**
- **Bill (No. 25) – The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act/Loi sur la transparence et la responsabilité en matière de partenariats public-privé**

- **Bill (No. 26)** – *The Vital Statistics Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil*

Committee Membership

- MLA Corbett
- Mr. Guenter
- Mr. Oxenham
- Mr. Perchotte
- Hon. Min. Sandhu
- Mrs. Schott

Your Committee elected MLA Corbett as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mrs. Schott as the Vice-Chairperson.

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 10)** – *The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (2)/Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation*:

Yutaka Dirks, Canadian Centre for Housing Rights
David Grant, Private Citizen

Your Committee heard the following five presentations on **Bill (No. 25)** – *The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act/Loi sur la transparence et la responsabilité en matière de partenariats public-privé*:

Paul Moist, Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees
Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour
David Grant, Private Citizen
Molly McCracken, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
Gord Delbridge, CUPE 500

Your Committee heard the following one presentation on **Bill (No. 26)** – *The Vital Statistics Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil*:

Lou Lamari, Manitoba Bar Association

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following one written submission on **Bill (No. 10)** – *The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (2)/Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation*:

Robyn Grant, Professional Property Managers Association

Your Committee received the following one written submission on **Bill (No. 25)** – *The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act/Loi sur la transparence et la responsabilité en matière de partenariats public-privé*:

Kyle Ross, Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union

Your Committee received the following one written submission on **Bill (No. 26)** – *The Vital Statistics Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil*:

Charlie Eau, Trans Manitoba

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 10)** – *The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (2)/Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 25)** – *The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act/Loi sur la transparence et la responsabilité en matière de partenariats public-privé*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill with the following amendments:

THAT Clause 1(1) of the Bill be amended, in clause (a) of the definition "private sector entity", by adding "and" at the end of subclause (ii) and striking out subclause (iv).

THAT Clause 3(2)(b) of the Bill be amended by striking out "\$100,000,000" and substituting "\$20,000,000".

THAT Clause 12 of the Bill be amended by striking out clause (a).

- **Bill (No. 26)** – *The Vital Statistics Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

MLA Corbett: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Lagimodière (Mr. Blashko), that the report of the committee be received.

The Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Transcona (MLA Corbett), seconded by the honourable member for Lagimodière, that the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs be received.

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

The motion is accordingly passed.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Speaker, I'd like to table the sequence for the consideration of departmental Estimates in the Committee of Supply for today, only.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Wildfire Update

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures): I rise today to provide the Chamber with an update on the wildfire situation in Manitoba.

This is a very serious situation our government is monitoring closely. It is a fluid and rapidly developing situation, particularly in the Lac du Bonnet region and the Whiteshell Provincial Park and Nopiming park.

There are 24 active fires. Six of those fires are of note and require significant and prompt response.

Mandatory evacuation orders have been issued in five provincial parks, three local authorities, three Northern Affairs communities and 24 cottage subdivisions, and so far six states of local emergency have been declared.

The current status of wildfires in Manitoba is serious.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the first responders who step up when called upon and who put themselves in harm's way to protect lives, livelihoods and property. I also want to thank local communities and authorities who have been integral in helping our government and folks on the ground respond to challenges we are facing.

I want to ensure all Manitobans Emergency Management Organization and local fire departments are working around the clock and are in constant contact with our government. We are actively working to manage this situation and use the appropriate resources as necessary. All Manitobans' safety is our top priority and responsibility.

We know Manitobans are looking forward to getting out and enjoying this potential May long weekend.

In the Whiteshell region, I want to urge Manitobans to give space to let the first responders do their work, and if you don't need to be there, please stay away.

Please remain mindful that there are emergency activities in close proximity and remain aware of alerts and emergency communications as the situation develops.

Stay alert to monitor for communication from local authorities and follow their directions. Check out gov.mb.ca/wildfire for updates.

I want to send our support to all Manitobans who have been forced out of their homes and the folks on evacuation watch. We thank you for your co-operation and understanding while we work through this developing situation.

Manitobans always draw together in times like these to support one another.

Miigwech.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Today, our thoughts are once again with the many Manitobans who are facing the frightening reality of evacuation and uncertainty due to the growing wildfire crisis across the province.

As fires intensify, a state of local emergency has been declared for Nopining [*phonetic*], Wallace Lake, South Atikaki and Manitobotoboggan [*phonetic*]—or, Togogan [*phonetic*] River provincial parks.

Evacuation orders are now in effect for communities surrounding Bird, Booster, Davidson and Flanders lakes, Long and Beresford lakes and Wallace Lake, affecting hundreds of residents, cottagers, campers, business owners.

And in the Whiteshell Provincial Park, closures have expanded as out-of-control fires cross from the Ontario border, threatening more of our treasured landscapes. The emotional toll is unmeasurable.

* (13:40)

In Lac du Bonnet, flames moved swiftly through cottage country, displacing close to a thousand people overnight, some with only moments to leave their homes. These are not just stories; they are lived realities unfolding for families and individuals across our province.

To every person forced to flee: Your fear, your losses and your resilience do not go unnoticed. We stand with you.

We also are deeply grateful to our courageous teams fighting these fires around the clock. Firefighters, RCMP officers, Manitoba Hydro workers, search and rescue units, emergency co-ordinators, all

working through dangerous conditions, protecting life and property.

Manitoban Hydro has now shut down the Slave Falls and Pointe du Bois generating stations to protect their crews, an extraordinary decision that speaks to the severity of the moment. Your sacrifices are not just acts of duty; they are acts of deep service to our communities.

As this crisis continues, I urge everyone to follow evacuation orders and park closures without delay. We are not—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Honourable Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance, also known as MOVA. I speak today in honour of their 25th anniversary of supporting families of victims of homicide.

This week is national victims of survivors of crime week, and the theme is The Power of Collaboration, and I believe it's particularly fitting as there's no better example of the power of collaboration than MOVA.

Honourable Speaker, 25 years ago, then-minister of Justice, Gord Mackintosh, met with Darlene Rempel-Fillion, a mother who tragically lost her son to homicide, to discuss how better—how to better support victims as they navigate our justice system.

Ms. Rempel-Fillion voiced her concerns around the gaps in support for victims in Manitoba. With encouragement and support from former minister Mackintosh, MOVA was created.

MOVA is an organization comprised of victims helping victims. They provide a support system through court accompaniment, phone and virtual support, as well as group sharing sessions. The Manitoba government greatly appreciates MOVA's commitment to helping Manitobans in times of crisis and grief, and their work is invaluable.

That is why this year, we are providing MOVA with an additional \$15,000 in funding to further support their events and activities this year.

Ms. Rempel-Fillion has advocated for the improvement of rights for victims across Canada throughout the past 40 years. Her vision of helping victims with the grieving process from beginning, to wherever their individual journey takes them, is inspiring.

This vision has now been carried on with energy and dedication by Karen Wiebe, MOVA's current executive director. Ms. Wiebe is a trailblazer, someone who has turned her own grief following the loss of her son to homicide into action, both through her work with MOVA and by establishing the TJ's Gift Foundation.

Supporting victims of crime is a priority for our government and for my department. We'll continue to protect victims and ensure they have better access to justice and that they have the supports that they need before, during and after a trial. I am thankful for our ongoing collaboration with MOVA to achieve this goal.

I was honoured to join MOVA for their parade and 25th anniversary event on the steps of the Legislature this past weekend. The courage and resilience of the families who spoke about their lost loved ones was deeply, deeply moving.

There is a space here on the legislative grounds, Honourable Speaker; a flower garden which allows families to have a place to remember their loved ones, and as a place to remind us as legislators that there's more to be done, both in preventing homicide and in supporting the victims of it.

I'm pleased to share that a beautiful new bronze plaque will grace the garden later this spring in honour of MOVA's 25th anniversary and of all of the organization's work in supporting victims.

The pain of—caused by murder never goes away, Honourable Speaker. It leaves a void that can never be filled. But MOVA wraps its arms around bereaved family members and provides them with comfort, support and love during the most difficult of times in their lives.

As Minister of Justice, I want to say thank you to MOVA, the staff and volunteers, and everyone for their incredibly difficult work that you do in supporting families through tremendous loss and grief.

To Darlene and Karen, who join us here in the gallery today: you have made our province a better place, a more compassionate place, a place where families who have endured the unimaginable can find comfort and peace. The commitment that you demonstrate each and every day is truly remarkable.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Today I rise with deep respect and gratitude to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance, or MOVA as many Manitobans know it.

Since 2000, MOVA has been a place of hope, healing and strength for Manitobans affected by crime. As a non-profit organization, it's built on a simple but powerful idea: those who have experienced harm are often the strongest support for others on this very same journey.

MOVA's guiding principle, Victims Helping Victims, is what makes the organization truly special.

To the people at MOVA, thank you for showing what courage and compassion look like. You stand with victims, you listen, you speak up and you remind them that they are not alone.

Over the past 25 years, MOVA has quietly and with great heart supported thousands of Manitobans. Their work may not always make the headlines, but its impact is lasting and deeply felt.

Honourable Speaker, today we honour not just an organization, but a community, one built on empathy, resilience and love. On behalf of our PC caucus, I extend our sincere thank you and congratulations to MOVA on the important milestone today.

Your dedication has touched countless lives, and the hope you inspire will continue to guide and uplift our community for years to come.

To Darlene and Karen, thank you for all you do, not just today but the entire year through.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to member statements, there's some guests in the gallery that will be leaving us soon, so I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce them.

We have, seated in the public gallery, from Gordon Bell school, 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Peter Vanderhout, and they're guests of the honourable member for Wolseley (MLA Naylor).

And we welcome you here today.

There are some other guests seated in the Speaker's Gallery that I'd like to draw all honourable members' attention to. We have with us today the summer tour guides for the Legislative Building: Emilie Derbowka, Emma Fomgbami, Andreas Detillieux, and Beaudry Labossière, and they are accompanied by Claire Normandeau, manager of the Visitor Tour Program.

And we welcome you all here today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Recognizing Early Childhood Educators

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): During Early Childhood Educator Week, I had the privilege of visiting daycare centres and home-based child-care providers in Burrows, where I witnessed first-hand the incredible contributions ECEs and child-care providers make to our community. Their dedication is vital to the development of future generations and to supporting Manitoban families.

* (13:50)

I would like to commend these individuals and facilities for their indispensable work. In particular, Huron Child Care has been a longstanding pillar in our community, and I want to thank Erin Nault and Charanjit Singh for their leadership.

I also had the pleasure of visiting Shepherd's Care Day Nursery and Inspired by Wonder, both of which provide nurturing environments where children thrive.

Home-based child-care providers, whose work often goes unrecognized, are equally deserving of our gratitude. Special recognition goes to facilities such as Fun Kids Family Child Care, Lorenda and Roland Cabrerros; Happy Feet Family Daycare, Christina Arsenault; Corazon Family Home Child Care, Corazon Lubi; and Little Angels Family Daycare, Maila Cua.

Additionally, I am inspired by the collective efforts of Filipina child-care practitioners who form a strong support network through the licensed Filipino family child-care providers and educators. Their dedication and collaboration exemplify the strength of community care.

As we celebrate these remarkable individuals and facilities, let us continue to advocate for and support the vital work of ECEs and child-care providers whose contributions profoundly shape the future of our communities.

Please join me in welcoming my guests in the gallery and recognizing all ECEs watching online today.

Gardenton Ukrainian Museum & Village Society

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to recognize the Gardenton Ukrainian Museum & Village Society for celebrating their 60th anniversary this year. That means 60 years of showcasing the more than 125 years of Ukrainian settlement in our corner of the province.

Each year for the past 60 years, the Gardenton museum has hosted an exciting Ukrainian festival on the second weekend in July, where thousands of people have gathered on their beautiful park located on the banks of the Roseau River. This year's special anniversary celebration will take place on Saturday, July 12 and also serve as the official kickoff to the site's campground development project.

UMVS is the only museum of its kind in southeast Manitoba, and located on the land originally settled by the earliest Ukrainian pioneers in Manitoba dating back to the 1890s. Inside the museum, you are able to learn about the rich history and cultural heritage of those first settlers who battled tremendous odds and hardship to help build the great province we have today.

UMVS has featured an annual Ukrainian festival each year since 1965 to highlight the culture of Ukrainians in Manitoba. Many Ukrainian performers from across Manitoba have graced the outdoor stage with their music and, of course, vibrant Ukrainian dancing over those past six decades. Along with the performers, thousands of spectators have enjoyed the culture, food and entertainment.

Sixty years of success and growth couldn't have been possible without the foresight of the museum's founders, decades of volunteers and the ongoing support of the local municipality.

I would like to welcome with us in the gallery today, museum director Helen Feniuk and RM of Stuartburn reeve, Michelle Gawronsky, and together would like to invite all Manitobans to this year's anniversary celebration on July 12.

Pharmacists Manitoba

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Today we are joined by seven representatives from Pharmacists Manitoba, and I want to use this opportunity to highlight how integral they are to our health-care system.

For many Manitobans, pharmacists are who we go to when we have health-care questions, when we are getting our flu shots or when we are getting a prescription filled.

They are easily accessible, very well-educated and highly skilled individuals, and fortunately for us, they are eager and wanting to do even more to alleviate the pressures currently faced by emergency rooms and walk-in clinics.

It is important to point out that in many provinces, pharmacists are enabled to work more collaboratively

with other health-care professionals compared to here in Manitoba. For example, they are able to make therapeutic substitutions, prescribe, adapt and change doses, order lab tests, conduct point-of-care testing and even treat specific cases such as shingles.

Now, Pharmacists Manitoba have been lobbying the government for several years expressing and demonstrating their ability to contribute further to our health-care system by taking a more clinical approach and offering services through pharmacy care clinics. However, there are barriers preventing them.

Every province has provincial regulations that set out what pharmacists can and cannot do, and currently, especially compared to other provinces, pharmacists can't fully exercise their training here in Manitoba.

Pharmacists Manitoba is prepared, with 460 points of care located in more than 90 communities. We're talking 1,100 front-line health-care professionals who are ready and wanting to help fill the big gap currently in our health-care system.

Other provinces are already well on their way in providing expanded services, and my guests from Pharmacists Manitoba are here and ready to do the same for Manitoba; they just need the opportunity.

In closing, I'd like to ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the over 30 graduates from the College of Pharmacy who are set to graduate first thing tomorrow morning, and to those who have joined us today in the gallery.

Thank you.

Silver and Gary Peltier

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): I rise today to recognize two extraordinary Manitobans, Silver and Gary Peltier of Woodlands, Manitoba, who have been named Make-A-Wish Manitoba's Provincial Volunteers of the Year. This remarkable couple is the heart and soul behind a Ride for a Child's Wish—an event that has become a symbol of hope, generosity and community spirit across our province.

Since 1988, the Peltiers have hosted this annual fundraiser on their farm located along No. 6 Highway between Warren and Woodlands. What began with just 11 horseback riders and \$750 raised has grown into a massive community event, drawing more than 700 riders and attendees each year.

To date, this grassroots initiative has raised nearly \$2 million for the Children's Wish Foundation and

Make-A-Wish Manitoba, helping to grant life-changing wishes for children facing critical illnesses.

The event's success is a testament to the countless volunteers brought together by Silver and Gary, whose tireless efforts, humility and compassion have touched the lives of so many. My family and I have had the privilege to participating many times over the years. We've even performed at afternoon shows and the beloved evening barn dances. It's a true community celebration.

In 2017, Silver and Gary were honoured with Canada 150 medallions for their exceptional community service. And on June 4, they will once again be recognized at a special Make-A-Wish banquet in Winnipeg. Their legacy continues with the 35th annual Ride for a Child's Wish scheduled on August 23.

Honourable Speaker, on behalf of this House, I extend heartfelt congratulations and thanks to Silver and Gary Peltier. Your selfless dedication has made Manitoba a more compassionate and generous place, and your efforts will continue to inspire generations to come. Congratulations on this well-deserved honour.

Thank you.

Curtis Hull

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I am honoured to rise today to recognize Curtis Hull, a professional engineer, climate advocate and community builder whose work has had a lasting impact across Manitoba.

For over 20 years, Curtis has been a leading voice in climate resilience and community-based sustainability. As lead author with Manitoba Climate Action Team, he helped develop the Road to Resilience, a comprehensive plan to transition Manitoba toward clean energy, geothermal heating and reduced emissions.

Through this work, Curtis travelled to communities such as Sioux Valley Dakota Nation and Swan Lake First Nation, supporting grassroots climate planning and helping secure federal funding for locally led projects.

* (14:00)

Curtis also worked in Northern Manitoba for over five years, completing sustainability projects in three diesel-dependent First Nations communities. His efforts supported local resilience, reduced emissions, created opportunities for self-reliance in some of Manitoba's most remote communities.

He currently serves as the vice-chair of Sustainable Building Manitoba and as a board member of Efficiency Manitoba. In these roles, he's advanced energy efficient building practices, supported climate education and helped professionals integrate sustainable solutions into their work. His leadership reflects a commitment to practical, forward-looking change.

Beyond environmental work, Curtis has made significant contributions to Winnipeg's urban and cultural life. He co-founded Bike to Work Day and played a key role in the creation of Winnipeg's active transportation network.

For more than twenty years, he co-ordinated the Banff Mountain Film Festival in Winnipeg, and he's also contributed to food rescue initiatives and the development of co-operative housing in the city.

Curtis's dedication extends to business as well. As a senior leader at Vansco Electronics, he helped grow a small Winnipeg company into a global enterprise, demonstrating innovation and sustainability can go hand in hand.

Honourable Speaker, Curtis Hull's work has touched the lives, built communities and strengthened our province. I invite all members to join me in thanking this outstanding Fort Garry resident's contributions to our province.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Prior to oral questions, there are some more guests in the gallery I'd like to introduce.

We have in the public gallery Gayle Romantex [*phonetic*], Pharmacists Manitoba president; Marilyn Sidhu, Pharmacists Manitoba board member; Marianna Pozdirca, Pharmacists Manitoba board member; Armaine Laurazeno [*phonetic*], Pharmacists Manitoba student liaison and pharmacy student; Sunjin Han, pharmacy student; Britt Kural, pharmacy practice adviser, Pharmacists Manitoba; Andrea Lear, CEO, Pharmacists Manitoba.

We welcome you here today.

We also have seated in the public gallery Luke Martens, who is a political science student from the University of Manitoba and the guest of the honourable member for Tuxedo (MLA Compton).

We welcome you here today.

Further, we have seated in the public gallery John Hendrickson from The Pas, who has won the king trapping contest there 12 times now. He is here as a

guest of the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk), and we welcome you here today.

Also in the public gallery, we have with us Darlene Rempel-Fillion, Karen Wiebe, Chad Wiebe, who are the guests of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General and the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

Behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

And then, I suppose, we must go to oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans are worried about their property taxes going up under this NDP government.

We've asked over a dozen times what the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) plan is, and he's denying Manitobans real answers.

Yesterday, I received a letter from a Manitoban whose education property taxes jumped 54 per cent under this NDP. In the letter, the Manitoba states that under the previous PC government 50 per cent rebate, the homeowner was paying \$880, but now, under this NDP Premier, they are paying almost \$1,400, an increase of \$520.

What does this Premier have to say to Manitobans and this resident and the other 132,000 property owners in Winnipeg that are seeing historic property tax increases under this NDP?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): Under the previous former PC administration, the member opposite well knows that they spent seven and a half years—every single day of each of those seven and a half years—working hard to make Manitobans' lives more expensive.

That's what they were focused on. They were focused on how do we make Manitobans' lives more difficult, more expensive; how do we hurt health care, how do we hurt education? That was their objective.

On this side of the House, we're taking a different approach. We're working to make life more affordable for Manitobans. We did that in our first budget, and thanks to our great Finance Minister, we did it in our second.

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

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, it's a shame that the Premier won't even have the courtesy to stand up and answer that question, so he puts up his failing Health Minister to answer that question. Maybe this minister also wants to fail on the economy as well.

The Premier has conveniently—the Deputy Premier has conveniently left out that Manitobans were getting more money back under the PCs than they are under this NDP government. And I quote from this Premier: We'll keep the 50 per cent residential education property tax rebate, end quote.

No surprise, Honourable Speaker; another broken promise by this Premier. Now seniors on a limited income are paying more.

Did this Premier tell Manitobans, with that smile on his face, that he will be rise—raising education property taxes to historic levels in this province?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, his jealousy is showing. This is the second day in a row he's talking about the Premier's wonderful smile. What's up with that? Manitobans want to see a happy Premier who's hard at work, making their lives more affordable. That's what Manitobans want.

Honourable Speaker, today we are proud to announce that our government has taken another step towards knocking down the interprovincial trade barriers. Our Premier signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Ontario to boost the flow of goods, services and investments between workers in both of our provinces. Our Premier is getting it done for Manitobans.

The Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition—[interjection]

Order.

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, let's be very clear here: No one is jealous over a creepy, fake smile. Also, no one is jealous over a D- Health Minister. The Premier needs to stop with the fake news and photo shoots and start governing for Manitobans.

A senior on a limited budget reached out to this Premier's office to explain that actions of his government have caused a skyrocket of \$522 under this NDP government. This senior has spoken to neighbours and they're facing the same thing under this

NDP. These are real problems. Manitobans are asking for real answers.

Why is this Premier (Mr. Kinew) and this failed Health Minister not answering the question? Why have they increased education property taxes in Manitoba to historically high levels?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, our Premier understands that Manitobans have very real needs and challenges that were unaddressed for seven and a half years under a callous PC government that focused on making life more expensive and hurting the structures that provide for Manitobans every single day.

That's why, in our very first budget, we made sure to freeze the fuel tax. We cut that fuel tax right down to zero for Manitobans. For seven and a half years, each and every day of their time in office, the PCs charged Manitobans that fuel tax.

In our second budget, Honourable Speaker, we're making sure that Manitobans can save money on their property taxes. A \$1,500 rebate that's going to go up to \$1,600. Eighty per cent—almost 80 per cent of Manitobans are going to be better off as a result.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

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

Increase Concerns for Small Business

Mr. Khan: Manitobans, you can see it once again. The Premier is not answering the questions and now the Deputy Premier, failed Health Minister, is not answering the questions.

Honourable Speaker, I'll—now I'll pivot from seniors to small businesses. We've heard from dozens of small businesses that are—also experienced the pinch under this NDP government. One has reached out and shared that the education portion of their tax bill went from \$8,600 under the previous PC government to \$13,250 under this NDP government—an increase of \$4,650 in just one year. I will table that today for the minister—failed Health Minister—to read.

The Premier talked about targeting Bay Street. Seems like he's targeting businesses right here in Winnipeg.

* (14:10)

MLA Asagwara: Speaking of targeting, perhaps the Leader of the Opposition will finally stand in his place today and apologize by way of action for targeting the murder victims of a serial killer.

That member opposite is keeping a rebate, a \$160,000 rebate. He spent \$650,000 attacking the murder victims of a serial killer in this province, one of the most disgusting things we've ever seen during a political campaign in our province's, and our nation's, history.

Will the member opposite stand in his place today and return those dollars to the hard-working Manitobans that he took it from to do that harm?

Mr. Khan: Honourable Speaker, I'm asking questions about affordability, about Manitobans that are feeling the pinch under this NDP government.

What does this Deputy Premier do? Doesn't even answer the question—completely avoids it.

Small businesses are feeling the heat under this NDP—a \$4,650 increase for one small business under this NDP—at a time where small businesses are worried about how they're going to make payroll, how they're going to pay their rent and how they're going to pay for supplies they need.

This NDP Premier is directly attacking them. Their Premier falsely claims, and I quote: Everyone is better off. End quote.

Can the Premier or Deputy Premier stand up and tell Manitobans how a small business is better off paying an increase of \$4,650 under this NDP?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition really needs to take a closer look at the '25-26 budget. Our budget cuts the payroll tax for businesses here in Manitoba. We're making life more affordable for the small business owners.

In addition to that, Honourable Speaker, because we know that safety for small businesses is important and it comes at a cost, our government has \$10 million in our budget for security rebates, again, for small businesses right here in Manitoba.

Our team has brought that forward because we understand that small businesses need some more support, and we're going to keep doing that work. But the member opposite is keeping the hard-earned tax dollars of Manitobans, a rebate for attacking the murder victims of a serial killer.

Why hasn't he apologized? And will he give those hard-working dollars back to those Manitobans?

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

Mr. Khan: Here we have in Manitoba, under this Kinew government, homeowners are worse off, seniors are worse off, health care is worse off and small businesses are worse off, all under this NDP government.

Another small business I spoke with was assessed with a 90 per cent increase of their small business—90 per cent—90 per cent. That doesn't affect the businesses that have a \$2-million payroll, Deputy Premier.

Why is the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and Deputy Premier so focused on making life impossible for small businesses in Manitoba?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I want to remind everybody in this House and Manitobans who are paying attention that part of the reason why we're facing economic challenges in this province is because people like the Leader of the Opposition have thanked Donald Trump for tariffs.

The Leader of the Opposition does not stand on the side of Manitobans or Canadians. He thanks people who are going after our economy. He doesn't care about small businesses in Manitoba.

Our government is cutting the payroll tax, offering a security rebate for Manitoba small-business owners and we're making life generally more affordable when that member opposite only cared about making life more expensive when he was on this side of the House. And, Honourable Speaker, that's why he's now on that side of the House.

Impaired Driving Legislation—Bill 5 Request to Support Amendments

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Yesterday, I joined Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Reimer family at an event to call on Manitobans to be vigilant and alert the police about suspected impaired drivers.

It's unfortunate the minister opted not to attend, as I know many of the attendees wanted to call on him to reconsider his opposition to amendments to Bill 5, amendments to strengthen impaired driving legislation.

Will he? Yes or no?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Honourable Speaker, I was honoured to spend time with Jordyn's family yesterday, to speak to them personally, to thank them personally for their advocacy. Their strength and their activism has been so amazing, and it is such an important part of the conversation.

I know that they recognize the work that we're doing is unprecedented, that, in Manitoba, there's more work to do; but this bill is a bill in the right direction, so a step in the right direction on clamping down on impaired driving. We do it in Jordyn's memory, as we do for all victims of impaired driving.

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

Mr. Balcaen: It was a simple question posed to this minister: yes or no, and he failed to answer that question. It's quite telling how this minister acts: when families are in the gallery, he pretends he cares, yet he sits in his place and denies leave to send a bill to committee, and to those same family members call him out for playing politics with commemorating victims.

Families have called on this minister time and time again to act. Why is he refusing to act on Bill 5 amendments?

Mr. Wiebe: We—we're listening to victims. As I said, had a chance to talk directly with Jordyn's family yesterday. Of course, we met with MADD Canada, in collaboration, in developing Bill 5, in ensuring that we were getting it right, that we were taking the steps that we can take here in the province of Manitoba.

There's more work to do. We heard from Jordyn's family yesterday at the dedication ceremony of the bench in her community that a big part of this is education; it's working with law enforcement. We're supporting law enforcement in the efforts that they're taking, or—around impaired driving as well.

And this is about taking absolutely every step; and this should be a non-partisan issue. I ask the member opposite to join in—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Brandon West, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Balcaen: Organized labour raised concerns about Bill 25, and this government scrambled all over itself to amend that bill time and time and time again. The only time this minister considered amendments to Bill 5 was when he needed to clarify that a drunk driver had to kill people on multiple occasions before he would act.

The minister prioritized the driving privileges of convicted drunk drivers over those of Manitoba families who have lost loved ones.

Will he support the amendments to Bill 5 today as MADD Canada, MADD Winnipeg and the Reimer family are calling for?

Mr. Wiebe: What the member opposite put on the record is completely false. And this is the problem that Manitobans have with the party opposite and the unserious way they deal with issues like this.

MADD Canada is in full support of Bill 5, full stop. They want to see this legislation move forward because they know that every time they knocked on the former minister's door, nobody answered. We're answering the call, Honourable Speaker; we're going to make a difference, because we care about the issue, we care about making our roads safer. We are listening to victims. We're not making political hay out of this issue.

We're going to make our—a difference every single year. The members opposite need to get on board.

Water Conservation and Stewardship Budget Reduction Inquiry

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): The key objectives for water stewardship initiatives include improving water quality, aquatic habitat, fisheries, drinking water and climate change adaptation.

Most Manitobans would agree, these are valuable objectives.

Why did this NDP government slash the budget by 25 per cent?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I find it a little disingenuous, to be perfectly honest, Honourable Speaker, when the failed PC government is asking questions about cuts. They were the ones that cut the department; they were the ones that cut organizations like the Green Action Centre, like the Manitoba Eco-Network and like the Climate Change Connection.

We're making investments each and every day; we're reaching out to that, and we have a serious plan to actually address climate change and environmental issues.

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

* (14:20)

Mr. Nesbitt: Honourable Speaker, this minister's own budget documents clearly show a 25 per cent reduction. This brings dry conditions and accompanying water restrictions by many municipalities, reinforces the

need for water conservation as part of our long-term water management strategy.

Why would this NDP government slash funding for public education to provoke water conservation, or does he no longer believe that every drop counts?

MLA Moyes: The fact of the matter is that we have great relationships with groups like our watershed districts that are doing incredible work each and every day to protect our watersheds and to ensure that we have clean environments right across our great province.

The members opposite absolutely have no leg to stand on.

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

Mr. Nesbitt: This minister continues to deny a 25 per cent cut to water stewardship. Prairie Provinces Water Board, Red River Basin Commission, and Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium all receive partnership funding through water stewardship initiatives. A 25 per cent funding cut means a lot fewer project grants.

Why is this NDP government no longer supporting these partnerships?

MLA Moyes: What our government is doing is taking a comprehensive approach to a whole host of environmental issues. We are committed to fighting climate change, full stop. That is why we are building more clean energy. We are investing in ensuring that Manitobans can transform the way that they get around, including with EVs, and that is why we're protecting more and more nature, including the Seal River Watershed.

We're moving forward. They should get on board.

Rural 911 Emergency Services Calls Not Reaching Dispatch

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Honourable Speaker, I rose recently to ask about the circumstances that may have contributed to the death of a man in the RM of Fisher.

The NDP government's response was underwhelming. Hopefully they've—finally have some answers for Manitobans.

I will ask the question again: Honourable Speaker, can the minister share how many rural 911 calls are not getting through to our call centres?

Hon. Mike Moroz (Minister of Innovation and New Technology): Honourable Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for the important question, and as we have in the past in this Chamber I want to extend condolences to the family concerned. I want to table in the House today a letter sent on April 9 to the CEO of TELUS expressing our concerns over the situation.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: Again, no answer and again, the wrong minister.

The Emergency 911 Public Safety Answering Point Act is administered by the Emergency Management Organization, which itself is the responsibility of the Minister of Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, the member for Wolseley (MLA Naylor).

Honourable Speaker, can the minister responsible for EMO tell Manitobans how many 911 rural calls are not getting through to our call centre?

MLA Moroz: Again, I want to thank the member opposite for the question. As a former teacher I'm always happy to walk back over material previously covered in class to see if students can collect it this time.

Cellphone services, of course, connected with my department, it's managed through the federal government, through the CRTC. We're working with them to try and improve conditions for Manitobans across the province in the hopes that this sort of situation never happens again.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: While the minister talks a big talk, it happened again last night with the wildfires in southeastern Manitoba. I've heard nothing that would indicate that this minister or their failing NDP government has any grasp on the seriousness of this issue.

I will be asking the same questions on behalf of Manitobans until a satisfactory answer is given: How many rural 911 calls are not getting through to the public safety communications centre?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier): The question the member raises is a very serious one. Our government is working very closely with different providers to make sure that the tragedy that occurred never happens again, that we have the service in rural communities and across Northern communities that is

there when Manitobans make that really difficult call in those really difficult situations when they arise.

The member did raise wildfires. I just want to really reiterate to folks in the Whiteshell Provincial Park area, if you do not need to be in the park and you do not need to be in the areas where first responders need to access, we are asking you to stay away.

This is a quickly evolving situation. We need all Manitobans to follow the instructions very, very clearly and stay informed, and we'll keep you informed as government in terms of the wildfire situation.

Manitoba Housing Units 24-Hour Security Guards

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, 24-hour security guards have worked very well at Oak Tree Towers, according to residents and Public Safety.

How many Manitoba Housing facilities have 24-hour on-site security guards?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): Safety and security in our Manitoba Housing buildings is of the utmost priority for our government. It wasn't under the failed former, callous government. They, in fact, cut security. They cut tenant service co-ordinators.

These are the very folks that kept these folks safe and secure; they kept them tenanted in these buildings. So for that member to get up and ask questions like that, that member should apologize to that—those folks that they made homeless under their time in government.

They sold off housing. They're holding up Bill 12. Their leader can pass Bill 12 that protects social housing today. Whose home do they want to sell next?

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

Oak Tree Towers Permanent Security Services

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I'll speak about one of the facilities that does have 24-hour security: that's 355 Kennedy.

Honourable Speaker, can the minister explain why security guards are not permanent at Oak Tree Towers?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): There is still security at Oak Tree Towers. Nothing has changed. In fact, we've beefed up the security there.

Since 2021, they were knocking on the former government's door asking for security upgrades in this building. They wanted cameras, they wanted key card access. They wanted a rock guard window put in their front door.

Did they respond? No. Guess who responded? Our government responded. We put those measures in place and we've invested over \$5 million into Oak Tree Towers.

So again, I'll ask the members opposite: Why is the leader holding up Bill 12, and whose home do they want to sell next?

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

MLA Bereza: Honourable Speaker, the residents have told me that this problem has gotten tremendously worse over the last year and a half. Oak Tree Towers was told by the security guard company they were done on June 4. Yet, yesterday, the minister's office said, no end date.

Will the minister stop playing with the people's lives of Oak Tree Towers? Honourable Speaker, will this minister listen to the residents, install security guards permanently at Oak Tree Towers today, yes or no?

Ms. Smith: The only ones who played with people's lives in this province is members opposite when they were in government.

They were selling off housing and putting people in encampments, allowing them to go into deeper addictions, allowing our streets to become unsafe. They were firing police officers, they were firing tenant service co-ordinators, they were firing security guards that actually kept these very buildings safe and secure.

We're not going to take that approach. We're continuing to work with municipalities, including the mayor of Portage la Prairie, Mayor Knox.

So I'd invite that member to get on board, come and work collaboratively because that's what we're all doing. We're all trying to make our province a better province, and we'll continue to do that work.

* (14:30)

That's why members opposite—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Expansion of Pharmacists' Prescribing Authority Prescriptions for Contraceptives

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Across Canada, pharmacists are playing an increasing role in expanding access to primary care, particularly in areas like contraception. In BC, pharmacists have been prescribing contraception for over a year, and it has quickly become the most common category of prescriptions they issue.

The president of the Canadian Medical Association has publicly called for a more team-based model of care, one that enables pharmacists and others to help reduce pressures on physicians.

Honourable Speaker, does this government plan to enable and empower pharmacists who directly assess and prescribe contraception?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): The short answer to that question for the member for Tyndall Park is yes. That is a very reasonable expansion of scope for pharmacists in Manitoba. We want pharmacists who graduate in our great province to know that right here, in their own province, they can practice to their full scope and that their scope is going to be enhanced.

And I want to thank the pharmacists who are here with us today, not only for choosing that incredibly rewarding career path, but for also advocating and using their voice to make the profession even stronger. I've had the pleasure to sit down with many pharmacists over the past 18 months or so.

We are listening, we're taking action, we're making changes so you can practice better in our own province.

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

Impact on Wait Times for Health Services

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, according to the Canadian Pharmacists Association, Manitoba currently ranks near the bottom of Canada for pharmacist-prescribing authority. This means Manitoba is missing out on accessible, front-line health services that are available in other provinces.

Just as an example, oftentimes people are waiting five-plus hours at walk-in clinics for antibiotics, for an ear infection or strep throat. If pharmacists had more

prescribing authority, wait times in clinics and emergency rooms could go down.

Does the minister agree that, if they were to give more tools to pharmacists such as prescribing authority, that the wait times for health-care services in Manitoba would go down?

MLA Asagwara: You'll note that the members opposite didn't clap for the first question the member for Tyndall Park asked, which was about reproductive health care. And I do find that really interesting and pretty telling.

But to answer her question directly: yes. I wholeheartedly agree, which is why our government, after seven and a half years of no action being taken by the previous PC administration on birth control or other areas, perhaps because they don't support reproductive health care advancing in this province, our government is taking very real steps.

We believe that pharmacists should be able to expand their scope. We want to make sure that our province is not only competitive, but a leader in this space. There are regulatory and legislative changes that need to be made. Our government is moving forward in making those.

We are going to keep pharmacists in this province up to speed as to how this work is moving along, and we're going to make sure they get to practice in the ways that they deserve and want to, to the benefit of all Manitobans.

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

Request for Funding Supports for Pharmacies

MLA Lamoureux: Honourable Speaker, here are a couple of examples. In Saskatchewan, pharmacists are now assessing and prescribing for strep, ear infections and other common ailments. In Nova Scotia, pharmacy-care clinics have reduced unnecessary ER visits by more than 9 per cent.

Now, here in Manitoba, pharmacists are specifically educated to help patients with common ailments and reduce their visits to the emergency room.

Will the minister in their mandate commit to enabling and funding Manitoba pharmacists to help their patients access the care they need faster?

MLA Asagwara: Again, I really appreciate that question from the member for Tyndall Park. We're on the same page on this, we really are. We want to make

sure that Manitobans have greater access to primary care.

I've had the opportunity to visit a number of pharmacies, whether it's in my own constituency or others, and I've been able to see the power of improving primary-care access when it's with pharmacists. What that means for folks in communities who maybe don't have a different primary-care provider, or who feel connected to the primary-care provider who is their pharmacist, we want to enhance those relationships. We want Manitobans to have more access to primary care, not less, and so we are going to be taking those steps.

I also want to highlight that pharmacy techs have a big role to play in this, and we're also exploring ways to enhance their scope of practice as well.

Plan to End Homelessness Housing Investment Announcement

MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo): Over seven and a half years, the former PC government forced hundreds of Manitobans to live in bus shacks, under bridges and on the streets. Members opposite sold people's homes right out from underneath them. But our government has been moving Manitobans out of encampments and into safe and supportive housing through our Your Way Home plan.

Can the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness update the House on how our government is helping Manitobans find their way home?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): I want to thank my colleague, the member from Tuxedo, for that great question.

Last week we announced that our government supported 33 people moving from encampments into safe, supportive housing. And we're going to continue that great work by investing \$6.4 million to open up 67 housing units, which will help dozens more find their way home with the support that they need to live successfully.

For years, the former PC government sold homes out from underneath Manitobans and forced them to live in encampments. But on this side of the House, we believe that in such a rich country as Canada, no one should be forced to live in a tent. That's why our government will continue to always support folks in Manitoba finding their way home.

Miigwech.

Education Property Taxes Increase Concerns

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield-Ritchot): A business owner in the Minister of Finance's own constituency has seen their education property taxes jump by almost 25 per cent.

This Premier (Mr. Kinew) talks about tax incentives to their American businesses, so why does he punish Manitoba companies with higher tax bills? And I table the tax bill for the minister's photo album of shame.

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Our government is making life more affordable for Manitobans, and we're reducing costs for businesses. Of course, the Minister of Health earlier referenced the fact that we cut payroll taxes this year to support businesses and providing the \$10-million security rebate program to help them do that important work of making their businesses safer while they reduce their costs.

That is something—right.

You know, we're also continuing to do that important work of making life more affordable for all Manitobans. We've reduced, of course, school, education taxes with our \$1,600 Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit. We've also, of course, cut income taxes. We froze hydro rates, and we cut the gas tax.

We are doing the work of making life more affordable for all Manitobans.

Mr. Schuler: And then this minister raised that individual's taxes by \$7,000; that is a tax increase, not a cut.

Those that are building our economy are being punished by this government. They are punished for trying to keep Manitobans employed and punished for trying to grow jobs in spite of this NDP government.

Why is this minister punishing his own constituents with higher taxes?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, we're making life more affordable for Manitobans and we're lowering costs for business, and while we do that we're also making sure that our education system has the funding it needs to make sure we support our students in a good way. That includes bringing forward an important universal school nutrition program that's helping kids to succeed.

Now, what did the members opposite do with education dollars, Honourable Speaker? Well, they sent cheques to billionaires, including a one-million-dollar, forty-eight-thousand-dollar cheque in 2022 to Cadillac Fairview.

While they send cheques to billionaires and hand out money to billionaires, you know what we do? We hand out food to children in our schools to help them succeed.

Highway 227 Surface Reconstruction Project Construction and Completion Timeline

Mr. Trevor King (Lakeside): Honourable Speaker, Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure's website lists the Highway 227 surface reconstruction project from road 430 to PTH 6 as in the design phase.

Will the minister advise when construction will commence and what the anticipated completion date will be?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): You know, I just want to take the opportunity to—first of all, to say that construction projects that are scheduled can be found on the—online on the Transportation website.

But since I do have an opportunity to stand today, really want to take the opportunity to thank the department of emergency management. Staff have been working around the clock, on a—on—on helping people be safe and evacuating communities.

* (14:40)

And I really want to encourage Manitobans to please heed evacuation orders. It will save your life; it can save the life of your family as well as our firefighters working in that area.

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

Reduction in Projects for Highway

Mr. King: The 2023 MPI five-year plan listed several projects for Highway 227 with a total project scope of 72 kilometres of reconstruction. The NDP five-year plan now lists 59 kilometres of work on Highway 227.

Can the minister explain what has changed as it regards to Highway 227 to warrant the reduction in scope?

MLA Naylor: When it comes to highway infrastructure, evaluations are made based on the use of the roadway, the frequency of traffic, new businesses that might be developing in the area, safety—especially safety. All of those things are taken into consideration and then priorities are set.

With over 19,000 kilometres of highways in the province, we can't do every project at once. Our budget is substantially higher than any year from the

previous government's budgets. And we are rebuilding and building up this province.

**Consumer Protection From Spiking Fuel Prices
Request to Allow Public Utilities Board to Regulate**

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Manitobans are about to enjoy another long weekend, but what they don't enjoy is the price of gas spiking each and every weekend. The type of price gouging—*[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —by big oil companies hurts Manitoba families.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) vowed to do something about it and I quote him: Every single long weekend, the gas prices go up—*[interjection]*

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

The government bench needs to come to order.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'll quote the Premier: Every single long weekend, the gas prices go up without fail. Is it because the oil prices have gone up? No, he said. In fact, the Premier went on to accuse the big oil companies of engaging in unfair business practices. And I'll table the article.

The Premier promised he would give the Public Utilities Board the power to regulate gas to protect consumers while making big polluters pay. Halfway through his mandate, that hasn't happened.

He hasn't protected Manitoba consumers. He hasn't made the big polluters pay. He's broken yet another election promise.

How can Manitobans trust this Premier?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, if the member is asking if we did something about fuel costs in Manitoba, the answer is yes.

Not only did we bring in, of course, a fuel tax holiday for an entire year, saving Manitobans across the province hundreds of dollars, but we also brought in a permanent 10 per cent cut to the fuel tax, ongoing.

And while we do that, we're moving forward with important climate initiatives like the electrification of transportation, the electrification of home heating, and we're doing that because this team, this party cares about affordability. We care about climate and we're getting the job done.

Mr. Wasyliw: This Premier made a promise during the last election to regulate gas prices through the Public Utilities Board. He pointed the Atlantic provinces that do regulate prices.

In those provinces, gas prices don't spike on long weekends and their citizens are protected from gas price gouging. There have been 13 long weekends since the election and 13 weekends when Manitoba families had been price-gouged.

This Premier had two legislative sessions to bring laws in to allow the Public Utilities Board to regulate the gas price, yet this Premier has failed to act.

Will this Premier now admit he has broken yet another promise to Manitobans, and will he finally explain why he's siding with big oil companies instead of Manitoba families?

MLA Sala: Again, not only are we making life more affordable for Manitobans, but we're also doing the important work of moving forward on decarbonization here in Manitoba.

But we're also helping Manitobans to save money while they help us in doing that work with our amazing EV rebate that's been delivered by our Minister for Environment and Climate Change—not only on new EVs but also on used EVs because this party cares about all Manitobans and helping them to make the best climate decisions they can.

This side of the House, we will continue to work towards helping improve our climate and work on our environmental challenges while we make leaf-life more affordable. Manitobans can count on us to do that every single day.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

And I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone. Today's question period was almost enjoyable.

PETITIONS

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: the impaired driver and the accomplice.

The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from the citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service's, WPS, investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standards and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that the decision to prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba, and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within the existing system, and, in the absence of a prescribed process when a disagreement exists on charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December 2024, the WPS reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice systems to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute the accomplice in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

And, Honourable Speaker, this petition was signed by Maureen Lee, Edith Graham, Bernice McMullan and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Opposition to Releasing Repeat Offenders

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Manitoba Legislature.

The background to this petition is follows:

(1) Kellie Verwey, a beloved young woman from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, was tragically killed in a car crash caused by a repeat violent offender with a long criminal history.

* (14:50)

(2) Despite repeated violations of his bail conditions, the offender was free to roam the streets and to ultimately claim Kellie's life. This tragedy was entirely preventable.

(3) While the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction, provinces have been given the responsibility for the administration of justice, allowing for meaningful provincial action on bail reform to ensure public safety.

(4) Other provinces have taken proactive steps to strengthen bail enforcement, but Manitoba has not used all the available tools to address this issue effectively.

(5) The provincial government has the ability and the responsibility to advocate for and implement measures that protect its citizens by ensuring that repeat violent offenders are not released into our communities without proper safeguards.

(6) Immediate action is required to close gaps in the justice system that allows criminals to remain free, which puts innocent Manitobans at risk.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to take immediate and decisive action on bail reform to address serious deficits in enforcement by utilizing all available provincial mechanisms to strengthen warrant enforcement, increasing bail supervision, and opposing release of offenders, thus ensuring that repeat violent offenders are held accountable and that public safety is prioritized over leniency; and

(2) To urge the provincial government to lobby the federal government to immediately repeal provisions of the Criminal Code that allow for the continued victimization of law-abiding Manitobans while granting repeat offenders additional rights.

And this is signed by Neil Metcalfe, Pam Wilson, Cassy [*phonetic*] Dilworth and many other Manitobans.

Death of Jordyn Reimer—Judicial Review Request

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): I wish to present the following petition.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) On May 1, 2022, Jordyn Reimer, 24 years of age, was killed by an impaired driver while she was acting as a designated driver.

(2) There are two people legally culpable for her death: an—the impaired driver and the accomplice. The driver was charged, but the second criminal, the accomplice, was not—has not been held accountable.

(3) A concerned citizen took the keys from the impaired driver earlier in the evening to ensure he could not drive impaired. The accomplice retrieved the keys from this citizen under false pretenses and knowingly provided the impaired driver with access to the vehicle.

(4) The Winnipeg Police Service investigation provided adequate evidence to meet the charging standard and recommended charges be laid against the accomplice. The Crown prosecutors declined the—to prosecute the accomplice.

(5) The family of Jordyn Reimer has called for the prosecution of the accomplice and that the decision to not prosecute be reviewed independently.

(6) As recently as 2022, there is precedent to refer criminal files of decisions to not proceed with—sorry, prosecution to extra-provincial departments of justice for review. This was done with the Peter Nygård file, which ultimately led to a reversal in the decision to not prosecute, and charges were laid.

(7) An out-of-province review is supported by MADD Canada, MADD Manitoba and by Manitobans.

(8) The family has exhausted every avenue within existing system, and, in the absence of prescribed process when a disagreement exists in charging standards, the only option is to request an independent out-of-province review.

(9) In December 2024, the Winnipeg Police Service reported an alarming number of impaired drivers in the holiday Check Stop program. Extending criminal culpability beyond the driver to those who engage in overt actions to facilitate impaired driving will save lives.

(10) Manitobans deserve to have confidence in the provincial government and justice systems to make decisions that achieve true justice for victims and their families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to order an out-of-province review of the prosecutor's decision to not prosecute 'accompliance' in the death of Jordyn Reimer.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans, including Laurent Peons [*phonetic*]-Peon [*phonetic*], Chantal Treault [*phonetic*] and Zach [*phonetic*]-Zeke Zarir [*phonetic*] and other Manitobans.

The Speaker: There are no other petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Can you please resolve the House into the Committee of Supply for the consideration of departmental Estimates.

The Speaker: Been announced that the House will now dissolve into Committee of Supply.

Will the deputy Chair please take the Chair—will the Deputy Speaker please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH, SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

* (15:40)

The Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open. Questions?

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I just want to make sure I get this correct—it is honourable Chair? [*interjection*] Thank you.

Honourable Chair, three months ago, wait times in Southern Health for MRIs were approximately six to eight months. Today, that wait time has skyrocketed to 10 months. This is the longest waiting period of time in all of the province.

What is the government currently doing to alleviate the number of weeks waiting in the Southern Health region?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

* (15:50)

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): While I wait for a bit more information, I'll take the opportunity to talk a bit about what we're doing on the diagnostic side. You know, MRIs: the technology is just technology without having people to staff them; I think the member's well aware of that.

I had the opportunity to meet with physicians in Portage la Prairie to hear from their perspective what their priorities are. They actually made clear that mammography was a greater priority, making sure that breast cancer screenings accessibility was more of a—was more accessible, rather. And, you know, there were concerns expressed about the approach that the member for Portage la Prairie has taken.

However, everyone was in agreement that more capacity, generally, is what's needed. We need more capacity in health care. And what I found really fascinating—it's a big, beautiful, much larger footprint hospital that's being established now in Portage la Prairie, and one would think that the previous government had done their due diligence and really done the work to identify how they're going to staff it. And they didn't, you know. It's—which is really concerning. Really, really problematic.

And so, as the member is well aware, our government has made very clear that our priority is, first and foremost, to staff the front lines of the health-care system; that a bed is just a bed without people to provide care at the bedside. And that a building is just a building without people in it to provide services to Manitobans.

And so our top priority has been to make sure that we are doing the work of retaining folks in the health-care system; that we are training more folks to have a path to practice in our health-care system no matter where in the province they want to serve in health care; and that we are actively recruiting folks.

And so the member, given the fact that a mammography is such a big priority, certainly in the Portage community, and physicians have identified that, I'm happy to share with the member that our government has taken steps to proactively recruit folks, technologist students, into the path of taking additional training for mammography so that they can get a job right away in that area of health care. And that's an approach we're going to continue to take, to make sure that we're reaching out to learners while they're learning, before they graduate to let them know about the opportunities that are available to them to get more training, the opportunities by way of employment in our own province.

Whereas, previously, folks were not hearing from anybody consistently at all, in terms of what the opportunities were that existed for them, particularly in rural Manitoba. And as a result, we were losing folks to Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions because they were literally coming into our classrooms and letting people know what the jobs that existed in their jurisdiction.

So we've taken a different approach. We're proactively reaching out to student learners. We're letting them know about the additional training opportunities, providing supports so that we lower those barriers so they get those training opportunities and that we are giving them a letter of offer for employment before they graduate. And we've seen success as a result of taking that approach.

Portage la Prairie—you know, there's a lot of effort right now being put into making sure that we are—we have a strong sense of the health-care human resource capacity that's required. When we met with the physicians and leaders there, we really sent them away with this ask, like, really outline for us what that needs to look like, right. I know that you were never given any indication from the previous government or direction around having a strong plan in place in that regard, but we really do need to know what additional human resource we're going to need to properly staff this hospital, and what areas that perhaps we need to be paying closer attention to than others.

So certainly, you know, our government has prioritized doing the work of staffing the health-care system. We have a net-new over 1,600 health-care workers on the front lines of our health-care system, including in Portage la Prairie, including across rural Manitoba. It's not nearly enough. There's a tremendous amount of work that we need to do in order to continue to move in the right direction; we're committed to doing that.

And we're committed to continuing to meet with and learn from the experts in Portage la Prairie, who just want to work in partnership. You know, these are folks who didn't have the opportunity to sit down with former government and offer their insights, and our door is wide open for them. We want to sit with them, have those conversations, know where the priorities are, where their needs need to be met and make sure we're taking the right steps.

Diagnostics is a huge priority. You know, we're recruiting a number of new doctors. We have a net-new over 160 physicians in this province, a number of them in rural Manitoba. We need to make sure that we've got all of these new doctors and we also have a diagnostic capacity to meet their needs, right, because they're requesting more tests and procedures for their patients.

And so we're working directly with the leads on this to make sure that we have a plan in place to retain and to train the workforce we need to provide those services.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Bereza: Thank you to the minister for those questions.

Just so that we're on the same page, I'm on the gov.mb.ca website, the diagnostic services MRI scans, if you wanted to compare notes on that, and where those wait times are coming from.

My question to the minister is, in speaking with a number of the techs at St. Boniface and at Health Sciences Centre regarding MRIs and other diagnostic equipment, a number of our students in Manitoba and Saskatchewan—or, sorry, Manitoba, are having the opportunity to do distance education with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the BC Institute of Technology, I believe it's called.

The issue is that we're losing some of those people because they're being offered jobs, you know, by taking that. Is there any look right now from the department, looking at offering something like a distance education through Red River or whoever it may be here in Manitoba?

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

An Honourable Member: Yes, that's a really—

The Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

MLA Asagwara: Sorry for jumping the gun a little bit there.

That's a really great question. I really appreciate that question, you know, asking about what are we doing to make post-secondary training opportunities more accessible for learners who want to pursue that career path.

What I can tell you is that all options are on the table for our government. We—our department works very closely—and the member will know that our department is not responsible for post-secondary education; that's the Minister responsible for Advanced Education and Training. So some of these questions might be better posed in that Estimates.

But what I can say is that we work very closely together, and health care's our government's number one priority. So, really, we're taking an all-of-government approach to finding new and innovative ways to meet the evolving needs of student learners. We cannot be stagnant. We cannot be stuck in the past in terms of what we do to engage more learners in these opportunities.

* (16:00)

What I can say is that in this—before coming into this role, I didn't actually know the pathway for folks to become technologists. And when we started to really unpack that, it became very clear it's not intuitive. It's not a straightforward process that would necessarily from start to finish really entice a student learner to start and then finish that program in its entirety.

And so we've been working very closely with Red River College, with post-secondary institutions to explore ways that we can improve that pathway and that process. Everyone agrees we have to do better.

This was actually flagged years ago. There was no political will at the time to make those changes. We are highly motivated to make sure that Manitoba students, learners, people who want to pursue a career in health care are able to do so in a way that it makes sense intuitively, that is low-barrier and that meets their needs no matter where they live.

And so we certainly are exploring many different approaches to making sure that we can train more technologists. To grow your own approach is really important, making sure we have more training opportunities in rural and northern communities for student learners. Of course, virtual options are being explored. What can we do with our capacity here? And what is appropriate to be done that way?

I've also heard from folks who've been technologists for a long time that they're eager to provide mentorship, which I think is really wonderful. I had a great conversation with a woman in rural Manitoba who has been a technologist for at least a couple of decades, maybe longer. I think it's at least two decades. And she had a lot of ideas, strong thoughts and feelings on what's going on in health care.

We had a really spirited conversation, and she ended with: and I would love to mentor the new learners or anybody who's even interested in pursuing this path. They don't even have to be enrolled or be a student. I would love for them to come down to my workplace, see what we do and get a sense of what their career could look like.

And I thought that was really generous. And I also thought it was kind of a common-sense approach.

So one of the other things that we've been talking about is how do we get younger learners engaged. How do we make sure that by the time you're in middle school, by the time you're in high school, you have a good sense of what these career—*[interjection]*—opportunities can look like and how you would be able to access them.

I know for myself—and I've shared this before—I had no idea that I—actually, when I was a kid growing up, I didn't want to be a health-care worker. Full honesty, I wanted to be Michael Jordan. That wasn't in the cards for me. I wanted to play professional basketball, right. Worked really hard for that.

But some of the experiences I had as a kid volunteering at a personal-care home in my community, volunteering at the local hospital, that planted the seed for me that health care could be a really great place to have a career and that you can really make a difference in people's lives by being a part of those really important multidisciplinary teams.

And so we want for as many students across the province to have those opportunities. And what we've done is, we have looked at models like—there's a learning model at St. Boniface Hospital as an example. There are models out of UCN where they're engaging young learners and we're seeing the benefits of that. We want to apply that approach and those approaches to the area of technologists in post-secondary education.

So there's a number of things that we're looking at in terms of how we improve this area. We are also looking at—we've already expanded and added seats—training seats, but we believe we're going to have to go further in that regard. It's just a matter of—as you've

aply identified—how do we make sure that those seats are established in a way that really meets the needs of young learners or all learners. And we're doing that work in conjunction with Advanced Education and Training.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Bereza: Thank you for the answers, Minister. I appreciate that.

Looking at education again, and I understand you said that you work closely with Education.

In my past, when I was a little younger and going to school, there was a candy striper program. I knew at that time, I wanted absolutely nothing to do with health care.

Is there a want by this government to look at things like a candy striper program again, starting in middle and high school?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

I would remind all members to put their questions and answers through the Chair, please. Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I am going to answer this question, provide a bit of clarity for the member; and then I'll go back to his prior question on diagnostic services and MRIs.

So the Advanced Education and Training does the post-secondary and the training pieces. K-to-12 education would really be responsible for what that looks like in terms of youth engagement. So we do work together.

Our role as the Department of Health is really to provide clarity to the Minister of Education in terms—and their department in terms of where the best opportunities are, where the needs are, for young learners to be able to participate.

And then, ultimately, schools and school divisions, they design the program—my understanding, anyhow—and, again, this is a question better posed to the Minister of Education's department. So I—if I misspeak on any of this, I apologize. But my understanding is that the school divisions and schools themselves will design a program in partnership with different sites, perhaps with a regional health authority, and they will deliver that program for students.

I had the opportunity recently to have a good conversation with physicians and researchers at St. Boniface Hospital, just as an example, and with the St. Boniface foundation board. And they've done really incredible

work engaging Indigenous student learners in K to 12, and to find ways of developing a full program where folks can go in and learn about cardiac health and learn about cardiac sciences well before they're even in university, which is really exciting.

And, as a result of that approach, they've seen student learners want to pursue medicine. They've seen them want to pursue other health-care opportunities. So I recognize for the member that his experience resulted in the opposite, but for many other young folks, including myself, the opportunity to volunteer and be in health-care settings early left a really positive impression.

And, you know, for a lot of folks, we know that hospitals can be kind of a scary place. Those can be environments that people associate with negative experiences or challenges. And reframing that early is so important. It's so important for young folks to know that hospitals are safe places, that they are places where people heal, where they're connected to really important care, where whole communities can be healed through the work of what happens at community sites and health-care institutions that focus on making people healthier for the short and long term.

And so, you know, as the Department of Health, our rule is really to identify these areas of opportunity, often maybe provide an introduction or a bridge in terms of bringing education and health care together.

One other area that we've seen be very effective is the introduction to health-care aide training for high school students, so that's an area for us that we know we really need more folks on the front lines. And what we've been able to do is work with the Minister of Education's department, identify opportunities and where the needs are. And then school divisions' sites have been able to design a program and work with different locations so that youth can get those experiences and actually get their health-care aide certification.

So not only—it's not even volunteering; it's employment. These young people can be gainfully employed, earning an income, learning about health care and proactively giving themselves an opportunity to ladder their skills up much earlier on, you know, whereas someone in their 20s or 30s or 40s or 50s maybe becomes a health-care aide and then decides: You know what? I want to become an LPN. Or I want to become an RN or a physician or a technologist, something else, because I'm comfortable with health care now.

* (16:10)

We're allowing these young folks to get this training, this education and then the experience and gainful employment and relationships in the workplace that will allow for them, even earlier on in their careers, to pursue further opportunities in health care, which I think is just really wonderful.

When I was working on the front lines as a nurse, I worked with some pretty young health-care aides. It was really great to see people in their very early 20s working in that role and seeing how their ambitions might change over time, and knowing that they could pursue those opportunities at sites or in regional health authorities where they've already formed relationships and where people really want to see them succeed.

And so we're working really hard to facilitate more of that through our department.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Bereza: Thank you to the minister for the answer to that question.

Minister, I just want to make it clear, and to this committee, that it was the doctors from Portage la Prairie that reached out to me regarding the MRI. I'm also glad to hear that the Pink Ladies from Portage la Prairie are purchasing the mammography machine, or are working on purchasing the mammography machine for the Portage hospital.

The—you know, when it comes to—again, I'm sorry I wasn't part of the PC government when we were designing. Thank goodness the hospital is going into Portage la Prairie. It's going to make a tremendous difference there. I've made it very clear to the press a number of times that, if I could stand up on the top of the Golden Boy and take blame for not having that MRI in Portage la Prairie, I would do that for the amount of people that are waiting for MRIs.

So, again, with the—with Portage la Prairie, and, again, in hearing from the docs that have said to me that they believe that the MRI in Portage la Prairie could be one of the busiest MRIs in Manitoba because of our location. And again, when we look at the Grace Hospital in Winnipeg, where a lot of these patients are coming from as well, too, out to meet with doctors in Portage, their wait time is 39 weeks at the Grace Hospital, according to that website again.

So, again, Portage la Prairie would be a great opportunity there. With the walls and that all closed in of the hospital, we know that's not likely to happen or it would be much more costlier. But I know in talking to the Portage hospital foundation there is still a want

there, that they have come to me with as well, too, that they would be willing—again, the \$5 million that they said they would do is still on the table.

But in understanding the cost now, because of walls all closed in and electricity and all the rest of that to tear a wall out of a new hospital, just probably isn't the best thing to do right now. Surrey, BC, just purchased an MRI—a mobile MRI at a cost of \$3.6 million. There's other municipalities as well in Portage, and I'm thinking there's, you know, just off the top of my head, there's a hospital roughly 90 kilometres down the way on No. 16 Highway in Neepawa that I know doesn't have a CAT scan or an MRI in it is—either.

Is there an opportunity that may be a number of these hospitals to alleviate the lengthy wait times that there is, and I know we have a—you know, there is a shortage of people out there, but there's also a number of people, I understand, that are taking some of these distance educations.

Is there an opportunity to look at mobile like—are going in up in the North, to offer some relief on some of these patients that are waiting up to 10 months for an MRI?

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Just a gentle reminder to all members to put the questions and answers through the Chair, please. Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: So just to provide a bit of information for the member in terms of MRI capacity and diagnostics, and I want to be really clear: our government is focused on staffing the health-care system. It is much easier—and I know the member opposite wasn't a part of the PC team when this was happening—but it is much easier to cut a bed than it is to add a bed. It is much easier to close an emergency room than it is build and establish an emergency room.

And so I think it's really important, and sometimes, you know, the member, or members on his team or his caucus will say to me, stop bringing up the past. Well, the past is how we got here, and Manitobans are dealing with the ramifications of the past in the present. And so I'm always going to put on the record the realities that we are dealing with some very—we're dealing with massive challenges in the health-care system as a direct result of an irresponsible and reckless approach to health care that was short sighted and did not prioritize the health-care outcomes of Manitobans.

And so when we talk about adding capacity, we talk about adding staffing, it is not just as simple as adding training seats at post-secondary institutions. It is about changing the culture of health care and doing the work to ensure that people want to pursue a path and a career in health care. It's about creating opportunities for health-care workers to practice to their full scope, to know that they are respected, to have collectively bargained agreements that allow for people to actually have a work-life balance and know that their hard work on the front lines is being fairly compensated.

Those are all things that were denied from health-care workers, including the same people who staff MRIs for years. Allied health-care professionals had their wages frozen for almost six years, and during a pandemic. Knowing the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza), I don't think that that is something the member believes was appropriate or right or contributed to health care being better; it didn't. It did a lot of harm, a lot of damage that we are still fixing and cleaning up in the health-care system.

* (16:20)

And so, so much resource—government resource—the '25-26 budget has a \$1.2-billion increase, a 14 per cent increase to health care; 770, 780 million of that is wages. That's health-care worker compensation. That includes the very same technologists who staff MRIs. And we have more work to do. We have more to do to make sure that we have these folks pursuing this career path and that they are working in environments where they really feel fulfilled in their roles.

And so the work that we've been doing is in partnership with diagnostic services Manitoba. It's working with the experts in Manitoba who understand that you cannot just add an MRI anywhere because you feel like it or because it's a priority or because, you know, we want it to happen. You have to have a plan; you have to have the staffing and the resource in order to make sure that that machine is used to its full capacity. There's a number of scans and a number of tests you have to be able to run in order for it to be working optimally and for the technologist to be able to meet their own standards in terms of practice, right.

And you also need to make sure that clinically—when you look at the whole province, when you look at the whole system, that you understand why you're making those investments, which is why our government took the step of having an MRI in the North. It never had diagnostic technology of that kind, which is unacceptable. And it's long overdue.

But in able to do that, we had to make sure that we spent, you know, the year and a half leading up to that training, recruiting, retaining and doing the work so it could be successfully staffed. That takes a tremendous effort.

And so, you know, our government is certainly always open and willing to listen to: how do we evolve health care; how do we make sure that the citizens of Portage la Prairie and surrounding communities have the diagnostic services they need. We're always going to continue to listen to the experts and work with them to make sure that how we roll out diagnostics is done in an intentional, thoughtful, sustainable, achievable way that really delivers for Manitobans.

We work directly with diagnostic services to ensure that we're taking that really comprehensive and thoughtful approach, an approach that the member acknowledges himself was absent from the previous government, who made certain decisions in that moment but perhaps were not planning as far enough as they should've ahead in terms of staffing. And we're doing the work now of addressing that human resource capacity reality that we know is present, not only in Portage la Prairie but across the province.

In my next response, I'll speak to some of the numbers the member was referencing and provide him a bit more accurate information.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Bereza: Through you, to the honourable minister, the health—the foundations such as Portage hospital foundation, the health science foundation, the HSC Foundation, Grace Hospital Foundation, Brandon—all these, it's private money coming in to the foundations.

Are the foundations viewed as private funding that is coming into the health-care system, and is that not the start of private health care through the money that's coming in from the foundations?

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member for Portage.

MLA Asagwara: I just want to go back to the question about student learners and share with the member that—just to get clarity on his question about volunteer opportunities for students in health-care settings.

So the member, I don't know where—anywhere that references those programs as candy striper programs anymore. They might still; I'm just not sure. I know that in Manitoba we reference those programs as student volunteer programs and they are running all

over the province. So we got several running in hospitals, personal-care homes across Manitoba, which is really wonderful.

But I do want to highlight one particular program. It's the Muskike Muskwa program; it's the Medical Careers Exploration Program. And that's a program that was established by Pan Am Clinic in partnership with the WRHA and HSC foundations, speaking of foundations. And it's a wonderful program. They have 100 students every year for this program.

I'm just going to read directly from their website to give you a bit more information on this program and why it's so important and impactful.

It's a program that inspires and supports Indigenous youth to learn about, experience and pursue a wide range of careers in health care. MCEP was launched by the Pan Am Clinic Foundation in 2007. The program provides students the opportunity to immerse themselves in more than 20 different health-care environments across Manitoba, including Health Sciences Centre.

HSC participates in one of the programs' core components, practicum days, which allows students to gain an in-depth understanding of a wide range of health careers, from health-care aides and MRI technicians, to doctors, nurses and surgeons. They can job shadow, they can learn hands-on skills in labs and they can attend and participate in panels and one-on-one discussions with health-care professionals.

It's really a phenomenal program. I've had the chance to have the conversation with some of the folks at Pan Am about this. It's an opportunity that we know has tremendous benefit to not only these students, their communities—and their communities, rather, but also our health-care system. And that's the approach that we want to see more of in our province, right?

In particular, we want to make sure that diverse communities have an opportunity to get access to these volunteer roles and jobs as early as possible. We know, because science and evidence tells us—and I think, you know, anybody with—on the right side of morality and decency would say that we want everybody who provides health care, we want them to also look like the people they serve, have shared and similar experiences.

We know, the evidence tells us very clearly, that when you have representative health-care workforces, a diverse workforce, you support and facilitate innovation. It fosters creativity and shared learning. It enhances relationships. It allows for a diverse problem

solving and ideas to come to the table in the forefront, which really improves patient outcomes. We know that.

And so, certainly in Manitoba, a very diverse province that we live in—we should very proud of; it's one of our greatest strengths—we want our workforce to be diverse, which means that we have to engage diverse learners as early as possible and make sure that we understand what their barriers are—what the barriers are, rather, that exist, that prevent them from accessing these opportunities, getting rid of those barriers and making sure that they have a fair shot at choosing that path. And this program is a really great example of that, and we're going to continue to work with Minister of Education, Minister of Advanced Education and Training (MLA Cable) to create more of those opportunities.

To the question the member asked previously around MRIs, I do want to be clear that the wait times for MRIs in Southern are actually coming down. The wait times are at about seven months, 31 weeks, right now. And, actually, in March—we did more MRIs in that month of March, 776, than we've done in the past 24 months.

We are doing more MRIs than we ever have. We're bringing the wait times down. Less Manitobans are waiting for those MRIs, but we recognize there's much more work that needs to be done. So we're working with Diagnostic Services Manitoba to develop more and new approaches to addressing those wait times and building more capacity.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Bereza: Thank you to the minister for the answer to those questions.

Through the Chair to the minister: my apologies. The only information that I have is what I currently have on the Internet today from Diagnostic Services, and that's where those numbers came from.

Moving along, because, again, I think the health facility, the new health facility, that the PCs brought into Portage la Prairie is second to none. It's amazing. It's beautiful. I'm sorry I haven't been allowed to be through there in the last number of months, but everything I'm hearing is it's beautiful. I am also working very diligently and happy to say that I've helped recruit three nurses to the new facility.

* (16:30)

I'm currently working right now with two young ladies: one from Morden, Manitoba, and one from

Boissevain, Manitoba, that have taken their education. They played hockey down at Minot State University. One is a BN; one is an RN. They have currently been working for over a year now to try and get registered in the province of Manitoba.

Currently, the one that's in Morden is working as a health-care aide and is also working as a RN in the US in—I believe it's in Grafton, North Dakota, she said.

The one in Boissevain is not working in the health-care field anymore, right now. But what is the—what are the—through you, Chair, to the minister: What are we doing to try and recruit these out-of-province and out-of-country nurses that are waiting this excess amount of time?

The one nurse that is currently not in the field, she's—she has a spouse that's here in Manitoba; otherwise, she said she would be in Alberta because she said that it was much easier to access and be able to get what she needs. And, my apologies, I'm not sure exactly what it is that she needs, but again, these are the people that we want to retain and keep in Manitoba—these young families.

What do we do to do that? Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: Yes, thank you so much to the member for bringing this forward.

I likely have already been in contact with at least one of the nurses that you're speaking of. I—again, I said this before in committee: I really encourage the member and other members of the PC caucus; bring these concerns forward directly to me as quickly as you can.

These are priorities for our government. We work very, very quickly and aggressively to make sure that we address those concerns that are brought forward. I welcome, you know, whether it's email or a phone call to let me know or pull me aside in the Chamber to let me know, and I will always make sure that we're following up expeditiously to address those issues.

I agree with the member. The amount of time that it's historically taken nurses who are trained in other jurisdictions to get their licence to practise in Manitoba has been too long. It's been unacceptably long. We know that this has been a long-standing issue.

Our government came into office knowing that this was a long-standing issue and sat down immediately and met with the College of nurses—Registered Nurses of Manitoba, the licensed practical nurses of

Manitoba, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba to get everybody at the table and have a conversation about how we work together to expedite those pathways.

And those are very key relationships. We want to make sure that we are, as a government, doing our part to support regulators being able to function. We also need to make sure as a government that we are doing everything we possibly can to ensure we have people on the front lines of our health-care system who are trained, ready and willing to practise.

And so we have worked directly with the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba to, quite frankly, push them to do better, to work with them to see how we can collaborate and partner where appropriate to eliminate those barriers, to make the timelines as quick as possible while making sure that patients remain safe and receiving care.

I'm happy to share that as of May 20, there will be an expedited pathway for US-trained nurses to be credentialed and licensed to practise here in Manitoba. We have been working with the college, well beyond—before, rather, this date for them to take the necessary steps. They're making their necessary regulatory changes to establish it. However, we have been working with them well in advance to get nurses from the United States and other jurisdictions on the front line more quickly.

We have an NREP—nursing registration practice—nursing registration expedited pathway program for internationally educated nurses that has about 80 nurses in it right now, right. These are nurses who have been living, paying taxes, raising their families in Manitoba, that for years never had an option. They brought their names forward. They were knocking on the Health Minister's door and nobody was answering them; nobody was talking to them.

We very quickly established a pilot program that has been very successful. We already have folks who have graduated so that we can have these IENs on the front lines of our health-care system. In fact, just this morning, I was in between meetings so, unfortunately, I couldn't be there in person, but I was able to join a virtual call with a lot of these learners and tell them, thank you, say, thank you for pursuing this opportunity to be able to get the necessary training or skilling up whatever is required in order for you to practice in our province.

These are folks who've been wanting to practice for a long time, and we're thrilled we're able to work with

them and support them through our retention and recruitment office to ensure they have that opportunity.

And, certainly, US-trained nurses, we want them to have an easy, seamless pathway to practise in our province, which is why the college is making that change, but we recognize there's more work to do. And whenever there's a concern brought forward about delays in being able to do so, we work very, very hard to address it as quickly as we can.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Bereza: Honourable Chair, thank you to the minister for the answers to the question there. Through the Chair, I will provide an email with these nurses' names to the minister within the next week.

Going back to the MRI—Boundary Trails, my understanding from talking to the people down there, the Buhler health centre and the reason for the name of the Buhler health centre is—my understanding is, John Buhler and his wife wanted an MRI down there. So they basically paid for one and had one sent there.

My understanding is, in Dauphin, there were some issues, you know, much like that as well, too, that the community wanted it and there was some heavy money went into that.

Hypothetically—no, I don't want to say hypothetically; I take that back. Through the Chair, to the minister, if a mobile MRI was dropped in the Portage la Prairie hospital parking lot, what would the provincial Health Department do with it?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

MLA Asagwara: I'm not sure if the member poses that question in a light-hearted tone. I'm not quite sure. If not, I don't know that the member understands the seriousness of staffing. I don't know that the member's taking that issue as seriously as he should, and that concerns me.

When I say that the previous government failed to adequately staff appropriately and take the necessary steps to staff the health-care system, or to plan, I don't say that in a light-hearted manner. There are real consequences for that that Manitobans, including folks in his region, are suffering with as a result.

I take very seriously the responsibility of training, retaining, recruiting and staffing the front lines of our health-care system. It requires an approach in partnership, it requires true collaboration and it requires respecting the people who lead these initiatives in our province. And I don't really take the question—the

member, in the way he posed it, I don't think that's very respectful.

I've sat down with the experts in our province who do this work each and every day, who recognize that Manitobans are waiting and they should not be waiting as long as they are, that we have to do better. And they're bringing forward plans and strategies in terms of how we can address that. I sit down with leaders every day who are committed to doing their part, to make sure that we are retaining, training and recruiting folks. That takes a real, sustained, dedicated, teamwork approach to addressing the staffing challenge that we face in our health-care system.

That is a national challenge, it absolutely is, but Manitoba was behind the ball on this because we didn't have the right focus and effort for seven and a half years under the previous administration. And so I would ask the member to be mindful of posing questions in that manner, because it really, to me, doesn't speak very respectfully of all of the experts, all of the partners who are working so hard to make sure that we're moving health care in a responsible direction that benefits patients and residents in rural Manitoba.

Our government has been very clear that we will always be open to making sure that we are taking the necessary steps, listening to the right advice and evolving health care, adding capacity—including diagnostic capacity—in that part of the province to meet people's needs. We must do it in a responsible manner. We must do it in a manner that can be sustained.

Our government could've announced a mobile MRI for the North, and we could've just left it at that. But that would be irresponsible. We knew that we needed to do the work intensely to ensure that that mobile MRI would be appropriately and adequately staffed, no matter where it's going, and to have a true plan in place to make sure that those who have gone without it for generations will not continue to go without it for generations.

* (16:40)

That takes a commitment to not only establishing the technology, but staffing it and working with our partners to develop a plan that makes sense.

And so I take very seriously the realities that folks in rural Manitoba, in Portage la Prairie, are facing. And our government is going to continue to take steps to ensure that they have more access, not less, that they have more capacity, not less, and that starts with staffing; that starts with training; that starts with

making sure we can recruit people where they need to go and to make sure that the hospital, as a whole, has the adequate staffing resources to deliver the care that folks in and around Portage la Prairie are counting on being delivered.

And those plans were not put in place or addressed by the previous administration, and so we're all working very, very hard collectively to ensure that we're doing the work the right way and that we can ensure that that site opens responsibly with staffing in order.

To the member's previous question about foundations—and it's kind of woven into this question as well—just to be really clear: foundations, those are private dollars that are considered philanthropy, right. These are classified as donations by the CRA for accounting purposes. And foundation support, their investments support capital; that's where those dollars go and are most always matched by government in those projects. Government has a responsibility. I'm sure the member saw the announcement more recently.

As a good example, for the first time ever in Manitoba's history, we have a surgical robot, right, at Health Sciences Centre. It's been operating for months and months. We wanted to make sure we waited, it was established, we had a good sense of what was going on there, and that was done in partnership with the Health Sciences foundation.

These are really important partnerships. I have the utmost respect for people who do that incredible work, and I want to give a quick-shout out to Tina Jones, who was the Chair for about 10, 11 years of the Health Sciences foundation, raised massive amounts of money for Health Sciences Centre, and did it in partnership with government.

The approach that we've taken with that foundation is to work in partnership so that when we make investments together we know they can be delivered on for Manitobans.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

MLA Bereza: Through the Chair to the minister, I—the talk of—the question regarding somebody dropping an MRI into Portage la Prairie, it wasn't meant as a joke because it has been done in the past. I had a very large business person that had come to me and said, I want to—because he said, I want to do like what John Buhler did; I want an MRI in the Portage hospital.

And that was my reasoning for the question. It wasn't to be smart. I know that we have issues with staffing. I know that the hospital—and I'm very proud

of the past PC government for getting the hospital started in Portage la Prairie, the one in Neepawa and the one in Boundary Trails, because that may not have happened under this current government.

So again, it wasn't a joke; it was meant as a question that was posed to me regarding an MRI. It's coming from people that—I just want to talk about a person that told me 600 kilometres between Winnipeg and Dauphin to get an MRI, an appointment at 7 o'clock in the morning. This person was from the west side of Winnipeg and said it would be a lot easier to have that done in Winnipeg or somewhere that was closer.

The only reason why I keep going back on this MRI is because of what we are seeing and what we continue to face. And, again, the numbers that I quoted were the only numbers that were available to me through the website.

So again, we do have the opportunity, because there is Manitobans that are taking their MRI tech training remotely through Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the BC Institute of Technology. What are we doing to make sure that these technologists have jobs here when they come back, and why are we losing them to other provinces right now?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza).

* (16:50)

MLA Asagwara: Just provide a little bit of information for the member and cover off something that he raised.

So I've—I think I've already answered the question about technologist students and what we're doing to keep these folks in Manitoba. What I would say is that if he knows of individual students who are taking their education distance, right, in other jurisdictions, technically, we would be more than happy to make sure that those learners also get a letter of offer before they graduate from our government.

So the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and I want to make sure that all folks in Manitoba know that there's a job here waiting for them, so if he's willing to provide that information in addition to the other casework that we will take away from this Estimates committee, we would be more than happy to ensure that those learners also get a letter of offer from the Premier or myself, offering them a job right here in the province before they complete their studies.

The other thing that I would say is that, again, diagnostic services Manitoba and our other partners, we work directly with them to understand what the needs are, how we use technology, how we maximize the efficiencies regarding diagnostics.

Typically, a scan—MRI scanner now, one of the size that we would use for an—a site, rather, like Portage la Prairie, would be—they need to do about 9,000 scans annually. They can go up to 12,000 scans annually in terms of what you need to perform.

The data that's been collected over the many, many, many months indicates that the Portage la Prairie demographic and surrounding communities would only ensure about 2,000 scans. And so the required scans in order to make sure it's utilized appropriately, we're not quite there yet.

What I've said previously, and I will continue to say it: we will monitor and continue to monitor these areas very closely. We want to make sure that we are planning, we're being proactive in terms of when particular thresholds are met that we can respond to that; we're positioned to do so. We want to make sure that, should the time come where we're advised that now is the time for an MRI to be established, we want to make sure that we've got enough capacity to really maximize the utilization of that, that we have the people power in place to staff it, right.

And so we're focused on staffing, we're making sure that our services can be delivered responsibly and sustainably and we are always going to continue to listen to communities—Portage la Prairie, other rural communities and in the North—to ensure that as their health-care needs evolve and as capacity evolves, as a government, we're making investments that can evolve alongside it.

So just wanted to offer that information to the member and provide a little clarity, I think, on the learners that he's concerned about not staying in Manitoba. I'm equally concerned. I hope that the member will support us and work with us in making sure that they have a letter of offer and an opportunity right here in the province before they're done.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): We have no further questions and we're ready to move on to resolutions.

The Chairperson: If there are no further questions, we would move to the question on resolutions.

Resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,970,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Health Policy and Planning, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,141,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Insurance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$31,669,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Public Health, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,767,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Performance and Oversight, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,604,000 for Health Seniors and Long-Term Care, Seniors and Long-Term Care, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,304,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Corporate Strategy and Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,638,298,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Funding to Health Authorities, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$345,157,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Provincial Health Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,039,596,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Medical, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.11: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$466,088,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Pharmacare, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.12: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$238,510,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Costs Related to Capital Assets of Other Reporting Entities, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.13: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$550,000,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates for this department is item 21.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 21.1.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Cook: I move that line 21.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care's salary be reduced to \$1.

Motion presented.

The Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on this motion?

Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Chairperson: The motion is—all in—all those in favour, say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

The Chairperson: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

The Chairperson: Resolved that—resolution 21.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,305,000 for Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

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

ROOM 255**FINANCE**

* (15:00)

The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Finance.

Questions will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Going back to questions that we had left off, I believe it was last week, regarding the minister's meeting with the three credit rating agencies.

So, to confirm, the minister did meet with S&P, DBRS and Moody's.

Can the minister please tell us what the reaction was from those three credit rating agencies in terms of Manitoba's current debt and borrowing situation? Seeing as how Manitoba is currently one of the more indebted provinces in the country, what did they say about Manitoba's current debt profile and deficit situation?

* (15:10)

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Good to be back here. Thanks to the critic for the question.

So I can confirm, as I did in our last meeting here at this committee, that we did get to meet with S&P, DBRS and Moody's. We actually met with them all on our first day on our trip out east, where we met with both credit rating agencies and investors, and those conversations were very positive for a number of reasons.

And, you know, I'll speak just high-level to one of the questions that was asked just when it comes to borrowing. We have a very encouraging cash borrowing forecast as a Province, especially when you compare us to some of the other provinces in Canada, in that we're very flat and straight, whereas some other provinces have cash borrowing needs in future years that look a lot steeper.

So the credit rating agencies I think really responded favourably to that. It shows that we're moving forward in a responsible manner and that our plan is, you know, is focused in, again, fiscal responsibility and delivering on that commitment we made to balance the budget, and I think those cash borrowing requirements show that.

You know, they are also, I think, very happy to see that we had done the work that I described during our last meeting here in committee to do multi-year planning and to really look at what our cost structure was and really, at a very deep level, understand what our proposed expenses would be when it came to all major government decisions over the next many years.

Collective bargaining, really looking at all of those costs and—as well as understanding what the proposed costs were of the many commitments that we made to Manitobans, which we've been delivering on and which we're going to continue to deliver on. And I think for the credit rating agencies it was very, very encouraging for them to see that our government had been doing that work in showing, I think, a responsible path forward while we invest in the important things that we committed to Manitobans we would invest in.

You know, the—I think the other thing that I believe the credit rating agencies responded favourably to was our debt-to-GDP ratio and projected debt-to-GDP ratio through the track which shows a downward slope. And I think, you know, that speaks again to the approach that we're taking and it's the kind of approach that I think they wanted to see.

So our takeaways from those meetings were very positive. Of course, I can't in any way have any guarantees about the outcomes of those discussions but there were—certainly was positive reactions in those discussions and no signals of any kind of action that would be concerning. You know, we've seen in other provinces after budgets have been released, credit rating agencies move pretty swiftly to respond to their concerns that they've seen.

So I think it's, overall, very positive response and I think really demonstrates and speaks to the good work that our government is doing to try to make sure that we, again, we balance the importance of investing and fixing health care, you know, responding to the cuts that were made to health for many, many years that resulted in a lot of challenges for Manitobans, balancing the need to make investments and improving affordability with fiscal responsibility.

And I think that, you know, we have just a great story to tell as a government and as a Province right now because of the work that we've been doing, and that's work that I'm really proud of and work that we've done, of course, not just with our team but also we were very well supported by folks in our Treasury Board and Finance teams and beyond.

Now, we do, of course, continue to have a lot of work to do because we inherited a \$2-billion deficit, a hole that we needed to dig out of. We are doing that work and we're doing it every day. We've got, you know, I think this year we've shown about a one-third cut to that \$2-billion deficit we were left. We'll see where Public Accounts lands but I think it's going to be somewhere in the 1.3 mark, which shows very good progress and, of course, this budget that we recently released shows more progress on that.

We are in an era of uncertainty to the Trump tariffs but we continue to, I think, show that we're very serious when it comes to finding that responsible balance of making investments that are needed with making sure we deliver on that balanced budget commitment we made to Manitobans in the last election, and one that I know, again, a commitment that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) really, really takes incredibly seriously and reminds us, as a Cabinet team, that that continues to be a top focus for our, again, our government.

But we're, I think, finding that path forward and the credit rating agencies I think responded favourably to the story we shared and the work we're doing.

Mrs. Stone: So with a up to possibly \$1.9-billion deficit, \$2.3 billion in debt-servicing costs, 7 per cent

increase in spending compared to previous year and struggling real economic GDP growth, both last year at 1.1 per cent and this year projected to be 1.7 per cent, did any of the three credit rating agencies issue Manitoba a caution?

* (15:20)

I will be ceding my chair to my colleague, the MLA for La Vérendrye.

MLA Sala: So in response to the question, as I shared in my previous answer, we can't presume what the credit rating agencies will do, but we can say that again, their—I think it was a very favourable, positive response to the information we shared and a great discussion. And, again, I think they were very content with the work that we're doing, in terms of our multi-year planning and just the—I think, the very forward-looking approach that we're taking to managing our Province's finances.

You know, in terms of some of the risks I think that they were concerned about, probably, without question, they continue to be most interested in the impacts of tariffs and what we were, you know, presuming those impacts might be.

I'll remind the critic, these were—you know, Trump tariffs, these were to a certain extent celebrated by the Leader of the Opposition; that there was a very strange set of comments made on a podcast where there was a celebration of a 25 per cent tax on exports from Manitoba that, of course, very few people in this province can understand where those comments were coming from.

But, you know, I—again, in those meetings with these credit rating agencies, this was a concern of theirs. And we did share that, of course, as we've spoken to in the House and outside of the House, we do continue to be concerned about the impacts of tariffs on the provincial economy, especially, of course, for our steel producers, our agricultural producers. And we know how important it is that we support those sectors and all Manitoban businesses during this time and that we do not celebrate the imposition of this tax on our exports to the US.

That's of course something that works against the interests of Manitoban businesses and again is very confusing for Manitobans to know that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan) celebrated those, or celebrated an interference in our sovereignty or however, you know, he went on to characterize that—those words that he shared.

You know, those conversations I think were also an exciting opportunity for us to talk about what we were doing overall in response to the challenge of the moment, this tariff challenge that Trump has created for Canada and our provinces. And we had, I think, really exciting news to share in those discussions.

Of course, our recent budget focused on, first and foremost, a major capital plan—a \$3.7-billion capital plan—to get a lot of important things built, a lot of economy-supporting infrastructure built, trade-supporting infrastructure built, including investments in things like NEWPCC to help make sure Winnipeg can continue to grow and thrive; investments in important trade-supporting infrastructure like CentrePort, which is a really—a growing multi-modal facility to the west of Winnipeg that we can all be really proud of. And I think that it sort of harkens back to the potential for Manitoba as what we were previously known as, as the gateway to the west.

We have this unbelievable opportunity as a transportation logistics hub to lean heavily into that history, into that past, and to once again become a bit of a—you know, a place through which the stuff moves to the world.

And CentrePort is a great example of investments we're making to help offer opportunities for Manitoba businesses to diversify their trade, to find new destinations for their goods, including, you know, we've helped to expand access to further trade opportunities through our investments in AGG and the Port of Churchill which, again, is supporting Manitoba businesses to find new ways of getting their goods to market.

So again, this was a very positive—I think, positively received, those investments. In addition, they were really happy to hear about the important work we're doing in laying foundational economy-building strategies like, for example, our affordable energy plan that will ensure that we have reliable low-cost energy. They like that we were doing it in the way that we've outlined, which is to partner with First Nations to have them deliver that win and that new energy and to do that in a way that focuses on economic reconciliation.

And they also were very happy to hear about our critical mineral strategy, which I'm really proud to say was delivered by the minister for BMTJC, who is joining us here today. Wonderful strategy that's going to help to unlock an incredible amount of exploration and mineral extraction opportunities to help build an even stronger economy in Manitoba.

So again, really wonderful story that we were able to share, positively received, and proud to be doing that important work of connecting and building those relationships with those credit rating agencies to help Manitoba's costs of borrowing remain as low as possible.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you to the minister, again, for having me here and taking some of the questions. I'll go in a bit of a 'driffent' direction and allow the critic to circle back to the direction she was on.

Contraband tobacco in the province is something that both Finance and Justice have been struggling to gain control of in recent years. And tobacco tax revenue is substantial for the Province of Manitoba.

So my question to the minister would be: How much lost revenue has his department seen as a result of contraband cigarettes finding their way into our province?

* (15:30)

MLA Sala: So, you know, in discussion with the team, what I've come to understand here is that it's very, very challenging in any jurisdiction to understand the quantum. They don't know what they don't know.

Of course, we know this is a challenging issue that we continue to work towards reducing the incidents of illegal tobacco in Manitoba, of course. But it is very difficult to get a total estimate, and this is—again, this is a challenge. We need to continue to work towards reducing contraband tobacco in Manitoba, but we do not have an estimate on the total quantum there to offer here.

Think in the way of good news, you know, we are seeing an overall decline in people smoking in Manitoba; it's, of course, good from a public health perspective. That's perhaps reflected in our estimated tobacco revenues this year, which is estimated to decline by 2 per cent. And so, as the Minister of Finance, on that side I note that, and I would imagine that that is tied to reductions in levels of smoking among Manitobans.

In terms of, you know, work that we're doing to try to continue to grow the economy and grow GDP and grow revenues for the province, we're working to do that through growth of business. And I mentioned a bit about that in my former answer, but, you know, I just got—I had a chance to only speak to a few that—those items that we are focused on right now, but great

opportunity to talk a bit more about the work that we're doing to support GDP growth in Manitoba.

So I spoke about the \$3.7-billion capital plan. I spoke about the work that we're doing to invest in trade-supporting infrastructure, which we know is very important and, frankly, has probably never been more important than now.

Interprovincial trade barriers—I cannot express how excited I am about the announcement that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) made today and that we've made together with Ontario about the MOU on interprovincial trade between Manitoba and the biggest economy in Canada.

I'm hoping that the members opposite are as excited as I am about that. I think that's something we can all celebrate. Looking forward to the critic talking about his excitement about that agreement when he gets his chance to follow up to my response here.

But I mean this is the work that we need to be doing and you know, it doesn't end with Ontario. More work to be done but we're going to continue to move the ball forward when it comes to making it easier to move goods and people around the country.

And what an incredible start for Manitoba that we've been able to announce that MOU today. So, just so proud of that progress we're making and a great sign and I think, surely, a great signal for Manitobans that our government is focused on doing that work.

And we know the promise of the reduction of those interprovincial trade barriers has been quantified as being as high as \$200-billion net growth if we can work together as a country and as provinces to continue reducing those barriers. So that was just such an exciting thing today.

Buy Canadian—of course, the critic will know that we brought forward buy Canadian legislation and I'm proud of the work that we're doing to—

The Chairperson: Order.

We can't talk about legislation currently before the House.

MLA Sala: I apologize, Chair. Thank you for flagging that issue.

So very proud to be doing that important work of looking where we can take procurements and return those expenditures back to Canada and back to Manitoba.

I spoke earlier about our energy plan and the work we're doing to again lay that, sort of, those building blocks for growing our economy. We had for many years a failure to develop new energy to support business growth in Manitoba. The critic probably knows this, but we developed a grand total of zero megawatts over seven and a half years. That put us in a tough position, but we responded to that and we're, again, keeping our eye on making sure that we have the energy we need to grow our economy and support our businesses.

Investments in tourism—that's—you know, we made a \$4.5-million commitment in the last budget to help tourism Manitoba, to bring more people to Manitoba to spend their dollars in Manitoba businesses; and of course to help more Manitobans, or encourage more Manitobans to stay right here in our beautiful province to spend their dollars here and support the success of Manitoba.

You know, again, building on the work we're doing to grow our provincial GDP. Awesome investments in NFI, Magellan. We've seen, of course, a new gold mine is opening in Manitoba. Got a new potash mine opening in Manitoba. The open-for-business sign is finally placed right on the front of the—you know, that big provincial sign when you come into the province, after many years of it not being placed up there.

And we're proud to have done that to grow our GDP and improve our province.

Mr. Narth: It's great that the Minister of Finance has given us this opportunity to thank the previous PC government for initiating the gold mine that has now been reintroduced—or reannounced, not even introduced—by the current NDP government, his government, and also to reiterate the exciting news of the PC—previous PC government opening a potash mine, the first potash mine in Manitoba. So, great initiatives taken by the previous government that now, hopefully, the current NDP government is going to be able to reap those rewards.

But I'll tie back to my previous question. I don't want to dwell on it; I just want to paint the picture for Manitobans from a financial perspective, what the potential loss in tax revenue is as a result of contraband tobacco in our province.

* (15:40)

I think all Manitobans can agree that we would like to see no one smoking anymore, eliminating that health risk that is a reality as a result of smoking.

We also at the same time realize that there is a significant burden on our health-care system for the effects of smoking, so we all can support a loss of revenue if that means that it's going to improve the state of health for Manitobans.

What Manitobans are concerned about is the ever-growing presence of contraband tobacco that isn't providing tax revenue for our province, but still maintaining that burden on health care. So would the minister be able to tell us what the decrease in the last year—and I don't know how comfortable minister would be to going back two years to paint the picture on the decrease that we've seen.

As the minister has stated in the previous question that the goal is a 2 per cent reduction—or expectation is a 2 per cent reduction in revenue as a result of less people smoking, but is that also conveyed in the reality of what tobacco tax revenue is?

So would the minister be able to tell us a dollar value of tobacco tax revenue this year, and what it was last year—this financial year that we're speaking to, the current budget, and then dating back one fiscal year?

MLA Sala: So just to answer the question directly, we are estimating \$98 million in tobacco revenue this year, and last year it was \$100 million; answer their question directly, from the critic.

And then, you know, he did speak to the gold mine, so I do want to make sure we set the record straight here, and that the critic has the benefit of knowing what actually happened, if he doesn't already.

So that gold mine, under the last government, was an act of fiction. It wasn't—it was not proceeding, and I can tell you that with confidence because I met with the CEO of Alamos and talked to him about the status of the mine and understood many of the challenges that they were facing with being able to proceed.

There were some significant challenges with supply chain and ensuring that they could access some of the equipment needed to energize the mine, and we did an incredible amount of work to work closely with Manitoba Hydro to make sure that we could overcome those supply chain challenges.

Our minister for B-M-J-T-C also worked—did lift—moved mountains, I'll say, on regulations to move that forward. And, of course, it's just an unbelievable credit to our Premier (Mr. Kinew) and the work he's doing that, you know, he's got a team focused on, again, doing what's needed to make sure we move

forward on resource extraction and creating great opportunities in Manitoba.

So that's just the reality of how that went down, and I'm very proud to know that, you know, our team did that, that we worked closely in a very collaborative manner to make this happen.

And so, you know, that addition of that mine, once it's—once it comes fully online—will move us from three operational mines to four. And, of course, with the potash mine coming online, as well, we're going to be, in our government—within two years of having come into government, we'll have seen a significant expansion of resource extraction activities in Manitoba.

And, of course, why is that so exciting? Not only because of the job opportunities it creates and the economic growth opportunities it creates, but it's also exciting that that mineral extraction is happening in a jurisdiction where we know that the energy that's driving that is coming from clean energy sources, that we know we are in a jurisdiction that has fantastic labour laws. That means the workers working in those mines can do that in an incredibly safe manner.

And this just really speaks to our value advantage as a province, in that if you want to bring capital to Manitoba and invest in our—in bringing resources out of the ground, you can do it in a way that will, you know, be the least carbon intensive, the safest for workers, in the most environmentally responsible manner possible.

And I think we're seeing that excitement and that interest with, I think, an estimated 67 other mines that are currently in exploration phase. And my hope is we're going to see us unlock a huge amount of investment and that we're going to see, again, those minerals come out of the ground in the most environmentally, climate- and labour-friendly way possible.

So, again, you know, that—the idea that that gold mine was being driven in advance by the last government is an act of fiction, not too dissimilar from the act of fiction that was the former government's last budget that they brought forward, where we were left a \$2-billion deficit hole.

And when I say act of fiction, just to clarify for the members opposite who I think are rightfully expressing concern about that number—for example, one act of fiction was the projection of a \$550-million Hydro net income. We know that that is double, maybe almost three times, Hydro's typical net income. That was one of a number of things that they'd

included in that budget that we know MNP characterized as constituting, quote: high budgetary risk. And we know what that high budgetary risk left us with, which was a very deep hole that Manitobans have been forced to climb out of.

So again, that speaks to the former government's approach when it came to managing the books. I know that the critic wasn't here during that time, but that's the record of their party. That's the record that they left us with to—you know, to work through, and a significant challenge that we've had to overcome, but we're doing the work.

And as I think the critic and members opposite can see, man, there's a lot of exciting things happening in our province right now. We are really, really moving forward when it comes to resource extraction, expanding trade corridors, expanding the amount of procurement that we're doing here in Canada, bringing those dollars home and, of course, investing in capital infrastructure to keep growing our GDP and helping our economy to be as strong as possible during this challenging time.

Mrs. Stone: Does the minister expect other own-source revenues to go up or down this year? And can the minister explain what those revenue sources are?

* (15:50)

MLA Sala: So, the question was about own-source revenues, and I would turn the critic—or encourage them to go to page 12 of our budget document where there's a complete summary there with a full response to her question and, you know, happy to answer any further specifics there if she's interested in leaning into that.

But, you know, when it comes to fees and own-source revenue, one of the things that we were so proud to do this year was to make parks free. So that was, I think, a very important measure right now, and Manitobans are, again, feeling the—both the affordability pinch due their ongoing affordability challenges, and we know Manitobans across the province continue to need better support when it comes to making life more affordable. And that that change, when it came to park fees, I think has been widely welcome.

And, I think, especially during this time, when we're—you know, we're seeing Manitobans wanting to spend their dollars here in our province and in Canada, it's a really great opportunity for them to do that and save money while they're at it. And, of course, that builds on the investments in tourism that we made in

this recent budget. I spoke to that a bit earlier—the four and a half million that we're adding to tourism Manitoba.

We know that, you know, the Trump tariff tax that the member opposite's leader is supportive of has really angered, frustrated Canadians. They're, I think, really motivated like never before to want to invest and spend their money here in Canada. They're certainly not thankful for the tariffs that are being applied to our country and to Manitoban businesses. And I think that's resulting in them wanting to spend more time in our beautiful province.

And the elimination of those park fees is, I think, a great thing that we've done to help support them to do exactly that.

Mrs. Stone: Yes, if the minister could please speak to how many audits the taxation division has done in the past year, and how many the minister expects will be done in this fiscal year.

MLA Sala: Okay. So I can share the number of audits were roughly similar in '23-24 and in '24-25. So in '23-24 we had 727, and then in '24-25, 740.

* (16:00)

But there's also, of course, an audited financial statement that we all—you know, we're very concerned about, which was the final audited financial statements for the '23-24 fiscal year where we learned that we were left with this—again, this huge deficit.

And I didn't get a chance to read this earlier, so I thought I would just take an opportunity to do that. This is an executive summary from the MNP. It was called the Post Election Financial Accountability Review. And here's a quote from the executive summary: From the release of the '23-24 budget to October 3, 2023, budgetary decisions were made that collectively represent high budgetary risk.

And then it goes on to say the report concluded it was, quote: reasonable to expect the government to have understood that all the unique circumstances that led to significantly higher revenues in '22-23 would not likely repeat in immediately subsequent years. End quote.

And then just going on, the review also found—and open quote: the decision to aggressively budget for an above-average net income from Manitoba Hydro, and then fail to adjust for the significant downside risk to Hydro's net income in the first-quarter update led to additional fiscal pressure later in the year.

You know, that, in addition to the—I think it was \$1.4 billion of capital investment announcements after the budget was released, in addition to a number of other concerning decisions that were made—left us, again, in a very challenging position, and I think, frankly, spoke to a lack of transparency and accountability we saw from the last government.

Again, I think one of the most concerning things for Manitobans when we talk about what happened there was the fact that the government seemed to have gone out of their way to hide what was happening when they reported their Q1 report on July 28 before the election.

And thinking back to that date, you know, we were well into summer hydrology season. It would have been very clear at that point that Hydro's net income was not going to be anywhere close to what the government had projected. And yet we went into that Q1 report and Manitobans did not have a full, accurate picture of what was actually going on.

And so, as a result, Manitobans went into the election under the impression that everything was status quo and that there was nothing to be concerned about when it came to, you know, that year's overall fiscal direction.

And I—you know, I can't say that I don't sympathize with the opposition, that it must have been pretty concerning for them to see the overall direction of that year's fiscal result as they were leading up to that Q1 report out to Manitobans. But I don't think that that excuses what happened, which was that they still went forward with what ended up being like a full misrepresentation of the actual financial position of Manitoba.

Why they did that, you know, I would assume it was with the goal of trying to ensure that Manitobans felt that as though their financial management and their budgeting was accurate and that they had done the work, and they didn't want to create an impression or let Manitobans know or let on that they had not done a good job managing the books as they went into the election.

But, unfortunately, that, you know, that resulted in Manitobans getting a nasty surprise once our government was able to come in, open the books, understand the reality of the situation that they'd left for us. So that, I think, is, again, something we need to continue to remind Manitobans of, of that deep hole that we were left.

And I'm proud of the work we're doing and making progress in reducing that deficit. We've reduced it by a third with our first fiscal year result. That's going to be, of course, confirmed post-Public Accounts, but it's looking like it's going to be a full third reduction. And further work has been done, of course, with the release of our last budget where we're showing more progress in reducing the size of that deficit.

So again, happy to have shared the information with the critic about the number of audits, but of course, also happy to have spoken a little bit, too, I think, a very important audited financial result that impacted all Manitobans there in '23-24.

The Chairperson: Just before recognizing the next member, I'd just like to take a moment to remind all honourable members to provide the courtesy of attention to the member who has the floor. It is acceptable to carry on conversations at the committee table as long as they don't disrupt proceedings.

Thank you.

Mrs. Stone: Chairperson, the minister and I can go around and around regarding his junk math, because the reality is that the former government left the NDP with a \$373-million surplus, which was included in the audited Public Accounts. What he fails to recognize is that he was in government for six months and that they introduced and passed a \$700-million special warrant that bumped up those deficit numbers.

He was in government for those six months. They took a \$373-million surplus and turned it into a deficit. That is the numbers that we are speaking to today, and I will continuously correct the record of the minister that he brings forward the Meyers Norris Penny report that said, and specifically stated, that there were limitations in the information that was provided to them to make that analysis.

So I want to go back to deficit and debt and just refer the minister to page 119 of the budget documents, under Borrowing and Debt Management Strategy. As I've mentioned numerous times, Manitoba does continue to be one of the more indebted provinces in the country, and based on the chart in the budget documents, we do have some debt that does not mature until, I believe it's 2121, at which point none of us will be alive—unlikely we'll be alive, unless some medical marvel happens—and saddling our grandchildren and future grandchildren and future grandchildren with that debt.

So if the minister could please tell us how many bonds matured in the 2024 fiscal year, and if the

minister has signed any new long-term bonds, ranging in kind of the 50- to 100-year mark. And if so, how many, at what additional debt and at what average interest rate?

* (16:10)

MLA Sala: Appreciate the question, and I do think it's important to make sure that when we're here in committee that we set the record straight and we speak honestly about what's happened. The critic has referenced what she called junk math. I would say that that risks offending MNP and the workers and the, you know, the incredibly important services that they provide. And I do think it, you know, it disrespects the fact that they're an independent accounting firm doing important work.

And I'll share with the critic—you know, she references limitations. And I can share that the only limitation we faced was that we could not release Cabinet records of the former government. So that is a long-standing tradition in our Legislature and in Canadian Legislatures, pillar of our system. But with that said, I want to share with the member that if she's wanting to call on her teammates and her leader to suggest that they release the Treasury Board records during their tenure—God, would that ever be welcome. And I would love to see the details of the decisions that were made.

So if that's, you know, the concern that she has with MNP's analysis, we're all—we're open to it. And in fact, I would encourage her strongly to share with her leader that she would like to see those records released so that we could an even deeper dive into some of the decisions. And I know that one decision in particular that Manitobans would love to see the details of at Treasury Board was when they decided to give a \$500,000 cheque to the individual who's now leading their party.

I'd love to see the deliberations that went into that and how they decided that he deserved a \$500,000 cheque at a time when I remember a lot of other businesses were wondering, you know, why they weren't getting a \$500,000 cheque and were probably wondering what it was about the now-Leader of the Opposition's relationship with the premier, Stefanson at the time, that gave him such an asymmetric and disproportionately large cheque relative to all of the other business supports that went out at that time.

So that would be another really valuable, you know, TV minute that, I think, if the critic wants to share, that would be great to offer that transparency.

So we brought in MNP not just to help us understand the—how we got to a \$2-billion budget disaster that the former government left with us, but we did it because we wanted to actually understand lessons; lessons learned about how governments can avoid that type of decision making and, ultimately, fiscal planning that led to the financial hardship that they left us with.

And we've taken those lessons, and those are lessons that we genuinely wanted to benefit from, and I think Manitobans, credit rating agencies, investors can see that we've benefitted from those lessons to make sure we don't repeat the mistakes that they made. And that's reflected now in our multi-year approach to planning. And all the incredible work that our team has done to ensure that we deliver on that balanced budget commitment.

The critic did ask about our borrowing strategy, so I'm happy to speak to that. I'll speak as high level: we are focused right now on 10- to 30-year market, mostly within the domestic market. But we're not just focused domestically. When it comes to our bond strategy, we're also looking to diversify; we've got what are called kangaroo bonds. There was—we're doing business with the Australian market. We've also got some Swiss—some purchases there.

So we're seeing some good diversification, again, all with a focus on helping us to shave basis points from our costs. We know how important that is because the lower we can—the further we can go in lowering our borrowing costs, of course, the more we can do to invest in health care and invest in improving affordability.

And, again, you know, I just want to say, I think the work that's being done is exceptional. We've got an amazing team in Treasury led by our ADM, Nicoleta Opeara [*phonetic*], who I think is just an outstanding leader in the civil service; who, everywhere we went on those bond tours, was treated like a rock star. We would walk into rooms and everybody knows Nicoleta thanks to the great relationships she's building.

And again, the result of that is that we will have lower borrowing costs that will serve Manitobans and ensure we can do more of the important investments we're making in health care, improving affordability and making Manitoba into a safer place to live.

Mrs. Stone: I thank the minister for clarifying what some of those long-term bonds are in kind of a 20- to 30-year domestic market, as well as where else they're looking and exploring.

I did notice on that same page I spoke to, 119 of the budget documents, that the debt maturity profile excludes short-term debt. So wondering if the minister can walk me through the Province's short-term issuances—you know, how many, and how many are maturing in this upcoming—or, this fiscal year of 2025-2026, and what that debt is that's maturing in those short-term issuances as well.

* (16:20)

MLA Sala: Okay, so in terms of the short-term debt collection, the value of the T-bills we have outstanding is \$2.6 billion. Those are 91-day terms, and we just roll them over. And then just to give a more fulsome picture, right now, cash on hand, as of the end of March, a total of \$4.168 billion.

Mrs. Stone: I thank the minister for answering that question directly with facts and figures.

I want to switch to income tax questions for this minister. And, in the past, Manitoba Tax Assistance line has been used to assist Manitobans or answer questions regarding income taxes, such as the Manitoba School Tax Rebate—school taxes or tax rebates. However, I've now heard from constituents that that service is now gone, and they're directing individuals directly to CRA and not helping Manitobans with those questions.

So can the minister please explain the rationale for why that service has now been stopped when Manitobans are just trying to pay their correct taxes or get their correct rebates? I understand that individuals have used this phone line and the service last year, and it was in place; however, when they went to go use it this year, they were told that those individuals in the Manitoba tax department no longer provide that service to them.

MLA Sala: So to the critic's question: my understanding from our team—the departmental team is that CRA directed that we no longer provide specific advice on personal income taxes because the CRA is responsible for administering and interpreting our Income Tax Act. And they want to ensure consistent responses.

However, they still do answer questions about rebates and school tax credits. So they're still providing those supports, but the CRA advised that we needed to stop because they wanted to ensure consistency of responses there. So again, still providing Manitobans with supports on those other areas of taxation, but when it comes to personal income taxes, the CRA is providing

those supports directly and my understanding is that's consistent with other provinces as well.

But, you know, just talking about taxes, it, you know, reminds me of one tax that I really haven't had much of a chance to talk about here in this committee, but it's the great work that we've done to reduce costs for businesses through our reduction of the payroll tax. And that's—is very exciting, especially right now.

We know businesses are needing that little bit of additional support and I just want to flag for the critic, if she hadn't read this part of the budget, that the threshold is now going to be raised from \$2.25 million to \$2.5 million 'til you get to that notch rate and then the threshold below which businesses pay a reduced effective rate is raised from 4.5 to 5 million. So we know there's almost 900 employers that are going to benefit from that and that there's many, many employers that are going to be exempted completely from the payroll tax as a result of those changes.

And we know that those supports to our small and medium businesses couldn't come at a better time and proud to be doing that work in support of businesses.

With that, I'll pass it back to the critic.

Mrs. Stone: Okay, thank the minister, and I'm sure those businesses would've appreciated being bumped into that other threshold a year ago had the minister followed the plan of the PC's of removing the payroll taxes and starting that process.

But instead, now Manitoba businesses are going to have to wait until January 1, when they could have already been exempt from paying that payroll tax a year ago and had those savings directly right now, during a time when businesses are struggling with US and China tariffs and other high costs that are coming at them.

But instead, the minister decided to hold off on moving forward that plan a year ago and now those businesses are going to have to wait until January 1. So they will not see those savings right now. They are not currently seeing those savings right now. They have to wait as this minister delayed that movement.

You know, I also want to make reference to the income tax increases that this minister has decided to place on many Manitobans at a time of a cost-of-living crisis and possible economic recession that economists are currently predicting, as the minister has decided to stop indexing tax brackets to inflation, otherwise known as bracket creep.

As we know, when inflation increases, any wage increases will not be seen by Manitobans who will end up being pushed into a higher tax bracket as a result of this poor decision that the minister has made.

The minister has—is expecting, in his budget documents, to generate around \$82 million from this increase of income taxes on hard-working Manitobans.

* (16:30)

So since the minister made this change, if he could please provide the number of Manitobans that this will impact. Essentially, what I'm asking is how many Manitobans the minister projects will be pushed into a higher tax bracket to generate that \$82 million. Are we looking at 100 Manitobans, are we looking at 10,000 Manitobans? What does that number look like, if he did his homework?

MLA Sala: Chair, I appreciate that, and appreciate the question from the critic.

Again, as I've said here, it is very important that we correct the record and that we speak honestly about what's happening here in our province.

I just want to speak specifically to a comment that was made about the payroll tax, which we were proud to bring in that reduction to help save businesses money. When the critic references that this is something that their government had done, again, it's important to remind their team that that—like many things that they had said—was just an act of fiction, because they had no role in any—of any kind in actually implementing that.

Just as they said they were—they had a plan to build nine schools, but there was no budget for that. Just as they said they built a gold mine, which was, again, never going to happen without our NDP government doing the work that we did. There was no payroll tax reduction there that Manitobans were going to benefit from until our government came in and actually made it happen.

So very important that, you know, we, again, correct the record as it relates to that payroll tax comment. And again, just as with schools, the gold mine—so many other things the Conservatives like to try to take credit for—it was all just an act of their imagination. And we know that, of course, the MNP report spoke to that, spoke to how we got there, and it spoke to many of the bad decisions that we saw from them that left us in a very challenging place. But our government is rectifying that and is starting to move us forward on a good path.

When we talk about tax increases here in Manitoba, and the biggest existential threat that we're facing, it's, of course, the Trump tariff tax: the 25 per cent tariff tax threat that has Manitoba industries, businesses, communities really worried about the future. And, again, Manitobans are confused as to why the Leader of the Opposition supports those tariffs that we're being threatened with.

And I guess what I would like to know from the critic and the critic's leader is: Which industries is he okay with us losing? Which sectors of our economy does he support creating significant economic scarring within? Why does he feel that we should be saying anything positive about that threat to Manitoban businesses?

So, you know, this is the economic threat of the moment. This is the real tax concern that, when you speak with businesses, that's what they're most worried about. And again, we have a Leader of the Opposition who seems to speak in favour of those taxes that are being applied to Manitoba businesses.

We know those risks are real, and I, along with—I know many of my colleagues have been working really hard to speak directly with businesses and to understand the shape and contours of those risks that have been created by Trump's tariffs.

And I think about some of what I learned when I did—when I visited some of our local businesses. And I'm thinking about, you know, one very powerful visit that I was fortunate enough to make with our Premier (Mr. Kinew) when we visited Gerdau steel. We spoke with the leaders of that company. We spoke with workers for Gerdau and we heard about their worry about the threat that that tax threat, the Trump tariff tax threat presents to them and their jobs.

I was also really fortunate to tour two incredible businesses in Winkler recently: Triple E Recreational Vehicles. Ryan Elias, the CEO there gave me a tour of the incredible facility that they're operating where they're making a world-class product, but, of course, are worried about the impacts of tariffs on their business.

I also was fortunate to visit Decor Cabinets, who are, again, operating a world-class facility doing really unbelievable work. I was, again, fortunate to meet with Stan, the CEO there, to learn about the work that they're doing to continue to invest in automation, improving productivity there. But, once again, significant risks being presented to their business due to those Trump tariffs that the Leader of the Opposition and their team seems to be supporting or, at least, if

you look at the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, it would appear they're supporting.

So that is the significant tax threat that are—is facing Manitobans right now. We're doing the important work of working to support our businesses so we can help them through this challenging time, and that's what Manitobans can count on us to continue doing.

Mrs. Stone: This question was a pretty direct question about income taxes and the number of Manitobans that this minister is putting into a higher tax bracket in order to generate the \$82 million within this year's budget documents. He's clearly trying to distract Manitobans from his tax increases. He's having a bad couple weeks because property tax bills have hit the doors, and he's probably very embarrassed that he has now made 132,200 property owners within the city of Winnipeg worse off as a result of his bad planning with the general assessment and the double-digit school tax increases that have occurred this year.

So I'm going to ask the minister another very clear question, and this is an answer that Manitobans deserve to hear.

* (16:40)

Can the minister provide a breakdown of the number of Manitobans, in 2024, that were in the 10.8 per cent tax rate bracket, with incomes between zero dollars and \$47,000?

Can he provide the number of Manitobans in the 12.75 per cent tax rate, with incomes between \$47,001 to \$100,000?

And can he provide the number of Manitobans in the 17.4 per cent tax rate, with incomes over \$100,000, from 2024?

MLA Sala: Grateful for an opportunity to talk about the important work we're doing to lower costs for Manitobans.

You know, one thing we did right out of the gate, and I remember being pushed by CRA to get clarity on, was how we were going to approach brackets and bracket changes. And we were, of course, focused on lowering costs for Manitobans, and we committed to making changes to the brackets that help to reduce personal income tax burden for Manitobans.

That was in addition to the basic personal exemption lift that we brought in. That brought an enormous reduction in personal income taxes for Manitobans, saved them, in many cases, hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and we know how important that is.

And that, I think, was something that we demonstrated again, right out of the gate, that ours was a government that was going to reduce costs for Manitobans.

So in addition to those commitments where we had to reduce that scope of that personal income tax burden for Manitobans, we of course, you know, did other things—took other measures shortly after coming in. For example, our fuel tax holiday which we brought in, I think, within two or three months of coming in to government where, again, we made a change that, for Manitobans, meant hundreds and hundreds of dollars of additional savings, savings that they were not able to obtain under the former government because the former government seemed to really love to keep gas taxes as high as possible.

For seven and a half years, they charged the maximum they could. Again, and this is—you know, these are significant costs. Fuel taxes are a form of—or fuel costs, rather, represent a big portion of the average household's, you know, yearly budget, and under the former government, they kept those costs as high as possible. You know, what we did was we slashed them to zero and we did that in very short order after coming in.

So those were some of the immediate measures we took, and again, to questions about our approaches to brackets, as raised by the critic, that's what we did. We made changes. This government was responsible for an enormous personal income tax cut because that was our focus and we know that that's why Manitobans sent us to the Legislature.

So we did bring in a budget that brought in those savings for Manitobans. But you know, of course, we had other areas of focus, commitments that we made, whether it was fixing health care that had been slashed and cut for many years under the members opposite, or it was, you know, focusing on growing the economy. We had a lot of areas of focus, but one of the top focuses—and it shouldn't surprise the critic—was improving affordability. And I'm delighted that you know, in our first budget we brought in 21 ways to save that helped to deliver that.

That was, I think, the right focus, and our last budget continued to build on that. And I'm happy to share just a few of my favourites here.

I talked about our personal income tax cuts. I've talked about our gas tax cut, but I haven't had a chance to talk about our hydro rate freeze. You know, that's another really important measure we took. We know that the last government was almost obsessed with

finding ways to increase hydro rates on Manitobans, whether it was through legislation, like, for example, the year that they brought in a hydro rate increase in a BITSA bill—the first time in our province's history that Manitobans had ever had a hydro rate increase imposed upon them that didn't have the benefit of going through a regulatory body, through the PUB.

That meant that that increase was an increase that Manitobans will never know if it was actually needed. And you know, we saw them continue to try to focus on using that type of approach where they sought to do a runaround from the PUB with their bill, bill 36. And I think it was—the final iteration, you know, after having gone three years of them trying to push that through, the final iteration, bill 36, essentially sought to again do away with the role of the Public Utilities Board, all with the goal and allowing them to raise hydro rates as quickly as possible.

So fortunately, our government put an end to that. We made those amendments that did away with that approach and we stopped the 5 per cent increase that would've gone live April 1. And that, again, was a major, sort of initiative that we undertook to lower energy costs for Manitobans, in addition to that permanent gas tax cut.

So just a handful of my favourites there; some of the highlights from our affordability highlights reel. And you know, lots more to say when it comes to affordability and the important work we're doing to reduce taxes for Manitobans, and happy to return to that in a following answer if the critic wants me to keep highlighting our fantastic record in reducing costs for Manitobans.

Mrs. Stone: Quite frankly, the minister doesn't have much of a leg to stand on when it comes to hydro rates because he's jacked them up 11 per cent over the next three years.

But I do want to come back to another topic as we've seen education property taxes skyrocket over the past couple of weeks, and Winnipeggers and Manitobans are currently in shock as they're seeing their property tax bills come through their mail boxes.

But the minister, in the past, has often been fond of talking about the reduction of the education property tax credit for renters but fails to acknowledge that the former minister of Finance, Scott Fielding, created a new renters tax credit of \$525 to replace it.

* (16:50)

The minister then promised to increase it after the election to \$750, but has since been making renters wait, and it's only seen an increase by a small amount.

So why, in 2021 and 2022 and 2023, did the minister say it should be \$750, but now as minister, he's been breaking that promise and his word and only delivering half measures? In 2024, it was left at \$525. In 2025, it was only \$575, with this budget promising that would go to \$625 in 2026.

So why has the minister failed to deliver on his promise of increasing it to \$750, when year over year over year, he said that he would do this and wanted to see that happen? So I think those renters may have voted because of this minister's promise and might feel very betrayed after the minister spoke for three years about increasing it to \$750 and has failed to increase it to that amount.

So why should renters trust this minister and his word?

MLA Sala: Because we're doing what we said we would do, and that's just proven out in the record. So, I mean, I'm delighted to have a chance to speak to this work that we're doing to make life more affordable for renters.

We know that when it comes to costs of renters, the last government increased their burden by \$175. So, I mean, it's kind of a strange thing to lean into here, I would say, because this is an area where we have a clear-cut example of the PCs raising costs on folks who need the most help.

Renters tend to be folks on fixed incomes, seniors, folks struggling with various disabilities. These are—this—really, our renters tend to be made up with folks who are facing some financial challenges, not in all cases but in many cases. And so their decision to raise taxes on renters by \$175 was very concerning.

To the critic's point, we did indeed commit to raising that back up to where it was before the PCs slashed that credit and ultimately increased the burden for folks who needed those supports, and I'm proud to say we're doing the work. We're doing what we said we were going to do, and we're committed to getting that back to what it was before the Conservatives cut it.

And both of our budgets have made progress in delivering on that commitment, and the critic can expect more progress on that in future budgets, as well. And that's because our team and our government is focused on ensuring that, you know, hard-working everyday Manitobans are seen and that their

challenges are recognized. And I think there's no question that we've proven that we're committed to supporting them in our—both of our recent budgets, again, have shown progress in helping those folks who need the help.

I—you know, I have to say, in terms of the hydro rate comment by the critic, it does give me an opportunity to speak to the important work we're doing to, again, keep hydro rates affordable while we actually move Hydro forward.

One of the things that was most concerning about the former government's record is that not only did they develop no new energy to support Manitobans or supporting economic growth, but that they had this program of increases in hydro rates—which, by the way, is in excess of our proposed rate increase path that's gone from Hydro to the Public Utilities Board—but they did that. They raised hydro rates, again, in excess of what we're proposing, during a period where they were doing absolutely nothing to move Hydro forward. No program of building. No vision for moving Hydro, you know, ahead. No proposals for developing new energy.

So while we were sitting on our hands—while the former government was sitting on their hands when it came to energy and hydro, they were doing that while they were increasing rates. So you have a very clear distinction if you compare their record: big hydro rate increases, doing absolutely nothing. Our approach is: reasonable hydro rate increases, which are still lower than what they brought forward, while we get the job done. That's a pretty, you know, clear contrast when you look at, again, no accomplishments, big hydro rate increases—moderate, fair increases that keep rates low while we do what needs to be done and building out new hydro.

It's a remarkable contrast and you look at what we're proposing and what we've outlined in our affordable energy plan: 600 megawatts of new wind in partnership with First Nations for the first time in this province's history. Doing that work in the right way, in a good way, in collaboration with First Nations. That is an exciting path forward.

We've committed to, of course, a lot of other really important changes that is going to start to take full advantage of what we have here in our province, which is this remarkable endowment with—for watersheds that run through our province, and our team is making the most of that. And we're, again, as we are on so many other areas, whether it's health care,

justice, infrastructure, almost every single area of government, we're making progress and hydro's no exception.

And, again, if you compare what happened under their tenure, boy oh boy, did they ever put us in a tough position. We have, you know, because of their lack of action, needed to move at a very fast clip to start developing new capacity.

Hydro's moving forward in the right way to make sure that we advanced and made progress on that commitment to 600 megawatts of new wind energy. Proud of the work that they're doing. Proud of our team and the fact that we're keeping rates affordable while we do it.

And, again, that's what Manitobans can expect from us: more progress, a focus on affordability while we get the job done.

Mrs. Stone: As we know, many Winnipeggers—132,200 properties within the city of Winnipeg; that's 55 per cent of properties in Winnipeg that are receiving property tax bills—are worse off under this NDP government.

We are hearing from homeowners and property owners across the entire city that are being hit with significantly high property tax bills as a direct result of the decision that this minister made to get rid of the 50 per cent education property tax rebate and replace it with a poorly thought-out \$1,500 homeowner affordability credit.

And what we're seeing is those homeowners are now in for a property bill shock, and they are seeing that as we speak as those property tax bills went in the mail last Thursday and have been hitting mailboxes as we speak.

In fact, in the minister's own constituency, St. James-Assiniboia has increased school division taxes by 10.4 per cent. In the Winnipeg School Division, we're seeing a 13.7 per cent increase; in Pembina Trails, a 16.6 per cent increase; in Seven Oaks, a 16.8 per cent increase; in Seine River, a 14.4 per cent increase; in Interlake, 17.9 per cent increase; in Louis Riel, 18.4 per cent increase; and River East Transcona, 14.4 per cent increase.

Those are double-digit school division increases and taxes across every single Winnipeg school division. This is analysis—public analysis done by the City of Winnipeg.

So seeing as how Manitobans' and Winnipeggers' property tax bills have skyrocketed under this NDP government and we are seeing historic double-digit increases by school divisions across the city of Winnipeg,

does this minister maintain that his decision to remove the 2 per cent cap on school divisions is a good one?

MLA Sala: Happy to just use the last 40 seconds here to talk a bit more about the important work that we're doing to make life more affordable.

I flagged this for the critic many times but I'm happy to repeat. The \$1,600 tax credit that we committed to will make it more affordable to own a home for nearly 80 per cent of Manitobans, according to the Department of Finance.

And so, you know, building on that, just happy to share for her benefit, what we know is 90 per cent of homeowners in Dauphin, Selkirk, Gimli will pay less taxes thanks to the tax credit. Nearly 90 per cent of homeowners in Winkler will pay less taxes thanks to this credit. And on and on and on.

That's work we're proud to do and we're going to continue to do as a government focused on affordability.

The Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

CHAMBER

SPORT, CULTURE, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

* (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 the Department of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I do, thank you, Chair.

I am pleased to be here today, honourable Chair. I would like to welcome my colleagues and the members opposite. It's an honour and a privilege as Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism to introduce the 2025-26 budgetary Estimates for my department.

* (15:10)

Budget 2025 reinforces our government's ongoing dedication to nurturing a vibrant and inclusive arts, culture, heritage, sports and tourism environment across Manitoba, throughout our term. Our department supports arts and cultural organizations, amateur sports, heritage programs and public libraries. We help

preserve government records and share Manitoba's unique identity. These efforts celebrate our history, reflect our diverse communities and create opportunities for people to connect and to grow.

We also support tourism throughout—through the efforts of Travel Manitoba. Attracting tourists to our province is even more important than before, as Manitoba faces the economic challenges brought about by American tariffs. Tourism is a significant driver of job creation and economic development in our province, playing a crucial role in both urban and rural areas by fostering regional growth and enhancing cultural vitality. This year's budget builds on our previous commitments with an additional \$4.5-million investment in tourism, bringing the total to \$18.4 million.

We are actively encouraging Manitobans to stay at home and explore our beautiful province instead of looking south, while at the same time enhancing our efforts to attract our fellow Canadians and our American neighbours to discover all that Manitoba has to offer.

This new funding is projected to generate an additional \$125.5 million in visitor spending, including \$9.2 million in provincial and local tax revenues and creating approximately 770 new jobs. These efforts will contribute to the tax revenues necessary to reduce the deficit and support a balanced provincial budget.

We are proud to support major sporting events that bring our community together and showcase Manitoba on a national stage. This year, we have allocated \$3.6 million to support the hosting of major events in 2025, including the CFL's Grey Cup and the Canadian Elite Basketball League championship. These events promote physical activity, build community spirit and reinforce our provincial pride. They support local restaurants, hotels, attractions, bring visitors to our city and boost our local economy.

Public libraries continue to be vital pillars of learning, literacy and connection in our communities. Recognizing their impact, Budget 2025 provides a \$500,000 annual increase, beginning in the fiscal year 2025-26, for the Winnipeg Public Library system and the Legislative Library. This additional support will expand the access to library services and contribute to the long-term growth of our library network.

Our commitment to culture and the arts remains strong. This year, we have provided funding to the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and the Manitoba Arts Council, with allocations of \$300,000 and \$250,000, respectively. These investments will help

sustain and grow our vibrant arts community, ensuring that Manitoba's—Manitobans continue to have access to high-quality cultural experiences.

Lastly, I want to express heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff in our department. Their dedication and hard work plays a vital role in ensuring a stronger, more inclusive and culturally rich Manitoba.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those opening comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening statements?

Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk): I do.

First of all, I want to give my thanks to the minister and congratulate her on her first Committee of Supply. I'd also like to thank the department and the civil servants who help to keep all the sectors in this portfolio thriving in Manitoba.

Manitoba's iconic arts and cultural scene and sports sector are part of our identity as Manitobans and our economic future. From the Jets to Folklorama to the Manitoba Museum and beyond, these are key institutions that play a huge part in our lives.

I am proud to be a part of the PC Conservative team that truly values sport, culture, heritage and tourism. You can see that reflected by our new Opposition Leader, who was the most recent PC minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage. Under his leadership, our previous PC government was able to accelerate progress in those sectors.

When we talk about sports, I'm excited for Manitoba to be hosting the Grey Cup and the Canadian Elite Basketball League championships this year, thanks to the millions of dollars invested by the PCs. Funding for local community groups, initiatives and events is also very important. The PCs supported them through a \$100-million Arts, Culture, Sport in Community Fund, which the NDP government have since scrapped without replacement.

When it comes to heritage and information, PCs supported essential community hubs through heritage grants, millions of capital investments, modernization, a new funding model for our public libraries. We also supported the establishment of a monument to Chief Peguis on the grounds of our Legislature, which has since been delayed by the NDP with no update. We invested and focused on rural Manitoba, which we have heard nothing of in the speech earlier.

In terms of the film industry, we introduced and enhanced North America's most competitive film tax credit, supported the new production studio in Niverville, and invested in direct flights between Winnipeg and LA, the later of which was scrapped by the NDP.

Tourism has been the talk of the town lately, and we know it's the PCs who built this sector, as well. The new PC government came in, in 2016, and gave Travel Manitoba a 42 per cent funding boost, the first increase that agency had seen in over a decade under the NDP.

Since then, we introduced several strategies that have been bolstering Manitoba's tourism to this day, including Indigenous tourism.

There is a clear contrast between the PC record and the NDP record on supporting sport, culture, heritage and tourism here in Manitoba. My hope today is to unpack the direction that the Sport, Cultural—Heritage and Tourism file has taken thus far under the NDP and see where it is headed in Manitoba.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: And we thank the critic for those opening remarks.

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

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

MLA Kennedy: So I would like to introduce the members of my department with me here today.

First, we have Jeff Hnatiuk, who is the deputy minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism. And we also have Mike Sosiak, and he is the assistant deputy minister for Administration and Finance, as well as the executive financial officer for our department. We also have with us Chantel Bacon, and she is the director of ministerial affairs out of my office.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

And would the critic like to introduce the staff joining him?

* (15:20)

Mr. Perchotte: Very proud to introduce Guruch Buttar, who is the No. 1 staff in this file, doing a tremendous

amount of research and getting the information that we look for on a daily basis.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that.

In accordance with subrule 77(15), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Perchotte: Like to see if the minister can provide a list of all political staff in her department, including the names and titles.

MLA Kennedy: So the staff that I have, I—as I'd said previously, I named Chantel Bacon, who's here in the Chamber with me, and she is the Director of Ministerial Affairs; and then also I have Komalpreet Sangha and she is the assistant—Executive Assistant to myself. We did have a third position, which was a policy analyst, and they have since moved to a different position.

Mr. Perchotte: Thank you for that answer.

Does the minister have any staff who are on secondment?

MLA Kennedy: If I could just ask the members opposite for clarification. Are they looking for secondments within the minister's office, or secondments within the department?

Mr. Perchotte: Both, please.

MLA Kennedy: So, currently, there are no secondments within the department or within the minister's office.

Mr. Perchotte: You had—it was mentioned earlier by the minister that the third position was vacated. Are there any vacancies in the political staff or are they anticipating adding any positions in the department?

MLA Kennedy: So we will not be adding any staff members to the team within the minister's office.

Mr. Perchotte: Thank you for that answer.

Is there any other additional political staff that work with the minister?

MLA Kennedy: So there are a number of political staff, really a team of political staff, who support a number of the minister's offices within the Legislative Assembly. And so they're not directly staffed within

my—the minister's office, but they do support a number of ministers' offices.

Mr. Perchotte: Can the minister tell us which departments they would come from—communication—or is there other supporting roles that the staff work with?

* (15:30)

MLA Kennedy: So I'd like to just talk about the collaborative approach that we take as a government. It's something that we really pride ourselves on and as Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, I work with all ministers and their staff cross-departmentally, and it's pretty wonderful to be able to have that relationship with the other ministers in our Cabinet.

And I'm really fortunate to have the support in my office of my two political staff, Chantel here and Komal, who's my executive assistant.

Komal is a young woman who is quite brilliant, really; has a lot of experience for someone of such a young age within different offices. She's worked within the Minister of Health's office, and—as well as my own, and is such a wonderful addition to our team. She really is able to be responsive when we're out in the community, attending events, meeting with stakeholders at the Legislature; is great at building relationships and just being able to operate in a variety of different social situations. She has her degree in political science and really is the future of leadership and politics, so I'm happy to be able to work with her on a—many hours a day.

With regards to my director of ministerial affairs, Chantel here, I'll say some really amazing things about her. As someone who was newly appointed in the middle of November as a minister, she comes to this role as director of ministerial affairs with a wide range of experience in the previous NDP government, was able to have that role with a number of ministers, one of them moving on to be the leader—or, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) of the province. And so—and she's been with my colleague, Minister Moses, before coming over to my department when I was named minister.

The Chairperson: I'll just remind the minister we have to refer to folks by their constituency or ministerial department.

MLA Kennedy: Thank you, Chair, for the reminder.

And so, she has just a wide range of experience and is so adept at being able to guide me with her expertise and her political knowledge and knowledge of departments. And is able to really keep our

department running in a way that is so wonderful to be able to be able to have the liaising with our deputy minister. And so she is just a wonderful addition to my team, and I enjoy working with her very much.

Mr. Perchotte: Like to thank the minister for that glowing review of the staff that she works with. It's very important to appreciate the people that you're with.

But, however, the question was the additional staff that work with the minister, that are—were not those previously named people. I—the question was: What departments do they come from?

* (15:40)

MLA Kennedy: So I just want to reiterate how very fortunate I am to work with amazing ministers. My colleagues are pretty incredible people and do a great job. And we work together, and it's because we're a collaborative government and we have these relationships with each other.

So, I work with everyone. And that's how, really, our government should be. It should be collaborative. It should be a listening government. And so I'm proud to be a part of a government that is both of those things.

So, I'm happy to ask—answer these questions about staffing, but I would like to actually answer some questions about my portfolio: Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism. So, hopefully, this is the last question about staffing and we can move on to the orders of the day and chat about the department.

Thank you.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): I respect that the minister wants to move on from the questions about staffing, but staffing play a critical role in all things within government, so these are very important questions to the way government is being run and her department is being run.

I'm going to shift just a bit over to the sports end of things here.

Can the minister provide a total allocation for the department of sport budget for 2025 and 2024? And then I'll let my colleague get back to his staffing questions.

* (15:50)

MLA Kennedy: So in Budget 2024-25, which you were asking about, the budget for Sport Manitoba for that year was \$14,310,000.

And then for the sport event hosting grant for '24-25, was—\$102,000 was the budget.

Mr. Perchotte: My previous question regarding the staff—and I've been a business owner for many years. I've sat on many different boards. I've been on charge of committees and volunteer boards. And every opportunity I've had to uplift and talk about staff or the people in the organization, I jump at it.

I found the answer to that from the minister to be actually very disrespectful to the staff that work very hard in that department so I'm going to move on to something a little closer.

Will the minister tell us who is directly responsible for the casework that comes to the minister's office?

* (16:00)

MLA Kennedy: So with regards to the casework that my critic is asking about, my office works with the deputy's office to work through any casework that comes in, in consultation with my political staff.

Also, I wanted to just take a moment to talk about, really, the amazing front-of-the-house staff that I have within my department office. They are quite remarkable. They field calls and emails on a daily basis. It's a very heavy load of phone calls and emails, and they go through, you know, touching base with the public on a daily basis and they listen to them and, of course, they provide information as they can. And, yes, they're really great staff.

Thank you.

MLA Lagassé: So I'd like to thank the minister for the previous answer regarding the budget.

Can the minister break down what specific programs or areas saw the largest increases or cuts, and why this occurred?

MLA Kennedy: So I just want to clarify with the member, just to be sure that I'm gathering the correct information, when you say increases or cuts, are you meaning in comparison to last year's budget, so '24-25 budget compared to '25-26 budget? I just want to clarify.

Thank you.

MLA Lagassé: So my question is more geared to what's going on currently, not past years. I'm curious—and it kind of leads into my next question, so I'll ask them both at the same time here. It's talking about

whatever programs did see increases with this budget and which ones did not.

Also, how were stakeholders consulted in that, and how was that determined in those changes? So that would have been my follow-up question. I'll give you them both at the same time.

* (16:10)

MLA Kennedy: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question.

Really, what I want to stress is that our government is really here to invest in Manitoba. We've made that clear and we're stepping up to invest an additional \$4.5 million in Travel Manitoba in order to boost our local economy, support local businesses and create good jobs for Manitobans.

Manitobans are proud of our incredible province and our country, and this investment is going to strengthen our economy as we work together to build one Manitoba and, really, to invite the world to visit the true north strong and free, our beautiful province.

We've also increased funding to libraries, which are community hubs, and—you know, being a person who grew up in a rural area, I know—and having spoke with folks who run these local libraries that are really those community hubs in small towns—so important, and so we're really happy to be able to increase that funding.

As I said in my opening remarks, we've also invested in hosting the Grey Cup this year, which we're really excited about, and also hosting the Canadian elite basketball championship.

Our government really—is important to note that we made a province—a promise to Manitobans that we're working to uplift our province's rich cultural history and strengthen our communities and build a province for the next generation, which is, as a parent, something that's really important to me.

MLA Shannon Corbett, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Having already met with arts groups and performers in the province, I can confidently say that our government is there for the WSO and for Manitoba's arts community. We're listening and we're acting to support musicians and arts across the province.

This year, we've also increased funding to the WSO and the Manitoba Arts Council, and we—really, I think what's really important to note, since becoming minister in the middle of November, I've had the great

privilege and honour to meet with a number of stakeholders in the areas for my department and they are incredibly passionate about the arts and the areas in which they serve Manitobans.

And, you know, as we prepare for Estimates—this is a process that's starting—we—we're going to be continuing the tradition of meeting with stakeholders. We're a listening government, we're collaborative and we want to know what's important to these organizations and to these stakeholders, so we take those things into consideration.

And it's something that we do on a very regular basis, and something that I really enjoy doing is building those relationships with our stakeholders.

Mr. Perchotte: A little disappointed. The—my colleague asked a sports question. I think we got an answer on everything else, or a statement on everything else but sports except for their: Did you know the Grey Cup is coming?

* (16:20)

I think that as being a business owner for many years and being on a bunch of boards, I would be remiss if I didn't say I'm a little disillusioned here. I would assume that somebody in charge of a department would be—have the information readily available and couldn't wait to get up and tell the wonderful things that were going on in that department and be able to spew them off. You could ask me anything in my business. You can ask my employees things in the business and they would certainly know what the intricacies are on a very quick basis.

So, hopefully, we can get some actual answers here today. Just a very simple questioning that we're asking as to funding and for sports and for culture, for arts and for heritage.

So I'm just going to go back to just something that we know in this House is that just last month, in this Chamber alone, the WSO came here and filled the gallery. And they were here to talk about the financial strain that they've been under, and they've been forced to face significant cutbacks to their programming. Other local organizations have also expressed similar challenges.

What has the minister done since the WSO came here and talked about their cutbacks? What have they done to increase funding in that sector?

MLA Kennedy: So what I would say is, something that we're really proud of within our government—*[interjection]* Thank you. Sorry about that. Something

that we're really proud of within our government is that since taking government, we've increased funding—increased funding—to the WSO by \$700,000.

And I'll—I would like to point out that when the members opposite were in government, they actually froze funding to the WSO year after year, which is pretty disappointing.

So not only have we increased our investment into the arts sector, specifically, I would say and would like to put on the record, that our government has increased, since taking government, funding to the Manitoba Arts Council to the tune of \$1.25 million, which is significant.

Our government understands how important the arts is in our province, and certainly, we're incredibly proud of our investments and we are really proud of the thriving art scene that we have here in Manitoba, and we'll continue to be proud of the incredible art scene that we have here in our province.

* (16:30)

MLA Lagassé: Okay, so, again, I had a question that was very specific about consultation and those sort of things, and it seems like sport isn't very high on the radar for the minister currently, which is a bit surprising to me because we are bringing forward a bill on Safe Sport, and there's not really a lot of consultation going on which, again, concerns me. But we're not here to debate legislation at this point.

Again, would love to give the minister that opportunity to re-answer that question, but I'm going to move more towards the Grey Cup right now. The budget mentions that Manitoba will be hosting the Grey Cup and the Canadian Elite Basketball League championships this year. As we all know, these major events are coming to the province thanks to PC investments in the Winnipeg Football Club and Sea Bears.

Last year, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) ran out, put out a press release re-announcing the \$1 million for the CEBL championships and \$450,000 for the Sea Bears' initial operations.

Can the minister please share any new funding her government has invested in the Grey Cup, and then a separate number for the investments within the CEBL events this year?

The Chairperson in the Chair

* (16:40)

MLA Kennedy: So I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. I enjoy talking about sports.

I think that our government does a great job of supporting the sports sector.

We're incredibly thrilled to support the sports sector in our province, and that's why our government invested \$5.5 million for the Grey Cup. And through just that one event that's going to be happening this fall, the economic impact is going to be \$90 million, which is truly incredible.

We've also invested \$1 million for the CEBL championships. And that's going to be bringing in 5,000 spectators, and it's going to have an estimated direct spend of \$1.8 million.

Also, which is something that's happening right now, which is very exciting, is the—of course, the NHL playoffs. And we've invested \$300,000 to go through holding the Whiteout parties which everyone's been so excited to take part in. And that's bringing business to our downtown Winnipeg, and, really, you know, our whole entire province is behind the Winnipeg Jets. Yes, so we're excited to see them advance to the third round.

Go, Jets, go.

Mr. Perchotte: Again, that was 10 minutes to come up with that answer; a little underwhelming from my standpoint. The previous answer also was 10 minutes to tell me that there's been zero dollars spent since the WSO came here asking for financial help.

And then the minister talks about the funds that they put in. I'd like to remind the minister that when you combine the PC budget that was put forward along with the ACSC funds that were put there, the amount of money spent by the PC government on the arts is much greater than the NDP government is currently doing.

So I'll move along. We know that in addition to the incredible PC film tax credit, another key incentive for the film industry here in Manitoba was the direct flights between Winnipeg and Los Angeles. That was another initiative of the former PC government. Yet, a few weeks ago, the NDP government pulled its support for these direct flights.

What was the dollar amount that was saved that put nearly a half-a-billion-dollar industry at risk?

* (16:50)

MLA Kennedy: Manitobans are proud of our world-class film and production sector. I certainly am, as Minister responsible for Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism here.

Over the past year, Manitoba saw an all-time high of \$440 million in film production in 2024. We've helped draw millions of dollars into our local economy from international investors.

And, to be completely honest, that's why it's really concerning that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Khan)—your leader—thanked Donald Trump for tariffs. It's incredibly important. He's willing to put our provincial economy at risk for his own gain, which is quite disturbing, really.

I've been speaking to those who represent the film industry. We've been in constant contact, and they are just remarkable professionals. And they know that our government is working collaboratively with them. We hear all the time from stakeholders about how open our government is, how easily accessible we are, how collaborative we are, and that really is the style of governance that the NDP takes and we're proud of that.

We have a resilient local production industry, but, of course, we understand that uncertainty that the issue creates—it really does; the tariffs are creating uncertainty—and that's why we're monitoring the situation closely. And we're going to continue to work with folks in the film industry to protect and to grow this vital part of our economy together.

I think it's important to highlight that our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has been on the front lines of the team Canada approach to deal with Trump's tariffs inasmuch as he has signed a memorandum of understanding today with the Province of Ontario, which is incredible. He's also been working with all the premiers, federal government, and everyone is, you know, on—really united on the tariff front.

So while the opposition and their leader are thanking Trump for tariffs, we're working to boost our local economy and protect our workers.

It's also important to note that our government has invested \$4.5 million here at home to boost our local economy.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

MLA Lagassé: Shifting back to sport. And just a little bit in my preamble here before I get to my question, I'm pretty sure the member didn't ask anything about Trump tariffs and—in his question there, so I believe it

was more about what the industry was bringing and why you would cut to that industry.

Going back to my previous question, I'd like to thank you for those numbers and ask the minister if any of these investments have come at the expense of other sport organizations, like minor sports, so on. Like, we've got some pretty significant investments here with the Grey Cup and you know, the Jets and all those things.

I just want to ensure that they're not coming at the expense of minor sports or other organizations and because in my first question, we really didn't touch on any of the consultation. This is where this concern's coming from.

MLA Kennedy: So while the PCs cut while they were in office, we're investing for sports for all Manitobans.

Since our government has taken power, we've invested \$1 million more in Sport Manitoba to support amateur sport.

MLA Lagassé: So I understand that the minister has these talking points that come from her government and they always claim that in seven and a half years of damage, so on and so forth. They've also claimed during that whole entire time that they had solutions to these problems.

It's been a year and a half and they really haven't come up with any of those solutions that one could argue they've had for the past nine years.

So I'll give the minister an opportunity again when this resumes to talk a little bit more about consultation and some of the—you know, give us some real answers on what's going on within this department and not just talk in lines that come from her party.

Looking at the time, I'll just leave it to the minister at this point.

The Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise and call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 14, 2025

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