



Third Session – Forty-Third Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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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	Ind.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
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
ROBBINS, Colleen	Spruce Woods	PC
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>	The Pas-Kameesak	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the honourable Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko): O Eternal and Almighty God, from all—from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as they 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

The Deputy Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Spring Flood Update

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I rise today to give an update to the House on the flood outlook for Manitoba.

As members have already seen in the media, the Fisher River basin is very likely to have a significant flood this season, particularly affecting the communities of Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and communities in the rural municipality of Fisher.

Elevated flood risk in the Icelandic River basin could affect towns like Arborg and Riverton, and low-lying lands in the Parkland region could experience high water levels as well.

The additional precipitation forecast to begin tonight could make the situation more severe.

Manitoba is very fortunate to have the hydrological forecast centre within my department of Transportation and Infrastructure. These hard-working civil servants on that team, as well as across the whole department, have been working in lockstep with communities to secure sandbags, super sandbags, heavy equipment, planning, technical engineering support and design for clay diking as well as labour to protect homes and critical community infrastructure. Staff have also been working with communities to improve critical roads and establish emergency detours.

I want to thank all of the volunteers in Manitoba who have shown up to support their fellow Manitobans. Every day, for over a week, there have been hundreds of provincial, federal and municipal staff and volunteers who've travelled to Peguis to support the community.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) and myself and the minister of natural resources and Indigenous services have been up in Peguis throughout the past week. I also had the opportunity to meet with the chief in Fisher River, and it's really important that we've been able to connect and work closely with the chiefs in those nations that are taking the lead on these flood mitigation efforts.

I also want to extend my gratitude to my federal counterpart, Eleanor Olszewski, who is the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, for her attentiveness to these issues and the support that's come from the federal government.

Manitoba's private contracting industry has also been assisting with preparedness efforts.

It has truly been a one Manitoba response to prepare for flooding and prevent devastating damage to homes, waste water treatment plants and arenas.

For a quick snapshot of the situation in Fisher River Cree Nation and Peguis First Nation, our government provided over 800,000 sandbags and

23,000 super sandbags to prevent—to protect assets, as well as heavy equipment and sandbag machinery.

The runoff and weather events we have experienced for the last few weeks have also had an impact on the Parkland region: Vermilion River, Swan River and the Assiniboine River. This winter saw a significant amount of snow in the region, and this weekend's expected storm will increase the risk of overland flooding.

If there is one thing Manitobans know how to contend with, it's flooding. We collectively have a lot of experience, and our emergency management team is in regular contact with the regions potentially affected. Staff are currently out steaming culverts and breaking up ice to allow for water to flow.

Thank you for your time—for this time, honourable Speaker.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I just want to thank the minister opposite for the flood update. We certainly appreciate being kept apprised of the government's efforts. And I also want to thank all those in the department, everyone involved in preparing Manitoba's flood response.

As a member representing the constituency of Borderland, which is often an epicentre of flooding being along the Red River, you know, I know the importance of this issue in this upcoming season, flooding season, where we're anticipating runoff and rising water levels and the challenges and dangers that that presents.

So, again, I want to thank the minister and everyone in her department involved in the response this year.

Thank you.

Earth Day

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I rise today to proudly say happy Earth Day and to honour the many Manitobans who dedicate their time, expertise and passion to protecting the environment.

Across our province, environmental organizations, educators, community leaders and innovators are doing the essential work of supporting wildlife and habitats, teaching families how to grow food, advancing climate resilience and building a cleaner economy through new technologies. Their efforts strengthen our communities, our health and our shared future.

Environmental stewardship is not work that can be done alone. Whether we're talking about clean energy, nature and water protection or preparing communities for extreme weather, these issues touch every part of our society and economy. I want to acknowledge the many partners—municipalities, Indigenous Nations, non-profits, businesses and young people—who lead this work.

I would like to share several important milestones from the last year. Last June, our government and Efficiency Manitoba launched the Affordable Home Energy Program, with a goal of supporting thousands of families in installing heat pumps. I'm pleased to report that 800 families have already installed geothermal heat pumps, with many more adopting air source heat pumps, reducing energy bills. This also strengthens our electricity grid and helps families stay comfortable year-round.

* (13:40)

I also want to recognize Efficiency Manitoba for being the only jurisdiction in Canada delivering on the federal Greener Homes Affordability Program to directly benefit residents right here at home.

In October, we released Manitoba's Path to Net Zero, a broad road map that touches every sector of our society and economy. Work is well under way on the first set of action plans that will make this path tangible and demonstrate clear leadership at a time when climate action is most urgent. The path is designed so that all Manitobans—businesses, students, Indigenous Nations, communities and NGOs—can see themselves in the work ahead, and we've heard this reflected back to us since its launch.

Last month, as part of Budget 2026, we announced support for municipalities to make public transit free for students across Manitoba. This will make the climate-friendly choice easier while reducing barriers for students getting to school and getting around and also help build a new generation of public transit riders.

This initiative builds on the work of Manitoba's first climate educator-in-residence, who has been supporting curriculum development and helping integrate climate action into classrooms across our great province.

And just last week, the four First Nations of the Seal River Watershed Alliance, Parks Canada and our government shared with the world the formal proposal to protect nearly 7 per cent of Manitoba as the province's first Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area.

This proposal represents what is poised to become the single largest protected area in Manitoba, combining the largest provincial protected area with the largest national protected area in our province. I want to acknowledge the years of dedication and collaboration that have brought us to this historic moment.

Today, I am also pleased to highlight new investments in organizations that help Manitobans make informed climate choices and build resilient communities.

ClimateWest will receive \$170,000 over three—over the next three years to support climate resilience and adaptation across the Prairie provinces. The University of Winnipeg's Prairie Climate Centre will receive \$200,000 to advance climate education and ensure Manitobans have access to the data and tools that they need. And Eco-West's Southeast Regional Transit initiative will receive \$400,000 to expand electric vehicle charging infrastructure and develop a low-carbon mobility option for approximately 80,000 residents in southeastern Manitoba.

I want to congratulate these organizations for their leadership and thank all those working behind the scenes to make this progress possible.

I'm also proud to announce that Manitoba's youth advisory committee has now been formally appointed. These young Manitobans bring energy, insight and big ideas to the table and they will play an important role in shaping our climate action plans. I look forward to working with them in the years ahead and championing their ideas in this House.

Much has been accomplished in our time in government: helping Manitobans make the switch to EVs, launching the first call for wind power in a generation, providing the biggest ever rebates to Manitobans to make homes more energy efficient, saving the Lemay Forest and reinstating funding to Manitoba's environmental NGOs, among others. And there's more to do.

To everyone across Manitoba who continues to advocate for the environment, who calls for strong policy and who works every day to build a sustainable future for the next generation, we thank you. Your efforts matter and your provincial government is committed to working alongside you. Together, we're building a Manitoba that is cleaner, stronger and more prepared to address the challenges of tomorrow.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Honourable Deputy Speaker, today I rise to recognize April 22 as Earth Day, a global day of action and reflection focused on protecting our environment and ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

Earth Day is a reminder that stewardship of our natural environment is a shared responsibility. A balanced, practical approach is one that protects our environment while supporting economic growth, energy security and opportunities for Manitobans.

Earth Day's theme, Our Power, Our Planet, emphasizes the importance of clean, reliable energy and the role it plays in reducing emissions and supporting long-term sustainability. Manitoba is well positioned to lead in this area, with one of the cleanest energy grids in North America, driven by hydro-electric power that provides affordable and dependable electricity to families and businesses.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Manitoba is home to some of the most beautiful and diverse landscapes in the country. From our prairies and forests to our lakes and rivers, places like Riding Mountain National Park and Whiteshell Provincial Park are not only sources of pride, but also vital parts of our natural heritage that must be protected and preserved.

Our responsibility is clear: We must continue to invest in conservation, protect our water and natural resources and support responsible development that balances environmental protection with economic opportunity. That means working with communities, Indigenous partners and industry to ensure sustainable outcomes that benefit all Manitobans.

Earth Day is also an opportunity for individuals to take action. Whether it's reducing waste, conserving energy, supporting local conservation efforts or simply spending time outdoors, every effort contributes to a healthier environment.

I encourage all Manitobans to take time today to appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds us and to reflect on the role we all play in protecting it.

By taking a practical, balanced and forward-looking approach, we can ensure that Manitoba remains a place where both environment and our economy thrive, for today and for future generations.

Thank you, honourable Deputy Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: Before we head on to members' statements, I'd like to recognize a student group in the gallery. We have seated in the public gallery from Ralph Maybank School 18 grade 5 students under the direction of Mathew Thompson. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw).

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Annual Free Tax Clinic in Assiniboia

Hon. Nellie Kennedy (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I rise today to recognize the incredible spirit of community service shown by the volunteers of our annual tax-free tax clinic in Assiniboia.

For many in my community, particularly our seniors and those living on a fixed income, the task of filing taxes can feel incredibly overwhelming. It is in these moments that small, practical supports can make a truly meaningful difference in the lives of our neighbours.

For two years, my constituency office has been proud to host this free tax clinic throughout March and April. What began as a simple effort has grown into a vital community initiative, shaped by need and strengthened by the compassionate people who take part in it.

By removing financial and emotional barriers, we help ensure that constituents can access the benefits and credits they are entitled to while easing the stress that often accompanies this time of year. This clinic is intentionally low-barrier; participants are not simply handed forms but are welcomed in and supported through every single step of the process.

Our volunteers take the time to sit down, listen and carefully guide individuals through each step. And beyond the practical filling of forms, this space has become a profound place for connection, allowing us to meet with constituents, hear their concerns and their experiences and better understand the challenges they are navigating in their everyday lives.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, it's truly inspiring to see the dedication of our community volunteers year after year. Without them, we would not be able to offer this service.

I ask all members to join me in applauding our volunteers, who are joining us online from this year

and last, for their incredible service to the community members of our wonderful Assiniboia.

Thank you.

Child-Care Availability

Mrs. Colleen Robbins (Spruce Woods): I rise today to address an issue that is affecting families across Manitoba every single day: the growing child-care crisis.

While this government often points to affordability measures, the reality on the ground tells a different story. Yes, fees have come down, but what good is affordable child care if families cannot find a space in the first place?

Parents in our communities are waiting months, sometimes years, just to secure a spot. Wait-lists are long, frustrating and uncertain. For many families, it's not a matter of choice; it's a matter of whether they can go back to work at all. Honourable Deputy Speaker, 52 per cent of parents have delayed returning to work.

* (13:50)

Mothers and fathers are delaying careers, turning down opportunities and, in some cases, leaving the workforce entirely because they simply cannot access reliable child care.

Like my own grandson that has been on the list since his mother was three months pregnant, and that'll be four years in—it was four years in January, and I know ones that have never got into a daycare. I have constituents driving one hour from home to daycare to work and then the same in the evening. This is shameful.

We have a residency doctor in Brandon having to delay their residency twice now due to no daycare availability for her, so training doctors now slows due to this crisis.

The Auditor General says Manitoba is unlikely to meet their targets on time because this government has poor planning, lack of data that they are keeping and staff shortage.

Rural and smaller communities are feeling this pressure even more. Families there have been—even fewer options, and the gap continues to widen.

Because child care is not—

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I hear a no.

Further member's statements?

Kerry Auriat

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): I am privileged today to recognize my Brandon West constituent, Mr. Kerry Auriat, a man whose contributions to Brandon, to Manitoba and beyond are far greater than what you will ever find in his professional bio. I'm pleased to welcome Kerry, along with his fiancée, Christina Torres, who are joining us in the gallery today.

Kerry is someone who gives quietly, consistently and with purpose. He co-chaired the Murray House campaign, something he rarely takes credit for, yet his efforts were real and the comfort it provides to families will remain a lasting part of his legacy.

His commitment to community runs wide. He has served the Brandon general hospital foundation, co-chaired funding efforts for the Brandon Riverbank, supported the Brandon YMCA, the Brandon University Foundation, the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, the Brandon Toy Lending Library, Crime Stoppers and the Brandon Chamber of Commerce. But it doesn't stop there.

Kerry's influence reaches into both education and public life. He has taught business at Brandon University, served on the board of governors, moderated debates and shared his commentary as a columnist, but it's the work that he does out of the spotlight that has made such a lasting difference in our community.

It's a legacy that continues today, reflecting in the Auriat family broadcasting studio at Assiniboine College. Kerry has now taken on yet another challenge: serving as chair of the capital campaign for the Assiniboine College Foundation's where care begins, a project that will transform diagnostic care in rural Manitoba.

His generosity reaches beyond our borders as treasurer of the Canadian Friends of Rambam health-care campus in Haifa, Israel, reflecting his belief in global responsibility and the power of health care to change lives.

Kerry's impact is lasting. His service is always sincere and strengthens our community in ways that deserve recognition.

Please join me in recognizing a true man of honour, Mr. Kerry Auriat.

Access to Information Requests

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): On May 28, 2025, I requested records from the Kinew government about how many people were on the ankle bracelet program and how many have been tampered with. On July 11, I received a reply from the Justice Department saying they didn't track those numbers.

That turned out not to be true. October 27, CBC obtained that very information from the Justice Minister's office. Justice Minister's office full—and lied—provided fraudulent response to a FIPPA request.

There has been no investigation, no explanation, not even an apology and no one has been held accountable for breaching Manitoba law. *[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: On July 22 I made a request to the Minister of Education for chronic absentee numbers. After numerous delays, on February 3—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —a full seven and a half months later, I was given a briefing note that didn't have that number, something the minister—office claimed they didn't have.

Again, that turned out not to be true. The 2024 chronic numbers were leaked to me by a senior NDP official. This government lied about the existence of those numbers and tried to bury them.

Again, this government flagrantly—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —and intentionally broke the law.

To this day, the Kinew government refuses to take responsibility and no one has been held to account. They still refuse to release the 2025 numbers they have in their possession.

On November 12, 2024, I made the request seeking access to the cost to maintain the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) car and driver. On December 18, '24, they claimed that those records didn't exist, a response that was plain nonsense. A complaint was filed with the Ombudsman, who issued a ruling on January 16, 2026, ordering the Kinew government to release that information. To date, they have not.

Seventeen and a half months later, this government continues to stonewall and refuses to disclose to

Manitobans where their taxpayer dollars are going. This is a government that routinely and flippantly violates Manitoba law, a government that doesn't feel—

The Deputy Speaker: The members' time has expired.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to oral questions, we have guests in the gallery. We have us in the public gallery: Omowale Atiku, Maia Everton, Cade Kroeker and Belise Umwali Rutaganda from the Royal Canadian Mint, who are here as guests of the Legislative Internship Program.

We also have seated in the public gallery, from Landmark School, 35 grade 9 students under the direction of Jane *[phonetic]* Mullin. This group is in the constituency of the honourable member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé).

ORAL QUESTIONS

Economic and Affordability Pressures in Manitoba Concern Over Contract Issued to US Company

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): If you look up the definition of hypocrisy, you will find a picture of this Kinew government. At a time of economic pressures, Manitobans are looking for help and getting none from this NDP government. Families can't pay their bills, can't put healthy food on their tables and they can't fill up their gas tanks.

So what does this NDP government do? They send \$12 million of work, of jobs, to the United States by cancelling those contracts here in Manitoba; cancelling those contracts with local companies that employ Manitobans. That is \$12 million being sent by this NDP government to American firms.

Why did the Premier betray Manitobans, fire Manitoban workers, fire Manitoban families and funnel business to the United States of America?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): They love Donald Trump. What is he talking about? We hate Donald Trump. We can't stand the guy.

We're the party that put the big Canadian flag outside of the building. We're the ones who stood up and said we will never be the 51st state. And we're the ones who said we're going to work with the Government of Canada and every province and territory to build, build, build the true North strong and free.

What did they do on that side of the House? Well, the leader of the PCs went onto a podcast and he said:

Thank you; I would say thank you to Donald Trump for the tariffs.

The member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) also thanked Donald Trump. The member for Spruce Woods (Mrs. Robbins), also a big Donald Trump fan.

They come in here wrapped in the maple leaf, but we know that—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—their social media is littered with MAGA, Hegseth and fake Pulp Fiction quotes.

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

Mr. Khan: Manitobans can see for themselves; I asked the Premier a question about your jobs and he stands up and makes jokes.

He real-will-won't repeat those accusations out that—outside the Chamber because he knows they are complete and utter lies.

When local suppliers win these contracts—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

It's a well-known rule within this Chamber that we can't accuse other members of lying, so I'd ask you to recuse—or, withdraw that comment.

Mr. Khan: I actually can't hear.

* (14:00)

The Deputy Speaker: The—*[interjection]*

Order.

Members are not able or allowed to accuse other members of lying in the Chamber, so I'd ask that you withdraw that comment.

Mr. Khan: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Khan: When local suppliers win these contracts, they create jobs for Manitobans. They grow our economy. The profits and wages earned stay here in Manitoba, making Manitoba communities better.

What this NDP government has done is the exact opposite. They are setting a terrible example for others to follow.

And now, the City of Winnipeg has ended their long-standing golf contract with Salisbury House in favour of the same billion-dollar company based out

of the United States that this NDP government sent \$12 million to—\$12 million that should stay in Manitoba are now gone.

Will the Premier admit the error of his ways and cancel that contract and keep \$12 million right here in Manitoba?

Mr. Kinew: What's that in the distance? Is that the clout train that the member opposite is chasing? It's pretty far out there, because I don't know why he's talking about Salisbury House and the City of Winnipeg here at the provincial government.

What have we done? Well, Manitobans, we know that you love the great outdoors, and so let's talk about the parks, on this being Earth Day. We made parks free and then we brought back the contract for the sale of park passes right here to Canada, the true North, strong and free.

Now, honourable Speaker, you might be wondering, other than Earth Day, why is that relevant? Well, that's relevant because when that member was at the Cabinet table, they contracted out the park pass permits to a company from Texas—Texas. There's nothing worse than Manitobans having to pay a company in the US to enjoy the great outdoors here in Manitoba; that flies in the PC administration, but not with us.

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

Mr. Khan: The hypocrisy of this Premier has no limit. He stands up and talks about contracts signed in the United States; his own government signed a contract for \$12 million with a food supplier in the United States.

Actually, when someone makes a mistake, they admit their error of their ways and they say: You know what? Sorry, we'll fix it. What does this NDP government do?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: They took that \$12 million and they—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan:—tripled it to \$36 million. That's \$36 million that should be here in Manitoba for your family, for your job, for our economy, to make Manitoba better. But this Premier will send \$36 million to the United States of America.

Will the Premier stand up today, admit he was wrong, say he was sorry and bring that \$36 million back to Manitoba to grow our economy and help Manitoba families today?

Mr. Kinew: When it comes to growing the economy, we're cutting taxes on all food and drinks at the grocery store in Manitoba. We cut the gas tax to put more money back in your pocket. This month alone, 11,000 new jobs in the great province of Manitoba. We're investing, we're returning money to you, we're working with the private sector to build a bright, beautiful future that includes the Port of Churchill.

Now, what has the member opposite done? Well, he was found to have done something that he claimed in front of the media never happened. Your office released the audio proving that that was false; he came back in here and said that was just your interpretation. And then, he went out into the hallway and said none of it ever happened. He contradicted recorded proof.

The entry for hypocrisy in the dictionary is his homeland; I will continue to acknowledge that land each and every day that we're here. *[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

Manitoba Jobs Agreement Impact on Jobs and the Economy

Mr. Obby Khan (Leader of the Official Opposition): No one believes what this smug, arrogant hypocrite is saying, honourable Speaker. You can look at his track record or his criminal record to see that. When it comes to supporting Manitobans, Manitobans can see that this government is falling short.

This NDP sent \$36 million to the United States of America when that money should have stayed here. This NDP cut out local grocery stores, mom-and-pop stores and local restaurants, honourable Speaker. This NDP government is now cutting 88 per cent of Manitobans that work in the construction industry in this province in favour of their union bosses.

It is clear that this Premier, this hypocrite, does not care about you.

Will he reverse his decision today and commit to bringing that money back home to Manitoba and growing Manitoba's economy?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Well, I want to acknowledge the traditional territory of hypocrisy on which he has resided for many, many years. It's the first time

ever I've ever been accused of it, because I said I would cut the gas tax, and then I did. I said I would search the landfill, and then we did. I said we would staff up health care, and we have.

Now, who is my boss? You are my boss. The people of Manitoba are my boss. You elected us to come here and to fix health care and make life affordable. That's what we're doing: fixing health care, making life affordable. Nobody elected us to sell out to the United States of America. That's why the PCs, who do that each and every single day, are not in government.

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

Mr. Khan: Let's recap what the Premier said. He admitted that he is failing when it comes to health care. He admitted that he has the worst economy in Canada, and he admitted that affordability is not affordable under his NDP government. And now he's killing jobs in Manitoba with his NDP job-killing agreement. It's hurting Manitobans, not growing it.

But don't take my word for it. Winnipeg Construction Association, Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, construction association of Manitoba, all say this NDP job-killing agreement is killing Manitobans. It's going to remove 88 per cent of the workforce in Manitoba.

This NDP government is once again picking unions over the rest of Manitobans.

Will the Premier put an end to his NDP job-killing agreement—[interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Khan: —today and will he commit to growing Manitoba's economy for everyone?

Mr. Kinew: Honourable Speaker, 11,000 more jobs in the province just this month and thousands of people put to work since we took office. And we are never ashamed to say this: the best way to help somebody join the middle class is to help somebody join a union.

And so that's why the Manitoba jobs agreement are on the side of the workers. You know who else is on the side of Manitoba jobs agreement? The federal government. The federal government, who are investing billions of dollars into military investment, are asking for prevailing union wages to be paid.

You know who else is onside with the union jobs and prevailing union wages? Pierre Poilievre, fresh off of UFC Winnipeg. He supports unions.

So whether you're a UFC fan, a hockey fan, a cheer fan or a Canada fan through and through, union jobs are for you. The only one opposed, of course, is to the shrinking ranks of the failed—

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

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

Transparency in Fee Collection and Use

Mr. Khan: You know who's against the NDP job-killing agreement? Honourable Deputy Speaker, 88 per cent of Manitobans that work in that industry are against this NDP job-killing agreement.

I'm going to quote Ron Hambley, president of Winnipeg Construction Association, says: This MJA fee is being sent directly to Manitoba Building Trades without any clear oversight. Nobody in government has explained how the number was set, what is supposed to happen with the funds, where does the money go. At the end of the day, taxpayers are paying for this. End quote.

Chris Lorenc, the president of Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, says, and I quote: Transparency and accountability for public funds are absolutely critical. Neither are being done here. End quote.

In light of this I've sent a letter to the Auditor General to examine how the fees was set, who governs, collects the funds and how those funds are reported publicly.

Will the Premier stand up today and tell Manitobans where those funds are going, or will he simply admit that he's taking millions of dollars of taxpayer dollars and funnelling it to his own—

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

* (14:10)

I'd ask the member if he's quoting from a private document or a public document.

Mr. Khan: Sorry, I can't—I didn't hear the question. It's too much echoing, sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: Were you quoting from a public document or private document?

Mr. Khan: Public.

Mr. Kinew: We're going to make sure that Manitobans are trained. That's what the resources are for.

Now, when we want to talk about people who have illegally funnelled money into their own party

coffers, the PC Party of Manitoba is the only party to ever have been found to have done that. That was in the Monnin inquiry.

And who was the only premier ever found to have broken the law and to have been fined? Well, it was the PC premier, Heather Stefanson, that was the political member of the—political mentor of the member opposite.

I want to do—I do want to raise one more point, however, and that was that there was a pretty big gap in the law overseeing teachers that the PCs passed during the dying days of their administration. This allowed teachers found guilty of abusing children to voluntarily surrender and not be put in the registry.

Thankfully, our Education Minister closed that gap. But I do want the Leader of the PCs to tell us if that gap was allowed to persist in legislation because he was sitting in Cabinet alongside the member for—

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

Economic Investment by Small Businesses Call for Government Action to Support Growth

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, back in the good old not-so-distant days of 2019, Manitoba small businesses were growing, entrepreneurs were investing and confidence was strong. These are the businesses that grow into the major employers our economy depends on.

Today, under this government, that confidence is gone. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, only a small share of businesses plan to invest, while many are pulling back.

Why has this government turned Manitoba from a place where businesses grow into a place where they're afraid to expand?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation): Honourable Speaker, Manitoba is a wonderful place for businesses to invest in and grow and expand their businesses. That's why Manitoba ranks No. 1 in the country in job growth. Nearly 11,000 new jobs right here just over the last month.

Businesses are growing, businesses are expanding and we're ranked No. 1 in the country. We won't take lessons from the former failed government, who, frankly, did nothing in their seven and a half years to grow our economy. Instead, we're seeing record levels of investment.

Just last week, we know that Boeing is investing another \$36 million right here in the aerospace sector in Manitoba. Another company that is choosing to invest, choosing to grow right here in Manitoba because of the hard work of our government to grow a stable, strong economy that works for all Manitobans.

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

Mr. Narth: Honourable Speaker, seniors taking a second job shouldn't be a victory lap for this minister. Businesses used to grow here. Businesses even used to move here. Now they're just trying to survive here.

The numbers are clear. Only about 20 per cent of small businesses plan to increase their investment here, while 35 per cent are planning to scale back. At the same time, more than half say that rising costs and government policy are the biggest barriers for them to grow.

How does this minister expect to grow the economy when most businesses are not expanding, but instead are bracing for tougher times under this NDP government?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, the member opposite is just clearly wrong. We are actually growing more businesses, and businesses are investing here in Manitoba. That's absolutely clear.

Just look at the last couple months. Bayer Crop Science announced that they're investing \$45 million in a new research centre right here in Winnipeg, another company that finds Manitoba is the right place to invest. This is our track record: creating an ecosystem for businesses to thrive here; 11,000 new jobs in the last month.

But where are those folks working? We are tops in new construction sector jobs, honourable Speaker. It means that our plan and Manitoba jobs agreement are putting more Manitobans to work with guess what? Good wages, good union wages. The more Manitobans have opportunities to work—

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

The honourable member for La Vérendrye, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Narth: Honourable Speaker, we used to lead the country in machinery manufacturing.

Now, in one year, this government has dropped that by 30 per cent. But I'll help the minister because the solution is clear: lower costs, restore confidence and make Manitoba competitive again. That means

real tax relief, like raising the basic personal tax exemption to \$30,000 and creating a single window business approval process to get projects moving.

Will this government finally take action to support small-business growth, or will they continue on their policies to drive investment out of Manitoba?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, members opposite spend their time thanking Donald Trump for his tariffs and offering an unfunded economic proposal that will cost Manitobans millions, meaning cuts to education or other priorities.

Instead, we're going to focus on building businesses the right way, working with all Manitobans, providing them good-paying jobs and more of them. Over 11,000 created just in the last month in the construction sector. That's a huge rate, and it's actually No. 1 in the entire country.

Honourable Speaker, I'd like to make sure the House knows that we're growing when it comes to real GDP, growing in towards imports, growing in terms of housing starts, growing in terms of builds, growing in terms of employment rate, growing in terms of new skills, tradesperson; and the only thing that's going down is our unemployment rate, just like members opposite are going down. We're actually improving our economy, unlike anything they ever did.

Manitoba Jobs Agreement Request to Cancel

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): The other day we talked about how Manitoba's own homegrown construction industry is opposed to this NDP government's job-killing Manitoba jobs agreement.

Here's Chris Lorenc from the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association who said, and I quote, the Manitoba jobs agreement should raise red flags for every Manitoban. We are being forced to wastefully pay more and build less. The fact that Manitoba is requiring the definition of qualifying Manitoban to be tied to holding a union card to be able to work on a Manitoba taxpayer funding project, like schools, hospitals or roads, is not only discriminatory, it is the biggest red flag of all.

Why is this NDP government discriminating against Manitoba workers?

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): I want to thank the member for that question. We are listening to Manitobans and we are listening to Manitoba workers, honourable Speaker.

Every worker under MJA is better off because of MJA. MJA is about Manitoba workers. MJA is about fair wages, safe worksites, better benefits. I have never met a worker who wants to make less. We are turning construction sites—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

MLA Sandhu: —into training sites. We are training the workforce for the future.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

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

Mr. Guenter: The minister will want to listen to this. Chris Lorenc, who joined others in asking the Auditor General to investigate the government's MJA and the millions of dollars in political fees that they will be collecting, also said that, and I quote, it should terrify all of us that the government is going to impose that kind of measure, end quote.

When people like Chris Lorenc, with 35 years of experience in building Manitoba, say things like that, wouldn't it be time for this government to use a little common sense, apologize for not listening, for trying to foist this corrupt deal on Manitoba workers and cancel this deal outright?

MLA Sandhu: Last month, the largest employment gains were in construction. So that's news for the member opposite. Manitobans want to see Churchill built, and we are training workforce to do that. This will mean more apprentices, more diverse workforce.

These bids open to everyone—unionized, un-unionized, honourable Speaker. MJA is all about prioritizing Manitoba workers. We want to see more Manitoba licence plates on the worksite, like an—opposite what they did. They trained the workforce in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

* (14:20)

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

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

Mr. Guenter: Here's what the Brandon Chamber of Commerce had to say. The Brandon Chamber of Commerce has also expressed concerns about this NDP government's damaging economic policies. They not only single out the NDP imposition of a one-to-one apprenticeship ratio, which, by the way, is killing opportunities for Manitobans and has resulted in the first decline in years—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guenter: –in the number of Manitobans registering to become an apprentice. But they also called this government's MJA a concern for many industry groups. So, it's pretty clear that the only ones who love the Manitoba jobs agreement are sitting on that side of the Chamber or in the NDP party's backroom.

So when will this government stop their tin-eared, ham-fisted approach, listen to the folks who know, and cancel this job-killing deal?

MLA Sandhu: I don't know why the member opposite hates workers here in Manitoba, honourable Speaker. Conservatives don't listen to Manitoba workers; they only listen to the lobbyists. They should go out and talk to those workers who want to make more money, not less.

They were given the opportunity to learn more about MJA, but the members ignored.

Thank you, honourable Speaker.

Emergency Room Wait Times Government Reduction Record

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): ER wait times in Winnipeg have reached record highs under this NDP government. The median ER wait time is now higher under the NDP than it has ever been. At 9:45 this morning, the posted wait time was 10 hours at the Grace, over nine hours at HSC and over 14 hours at St. Boniface Hospital.

These wait times have increased since this time last year and have significantly increased since the NDP took office.

Why are emergency room wait times getting so much worse under the NDP?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): I welcome the opportunity to stand up in question period and talk about the work we've been doing to fix the damage that was done in health care.

And I think it's important to note that when we came into government we had an extreme crisis in terms of staffing in the health-care system. That's because the previous government fired hundreds of nurses, closed our three largest emergency departments and cut hundreds of beds.

So, I'm happy to share that we announced, as part of our budget, that we have hired a net-new, over 4,000 health-care workers for the front lines of our

health-care system. Hundreds of those workers are in ERs across the province and at our biggest sites.

So we know there's a lot more work to do to fix that damage, but we're committed to doing that work every day for Manitobans.

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

Mrs. Cook: Whatever the NDP says that they're doing, it's not working. Things are moving in the wrong direction.

On May 1 of last year, this Minister of Health promised Manitobans they were going to lower ER wait times by one hour over the next several months. Since then, wait times have crept higher and higher to now record-high levels. Four people, that we know of, have died seeking emergency care.

Why is it that the longer the NDP are in power, the worse things get?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, something else that we announced in our most recent budget was a \$22.1-million investment to restore cardiac-care excellence here in Manitoba; a historic investment in cardiac care. And part of that historic investment was investing in the emergency department at St. Boniface Hospital, one of the ERs in our province that's been hardest hit by the former PCs' callous closures of our ERs.

And we were so proud to stand with a family member, Morgan Ross, whose mother passed away, actually, in that ER. And I want to thank Morgan for her courage, for her strength and for helping to inform the way that we strengthen not only emergency department care, but cardiac care for women in this province.

Thank you, Morgan.

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

Mrs. Cook: Nothing that the minister is saying explains why ER wait times have continued to climb to record high levels under their watch.

Last year at this time, the median wait time in Winnipeg ERs was 3.97 hours. The minister said they were going to reduce that by an hour. It's been a year and they haven't reduced the wait time by even a fraction of an hour. In fact, the median wait is now 4.2 hours.

If the NDP can't figure out how to lower ER wait times to the levels that they were at before they took over, could they at least stop making it worse?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, we knew when we came into government that our population was rapidly aging. We knew that people were showing up much more sick to the ERs. We knew that we had to do the work very, very quickly to stand up more capacity. *[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: Now, everything we knew when we came into government is everything they knew for seven and a half years when they were in government. And instead of adding capacity, they cut it, year after year after year, including the member for Roblin, who advised Heather Stefanson to close the ERs and to cut health care.

So, honourable Speaker, we're going to keep doing the work of fixing the damage that they did, building up capacity that should have been in place for years and years prior. But I'll take no lessons from that member who spent her time in opposition—sorry, in government advising to cut health-care services.

Criminal Activity in Manitoba Housing Units Concern for Safety of Senior Residents

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): We've been hearing from seniors in Manitoba Housing that they have serious safety concerns with the changes the minister has made to the operations of their buildings. But the minister ignored each and every concern and deflected with partisan attacks. Tragically, it was revealed yesterday that someone died in the explosion at 444 Kennedy.

Will the minister put the partisan rhetoric aside and commit to sitting down to get to the bottom of these seniors' concerns?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness): I want to send my condolence out to, you know, that family and that whole community at 444 Kennedy. We're standing with them. I was out there, you know, supporting the residents, supporting all of the support services that are in that building, that are providing wrap-around supports to all of those residents that are in that community.

That strip, they all know each other, they all support one another, so I just want to, you know, let them know that we are there as a government. We're going to continue to be there, we're going to continue

to show up and we're going to continue to provide the supports that are needed for that community and any other community that we support in Manitoba Housing.

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

MLA Bereza: I've heard concerns about safety from residents all across Manitoba. There's serious concerns about criminality raised by residents, and while the investigation is ongoing, the minister can do a lot today to reassure residents that she will act. She could commit to real action. She bragged about stopping evictions. The fact is that she needs to evict those engaging in criminal activity that make seniors feel unsafe in their homes.

Will the minister do this today?

Ms. Smith: That member knows, under their watch when they were in government, they changed the practice, the policy under 55+ buildings. They allowed folks that were under 55 to start tenancing into those buildings, took out security, which were measures that kept seniors safe.

We've reversed that practice. We're turning those 55+ buildings back to 55+ buildings. We've brought security back in, which they fired. We're going to continue to put safety and security as our top priority, as we've done since we've took government, as well as maintaining, which they cut. They cut 87 per cent off the maintenance of Manitoba Housing buildings. Top priority for our—

The Deputy Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

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

MLA Bereza: So, the answer I heard is there will be no action taken. One resident was incredibly clear with their media, and I quote, the place is a psychiatric ward. It's ridiculous. The people that are living here, the drugs, the mental health issues, it's not a nice place to live. *[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

* (14:30)

MLA Bereza: The minister can say what she wants, but action means more than words. The residents who have had enough and want action.

When will a minister commit to rooting criminal activity out of Manitoba Housing so seniors can live in peace?

The Deputy Speaker: I'll just ask the member to confirm, he was reading from—quoting from a public document or a private document?

MLA Bereza: That was public.

Ms. Smith: I went down and I spoke to that gentleman. And, you know, that gentleman talked about living in that building for years and, under that former government, how bad it was and how much it's got better.

Is there more work to be done? Absolutely. And we're committed to doing that work.

We put wrap-around services in that building, including Canadian Mental Health, Sunshine House and IKWE. They are doing tremendous work. But under, you know, the former government, they put people in tents, didn't provide supports. These are folks that have complex needs.

We are working with, you know, law enforcement. If there is criminal behaviour happening in our buildings, we are ensuring that those folks are not—they are evicted because we are—

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

Environmental Initiatives Government Investments

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson): Happy Earth Day, honourable Speaker.

After years under the climate change-denying Conservatives who cut thousands of dollars to essential environmental organizations, turned its back on conservation and weakened environmental protections, Manitobans deserve better.

We know Manitobans care deeply about land, water and protecting our province for future generations to enjoy.

Can our Environment and Climate Change Minister tell this House what our government is doing to build a more sustainable, environmentally responsible Manitoba for generations to come?

Hon. Mike Moyes (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): The previous PC government turned its back on the environment. They cut funding to important organizations that were protecting our land and our water.

This Earth Day, our government announced \$400,000 for the Southeast Regional Transit Initiative, connecting 11 municipalities and 80,000 Manitobans. We're also investing in the Prairie Climate Centre and

supporting ClimateWest so Manitobans can take climate action.

Where the PCs we're climate laggards, we're working to be climate leaders.

Emergency Wildfire Response Utilization of Retired Firefighters

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Last year, the minister sat on his hands and did nothing. I stood in this very Chamber and begged him to hire back retired experts who had reached out to his office. Wildlife suppression is as much an art as it is a science, and the knowledge that these individuals possessed was vital. He waited and waited and waited because the government relies on hope like they are now. Hope is not strategy.

Last year, the minister delayed in hiring these needed experts, and clearly he still is.

Are these knowledgeable experts available and ready for hire?

Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures): The members opposite waited and waited and waited for them to actually care about what was going on last year. We sat here in a state of emergency while they rang the bells here all night and did nothing.

So here we are, concretely investing \$1.2 million to add 19 firefighters, \$1.2 million to upgrade the Wildfire Services, \$1.1 million for aerial attack.

Honourable Speaker, year after year—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bushie: —we're investing. We're investing millions and millions of dollars.

I asked that member to ask the former minister of natural resources, the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), when he—when we were investing millions of dollars, what was he doing with his millions?

2025 Wildfire Season EMO Preparedness

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Honourable Speaker, June 16, 2025—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —33 days after—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —Sue and Richard—*[interjection]*

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

I'll let the member for Lac du Bonnet restart his time, because I couldn't hear what he was saying.

Mr. Ewasko: Plus the minute and a half that the NDP have killed today, honourable Speaker.

June 16, 2025, 33 days after Sue and Richard Nowell tragically died in one of those fires last June, the minister responsible for EMO said, and I quote: Wildfire officials were prepared for everything that has transpired during the 2025 wildfire season.

Yesterday, the same minister doubled down and said we were as prepared as we could possibly have been for a season like we had.

I ask the minister to stand today and apologize.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Honourable Speaker, anytime we lose a Manitoban, it is a tragedy. And in the case of last summer's terrible wildfire season, which started in May, it was very sad to see that we lost two lives. I am very sorry for that family's loss; that's why we are renaming the bridge in their honour. I had the opportunity to speak to the Nowell brothers, to thank them for their good work. You know, they do some very good work for the Province, I can add. We should also thank one of their partners, who is responsible for saving the lives of one of those brothers.

So nothing but compassion and sympathy for this family, as well as everybody impacted by the terrible wildfire season.

If you want to get partisan, ask the member where he was on that day.

Chronic Absenteeism from School Links to Youth Involvement in Crime

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): In the last election, the Premier promised Manitobans that he would reduce youth crime. Every year he's been in office, youth crime has gone up—a staggering 29 per cent in the last five years.

Study after study shows that there's a direct connection between chronic absenteeism of children in school and involvement in crime. The Premier knows this because in his public safety strategy, he pledged that his Minister of Education, Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) would work together to address school absenteeism.

Surprise, surprise, honourable Speaker, this hasn't happened, and I'll table the FIPPA. It shows that the

Minister of Justice has yet to meet with the Minister of Education to discuss chronic absenteeism and youth in the justice system.

My question to this—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —Premier is: Why doesn't anybody in this—*[interjection]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —government take this seriously?

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

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Honourable Speaker, youth violent crime dropped by 23 per cent in Winnipeg. We're investing in schools. We started a universal school food program to keep more young people on the positive path here in this great province.

Now, this member paid for his house by going to court and defending pedophiles, trying to get them out of jail. It probably makes sense that he's sitting not too far from the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) after we've learned what he's been up to. There are serious questions of accountability that the PC Party refuses to answer when it comes to their member putting up to a million dollars bail forward for somebody who sexually assaulted a minor.

These questions will continue to persist and dog the members opposite. The leader of the PCs, the member for Riding Mountain and the member for Lac du Bonnet all sat at the Cabinet table when they passed a law that had the huge gap in it.

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

And with that, the time for oral questions has expired.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I couldn't help but notice that the PCs made sure that there was enough time for the independent member for Fort Garry to ask a question today.

I'd like to canvass the House for leave so that the independent member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé) could ask the question that he's been waiting to ask.

The Deputy Speaker: Is—*[interjection]*

Order. Order.

Is there leave in the House for the independent member from Dawson Trail to ask a question?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

An Honourable Member: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I hear a no. And it's also not a point of order.

* * *

The Deputy Speaker: Petitions? *[interjection]*

Order.

Grievances? *[interjection]*

Order.

* (14:40)

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, I do apologize. I forgot to recognize a group in the gallery.

I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Andrea Sutherland, Danny Blair, Matthew Loxley, Christey Allen, Elizabeth Shearer and Asha Nelson, who are the guests of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Moyes).

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker: We are on orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Honourable Deputy Speaker, can you please call Committee of Supply.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now resolve into the Committee of Supply to consider departmental Estimates.

Will the Deputy Speaker please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

BUSINESS, MINING, TRADE AND JOB CREATION

* (14:50)

The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

The Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation): Yes. It is my pleasure to be here on behalf of my department as the Minister of Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation to discuss Budget 2026 and the work we are undertaking to grow Manitoba's economy, create good jobs and build a more affordable future for Manitobans.

Manitoba is a place where workers can find a good-paying job close to home, where businesses choose to invest and where economic growth translates to real improvements in affordability and quality of life for all Manitobans.

Budget 2026 reflects our commitment to creating good jobs, lowering costs for families and strengthening services Manitobans rely on through continued investments in health care, safer and healthier communities and modernizing government services.

This budget supports economic growth while helping Manitobans afford a good life in the communities they call home. We recognize that the current geopolitical landscape and shifting trade dynamics are creating ongoing economic uncertainty for Manitobans.

In response, Budget 2026 advances strategic investments that support economic growth, encourage private-sector investment and expand opportunities for Manitoba businesses and workers.

Creating good Manitoba jobs and supporting sustainable economic growth across every region remain top priorities for our government as we work to build a stronger, more resilient province. Our economy is continuing to gain momentum with good Manitoba

jobs and wage growth that outpaces inflation, helping more Manitobans access employment and economic opportunities across the province.

Our economic development strategy is centred on creating the conditions to boost productivity and unlock economic opportunities. Through this strategy, we are working to make life more affordable by enhancing competitiveness and preparing our workforce for good-paying jobs. For Manitoba businesses that are working up to scale up, modernize operations or enter new export markets, access to capital can be the difference between an idea and real growth.

That's why, under the strategy, we have launched the Trade Growth Investment Financing program, providing loans to help small- and medium-sized enterprises invest in the productivity-enhancing capital they need to move forward.

We are helping Manitoba companies reach new customers and diversify revenue streams, as well, by supporting interprovincial and international trade initiatives that strengthen supply chains and open doors to new markets. We've doubled the exports program to \$1 million, ensuring more small- and medium-sized companies are supported to participate in trade shows, attract international buyers and receive trade preparedness training. In '25-26, we approved 84 Manitoba companies to access this support, a new record.

We're investing \$500,000 to support interprovincial trade missions that help 120 small- and medium-sized businesses tap into new Canadian markets and strengthen supply chains. In partnership with Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, we're helping open doors for Manitoba businesses to opportunities for growth through new connections and reaching new customers across the country.

Manitoba is also engaged in the upcoming Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement negotiations, advocating for Manitoba businesses to Canada. And we'll also be launching a new Manitoba's trade market diversification plan to expand Manitoba's national and global reach. In partnership with northern industries, communities and Indigenous nations, we are advocating historic nation-building projects like the Port of Churchill Plus, leveraging our unique position as the only prairie province with maritime access, giving us a strategic trade advantage, improve supply chain resilience and help bring more Manitobans' goods and resources to global markets.

We are making it easier to do business in Manitoba. Following recommendations from the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) business and jobs sub-committee on trade, this year we will work to stand up economic development agency, which will provide single-window access to support programs and services, making it easier to do business in Manitoba and help advance economic growth across all regions of our province.

Through our collaborative efforts, we are promoting a diversified economy and preparing Manitoba for the future opportunities in emerging sectors. Our emphasis on private-sector growth and the expansion of market opportunities underscore our commitment to supporting Manitoba industries and—in competing with both domestically and internationally, helping to attract new investment and foster long-term economic resilience.

Advancing a stronger, faster-growing economy means bringing more Manitobans into the workforce. That's why one of our pillars of our economic development strategy focuses on building a more productive and inclusive workforce. We understand that a strong economy depends on strong partnerships and collaboration across sectors; that's why we are bringing—building an ongoing engagement with industry leaders, labour organizations, post-secondary institutions and community partners to support workforce development and economic inclusion.

By modernizing our apprenticeship system, we are preparing the next generation of skilled tradespersons, safeguarding jobs and helping businesses adapt. The number of 'apprentishes' in training is growing with 23 per cent increase in '24-25. In '25-26, there was a record number of 4,396 apprentices in technical training. Budget 2026 adds an additional \$7.2 million for apprenticeship training, the largest increase in over a decade.

We are investing \$4 million to launch building up Manitoba program, a streamlined workforce training initiative designed to support small- and medium-sized employers. They help employers boost productivity and competitiveness while equipping workers with the skills and opportunities they need to progress their careers.

* (15:00)

We are also launching an \$800,000 dream builders program to provide youth facing employment barriers with skills training, job opportunities and wrap-around supports. In collaboration with community

organizations, this program will help young Manitobans gain the skills and experience needed to secure sustainable, long-term employment.

Through the Canada-Manitoba Labour Market Development Agreement, we will receive \$18.2 million over the next three years to support workers and businesses impacted by tariffs. We will deliver targeted training, reskilling and job retention programs to ensure workers can continue working in affected sectors or transition to other in-demand jobs, ensuring stability and adaptability in a changing economy.

We know strong economic growth must include every part of our province. That's why Manitoba is advancing a northern Manitoba labour force development strategy focused on increasing workforce participation, promoting skills–trades–skilled trades, mining careers and supporting job creation in northern and Indigenous communities. By aligning training, employment supports, industry needs, this work will help to ensure northern Manitobans can fully benefit from new and emerging economies–economic opportunities.

This approach is especially important as Manitoba continues to build on its strengths in mining and resource development. Manitoba has world-class geology, with large reserves of high-quality critical minerals. To unlock the full potential in the in-demand resources, we are partnering with Indigenous nations at every stage of development to responsibly source critical minerals to benefit local communities.

We are committed to inclusive growth and partnerships that help to ensure Manitobans benefit, with natural resources, broader economy and shares more equitably across the province. We will continue to work collaboratively with Indigenous nations and organizations to ensure engagement related to mineral exploration and development. This includes hosting community outreach sessions and support Indigenous communities in a meaningful participation in mineral exploration and mining projects. We are supporting Manitoba's first First Nations-owned mine, Minago, with \$2 million for pre-feasibility study, 'include' hydrological assessments, technical validations.

Manitoba is strengthening its key role as a supplier to minerals for the next generation of economic opportunities. By working with the federal government to protect mining jobs in Thompson and partnering with the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the Canadian Infrastructure Bank to assess northern infrastructure needs, we're pushing ahead.

We're investing an additional \$2.5 million into the Manitoba Mineral Development Fund to continue supporting mining projects that create Indigenous partnerships, increase job opportunities and stimulate investment in the North. That's part of our Securing our Critical Mineral Future strategy. The fund has created over 1,300 jobs so far.

We understand Manitoba's future relies on strong partnerships. By working together, we can build a stronger and more resilient economy that supports inclusive growth in all regions of our province.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the staff in the department for the work they do to support businesses, workers, communities across our province every day.

Thank you, and I look forward to this discussion this afternoon.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

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

An Honourable Member: Yes.

The Chairperson: The member for La Vérendrye.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): I'd like to thank the minister for this opportunity, making the time to have himself available, and his department, to answer some questions that are important to the current budget, the 2026-27 budget, but also a department that's very important to the growth and prosperity of our province moving forward.

We see a time when governments need to take an open-minded approach to the growth and development of the economy at a time when we're seeing gaps in employment that hasn't traditionally been seen. There's factors that are sometimes out of the control of government, but it's government's responsibility to act and answer to those changes in the business environment as well as the employment environment.

So, this opportunity that we have to ask the minister questions on what the budget holds for responding to the changes in our economy and also the geopolitical environment is of great value to the province.

So, with that, I think of most value is getting into—getting a clear picture of the direction of our province as it pertains to business, mining, trade and jobs. So, with that I'd like to start in on the questions.

The Chairperson: We thank the member.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 10.1(a) contained in resolution 10.1

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

Mr. Moses: The staff who we have with us here are assistant deputy minister of Finance and Administration, Melissa Ballantyne; assistant deputy minister of Workforce Development and Training, Lynn Houghton; assistant deputy minister of Minerals, Petroleum and Geoscience, Jeff Kraynyk; executive director of Economic Programs and Initiatives, Investment and Trade, Nestor Dudych.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Narth: I'd like to start off with questions. I'll bounce around a little bit, but start off with some broad economic questions, sort of to paint a picture of the path that we were seeing and the direction of this year's budget.

So for committee today, would the minister please be able to define gross domestic product, or GDP, for the committee here?

Mr. Moses: I thank the member opposite for the question.

It's important to just go through what our economic goals are. Obviously, increasing GDP is really important. I don't think member would be served by giving off our, you know, Webster's Dictionary definition of GDP or anything like that. I think the member and many members in this committee and Manitobans at home have a phone and can search those sort of things out. But I think it's just as important to put into context of Manitoba here, right?

* (15:10)

So, we have one of the most diverse economies in the country, and Manitoba's economy has performed better in '25—in 2025 than initially anticipated, with our real GDP outperforming some of those additional

predictions and that's all in the face of the ongoing economic challenges.

We know that because of the tariff situation, it has softened some of the US demand and that uncertainty has impacted businesses across Manitoba, particularly weighted towards Manitoba's export-orientated sectors: agriculture and manufacturing.

So we also know that as some of the population growth changes and slowing, that has also impacted and constrained our labour supply and the part of that is related to the changes of the federal government immigration system.

And so those things have undoubtedly introduced headwinds into Manitoba's economy, just like economies right across the country. The fact that Manitoba's economy is diversified has actually helped to provide us some resilience.

So looking ahead, we know that most provinces are expecting to have some modest GDP growth, including Manitoba. So, we're forecasting our GDP growth as is ranked—listed in our budget for 2026. Here you can probably see that on page 87 of our Budget 2026, Economic Review and Outlook forecasts our GDP growth.

And it's notably, though, that Manitoba's forecast to outperform manufacturing intensive economies such as Ontario and Quebec while the fastest growing provinces in 2025 and 2026 are the ones that are oil rich.

Mr. Narth: I'd like to thank the minister for that. I didn't—I wasn't wanting an exact Webster's dictionary definition of gross domestic product, but I'd like to lead into whether or not the minister does feel that regardless of economic headwinds, you know, as a result of whatever they may be, but in this case, I sense the direction of justification is trade disruption with the United States.

But who would—does the minister feel that GDP growth is a fair metric of the government's performance?

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the question around how we frame and understand the objectives of how we measure a strong economy here. Obviously, I think GDP is used as a kind of global metric. It's the most common indicator and tool used to assess economic performance and success.

I think, you know, that's obviously going to be something that we strongly use as a—to look at; however, it's not the only thing and I think it's also

important for us to understand what economic success can look like in different forms.

So just as a—and just to back up a little bit—and particularly going back to your previous question as well—and, you know, how I really spoke about a diversified economy. I just wanted to, like, expand on that a little bit more, that we certainly do appreciate how that diversity in our economy really adds to our benefit when there are downturns in a broader economic landscape, whereas we're not dependent on a boom or bust cycle of oil industries or whether or not there are, you know, conflicts in the Middle East that might hamper oil supply chain and have a drastic impact on those prices. We are very 'velirant' on a variety of industries.

As the member opposite would be well aware, agriculture plays a massive role in our economy—ag tech as well, and ag manufacturing. The larger manufacturing sector as a whole is a massive industry player and adds to our diversity, as well as our aerospace sector with added connection to defence, which is seeing a big 'grewth' as a—big growth as a result of federal government policy changes.

Additionally, our life-sciences sector is—plays a significant role in growing our economy and employing many Manitobans in high-paying jobs in research, technology and innovation. Our resource sector plays a strong role, as well, in oil and gas development and the mining sector, which is seeing a massive boom in creation of jobs in the mining sector right now, and I think it's due in part to changes in prices globally, but also in our government's ability to support projects and get them to completion, as well as, I think, certainly, the creative sector: film and tech, communication sector is certainly a strong diversity that gives our economy here in Manitoba some of the resilience that we might see compared to other jurisdictions.

We also use metrics in addition to GDP as really looking at some of the other aspects that make a more wholesome—a fulsome approach, I would say—or rather, a fulsome view of our economy, things like unemployment rates; participation rates; even housing starts, which is, of course, up, as member opposite might know; building value—building permit values, which again is up 21 per cent year over year.

You know, we look at employed Manitobans, up almost 11,000 Manitobans, right?

That unemployment rate continues to be one of the leaders in the country, having a low unemployment rate. And particularly in a province where we

look to build and a government that really look to build, having a skilled tradesperson and look into how many of those folks are employed, and having that number be up, as well, are all strong indicators that our economy is doing very well given the global challenges; that we are, I would say, in many respects, outperforming competitors in this challenging environment. And we're providing the right landscape for investors to seek and find Manitoba as the place—as the right place to make their future investments.

Mr. Narth: Thank you to the minister for that.

I'll definitely—hope to have the opportunity to dive down into the actual industries and ask questions around what we're seeing. Really, the lack of growth and strength and the economic decline around some of those industries is concerning, something that I think the government should be representing more thoroughly.

But I'll continue on the question line around our basic overarching performance, and I'd like to ask the minister if he thinks that GDP per capita is a fair metric for his performance as the minister responsible for jobs.

* (15:20)

Mr. Moses: So I can see that the member is trying to boil down an economy into a single metric, right? And it's not the—I would think—the most—the healthiest approach to assessing the success of an economy.

I think there are many factors that we should be looking at and we do look at as a government, and I outlined some of them just previously; things like unemployment rates, things like participation rates. Again, those are both areas where we're seeing improvements in Manitoba. Things like even average weekly earnings, again, we're seeing a 3 per cent—3.5 per cent increase year over year. Things like, you know, housing starts, and Manitobans were employed, working Manitobans. Those are all things that I think are very important, and we take them very seriously and look at those metrics as well.

And so I think our job—and we look at our role—is to really create the conditions and the landscape and the underlying atmosphere and conditions for a successful economy. That's what we do in our department, and we provide—try to provide the right tools for an economy to thrive.

We can see that the work we're doing is having some lasting impact and positive impacts and some good successes. And that's what we highlight, those

things like eight–10,800 new jobs being created just over the last month. That's a sign that our economy is thriving, that more businesses are making investments to grow here and that they're hiring more people as a result. That's why we see the things like no—not only jobs being added, but the fact that wages are increasing as well—another good sign that people are being able to advance economically here in Manitoba.

So, when we see these factors and when we see the unemployment rate continue to be better than many other jurisdictions, we know that our plan is working. When we face headwinds like we do in the uncertainty of the US trade relationship and we know that there's an issue when it comes to exports, what we do is we work with businesses; we work to support them.

And one of the avenues we did is through our Export Support Program. So I highlighted that in my opening comments, highlighting that our Export Support Program was doubled throughout the last year, meaning that we increased the amount of dollars that businesses could access to help them reach a new trade show, an international fair, going to make a connection with a business in a global setting, so that they could, you know, make a new deal, get a new business contact, make some sales, make their supply chain more resilient, release the pressure of the uncertainty of the 'chariffs' from the White House.

And so these are the things that we do as government: support businesses. And that's just one program, as an example of how we've allowed more businesses to connect to global partners, international opportunities that have strengthened our economy here in Manitoba.

So, when we look at the success of our government's role in fostering a healthy economy, we look at all these factors. And then we take action, working alongside the business community that not only support their opportunities to 'withstand' the challenges that we're seeing from an ever-pressing global economy, an ever-changing and global economic landscape, but also one that's ever-more competitive. So, to remain competitive and put Manitoba at the best foot forward, we need to be more proactive. And that's exactly what these sort of initiatives, like our Export Support Program, is actually doing.

So, I think it's very important to make note and comment on those things as well, because it does show not only the health of our economy, the role that we play as government in doing that and the success that we've had so far in doing that work and the success

that we anticipate having in the future, based on the programs and programming that we've laid out thus far.

Mr. Narth: Would the minister then—we'll bounce around a little bit here, but it's good that the minister led us down this path to talk about the Export Support Program.

Would the minister be able to outline what the dollar value is of that program over the last two years? Because I believe it came in in last year's budget as part of the contingency budget for the government. And would he be able to outline the costs and also what percentage of an increase to the budget that that program represents?

Mr. Moses: So, I appreciate the question regarding the Export Support Program. It's, I think, been a very successful program now that we've—our government has been promoting it and talking about it with the business community. And we've been using it as a tool to make sure that businesses have the opportunities to go seek out the next opportunity.

You know, I spoke to a company who was on and he got some of those dollars and went on an opportunity to go to a show internationally, and they said when they came back that they had just like a list, like a whole stack of, like, contact cards, right, and found that very valuable for a couple of reasons: (1) they got a ton of contacts. Afterwards, they followed up and did the work and went back and reached out to the companies who were specifically interested, ended up getting some successful deals and more business as a result of it.

But the second benefit is that they got a ton of exposure by being at these events, seeing what was out there, seeing what other people in the same similar industry or fields are up to—gave them ideas of how to improve their own business and how to become more competitive, how to up their game a little bit and they—and therefore raised their own ability to grow and become a successful company here in Manitoba.

* (15:30)

So there's a ton of value that companies get from increasing their exposure and attending these sort of events, including the fact that they get to have that exposure and build and grow their network, right?

I think a lot of folks in the business community know how powerful LinkedIn is these days, right, and having those connections with other folks in the business community.

And so building those connections, whether it's virtual or in person, like we support through our Export Support Program is really powerful.

And I think, even coming out of the pandemic, when a lot of business connections were only made virtually, it's even more powerful now to have those face-to-face meetings, those opportunities where you get to see someone across the table from you or shake their hand at the end of the meeting.

I think that's more and more what business leaders are telling me gets the job done, gets the deal over the finish line. That's what we value as well as part of our government. And so that's why—one of the reasons why we're continuing to support the Export Support Program as a very successful program.

So just to clarify, in the previous year, we—there were 47 companies that participated in the Export Support Program that received 200—about \$255,000. Now, that was in the previous year, 2024, that year the budget for the program was \$500,000, so it wasn't fully used.

The following year, when we really started to promote the program in 2025, we increased that to 84 companies and we expand—and at the same time we also doubled the allotment for that fund up to \$1 million and we expended the full \$1 million.

So these gave significant more opportunities for companies to utilize the Export Support Program. Again, we've doubled the amount of it. So this is a huge lift to companies who want to go out and reach more companies.

And, really, I think the point to make is that not only did we have the foresight to do this and continue to expand it—this program—throughout the challenges we're seeing in the tariffs coming out of the White House, but also, I think we really got a chance to give our companies a leg up, give them the leg up in the long-term success of their business.

So I really want to shout-out to the program staff who helped to initiate the increased volume of this program. It's been really beneficial for many companies. We're going to continue to engage with those companies, encourage them to put their best foot forward, tell the great story of Manitoba, utilize this program to grow our economy here at home and continue to share the success of this program.

Mr. Narth: Thank you to the minister for giving us some insight on that program. I appreciate it.

Would the minister be able to give us some numbers on how much we've seen an increase in export from Manitoba since that program's been rolled out? So, essentially for the 1 and a quarter million dollars, how much have we seen export numbers increase?

Mr. Moses: Thanks. I appreciate that.

So I'll probably be—Manitoba Bureau of Statistics would probably have the exact numbers, so you probably want to refer to them, but I'll just talk briefly just about our Manitoba—one of the reasons why we know that these programs are successful.

In light of the trade, you know, changes in the United States, people are saying that their US customers are—it's harder to work with them because of the tariff front.

And so, many of our manufacturers are looking for new export markets. Us helping them and providing them support to either make the case to those US customers that they've had for a long time, but are now questioning whether they want to purchase from us—continue to purchase from us or find new markets in Asia, or find new markets in India or in Europe, are all the sort of things that businesses are looking for.

So our Export Support Program is actually very well received by the business community, and it is showing significant amount of successes.

We look at some of the trade shows that we know businesses have attended—things like our BIO international, which is the largest life sciences conference; the prospectors developers association of Canada, the largest mining conference; Agritechnica, one of the largest ag manufacturers' conferences in Europe—believe in Germany; the Team Canada Trade Mission to Mexico. I've heard from companies from each one of these trips who've said not only is it valuable, but they came away with more business opportunities as a result of participating on those events.

And so we know that our ability to foster an economy that works for businesses is also dependent on our ability to adapt for long-term success and economic growth. And so our ability not only to put forward programs like this but, in the face of tariffs, adapt.

We've understood and saw the tariffs that came into place. We listened to the business community. We adapted. We doubled the program so more businesses can participate, find new markets, make sure

they had resilient supply chains. And that's how we continue to have a long-term economic success.

Mr. Narth: Yes, unfortunately, we—you don't have that statistic available, but I think everybody realizes that, as the minister has stated, as we all realize, that Manitoba's economy is quite diversified with, you know, a significant portion of our GDP contribution being in agriculture. So, I appreciate that the minister has highlighted manufacturing as being the highlight to export, but in reality, our economy is represented by much more than manufacturing.

* (15:40)

And nearly every other aspect of our exports for Manitoba has been uninterrupted by trade disputes with the United States. Many of our exports go to other countries—not that they haven't been disrupted in some way, shape or form—but largely, they've been uninterrupted and whatever interruptions have existed have opened the markets.

And when we look at agriculture, the trade and export of those goods are not as time sensitive as—unless it's livestock, but if it's commodities, and especially processed commodities, are not as time sensitive. And it's commonplace that month-long or year-long interruptions aren't devastating to that market.

So, I can appreciate the focus that the minister has made on manufacturing, but would the minister be able to maybe provide this committee with those statistics to highlight the percentage of exports that are represented by manufacturing in Manitoba—total exports for Manitoba?

And then, if supportive of that, tell Manitobans and this committee, you know, exactly the entire picture of our export market and how that would tie to the export support program.

Mr. Moses: I appreciate the question.

So, first of all, I think, like, member opposite is asking about our manufacturing exports and export marketing in general, and what percentage that plays and what role the Export Support Program would play in—to facilitating growth in those areas.

But I think the undertone of the member opposite's question is a little bit—was a little bit to downplay the role that the US market plays in our exports, a little bit, to say that maybe the changes that, from the tariff landscape in the US, aren't having a significant role in our economy here in Manitoba.

I'm not sure if that's the theme of member opposite's question, but that's kind of the tone that I was getting and I just wanted to maybe dispel that a little bit.

It has had a significant role in our entire country's economy from—when it comes to exports. Manitoba, like many other provinces, the vast majority of our exports go to the United States. In fact, in Manitoba, and it's roughly around the 72, 73 per cent of all of our exports go to the US, right? That is a really significant number. Imagine seven out of 10 of every product or item, service that leaves Manitoba's borders and is exported internationally, goes to the United States of America.

That's a market that is in—impossible to ignore and it's, quite frankly, impossible to diversify away from in just one single year or in—and that would be the same true for any jurisdiction in the country. And I think for us, it's not necessarily about shrinking the American pie necessarily from a business perspective; it's about growing the pie in other parts of the world.

So that's the effort that we're doing with our Export Support Program. It's allowing businesses to diversify markets to help make their—make and ensure that their supply chains, their customer base is as resilient as possible in any uncertainty that might occur in the economy.

The other point I want to make, and away from the manufacturer's aspect of that, is that even though there are—we know that the Canada-US-Mexico Free Trade Agreement allowed many exporters to continue on a fairly similar landscape as prior to the introduction of tariffs. The atmosphere in the US was shifted, where there was a lot of uncertainty, both from Canadian and US investors, where they were more hesitant to purchase product or to purchase it with a long lead time or purchase it with any recurrence, which meant that it made it more challenging for US businesses on the back end, who were then trying to supply the US market.

And as a result, Manitoba businesses were challenged from that standpoint as well. So even though in the industries where they did not feel the direct tariff financial impact, they felt the uncertainty, as a result of the tariffs played a significant role in decision making and market decisions which impacted Manitoba businesses and businesses right across the country. And so there was that aspect as well.

And the third point I want to make is that there was also a significant impact of the canola tariffs and

pork tariffs from China. And so the People's Republic of China imposed tariffs on our market here, which affected agricultural producers as, of course, member opposite might know. Manitoba is the largest pork exporter in Canada. And so that fact had a large impact. And canola is also a large major export from Canada as well: canola seed, canola meal; those have—play real impacts and the PRC making a massive change to their tariff changed the landscape from export, as well, over the past year.

And so I do think that our role in fostering a strong economic landscape by providing and doubling our Export Support Program has allowed producers in ag tech, in manufacturing, in some of the services and some of the other technical skills, more opportunities to find new markets.

And so I think just here, by share—we're seeing that this is a share of trade data I'm getting here—this one right here? Roughly here, yes. So we're looking at—yes, so 2024, so the numbers I had there are 2024. We're looking at roughly 72 per cent US exports; China was 7 per cent; Japan was 4 per cent; Mexico was 3 per cent; South Korea was 1 per cent. Those are the 2024 stats on percentages of exports out of Manitoba to international companies from 2024.

I'm just running out of time. If the member wants, after the next question, I can provide some of the stats from 2025.

* (15:50)

Mr. Narth: I appreciate that response, but maybe I'll make it more pointed and more specific because, you know, as I've seen personally, you know, as I represent the southeast corner of the province, one of the strongest entrepreneurial business-led regions of our province: I talk to business owners, exporters each and every day, as well as I am one myself. I'm sure the minister knows that I'm a business owner, that business is dependent on export, as well as an agriculture producer.

So, I not only know it as a representative of the people of my constituency, I realize it first-hand, so I am able to resonate the message to the minister that a lot of the downturn in our growth has not been due directly to tariffs.

So, I'd ask the minister if the—him, together with his staff, would be able to supply the data on how much of our exports were directly impacted by tariffs. So, that's not the uncertainty in the market, the what-ifs, the people being uncomfortable with selling to the states, Americans being uncomfortable buying

from Canadians—none of that. Just what percentage of the exports of Canada were directly affected by changes to tariff agreements?

Mr. Moses: I thank the member opposite for the question.

I think the member opposite is trying to separate two things that are inseparable. You can't separate the tariffs from the impact of the tariffs, right? Like, you're saying—you're trying to suggest: Tell me what the impacts of the tariffs have been without saying all the chaos that talking about tariffs has also caused.

They happen at the same time; they're caused—they're one in each other, this—essentially the same problem, and they're having a ripple-effect impact throughout the entire Canadian economy and, quite frankly, across the world economy.

And so you—it's impossible to really separate and say that, you know, a tariff number, per cent that was put on item X has had this much percentage whereas the companies who delayed investments in product Y doesn't count as an impact as a result of the first decision, right? They're correlating, they're inseparable, they work together and that's why the impacts and the uncertainty of the tariffs are a really challenging situation for the economy.

I think what we're seeing coming out of 2025 is that companies are starting to now understand the current landscape, that there are still right places to make investment which is why we're starting to see Manitoba become the right place to make those investments in.

We are seeing that having (a) a diversified economy, having a place like Manitoba that has clean, baseload, reliable energy, that has great universities with an incredible opportunity for people to get a great education, low-cost education, do so affordably with one of the most affordable costs of living and housing prices. That's—I mean I think, quite frankly, people are seeing what we did when it comes to taking the PST off grocery prices and saying, yes, Manitoba's the place to be.

An Honourable Member: They're hiping and hollering.

Mr. Moses: Manitoba's the place to be. They're hiping and hollering and saying, yes, I want to come here. I hear young people across the country saying: you know what, I'm going to move back to Manitoba, I was—maybe I went away for school in BC, Ontario, but I'm going to come and get a job in Manitoba.

Can get a job, get a good-paying job? Eventually, I'll own a home, maybe one day I'll even get a cottage and enjoy a really good high quality of life here in Manitoba. That's what you get here.

When businesses hear that story, that they can offer to their employees with a good wage, wage that is very good for our economy here but is even in some cases more competitive than in other jurisdictions—in many jurisdictions, particularly in southern Ontario, from the employer's standpoint.

When they hear that story, when they hear our hydro rates, know that they can have reliable baseload power at among the lowest rates in the country, large employers are saying, yes, sign me up.

When they can see a parcel of land available in Manitoba versus what it might cost in Ontario, say, yes, this is a great place. Maybe I want to be located in southeast Manitoba. Maybe I want to locate in the Pembina Valley, maybe I want to locate in CentrePort or in Westman.

This is a great opportunity here. So, I think all of that uncertainty that we saw in the economy is wrapped up and intertwined with the actual tariffs itself. They're inseparable. And, so certainly, we have been feeling, and all jurisdictions across Canada, have been feeling the impacts of tariffs. So it's impossible to really break out one versus the other.

We can certainly tell you that exports have undoubtedly changed and decreased over 2025 as a result of the tariffs. But I think our government has responded very strongly, both with our ability to work with business community, provide programming like our Export Support Program; helping businesses navigate, specifically changing their NOC codes and understanding how to make sure they qualify for—become CUSMA compliant, we've done that work; worked with partners like CME to provide that training and do those sort of things; reinvest in our own Canadian economy by having our B2B supply chain, B2B business connection events; actually work with our business council on the US trade relationship; do the advocacy work with the federal government on advocating for businesses in Manitoba's needs—what they need to be heard when it comes to that CUSMA conversation.

So we'll continue to do that work throughout 2026 because it's really important for our business community and for workers in Manitoba.

Mr. Narth: I would probably beg to differ on some of the comments that the minister made, with Manitoba

being second to none for regulatory burden for small businesses and medium-sized businesses. I don't think it's fair for the minister to say that it's the what-ifs and uncertainty in the export environment that is driving down investment or growth of businesses—export businesses in our province. And I don't want to dwell on one area because we have so many to go over.

* (16:00)

So I'd ask it again, because I think it's very straightforward, it's very simple, it's, you know, very clear what the tariff changes have been over the last two years and where those changes have been imposed.

I think it's also very easy to see the makeup of our export market for Manitoba in general, so I think it's reasonable for the minister and his department to supply us with that information. But if the minister isn't able to provide that at this time, I'd ask that the minister take it under advisement and provide those numbers for us at a later time.

But again, to make it clear, I'd like to know what impact the changes to tariffs have had over the last two years and what percentage that represents of total Manitoba exports.

Mr. Moses: I thank the member opposite for the question and I do really see, you know—understand why you're asking these questions. It's very important, right. This is the largest impacting factor in our economy that we've experienced over the last two years.

And I understand you have a, you know, personal connection as well, not only yourself in your own personal business but also your community, the folks you're advocating for as well. And I've talked to those folks, as well, in our economy who are impacted by tariffs, and they tell me that it's both the actual tariff dollars and it's the uncertainty effect that are hurting them.

I talked to many businesses, in fact, that are saying that it's almost—the uncertainty is worse because of the lack of commitments on investors or lack of commitment on purchasers or folks who aren't sure about whether they're going to have the ability, in the long term, to commit to making this purchase because of what might change from the direction in the White House at any given moment.

And so, again, I'll go back to my comment I made in the last point where it is inseparable to really distinguish between the true economic impact on our GDP. If you're looking at just boiling it down to our

GDP number is—to boil it—separate what the impact is just to the tariffs and to the uncertainty, because there's many deals that we won't know would have happened had we not been in that situation where we have had that ever-changing climate over the past year and a bit.

And so, our 'responsibility' is to provide a ecosystem in Manitoba where we have a framework for success, economically, and that's exactly what we've done.

We brought together a business council, a US council on trade, to understand the impacts of businesses. We advocated for those needs from the business community directly to the federal government. We deferred some of the taxes for businesses during that time period. We aligned and strengthened our Canadian economy with our Fair Trade in Canada Act, as well as our ability to build strong relationships with the United States and—our largest trading partner.

We did initiatives like rolling out our—doubling our Export Support Program to help businesses strengthen their supply chain and make new connections internationally. We've seen a lot of success in this program, as I highlighted: nearly double the amount of businesses were supported and using for the first time the full allotment of dollars in that budget to ensure that more small-, medium-sized enterprises have opportunities to find success in the global market.

And so, our team really understands that you're looking for that—you know, some of those specifics, but I'll just reiterate that, yes, we've seen a drop in the imports as a result of the 'tariffs' from US and from China. If—it had impacts in our agriculture, manufacturing, steel sectors, undoubtedly. And that uncertainty as a result of both of those changes have had ripple-effecting impacts throughout our entire economy. That story is true for every province and territory in our country.

So, I will continue to champion the fact that our government has done an incredible job of withstanding those issues—those challenges, that we continue to work with and alongside our business community and that our programming is setting the right sort of environment for future success.

And so, I would continue to encourage the member to understand how we can build a successful economy here: one that is powered and strengthened by our diversity in our economy—not relying on the boom-and-bust cycle of one industry, but really having a fulsome approach to economic success.

We're trying to continue to build that approach, whether that's through energy products, whether that's through advancing manufacturing, strengthening our aerospace sector, leaning into our life sciences or understanding how we can become the most innovative, creative sector and province in our country.

So we're going to continue to do all that good work and build an economy that's resilient and that is growing for Manitoba businesses and workers.

Mr. Narth: Unfortunately, we weren't able to get an answer—a clear answer from the minister on that very important question. But I do think it's an unfair representation of the state of export in our economy and an unfair representation of the economic strength or weakening resilience that we see in Manitoba.

Manitoba exporters have been preparing for a change in the CUSMA agreement—you know, what used to be the NAFTA agreement. We saw that the current administration in the United States is the same administration that brought forward the last trade agreement for North America. If a business is in export trade with other countries, this is just part of doing business.

So, you know, many within the industry, specifically those that have functioned for a longer period of time, have been preparing themselves for what the change in trade agreements could mean. And that's everything from manufacturing right down to supply-managed agriculture.

* (16:10)

This is something that has never provided certainty in, really, Manitoba's history, never mind recent history. So, I think there's a short period through the late 1990s when we could have rest assured that we had some certainty, but I don't know if that certainty could be said to have been any longer than the certainty that we've seen through the CUSMA agreement.

So, I think it's unfair representation and excuse for any potential downturn that we may be seeing in our economic strength, specifically our export strength in Manitoba.

And it's disappointing that the minister isn't able to provide the actual statistics, which I think probably a good solid Google search here—you know, maybe while the minister is researching and discussing with his department, I could do some research myself to provide that to Manitobans and the committee here today.

But, you know, what we've—we're hearing, not only, you know, as the opposition, as the critic to this portfolio, as a representative of my constituency, but we're also seeing through surveys done by industry groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, we're seeing, you know, quite concerning statistics coming out that more businesses are looking at closing or leaving Manitoba than looking to settle in Manitoba or expand in Manitoba. And when we dive deeper into the rationale behind these decisions, it's the rising regulatory burden that we see in Manitoba being the largest barrier to growth.

So my question to the minister is: Would he agree that outpacing tariff uncertainty—the actual effects of tariffs and the changes that they've brought—that regulatory burden is leading the decision for more businesses to close or relocate than grow and establish in our province?

Mr. Moses: Well, first, honourable Chair, I'd like to maybe just dispel or dissuade the member opposite from having that glass-half-empty approach to his narrative, right? I think the glass is half full here for our economy, and my thinking is that businesses are coming to Manitoba. And I've got a lot of great stories to tell.

First of all, you use—you paint the narrative that businesses are fleeing the province. I don't think that's true. Recent stories and articles are talking about even just the commercial vacancy in downtown Winnipeg is on the decline. More businesses are coming back to the downtown Winnipeg to locate their businesses and find success for the growth of their organization and their enterprise, right? So more businesses are doing that.

We know that there's great opportunities here. We know folks in the aerospace sector are growing, whether that's—you're talking about StandardAero or you're talking about Magellan. NFI Group, for example—they are growing. They've announced that, with their all-Canadian build, they've been—hired more people. They've grown their opportunities for sales. This is a fantastic opportunity here. Businesses are not only rooting in Manitoba; they are growing in Manitoba, and businesses that are from outside of the province are seeing Manitoba as the right place to be.

So we're very pleased with the continued success we have. We know we're going to do more, but with—right now, under the uncertainty and landscape we've been on for the last, you know, 14 months, we're doing very well in terms of growth and new prospects of companies coming in here, setting down roots and

establishing Manitoba as a place to find their economic success.

Member opposite talks about regulatory burden. So if there's a specific issue, I'd like to—him to highlight it, if there's a specific regulatory burden, because our government has done an intensive amount of work to improving the permitting processing system we have here in government, a significant increase over the former government which let so much red tape through, it was—they spent time counting the red tape. They spent—put more red tape in to count the red tape. That's what we saw in the last government.

But I'll digress. I'll give the member opposite instead some examples of how we've actually improved the system for businesses to go through.

So, for—in—particularly and specifically on mining: We've actually decreased the processing time over the last year by 28 per cent. So, again, that means it's a 28 per cent reduction in the average permitting time for a mining project. That's a real and significant impact. I don't know if the member caught that; I'll just repeat it again. On mining permitting time, it's a 28 per cent improvement in the processing time. That's a real credit to the team, our commitment, our government's commitment to doing that work, our team's effort to implement those strategies and do it in a new and more efficient and in an increased way. And we're very happy with some of those results. That's on the mining side.

I'll give the member another example on the permitting side for quarries. There was a massive wait-list for the quarries left by the former government. And so we've seen, over the last 18 months, reduction of nearly 24 per cent in the quarry permitting wait-list, in the backlog.

Now that is a huge improvement from what it was under the former government which let those applications just sit and sit and sit and sit. And so instead, we're actually taking action. We're improving the system, making it work more efficiently, getting more businesses up and running more quickly, making sure that the permit and regulatory approval process is as streamlined as possible.

We'll continue to do that work, but if there's a specific issue the member has, please bring it to the table instead of having this glass-half-full—glass-half-empty approach about our economy.

The Chairperson: Before recognizing the next speaker, I just want to ask all members to refrain from back

chatter and heckling and commentary when it's not your turn, you're not the recognized member.

Mr. Narth: I disagree that—with the minister that we or I see the glass as half empty versus half full. You know, on this side of the House, we would just like to see a Manitoba where the glass is completely full. We see the opportunity that our great province has. And we also see that government stands in the way of our potential.

So maybe to clarify my previous statement, and, you know, to add to some of the comment that the minister had made that improvements have been made to the regulatory process and red tape involved in industries—specific industries. He highlighted the mineral exploration and extraction around quarries and mine establishment, so that's one specific.

But with that being said, would the minister agree that regulatory burden is one of the largest restrictions and limitations to business growth in our province, if not the largest?

* (16:20)

Mr. Moses: I'll answer the member opposite's question very directly: No, I don't agree, because I think his assertions are incorrect. We don't have—I don't think a regulatory burden is the overwhelmingly largest impact to—any impact to businesses. And I'll also say that I think our government has done a really good job of aligning business needs with regulatory approvals.

And so we've not only taken as really strong an approach with making our government work more efficiency—efficiently. We've done a lot of work to understand how we can streamline some of these processes, particularly when it comes to environmental reviews, permitting, processing.

And we were happy to announce last week, Premier (Mr. Kinew) and Prime Minister announced that we're undertaking the environmental impact assessment and bringing a one-project, one-review approach to those assessments.

It's a new co-operative agreement with the federal government: streamlined approaches. This is a great example of how we're working more efficiently to get projects done, get businesses working in Manitoba. I think that's a really efficient way to work. I don't know, I suppose the member opposite is suggesting that's not a good idea.

I'm also saying that I know, led by our great Minister of Innovation and New Technology (MLA Moroz), has done a tremendous amount of

work to reduce barriers and burdens and hurdles, and really doing a lot of that work to reduce red tape across all government departments. And he does it in some of the most innovative ways anywhere in the country, with applying new technology, applying a creative lens to many of those initiatives. I think it's remarkable. So I applaud Minister of Innovation and New Technology for his incredible work that helps to lead and shape our government.

On top of all that, we've actually been happy to sign on to the MRA, which is the Mutual Recognition Agreement. It's a framework of agreement that Manitoba, alongside all the other provinces and territories, signed on to recognize goods that are sold across the country to help ensure that we reduce as much friction from goods being sold in any province or territory in our nation when it—they're being sold.

So we want products to flow. We want manufacturers, exporters, anyone who's selling goods and services across the country to have that ability to sell and work in an efficient way. And so that's why we signed on to the MRA, which allows more products, more goods to be sold with ease across our country, removing as many barriers and having them mutually recognized in different jurisdictions. That's the work that we're doing as Manitoba to actually facilitate and reduce any, as the member opposite phrases it, regulatory burden.

In addition to all this work, when it comes down to actually saying, well, are we doing good or bad in terms of our ability to reduce barriers? Well, member opposite has referenced the CFIB in his previous question, so I'll reference them as well, in this one. They gave us an A-minus grade, one of the tops in the country when it comes to internal trade in their last report—one of the best in the country, in terms of our ability to reduce interprovincial trade barriers.

So, I think member opposite is off base in his suggestion that regulatory burden is overly burdensome here in Manitoba compared to other jurisdictions. And if he doesn't believe me, then believe the same people he's quoting in CFIB when they give us an A grade, one of the best in the country.

Mr. Narth: It's almost mind-boggling, that response, but, you know, the exact source that the minister had just quoted for an A-minus in internal trade, the same report gave this government an F, a failing grade, on regulatory burden, the exact question that I asked.

What's also quite bizarre is that the minister, in the previous response to my question, in the last question,

had said how the government is cutting red tape, speeding up the process for approvals in mines and quarries and the great work that other departments are doing in reducing red tape.

But when I asked a simple question, if there's more work that needs to be done to reduce red tape, to encourage business development in our province and whether or not the minister would agree that regulatory burden red tape was one of the most substantial contributing factors to limiting business growth in our province, if not the most—so they were two separate. I don't need the minister to agree that it may not be the most. It may be—that may be the tariffs and US trade disruptions. You know, I think we could disagree on that, but it may be the position of the minister.

But, nonetheless, I would have expected the minister, after saying all the great work that that he and his department, along with other departments are doing to reduce red tape, that the minister would recognize that more work needs to be done in the regulatory burden that government imposes on businesses.

You know, I'd like to still get a response to that, because it seems like it's something that we actually agree on. Considering the minister speaking for four or five minutes on the great things that he's doing around cutting red tape and the regulatory burden, so then it's odd to—for him to, in closing, defend that nothing needs to be done to improve the regulatory burden, you know.

But maybe the minister can add his clarification into the response to the next question, because I think we desperately need to move on. We're kind of talking in circles here and not getting a clear picture of the economic position of our province.

So, along with that previous question, I'd also like the minister to answer what this government's real GDP growth was for the past fiscal year.

* (16:30)

Mr. Moses: So, going to the member opposite's question regarding regulatory burden, I think very clearly we agree that we can always do a little bit better, and our government is making significant steps to improve on what we found to be a lot of regulatory burden that was left by the former government.

I mentioned some significant improvements we've made in the mining sector and the mining permitting, reducing the processing time by 28 per cent. I highlighted some significant improvements we've made to the quarry backlog, improving that by about 24 per cent reduction on the backlog. Some real

significant improvements to the regulatory processing mess that was left by the former government.

We also, at the same time, are streamlining our processes with the one project, one review—signing on to the Mutual Recognition Agreement with all other provinces and territories to ensure that goods can flow as seamlessly as possible across our country. And for that we were able to successfully get one of the top grades from the CFIB's internal—interprovincial trade report.

We continue to make significant efforts to streamline our processes, but through—I'll highlight for the member opposite through—and I said this in our—in the first time I responded to this question—if the member opposite is claiming there's red tape or regulatory burden, if he can single out a single one specific regulatory burden, it would be very helpful. He could maybe signal one thing. He has had three opportunities to say one specific thing that he would like to change in terms of the regulatory approach. He hasn't done so. And if he'd like to do so, he's more than willing to.

But I'll move on to a second point of his question where he's referring to the real GDP forecast which we have in our budget here: real GDP forecast to be 1.6 per cent for 2025.

And so that is what we have forecast in our 2025 budget. That's what you were asking for, for last year, right? Correct? Right. So that's what we have in our budget here. Manitoba's real GDP is forecast to be 1.6 per cent in 2025.

Now getting back to that regulatory burden, we'll continue to make improvements. Our government is focused on being as efficient and a well-working government as possible, not only for the goals that we have which are growing our economy with good jobs for Manitobans, fixing and improving our health care, making life more affordable. We're going to advance on all those areas. And part of that approach to making life work for working Manitobans and for businesses to thrive is to ensure that they have the right economic landscape, right environment and sectors, ecosystem to thrive in.

And so we'll continue to make sure we reduce as many unneeded barriers and, at the same time, ensure that we work in a way that uplifts as many companies by providing the right sort of supports that they would need: like ensuring we have our Export Support Program that works for them; like ensuring we have the right sort of capital funding program, right?

Like making sure we have a tax system that removes the PST off of manufacturing equipment, which has helped many manufacturers make more investments right here in Manitoba.

So, all these things align to supporting the growth of a economy that works better for Manitobans than what we've seen previously and works better—and responds better—to the uncertainty and the challenges we've faced over the last two years.

Mr. Narth: Yes, I don't think we have enough time for me to go over all the regulatory burden that that is driving businesses away, that—detering businesses from investing in Manitoba.

But I can also, you know—to expand on that, I don't just need to talk about the regulatory burden that's limiting the growth in our province. I can speak specifically to the regulatory burden that the NDP government has brought in during their not even three short years of government, that is now creating uncertainty from investors and small-business owners in our province.

You know, I stood up in the House and I think I went three days in a row speaking about two significant economic contributors, not only in my constituency, not only in the province, but in the in the entire country. We have Natural Proteins Incorporated in the Blumenort area, a significant value-added agriculture food processor, that had looked at setting up a new processing piece of equipment. It was a dryer—dual-purpose dryer, and they had purchased it from a Canadian company called Law-Marot, world-recognized agriculture processing company that provides equipment for that industry. They're based out of Quebec and they provide their equipment all across the country.

This company, NPI, is in my corner of the province. Law-Marot's based out of Quebec, but because of the value-added agriculture expansion that we're seeing—the explosion in the industry in Saskatchewan right now—this company identified Manitoba as a real logical location to set up manufacturing.

So instead of shipping the product, you know—this is large, bulky agriculture drying equipment and processing equipment—instead of shipping it clear across the country, since the largest demand for their equipment is in western Canada, it made most logical sense to set up in Manitoba.

After a full year of a convoluted process that has been added to by the NDP government since the PCs left office—and that's a fact because NPI, the owner,

Ryan, had established that processing facility under the previous PC government and set up a very similar dryer. This company, who functions within our country, daily establishes new sites, was blocked by operating their equipment in Manitoba—in Manitoba only. At the same time as they were establishing these large-scale, multimillion-dollar processing sites in Ontario, they were also establishing them in Saskatchewan: in unison, the same day, same time, same crews were building. That multimillion-dollar piece of equipment sat idle.

* (16:40)

Unfortunately, what came of that is very little correspondence between the department of the government, his company, me as the representative, and what that led to is NPI looking at expanding their expansion and processing to Saskatchewan, and Law-Marot completely discouraged from establishing anything further in Manitoba. And they're moving their western operations into Saskatchewan—two businesses that we're losing as a result of the additional red tape and regulation. Not long-standing red tape and regulation, and I'm not defending that that doesn't exist, but this is a new establishment of regulation that has limited the efficient development of businesses.

So going back to draw this into a question, I'd ask what the real GDP growth—the actual real GDP growth was for the past fiscal year.

Mr. Moses: We certainly understand the impacts that businesses and—the challenges that businesses face when they're setting up. There's a lot of capital costs, understanding permitting regulating—regulatory approaches, and our government focuses on—certainly, our department focuses on helping businesses navigate those challenges.

And particularly, we have folks who specifically work with businesses to help them navigate our system. So we're very happy to work with businesses from any corner of the province to help them navigate setting up shop, expanding their operations, understanding what resources and tools and programs would be available to support their business. We'll continue to do this work.

We can find out whether there's any specific instances where we can find ways to work as efficiently as possible. And so, we can certainly—and we'll certainly continue to do that work.

Look, one of the things you understand that we—I've learned through experience in this role is that governments work best when they continue to listen

to folks, listen to the community members. So, we spend a lot of time listening to businesses, listening to workers and understanding how we can ensure that our economic system that we're setting up is working the best for them.

That's what we've been doing since we've been in government. And what we've reiterated, part of our broader economic development strategy, is our ability to respond to the needs and the growing changes that we're seeing in the business community, but also to set ourselves up to always be responsive to the quick-changing nature of the business landscape so that we can always remain competitive.

So, that's part of our goal. We'll continue to do that work under that landscape and the overall framework: where we're seeing uncertainty from US and Chinese markets; where we're seeing international conflicts in Europe and in the Middle East play a role in prices for businesses and for consumers here in North America; and where we're seeing other international challenges that are making supply chains more difficult.

So we'll continue to monitor these sorts of situations, act proactively to advocate for our Manitoba businesses and respond in the most appropriate way that allows businesses to continue to thrive, expand here in Manitoba and set up shop here to grow and create more good jobs for Manitobans.

When it comes to real GDP, as the member also asked, real GDP growth in 2024 was 1.7 per cent. That's the real number, is 1.7 per cent. The—what I mentioned before in the previous—my previous response was Manitoba's real GDP forecast of 1.6 per cent for 2025. The GDP is calculated, and it takes about—comes up about 11 months after the fiscal year—the year, and it won't—usually is typically not available until November.

So what we presented in our budget is the—Manitoba's real GDP forecast, which is 1.6 per cent for 2025. And that's our forecast, which won't be confirmed until November. And what I've just said there was our real GDP change of 1.7 per cent, which was for 2024.

Mr. Narth: So it was forecasted at 1.6 per cent, and now—I suppose not officially—I'm talking 2025—real GDP growth is unofficially calculated at 1.1 per cent, the—one of the lowest in Canada.

Would the minister agree that that is correct?

Mr. Moses: We take a responsible approach to forecasting these economic numbers, which is why what we do is we use the average of seven private forecasts. We partner with seven private agencies that provide these forecasts, plus we use a Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, who does their own analysis.

So, our forecast number of 1.6 is a calculation that is supported in a responsible approach that is averaged out by 'separate'—seven separate private forecasts.

* (16:50)

So, if member opposite is kind of cherry-picking a—the lowest number of 1.1 of—out of a series of forecasts, I think that's a bit unfair. We're taking a more responsible approach by, instead, actually taking an average of seven different forecasts.

And I'd also suggest to the member opposite that if he's cherry-picking the lowest number of 1.1, there's also another forecast that's got to be equally as high to make our average 1.6, which is what we printed in our budget. There's a variety of forecasts for what our GDP would look like for 2025, and there could be some as—that's well over 2 per cent.

And so I don't think it's fair to characterize our real GDP forecast for 2025 at 1.1 per cent at all. We've responsibly forecasted 1.6 as an average of seven different private forecast scenarios.

Mr. Narth: So, I had just brought it up on the second—what is this—the second quarter report, '25-26, presented by the Province of Manitoba by the honourable Finance Minister. So this is this government's report, and it showcases to the end of December 2025, the real GDP growth is at 1.1 per cent.

And then in Finance committee last week, the honourable Finance Minister had also highlighted the real 2025 GDP growth at 1.1 per cent. So I was just wanting to confirm that. So now, from what I understand from the minister here today, that their report isn't accurate and what the Finance Minister had said last week is also not accurate.

But what I wanted to establish is the facts. So, we drew out the fact of the forecast being 1.6 per cent. From what we've been told by the Finance Minister and the government's report—and I could supply the minister potentially the page number; I think page 15 of the second quarter report prepared by the Province of Manitoba—that, in fact, the real GDP growth was 1.1 per cent.

I'd appreciate if the minister could confirm that but also don't want to dwell on that because I'd like to

also know along with that, ideally, a confirmation of—that the government's report is accurate—I think we have some concern if it isn't. But along with that, what number is this government forecasting for the coming year, real GDP growth?

Mr. Moses: I'll just respond quickly to this because if there's another question, I might have missed it but—so I just want to confirm.

I think the member is quoting our 2Q—December Q2 report, where there was a projection of 1.1 per cent growth. But then at budget, which is—also acts as our Q3 report for 2025, there was a revised number for—upwards for that projection to be 1.6, which is what I said in my last response. So the—meaning our—excuse me—the 1.6 number that I said is an updated number from—updated from the 1.1.

Mr. Narth: With that, would the minister be able to provide us what the GDP per capita is for the province?

Mr. Moses: So, the real GDP per capita—and I'm—I just want to clarify if I'm giving a number for 2025, it would have to be a forecast because it's—we won't have the confirmed real GDP numbers for 2025 for a few more months, so I just wanted to confirm that—for members opposite that the number I'd be giving is a forecast.

What we have here is real GDP at 52,699—would be our real GDP per capita and that would be forecast for 2025. Now having said that, that's our real GDP number. It is one in which it has increased year over year, so we're actually seeing that number—that number rise, even though—even modestly. I think that's a sign that not only are the decisions that we're taking to grow our economy very positive, but they have been well received and we're seeing some positive impacts in terms of actual impacts in people's lives.

So both, as the member has mentioned early on, what are some of those economic impact indicators that we look at? One is GDP, but another one is jobs, unemployment; another one is real wages.

And so when we look at all those things combined we want to ensure that Manitobans have opportunities to work but mainly opportunities to work in good-paying jobs, ones that can afford them the quality of life that we would want for all Manitobans.

And so I think that that is a signal that shows that not only do we have a real GDP that is impactful for folks, but that is actually growing and improving our economy in Manitoba.

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

ROOM 255

JUSTICE

* (14:50)

The Chairperson (Diljeet Brar): 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 Justice.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

An Honourable Member: I do.

The Chairperson: Minister of Justice.

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Thank you to members of the committee for taking the time to review the Estimates during this Committee of Supply 2026.

Before we get started, honourable Chair, I just wanted to take a moment. Today is professional administrative assistants day; I think most folks know that. And so we've been spending the day thanking those super important folks that work with us every day and keep the office running.

And so I just wanted to take a quick moment to shout out my staff, so Reanne Nicolas and our correspondence secretaries, Helene Samonte and Courtney Chohey. And, of course, I also want to acknowledge the administrative staff that are over in the deputy minister's office: Danita and Doreen and even Kim, who does a great job of keeping us all moving forward.

So I just wanted to take a moment. It's—we couldn't do this job without you, and I just wanted to put on the record how much I appreciate the work that you do and thank you for keeping us moving forward.

I also wanted to take a moment to just send my appreciation and thanks to all of those Manitoba Justice employees who work tirelessly every single day across this province. The dedication, the care, the commitment that I've seen in so many of our facilities, so many—in many of our workplaces across, as I said, across the province, have been inspiring to me. They keep me motivated. I'm so appreciative of the effort, and I just want folks to know the work doesn't go unnoticed; it is so very, very important.

So, just on behalf of myself and the department and all Manitobans, I want to thank everyone who works in the Department of Justice for the work that you do.

Budget 2026 really does continue our government's successful work to begin to repair the damage that was left by the previous government, to restore safety, accountability and confidence in Manitoba's justice system. With a 4.3 per cent increase in Justice funding, this budget reflects clear priorities: protecting public safety, rebuilding justice staffing capacities and strengthening partnerships and communities across this province.

Public safety is not optional. Manitobans expect safe streets. They expect responsive policing and a justice system that works for them, and this budget delivers on those commitments. We're continuing to build back from the previous government's cuts to law enforcement year over year of flat or cut funding, including firing 55 Winnipeg police officers. We are strengthening front-line policing across Manitoba by continuing to fund the 2 per cent escalator for municipal law enforcement through the urban policing and the public safety basket funding.

Budget 2026 also provides funding for an additional 12 police officers for communities in rural Manitoba and across this province. Under the policing and public safety agreement, Manitoba Justice is investing \$8 million this year to strengthen the RCMP services across the province and is investing another \$6 million to support First Nations and Inuit policing programs in so many communities. This means better coverage and stronger safety in rural and northern communities and places where they need the investment the most.

Budget 2026 commits to co-ordinated action against organized crime, against drug trafficking and against retail theft in particular. We've implemented the Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Task Force, which brings law enforcement leaders together to crack down on methamphetamine, fentanyl and other illicit drugs. Guided by this work, the Winnipeg Police Service will lead a methamphetamine sweep in the upcoming year to disrupt the production and distribution of this toxic substance in our communities.

Budget 2026 strengthens our response to retail crime through the revitalized Retail Crime Task Force. We are improving co-ordination between government, law enforcement, retailers and front-line workers, all sitting at the same table working through solutions.

The budget provides \$2.4 million to the Winnipeg Police Service to fund an additional 12 downtown foot patrol officers. And we're also continuing to partner

with businesses and municipalities by investing another \$1.5 million in the Security Rebate Program.

We are continuing to press the federal government to take repeat violent offenders seriously. Bail reform is critical to our work and to public safety more broadly. That's why this budget includes an additional \$2.7 million for the ankle-monitor programming—ankle-monitoring program, one that was cut under the previous government, of course, which now has been restored and enhanced. And we also have enhanced supervising of those who are on bail, strengthening those services and helping to prevent repeat offences.

But public safety is not just about enforcement; it's also about prevention and addressing root causes. Our government is advancing youth-focused and community-based solutions that keep people out of the justice system and make people and communities safer in the long term.

Through investments in land-based education and culturally grounded services, we're working to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in custody and support better outcomes. The Thompson youth healing lodge is a great example of this. It's anticipated to open in '26-27, and it provides culturally appropriate programming for youth in northern Manitoba and helps to build safer futures for young people and their communities. I had a chance to visit this facility, and it is top-notch. We appreciate the partnership with MKO.

We also are continuing to fund the Manitoba Youth Centre, adding 19 FTEs to support youth with culturally appropriate mental health and education programming. These important programs further our government's commitment to provide better reintegration supports for youth who are looking to get on that better path, and I'll state here in the committee for the record, I want to thank the Premier (Mr. Kinew) for his leadership in supporting these initiatives and really taking the lead in giving—offering our young people a better path.

* (15:00)

Budget 2026 also continues to close the historic staffing vacancies that were left by members opposite, providing a \$14-million increase to Correctional Services, a 6 per cent increase in courts and an additional \$1 million to hire more Crown prosecutors. These staff play a vital role in the functioning of our justice system. Our government is committed to collaborating with Justice staff to address grievances that

were filed against the previous government, and we will work to repair that damage.

Our government is working to build back corrections infrastructure that the previous government closed. Budget 2026 includes \$7 million to break ground on the Dauphin Centre for Justice—of course, the replacement for the cut jail under the previous government. This will be an important part of access to justice for the Parkland, but also create good jobs for that community.

Budget 2026 continues to deliver on this NDP government's action after years of cuts and mismanagement by members opposite. We have been doing important work, but we're not slowing down. This budget strengthens public safety; it supports communities in a way that has never been done in this province before—true partnerships and a true commitment to the one Manitoba vision that our government supports; and it ensures Manitoba's justice system continues to work for the people that it serves.

Honourable Speaker, I am so, so grateful for the incredible people that support the work that we do as government. I have some of them here with me, and I'll, I'm sure, have a chance to introduce them as we welcome them to the table. Really, we couldn't do this without our incredible Justice team.

We're on the right track. We're making progress. We have a lot to lose if the former government ever got back in power; we all know that. And so we're going to continue with our foot on the gas to get results for Manitobans and make communities safer.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Does the critic from official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Yes. It's a pleasure to be here at Committee of Supply to talk about this budget as we move forward.

I'd like to start out by thanking all of the staff that play a vital role in justice throughout Manitoba. And they're too numerous to mention but, you know, some of the areas that we touch on are law enforcement, of course: our police services, security, corrections, institutional safety officers, public safety units, just to name a few that are part of this.

But, today, I would particularly like to thank the staff of Manitoba Justice who continue to serve in a non-partisan role to make sure that Manitoba is kept

safe and that the policies are followed and processes are followed.

So, on today, Administrative Professionals Day, thanks to all of those that administer professionally law enforcement across our province and make sure that it is kept on track because it is vital, it's necessary and it's not an option. It is something that has to be there.

Why is justice important to Manitoba, and why are these Estimates and these issues important to Manitobans? Well, first of all, we have to look at affordability. Affordability is a prime area that we really have to dig into in our province, and justice plays a vital role in that. And, unfortunately, it has been failing under this NDP government.

When we look at affordability across the way and the fact that we see billions upon billions of dollars going out the doors of institutions because of thefts, because of increased robberies and because of the fact that institutions have to take strong security measures because this government has failed to do so, that's costing Manitobans. It's an affordability issue in Manitoba because it's you that has to pay that.

Businesses are in this for profit; we know that. They have to turn a profit to employ people and to work further within our economy. But when they're losing billions, they have to pass it on to one person, and that's the taxpayers. Manitobans expect more when it comes to retail crime, when it comes to security of the institutions, and they need to feel safe when they go out into those areas.

And the second area that we have to focus on with justice is the economy. Justice plays a key role in our economy here in Manitoba. People may ask, well, how does justice play a key role in our economy? Safety is a No. 1 driver for people locating to certain jurisdictions. We want to have people coming to Manitoba. We want to have businesses coming to Manitoba because they know that it's safe to operate here, that they can bring employees in, that they can bring their management teams in to a safe and secure Manitoba. That will drive our economy, and that will help make Manitoba a have province, which, unfortunately, under this government we have not seen.

So it's time to dig in. We need to look at this budget. We need to look at Estimates, and we need to find out why Manitoba is getting the short end of the stick when it comes to this budget. We keep hearing seven and a half years of the PC government.

Seven and a half years of strong government made sure that Manitoba was safe.

Unfortunately, this government has had coming up to three years now to prove that they could do something with safety, and they failed, and they failed miserably. So we have to make sure that Manitobans also understand that 17 years prior to that, this government was in power, and there was all sorts of issues when it came to justice. Manitoba deserves to be safe, and that'll happen under a PC government.

So, before we continue on and we hear any more promises that we know are going to get broken, because we've seen it year over year—and I'll use a couple of examples. There was a promise of having a GIS unit in Swan River. Now, I know that has now been granted, but it took well over a year. This government was—this Justice Minister was happy to stand in front of cameras and say, we're going to make this happen. Didn't happen for years or months, and this government has neglected Manitobans. So we're going to hear promises; we know that, and we're going to see promises broken.

With that, honourable Chair, I look forward to digging into Estimates and asking questions and, hopefully, getting some answers for Manitobans.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen).

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 4.1(a) contained in resolution 4.1.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, while everyone's finding a place to sit and getting settled in, I'll just start by introducing the staff.

Of course, my Deputy Minister of Justice, Jeremy Akerstream, is joining us here today; and joining him, Mahesh Adhikary, my ADM for Corporate Services; and our ADM for Public Safety, Owen Fergusson. Also at the table is Will O'Connor, who's my director of ministerial affairs, my chief of staff.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

According to our rule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each

department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

* (15:10)

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Balcaen: Thank you to all of the staff from Justice for being here. You're a great group to work with and, I know, very professional. So I thank them for their time and the benefit that they bring to these committees.

I would like to introduce Shannon Martin, who is the staff for myself here and my colleagues that have adjoined me as well—the MLA for Agassiz and the MLA for Riding Mountain.

I'll dig into my first question because I know we're timed on these and I want to make sure that I use up the time appropriately and leave ample time during the day for the minister to answer the questions that Manitobans have been reaching out to me to ask.

So I'm going to start with staffing and, just to give the heads up, this will be probably more in the realm of the policing staffing. So, according to Manitoba RCMP, there's a vacancy rate in their offices at approximately 17.5 per cent. We also know that, across the board—but we have many detachments that, when you include the soft and the hard vacancies, are plus 50 per cent vacant.

And that's a concern, particularly for rural Manitobans when they're wanting a response and they're wanting to see their safety. And I think oftentimes that's neglected. And not because of the RCMP, but simply because they have no staffing available and it hasn't been taken care of by this NDP government over the past three years. We've seen a decline happening.

So what's dramatically different from BC, which has about a 2.4 per cent vacancy rate, Alberta with an 8.6 vacancy rate or we could compare to PEI, who is slightly oversubscribed with about a plus 0.08 per cent—I won't call it a vacancy rate—plus rate. Under this minister, Manitoba is the worst province in the Confederation for RCMP staffing levels. We have 44 officers—we've got 44 officers and need 115.

So my question is: Why has the minister not moved to address this issue? It's only gotten worse under his watch. And I'm referring to page 84 of the supplements for a number of these.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, thanks very much to the critic for the question.

And I'm glad he's now starting to pay attention, quite frankly, to the crisis that we inherited in police staffing with the RCMP that was allowed to get completely out of control by the previous government with nary a whisper. Not once did I hear this in the House. Never once did I hear this brought up in the media. Never once did the former minister write to the federal government, meet with the chief—with the D Division commander. Never once did he advocate to Ottawa to solve this problem that was allowed to be created under the previous government.

And I can understand why. Because the previous government only had one gear, and it was fight. Fight with the cities, fight with the municipalities, fight with chiefs of police across this province and fight with the federal government. There was only one gear. There was only one stance that they ever took. There was only one way that they approached the problem.

And so I can appreciate that they had no clue how to deal with this. But the reality is, of course, we came in and vacancy rates were through the roof. I went to Ottawa; I talked to the federal minister. I talked to other provinces. We had a great discussion. We had a round table just like this.

And the other Justice ministers from the provinces said, boy, vacancies are really high in the RCMP. And I said, yes, yes they are. And then, you know, the Justice minister from BC said, oh, they're really high; we've got a 15 per cent vacancy. And I sort of scoffed, and then I looked across the, you know, down the line and one of the Maritime provinces: Oh, we've got a really high—boy, it might be up to 20 per cent. We had Saskatchewan saying, wow, we have a really high vacancy rate; it's over 20 per cent. And I stood up and I said, we were left with a 30 per cent vacancy in RCMP staffing.

One of the first meetings I had was with northern communities. We brought them in one by one, and they came in and they talked about how a detachment with just a handful of people covering an entire northern community, multiple northern communities, was left with one or two people. A couple days in this community, a couple days in that community, get up—get an emergency call, nobody there, nobody home, nobody able to answer the call.

And that's because the previous government, they not only didn't advocate with the federal government,

but get this, they cut the funding for policing. Could you imagine? We need more police officers, and they cut, they froze. They said, no, no money for police. The language the member opposite has used before: defund the police. That's what the previous government did. I don't like the rhetoric. I don't like the slogan. I just like to get results.

So what did we do? Well, we wrote to the federal minister. I said we were at the table, we talked about this; I wrote to the federal minister. Was it just me? Was it just the Province out on their own? No, it was the mayor of Portage la Prairie, the mayor of Thompson. It was the mayor of Brandon going, hey, we need resources.

And we kicked and we screamed and we fought, and now we're starting to see record numbers coming through Depot. Finally, we're starting to get the numbers that we need back in Manitoba: 65 new cadets coming to Manitoba to start—fill the vacancies left under this previous government.

But we're going a step further because we know it's not just about funding for RCMP. It's not just support of the contract policing model. But it's about transformation. It's about bringing on FNSOs—54 communities with First Nations safety officer programs. It's about now a new—a brand new agreement with the federal government to build out the Manitoba First Nations Police Service and enhance services across this province.

We were just speaking with the chief of Brokenhead. This is how we're going to solve the problem, by having a floor, a foundation of trust, of solid, predictable funding, and then it's working through these issues around staffing, one by one, one community at a time, by bringing in more police officers, training them up and getting them on the front lines.

Members opposite don't have a leg to stand on. You know, you can start by just saying, sorry, and then we could get 'ron' with the rest of the day. But honestly, honourable Chair—through you—you know, we can't even have an honest conversation if there's no accountability, if there's no reconciliation with what members opposite left us with.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

For all members, please put your questions and answers through the Chair, please.

Mr. Balcaen: You know, I'd just like to focus for one minute on the last statement by the minister. He said

Manitobans can't move forward, or something to that effect, without honesty. And so I'll go back to the opening statement in that last answer by the minister and put on the record that it was categorically false. I can't use other language because it would be unparliamentary.

But maybe the minister forgets where I came from prior to this and when the Progressive Conservative government was in power. And he said that never did the minister meet with chiefs of police in this province or talk with them; I was actually at those tables, and I was the one that was there with other chiefs of police, including the RCMP, including all of my other colleagues across urban settings in Manitoba, meeting with the Justice minister, meeting with the staff of Justice services here in Manitoba.

* (15:20)

So, absolutely, categorically false to say that didn't happen. And it's misleading Manitobas, and that's exactly what this government has done and this minister has done from day one: grandstands and stands up about honesty. Honesty is a commodity that is running shy under this government's watch because there has been many, many times where these false narratives have been put on the record.

So I wanted to make sure that Manitobans were clear on that. When it comes to the record of the PC government and meeting with law enforcement, going to the federal government and having those discussions, because my representation with both the Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police tell me different, because I was actually a front-row seat to that. So, you know, it would be nice if the minister apologized for putting those false narratives on the record and did that.

But as I continue on with my questions here, the second part is the minister is taking a victory lap on the federal government's response. The federal government is the one who is supplying the funding. The federal government is the one that is stepping up to give the transfer payments to this province. It's not this minister, and it's not his work. You know, we look at this and it's disappointing to hear that rhetoric.

So keeping on the staffing, honourable Chair, I would like to know: What are the vacancy rates across Manitoba, including the Brandon Police Service; including the Winnipeg Police Service? Let's go with Altona, Morden-Winkler, Victoria Beach, the Manitoba First Nations Police Service and any of the

other police services that are part of the funding model for this government.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I'm glad to hear the member opposite is taking some accountability by saying he was at the table when there was a vacancy rate that shot up under the previous government, and he sat around, did nothing.

So he now claims that he was leading the charge on behalf of chiefs of police, to say what? To do nothing? I mean, things got worse. So he takes accountability for that, or that's the previous minister's fault? I—where does he stand? Like, whose fault is it that the vacancy rate went up under their watch?

And then he points to us—like, the opposition at that time. He's confused. And listen, I know this is difficult for him because he's been put in a really difficult spot. He—obviously, either he claims he had everything to do with the fact that vacancy rates were through the roof; he had everything to do with the fact that police services were getting cut under the previous government; that we saw a freeze and a cut to every police service in Manitoba. Either he's claiming credit for that now or he is somehow still trying to say that it was the former government; it was the former minister. I wasn't at the table. I didn't do anything. Maybe he can square that circle for me. He's in a tough spot. I get that.

But, again, that's why accountability matters. That's why you can say, you know, the last guys, they did—they screwed up. I'll do things differently. I'll, you know—we've got a different vision—whatever they want to try now to say.

But, yes, he wants to talk about credibility. Geez, man, like, results are there, right? Large operational vacancy for the division of—across the country, as I mentioned earlier.

But here in Manitoba, we've been able to bring that down. Some examples: 12 per cent hard vacancy and 23 per cent operational vacancy rate across the north, east and west districts.

Manitoba is anticipating, as I said earlier, a larger share. I think it's a record number—I'll just put it on the record—I think it's a record number of cadets that are coming through in '26-27.

You know, we made a strong pitch to the federal government around First Nations being a part of this

conversation and being at the table, and now the member says, well, it's federal government money. I don't think he understands how the agreements work.

This year, it's \$6 million more just for First Nations policing and First Nations safety officers. This is record funding, and it's an absolute testament to the kind of partnerships that we've been able to build with First Nations and with communities across this province. And then, across the province, \$8 million more—on top of the record funding that we've already provided to the RCMP—\$8 million more for that province-wide policing through the PPSA.

You know, we have created the kind of atmosphere with law enforcement where there's trust, where—before there wasn't, and I—again, this is because the cuts and the—I mean, they wouldn't even take meetings—the former government wouldn't even take meetings with law enforcement. He says he was at the table. I'm sure; he's a candidate—he was a candidate in the last election. Good—he was buddies, I guess, with the right people.

For the average person in law enforcement, they weren't allowed to talk to the minister. The minister is up here somewhere, I guess, and lowly law enforcement was way down there. And that's how they got treated. They got treated on a personal level that way, but then they got treated that way in terms of the funding that was provided to them.

We have set a different standard, and that is a collaborative one; one where we're going to work with community. We're going to meet these challenges head-on and then, in very real terms, offer the dollars and cents that are going to make a difference.

So I've told the member opposite a little bit about, you know, some of the investments in First Nations policing and RCMP. What about Brandon, where they were flat? He said nothing. He was quiet. There was no—we looked through the media, right? Where was the public hearing that he said: Hey, Justice minister, where's more money? Never said it once while they were flat and cut every single year.

So now what have we done since we've come into office—\$370,000 for safety, including downtown safety in 2024. Another \$85,000 this year. If he's keeping up with the news, another \$300,000 this year; met with Chief Bates last week. Where was he? He was nowhere to be found. You know, \$750,000 for Brandon public safety and downtown safety since we

took office—32 per cent increase. He never said a word when he was getting cuts, when he was chief of police.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Balcaen: I'll go back to the question that I asked because the minister failed to answer it at all.

The question was about staffing for a number of these municipal agencies. Not one answer; a lot of rhetoric about me. Well, go ahead; take those shots, because I'm not in government. And if I was, things would be much better at the helm there.

I do want to clarify, again, the false narrative that this minister is creating for Manitobans. And maybe it's his pie-in-the-sky idea that the minister is up here somewhere and doesn't meet with people but, again, I was at those meetings for six years as chief of police and a number of years—15 more—as executive of the police service.

And it didn't matter what minister, which government; the ministers would take meetings with chiefs of police, they would talk with them, they would deal with them in a professional manner. *[interjection]*

The minister is laughing and joking. He thinks it's a joke to be professional. But I come from a place where professionalism is demanded, it's expected and it's something that has to be done day in and day out, where this minister comes from a different background where, maybe, professionalism isn't expected at the office, maybe professionalism isn't expected in the communities that he represents. But, again, he can continue heckling right now and, you know, talking down on this, but I'm one that can say that I've walked the walk and I've talked the talk and I've been there, and this minister simply can't.

And, you know, I kind of bring it down to a minister in this position who doesn't have a law degree or doesn't have any law enforcement experience or anything else, is—you know what? It must be challenging for him to try and understand a lot of the issues that are being faced, and I understand that they have to go on the offensive to try and be defensive. And, you know, that comes with a personality trait that this minister brings to the table when it comes to law enforcement and comes to trust and it comes to building those relationships.

* (15:30)

So when we look at it, I believe I heard in the North, if we go back to the RCMP, a 23 per cent vacancy rate—a cold vacancy rate—and a 12 per cent hard vacancy rate. So the vacancy rate would actually be,

in total, 25 per cent. I don't know if I would—if I'm understanding that wrong. I'm sure the minister will correct me, but that's the words that he used when I wrote them down.

But my question was about the other urban police services and what their vacancy rates are right now and whether or not this government is—or what they're doing for those vacancy rates.

But I will add one other point that was a false narrative under this minister, and he can look at my record from the time that I became chief of police in 2017 through to the time I left in 2023. The staffing complement of the Brandon Police Service continued to grow. So when he says it sat on his hands and it was flat, it continued to grow year after year after year, and that's because of the relationships that I had with government, that I had with the municipal government and the board that oversaw that.

So I'll again leave that question because, typical, it wasn't answered.

My question is: What are the vacancy rates across Manitoba for the other urban police services?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, I mean, if the member wants to get the vacancy rate for Brandon Police Service, I encourage him to maybe actually talk to the mayor of Brandon every once in a while or the chief of police. I'm sure he's maybe not so welcome to show up there unannounced. We like going there, but for him, I'm sure it's a frosty relationship. We've got a chief who's doing a heck of a good job out there and want to lift him up.

And, again, we're working with the mayor. Mayor Fawcett says the funding will go a long way. It's a direct quote: Funding will go a long way in supporting the work already under way. We're hopeful it'll help us strengthen our downtown this summer. He's supportive of the public safety initiatives and investments in his city, something that never happened under the previous government.

If he has different information about funding for Brandon, please table it here. Funding was cut across this province—public safety basket funding cut under the previous government.

Now, if we're talking about the RCMP—and, again, I want to just be clear: We're talking—walking into a situation where you had 30 per cent operational vacancy which, again, he's confused about what we're talking about here—the difference between hard and

soft vacancies. I mean, it's just—boggles the mind he doesn't understand this stuff, but we'll walk through it; we'll help him understand.

You know, 30 per cent vacancy under the previous government. And the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) never said boo about it. Maybe he did behind closed doors, maybe at the Cabinet table. He can share that—he can share that.

I would suggest that people in his area—like Loren Schinkel, who works with us on our PMJAC committee—would maybe say differently. But anyway, he can reconcile that when he's going to ask some questions, so that's great. I'm going to hear from him and find out what he thought of the cuts to the RCMP during their term in office. Did he think that was a good thing then? Is it a bad thing? Does he say that was the old member for Lac du Bonnet? It's not me; I'm a new guy. I'm part of a new caucus. I'm taking a different tack now. Funding for police is important now; it wasn't important before.

Like, again, he can untangle that whole mess in his own mind. But here in the real world, in the world that we operate in, it's about those partnerships and working with the federal government to start build—start closing that vacancy gap that was left to us.

So it's—again, are—we're in agreement it was 30 per cent; it's terrible and it made jaws hit the floor when we talked about it at the federal level. Like—it's like the federal minister had never even heard this before; it's like he had never been brought this before. What—30 per cent? Like, you know, not to toot my own horn, but I think it's like we shocked the room and we got some attention that had never been taken to Manitoba—the, you know. Former government never thought maybe just to work with the federal government to get this problem solved.

So, anyway, we got to work. We had a number of Manitoba classes; recruitment efforts were increased in Manitoba. And, again, I'm not taking credit for this because it was the RCMP who, when they see the funding go up year after year, if the funding is going up, if there's support for law enforcement, then they can go out and they can say: hey, we want to recruit more people to be in the RCMP; like it's pretty straightforward how that works, right?

So we start getting the numbers back up and we start to see them start to close the gaps that were left by the previous government. And the proof's in the pudding: east district, again operational vacancy rates, which is again what I think the member opposite is

asking about: 11.1 per cent in the east district; 12.99 per cent in the north district; 10.82 per cent in the west district and 19 per cent in traffic services. More work to do, you better believe it. That's why we're full steam ahead. That's why this budget includes record funding to law enforcement: \$8 million more for RCMP, right?

That's how you do it. You put in place a foundation of funding a relationship of trust and you work through issues one by one. Again, I'm not taking credit, because it's the RCMP; it's working with our public safety folks. These are the real heroes. We're getting the job done.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Balcaen: The only records that are being set here is the broken record that seems to be spinning and spinning and spinning from this minister when the rhetoric gets spewed. It was extremely hot in here when we first started and it's getting hotter and hotter as—this week with the hot air coming out.

So when I look at what's happening across Manitoba and the service delivery that law enforcement is doing, law enforcement does an excellent job; Justice does an excellent job, and I'm happy to say that. But they need the support from the government and that's not something that they're seeing.

I want to talk a little bit about the provincial policing budget. The provincial policing budget line increases by just over 3 per cent across all of Manitoba, despite us being short hundreds of officers, and that's after budgeting for every initiative that this minister could possibly think of, dream of or bring to the forefront.

I'm just wondering how he expects to make progress for Manitoba with an inflationary increase. We know that Manitoba's inflation rate is 3 per cent and we know that this budget—the policing line is at 3 per cent. We have hundreds of unfilled positions.

And so this is just an example of how this minister has underfunded his budget and underfunded Manitobans to try and show that his government, falsely, is on a path to a balanced budget, because he knows that can't happen and he knows that when he starts making the hires of those hundreds of positions that the budget will explode under that line. And it's unfortunate because again, this is false promises to Manitobans; this is false promises to our taxpayers who will ultimately be on the hook. We've seen the

budget deficits go up billions upon billions of dollars under this NDP government.

* (15:40)

Right now, I think it's at \$2.3 billion in debt servicing under this government that this minister is part of. When he sits at that Cabinet table, when he sits at Treasury Board, I'm wondering, does he think about that? Does he think about the future of Manitobans, the next two or three generations? What's going to happen to them when they have to pay for his reckless accounting and his reckless use of funds within law enforcement?

Hundreds—hundreds of members short across this province under his watch. Three years—three years he's had to work on this. You know, he'll keep going back and saying seven and a half years of the provincial—the previous provincial government, that did one heck of a great job. But he forgets about the 17 years before that, that that government had to dig out of. And deplorable times, you know, times when our credit rating was questioned. We're heading there again now.

And, as I said, law enforcement is important for our economy. It's an economic driver. It's something that businesses will move here, they'll take up locations here in Manitoba in areas that, you know, I'm certainly passionate about. They'll take up business opportunities in Brandon and in Westman, in Lac du Bonnet, in Agassiz, but only if it's safe and only if this minister can offer that safety, which has not been happening under this minister.

So I'll ask again about the policing budget line increases of just over 3 per cent and how he figures that he can make progress for Manitoba with just an inflationary increase.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, it didn't take long, honourable Chair. I think we're, like, four questions into the day and all of a sudden the member opposite has changed his line of questioning from, you're not spending enough, to now, whoa, whoa, whoa, you've got to balance the budget.

An Honourable Member: I don't have to.

Mr. Wiebe: You're—well, he says he doesn't have to.

Like, yes; that's exactly right. There you go. That says everything you need to say. He says: I don't need to worry about that. But he says it's—first, he starts and he says we're not spending enough on law enforcement. Now he says: Whoa, whoa, what about that

deficit? You guys said you're going to balance the budget. You're going to do that, right?

Let's cut funding for law enforcement? What kind of argument is that, man? That is not what Manitobans are asking for. And, you know—and this is why the member opposite is so out of touch, because it's not just the base-level funding that we're providing for law enforcement across the board, which is that as—I keep characterizing it as a foundation; it's a foundation to how you build a relationship.

But then, on top of that, here in the city of Winnipeg, 36 new officers on the ground—36 new officers. So, you know, that's not including the increase that we're giving to WPS. That's not including the additional investments in Downtown Community Safety Partnership, in transit safety. You go down the list. This is over and above that.

And now, when you're talking about—if we're still talking about, you know—encourage the member to think about outside the perimeter here, because it's important to remember there's a world outside the Perimeter the member opposite's not aware of.

But if you think about what's happening in rural Manitoba, that 2 per cent is the foundation. And then we build 12 additional officers, which are going to be deployed for retail theft, additional money for the city of Portage and the city of Brandon, year over year now. Yes, yes, more money. He seems shocked by this. I guess he's not keeping up with what's going on in his own backyard.

And, you know—and what is the result? Well, again, that foundational relationship—and I'm going to just make sure I call out—or call attention to the mayor of Winnipeg, who's been a partner on this too. They were importantly a part of this call for RCMP resources from the federal government, a commitment to contract policing and a call for more resources. Even Mayor Gillingham, who doesn't have skin in the game, so to speak, in the sense that they obviously don't utilize the contract policing model, they see the value in enhancing policing across the province.

And he asked about vacancy rates in other services. I haven't—we haven't had a chance to get a hold of the chief of Victoria police or some other—Victoria Beach police, but we did get, I think, an update from the WPS: zero vacancies with WPS. And he laughs, so I—call—maybe he could call the chief of the Winnipeg police, check the number—I don't know. He doesn't have that kind of relationship, obviously.

And then what's the result of all of that work, all of the increased funding, all of the support, all of the ways that we're attacking and addressing crime right in community in a granular way that members opposite never even contemplated? Like, he's complaining; he says, oh, well there's not—they're—you know, inflationary. The inflation was 4.1 per cent in 2023 when this member cut funding for law enforcement.

So, wait a minute; hang on a second. So increasing 2 per cent is a bad thing? Flat while inflation is through the roof is a good thing now? Square the circle. Be honest with Manitobans. That's your starting point, and then maybe—maybe you can crawl your way back into relevancy in this province.

But before you do that, members opposite are continuing to be—

The Chairperson: Order, please. Order, please.

I would caution members not to use terms like—expressions like not being honest to Manitobans.

Mr. Wiebe: It's a good caution. I apologize for the use of language, honourable Chair.

So the relationship is strong. The funding is legitimate and is guaranteed and strong and predictable going forward. And we're starting to see results. He asked me earlier if I'm taking a victory lap. No way. It is full steam ahead, pedal to the metal.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Balcaen: Sorry, on a point of order.

Point of Order

The Chairperson: On a point of order.

Mr. Balcaen: At the outset of the minister's address or answer, he used a term that I find somewhat offensive and inflammatory. It's used in slang language and really amongst gangs and amongst people like that. He addressed me as man, saying, come on, man.

Again, I have to state that I come from a very professional background, and coming into this Chamber and the offshoot of this Chamber here, I expect professionalism as I give it. I refer to the minister as minister; I refer to the honourable Chair as honourable Chair, and using that sort of slang and what I've—in my area come from a lot of the gang sort of talk and language I don't think is appropriate. And I think (a) it should stop and (b) there should be an apology.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: This is—okay. I'd really love for the member opposite to explain to Manitobans how come on, man is gang language. I think it shows the disconnect between himself and what the—maybe people in the real world—I don't know what universe he's coming from.

I think it's pretty clear, honourable Chair, respect is provided here in this committee and I'm, you know, prepared to, at all times, ensure that our language is parliamentary, that the respect is there.

But when somebody says something ridiculous, asking come on, man, is, I think, a pretty common phrase that normal Manitobans use. And if this member opposite thinks that's a—gang language—he's nodding his head; gang language. Okay.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

* (15:50)

Order, please.

This is not a point of order. However, I would encourage all members, as we are sitting in a professional environment, to address other members with respect and with either their titles or their constituency name.

Thank you.

* * *

Mr. Balcaen: Well, thank you very much, honourable Chair, for that guidance. I'm sure that some will take it to heart, and it's appreciative that you took the time to address it.

So as we move forward under this budget and look at vacancy numbers, we can see that vacancy numbers are a significant issue across Manitoba in law enforcement. And that's causing a lot of issues in law enforcement. And I know that it leads to burnout and it leads to stress-induced injuries. It leads to people leaving the profession, and it leads to people not uptaking into the profession because of that. And understaffing is a primary driver of that because of the stress that is put onto the officers and—immense respect for them.

As a matter of fact, the mental health issues that officers suffer are as a direct result of the work that they do. And oftentimes, the situations that they're put in—and what they have to see can't be unseen. What they hear can't be unheard. And I know that the job has lasting impacts on them.

And I bring that up because one of the highest areas of job-related mental health issues in law enforcement comes under correctional facilities—correctional officers because of the work that they do and the situations that they're put in. And I don't think it's a mystery, and maybe it is to the public, but law enforcement, including corrections officers, see—in a career of 25 years, see critical incidents as much as 800 times in their career, as compared to the average citizen that sees three to five critical incidents.

And so they have to deal with the bad, the mad, the sad and continue on their day professionally and make sure that, you know, they're taken care of. And in order to do that, there's an honour system within policing and within corrections, where they have to take care of each other because there's not always other people there to take care of them. They don't get the calls at the—2 or 3 in the morning for people to say, we're really happy with what's happening. They get it because people are in crisis and people are having a difficult time.

And correctional officers see this more so in their institutions because they deal with it their entire shift—dealing with people. And the suicide rate and the mental health rates amongst law enforcement has gone up, so staffing is a real concern.

So I would like the minister to answer what the vacancy rate numbers are for each provincial correctional facility across Manitoba at this time.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate the line of questioning, and this is an area where I don't think we're going to see much daylight between the important advocacy that the member opposite just put on the record and that of the actions of this government. We've been very clear that we need to protect those who protect us. We need to do everything we can to ensure that the mental health of first responders and law enforcement in particular is put first and foremost in our actions.

One of the first actions that we took as government—in response to a terrible tragedy, of course—but an important step was the implementation of three mental health workers for first responders, one dedicated directly for law enforcement, to ensure that they have the supports and the resources that they need.

And, you know, the commitment to 100 mental health workers across law enforcement, to help to de-escalate situations and bring a different kind of response is one that we continue with. I think the

Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith) has maybe already done her Estimates or maybe is ongoing now, but anyway, I definitely support her work in developing and rolling out that support.

It's also important for the member opposite to tie that to vacancy challenges. Again, when we're talking specifically the RCMP, we saw a 30 per cent vacancy—hard and soft vacancies for RCMP detachments, and as he mentioned earlier, that was—even had a bigger impact in smaller communities or northern remote communities.

And as he said, if folks are asked to do more every single day and there's no break and there's no respite, then we're not going to see the kind of mental health outcomes that we want. So that's why I think the work that we've done with regards to, again, not just starting to fill the vacancy—the funding gap so that the vacancies can be addressed, but also being really aggressive about filling those vacancies.

Again, advocating to the federal government, working with D Division, working with our RCMP partners and then bringing in municipal leaders and others to ensure that this is a priority in terms of getting those boots on the ground. That's been a huge benefit for us.

And, likewise, with the WPS, I know he laughed about the numbers earlier, the lack—the no vacancy, the zero vacancy rate over in WPS. I imagine that's because, you know, we continue to see graduating classes that are bringing in more and more recruits to the WPS, and I'm very encouraged by that.

And, again, we've got the additional officers that we support—that's over and above—but we have set that's—that foundation of funding that the now—that the City of Winnipeg has been coming out saying they're hiring another 36 officers. Again, this is all repairing damage: 55 lost officers in the city of Winnipeg. And now we're seeing that increase and we're seeing the vacancy rates come down.

When it comes to corrections, we can talk more about this as I'm sure the member opposite will want to get more detail.

But I'll just say that we, likewise—I mean, this is across government, but certainly in corrections we saw the same sort of situation where the members opposite continually underfunded—they fought with unions, they didn't sign agreements, and you had workers who were unsure about their futures, they were unsure about how much value they had when the

previous government, all they did was disrespect them.

And so we changed the channel by negotiating in good faith, by working in an honest and straight-forward way with our staff in corrections, showing them the respect that they deserve and implementing a full-time workforce pilot project, which now in this year's budget is being expanded, which really shows in, again, clear terms, that we are willing to put the money to support workers who are doing this important work for public safety.

And I do consider corrections as part of public safety. The average person has no idea what goes on behind those prison walls, but I can tell you every single day, the work that those folks do in corrections to support our inmates makes a difference in public safety when those people come out of those institutions, and so we want to support their work.

* (16:00)

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Balcaen: I appreciate the minister talking about the effects that law enforcement have on those members. And I have great respect for them, no matter which area of law enforcement they come from.

And true—there's probably, I would say less than 3 per cent of the population that really understand the correctional system and the impacts that it has on individuals, the impacts that it has on the staff that are there and the work that they do.

And so that's why it is important to get those numbers and to find those vacancy rates. And that's the same impact that this has on individuals in law enforcement. And, you know, some of the—not just the RCMP, but all of the municipal police forces and the Manitoba First Nations Police Service. It's important that they're staffed and that they have those numbers, so that they can count on that team approach—not only on calls, but after the call. Because after the call is very important too, and the mental health that can be put into the officers themselves, the whole crew that were part of a call. It's important. That's why these vacancy numbers are important and that's why I've asked about them several times now.

So I'm wondering if the minister can, again, answer what the vacancy number is for each provincial correctional facility and for municipal police services? And if he can't provide it, will he undertake to get that information?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, again, it's important to—you know, to explain. As the member said, most Manitobans don't understand, again, what happens behind those prison walls. They don't understand the incredible work and professionalism that our corrections officers do.

And it's not just because one's sitting at the table right now here, in the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham), who is—you know, when we say people are fresh off the front lines and into this Legislature, it couldn't give you a better example than the member for Kirkfield Park, who has been an amazing advocate for folks in corrections and the important work that our workers do. But quite frankly, for the inmates too, because I know he worked closely with young people at the Youth Centre.

And there's a very specific job around keeping people safe and sort of having that structure that I think a lot of young people that are there benefit from. But there's that level of compassion—and for members that haven't had a chance to get there and meet some of the people that do this work at MYC—again, it's incredible. It's incredible the kind of compassion and perspective that those corrections workers have.

And, again, it was—it's personified in the member for Kirkfield Park, who is an awesome guy. So he's right here at the table. And so, anyway, I'm not just saying that about our corrections workers because he's at the table. I'm saying that because I've seen it first-hand and I've experienced it first-hand.

And, again, I want to set the stage because under the previous government, we saw the closure of one of our correctional facilities. Like, a jail was closed under the previous government. And I'm waiting for somebody over there to either defend this or to say, yes, that was a mistake. Which one? Was it a good thing to close a jail, or a bad thing to close a jail?

This is the kind of reckoning that members opposite—it's not easy, I've been there—but they need to do. They need to understand that Manitobans want them to be honest and straightforward with them. And so that's a good place to start: Good idea to close a jail or bad idea to close a jail?

But that's what we walked into, so Dauphin jail is closed. Agassiz Youth Centre is closed. Look, right? Two correctional facilities closed under the previous government. No plan, no ability to explain to people where the extra capacity is going to come from, where the extra workers—we lost so many people when the Dauphin jail closed. These were good correctional

officers that we lost because their home community lost its facility.

And that's the situation that we walked into. There was no respect for those workers, there was no respect for the work that they did, and we had a lack of resources across the system. Again, member for Kirkfield Park, maybe I'll tag him in here; he can take the chair. He'll explain to everybody here about what they experienced.

But we've taken a different path. We've taken a different path, and that's one of investment and true partnership with those people that are doing this work. Just recently, 75 new recruits into corrections. I get a chance to go downstairs—we have the ceremony here—welcome every one of those correction officers by name, shake their hand and thank them for the work that they're about to do. Members opposite never did that. They didn't care. They disrespected our correctional workers.

And I've talked a little bit in my opening statement about the work we did specifically at MYC. If you're going to have the biggest impact and you're going to offer that helping hand and that hand up to people who have taken the wrong path, let's do that in our correctional facility that services our youth. Let's give them the education they need. Let's give them the cultural supports that they need. Let's give them the mental health and clinician support. That's how we're going to make a difference.

He's asking about vacancy rate: it's a zero per cent vacancy rate in corrections, but there's more work to do to hire up staff. And the full-time equivalency pilot, which we're expanding, is going to be a big part of that next step in the work.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

I would appreciate members giving a shout-out to a colleague sitting around in the committee; fine. But a gentle reminder that we are to avoid quoting the member's presence or absence for the proceedings.

So this is a gentle reminder. Hope everybody takes care of it.

Mr. Balcaen: I would just like to ask the minister—again, I asked for vacancy numbers for each provincial corrections facility. And am I understanding right—he said there is no vacancies?

So each jail is—or correctional facility is 100 per cent staffed on their staffing complements. That's what, you know, my question is here.

And if that's the case, you know, I'm—I'll move off of this line of questioning, because I'm concerned with that response. But I'll dig a little deeper into that and have some follow-up questions certainly tomorrow.

Correctional staff are slated for a 3 per cent salary increase according to their collective agreement this year. Can the minister explain how he plans to cover that and hire all of the—sorry, the four more staff. And then the budget line is only increasing by over 2 per cent.

So is the minister already planning on going substantially over his budget, or is he planning to aggressively use vacancy management to meet those numbers?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: The member opposite is incorrect. The increase this year is \$14 million; that's a 6.5 per cent increase. It's from \$218 million to \$232 million. This includes additional money for enabling appropriations to address the rising staff costs in Correctional Services and it—and includes that adjusted print transfer from enabling appropriations, which is maybe where he's confused and not quite following along, once again.

* (16:10)

But, of course, he skated past the first part of the question. He couldn't address it. And it's okay. It's okay for the member opposite to just be straight up with Manitobans. It's okay. Everybody knows Heather Stefanson was terrible. Everybody knows that Brian Pallister slashed and burned our province for the services that Manitobans count on. Everybody knows this. Like, he's not going to betray the confidence of the caucus, or say something that the media is going to come up and, wait a minute, you don't like Heather Stefanson? That's—nobody's going to do that. Everybody knows that already. Everybody already has that as their starting point. Heather Stefanson is the worst premier the province has ever seen.

And so, he could just come out and say yes, cutting the Dauphin jail was a bad idea. Members opposite are allowed to say that. I'm hopeful that they'll get over this hang-up where they think that if they just sort of bamboozle Manitobans for long enough, if they just, you know, try to pretend all that didn't happen for long enough, that Manitobans will forget and then they'll get back into power. It's not going to work. I've been there before. Like, you know, there's a reckoning. There's a reckoning that has to

happen. Members opposite have to take, at some point, accountability, and say closing jail, bad.

Like, I'm not even saying address the, you know, the terrible things they said during the campaign, the sort of new low that they found around trans kids and around missing and murdered Indigenous women. I mean, they should be accountable for that, too, don't get me wrong.

But just as a starting point, closing jails, bad. Closing ERs, bad. Like, it's unbelievable to me that the members opposite can't even start from that point, they can't even get to that point where they can just say yes, we shouldn't have closed the Dauphin jail. We lost capacity, we lost beds, we lost correctional workers, and the impacts are still being felt.

Now, I think we have turned the corner in terms of not only hiring up, and we're getting more and more correctional officers hired up all the time. I talked about those 75 new recruits and I'm excited to shake their hands and welcome them to the work. But we are changing the narrative around what it means to be a correctional officer, showing them respect for the work that they do. Starts at the top, and I do this every time, every day. I say they are part of public safety. They're not doing something off in a corner somewhere; they are making neighborhoods and communities safer through the work that they do.

And then second of all, the full-time workforce pilot, which is, you know, we're now rolling this out to other facilities because we know that it's going to make a difference in how they see themselves in the work that they do. They now see themselves as being a professional full-time worker doing our correctional work. And then the money flows, as I said.

So \$14 million to support corrections in Budget 2026, a 6.5 per cent increase. Record increase. And he wants to talk about collective agreements. I'll talk about collective agreements all day long. The last government disrespected every worker in this province, but especially those workers who were just asking for a fair deal for the work they were doing, and they had to operate for years without that because Brian Pallister decided he was willing to fight with people rather than just get to the table, respect them and get to work.

I've also made important capital investments, \$2.7 million. That includes 986 for women's, \$422,000 for Headingley and \$1.2 million for safety and security upgrades across our system.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Balcaen: Just a question here, changing topics to one of the recent acts. The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act came into effect on December 31st of 2024, but when I look at the police reports, doesn't matter where you're getting the reports from, they're still full of cases where individuals suffer life-altering injuries, and one of these weapons has been used in this, sometimes wielded by a youth.

I'm wondering—quick question is: How many inspections to date have been done under this act?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, so this is really important legislation that we brought forward here in the province. And it's not me saying that; that's the association of chiefs of police, that's the AMM, that's our partners throughout the province and specifically here in the city of Winnipeg.

You know, member opposite, just for the record, called it window dressing. Knife crime came down 14 per cent. Knife crime, 14 per cent down, and then again. So I'm not on the front lines, so if we're talking about did our legislation make a difference: the chief of police said yes. He drew a direct line between our legislation and knife crime coming down.

So, you know, 14 per cent decrease in knife crime because of the legislation that we brought in. It matters. The legislation that we bring in in this place makes a difference for community. It saves lives.

So, it's not a game. It's not a hold the bill up, you know, call it, make fun of it, make—call it window dressing. He's done that a few times. He's done it with law enforcement. He's done it with, like, serious legislation—14 per cent decrease. This is incredibly important legislation. And it's so important that not only was it important to bring it in, but it was important to enhance it.

And so, again, when we're talking about games, I'm glad to see the member opposite didn't hold it up this time. He sees the value in enhancing our long-bladed weapon act, adding more protections for online sales and for sales, you know, online between individuals. He sees the value in it, and so he's going to let it pass so thankfully, he's getting on board. But we're taking it a step further, and we're taking it in a way that's going to really help law enforcement and that is with our street weapon control act, and I'm very excited to tell Manitobans about this one.

* (16:20)

This is about keeping our streets safe in public urban areas. You know, we're talking about the bus, literally the bus in Winnipeg. Somebody right now can walk onto the bus with a machete, and I think if you talk to any reasonable Manitoban, they would say, in the city of Winnipeg, there is no need to walk onto a city bus with a machete. Maybe the member opposite thinks there is; he can defend that.

But we—course, we went to AMM, we went to our municipal partners, we went to First Nations. We said, do you want to keep your public spaces safe? And they said yes. And they're in support of it. So I'm glad the members opposite have seen the value in this. They're turning the page, maybe, in their—maybe he can retract those window dressing comments, but I have a hard time believing he would do that.

But there has been a ton of work that's happening behind the scenes on The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act, and a lot of this comes directly to—you know, through law enforcement or other intelligence gathering, but it's been also been proactive. So, our PSIU team, these are folks—they have gone out. They have visited every retailer. They have visited in person to check, you know, what they're selling and how they're selling it to ensure that there's compliance.

To date, the latest numbers I have: 1,374 retailers that are contacted. And if the member opposite has specific information, we certainly want to get that to the professionals who do this work, but it's about keeping communities safe. And now, we actually have the tools to do it. Members opposite refused to support that good work. They make fun of it. They make fun of law enforcement. They demean the work that's being done by these incredible professionals in our PSIU team.

And he could start by retracting those comments and apologizing to them. But if he has specific information, he should get that information forward, because I want this to be the kind of work that's responsive to community, and so far, our PSIU team has done that with great professionalism.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Balcaen: I appreciate the statistics. Here, I'm just wondering as a follow-up, has any analytics been done on the impact to see if this has decreased youths' access to these weapons at all?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, again, it's an important correlation to make and an important connection to make, one

that I thought the Winnipeg Police Service did a great job of doing when they talked about the crime statistics for last year. They—you know, they made no bones about it. They said that the decrease that they were seeing in knife crime was directly attributable to the work that we were doing around long-bladed weapons.

And we know that it's across the board, of course, this law and this—these rules, but there are certain communities where there is a bigger impact, where we know there are the kinds of retailers who aren't following the rules, and I can tell the committee that there were 19 investigations or visits by our PSIU team based on complaints. So, when you heard a complaint from the community or a concern in the community, these were investigations. In fact, there were just two last week, and this is because we're staying vigilant and we're staying on top of this.

But I think the member opposite kind of asked a little bit more about, you know, these connections between our actions here in the Legislature and then the stats and how they're playing themselves out. So, I'll give the committee a little bit more of a snapshot based on the latest statistics from the WPS.

So, the WPS reported that 9.7 per cent of violent crimes were committed doing—using a knife, and that's down; that's down about 3 per cent from 2023. And 30 per cent of homicides were committed using a knife. The knife crimes decreased by 14.3 per cent.

And bear spray, which, again, I'll just remind the members opposite, we enacted that legislation—what's the word I'm looking for here? *[interjection]* Proclaimed that legislation—I'm new here; give me a break. We proclaimed that legislation; it was one of the first things I did. It was one of the first things I put my signature to, I think, and bear spray crime came down 29.4 per cent. That's real. That's huge, right? That makes a difference in community.

He asked about youth crime. Youth violent crime was down 3.1 per cent. This is last year. We're going to get the updated numbers because it's come down again. Youth drug crime decreased by 45 per cent. Youth crimes involving weapons dropped to 346 instances from 450 instances in the previous year. And, specifically, knife crimes using a weapon—no, youth crimes using a weapon, as I'm sure I wrote this down incorrectly—down 23 per cent.

So, there's a very direct connection, not only in violent crime coming down, not only in youth crime coming down, but the fact that youth crime using a

weapon is down 23 per cent. You could not ask for a better connection, a correlation between legislation that we have passed here in the Legislature that is making an impact out on the streets.

And again, you know, I feel like a broken record, but it's not me saying this; it's the Association of Manitoba Municipalities who stands with us. It's the association of chiefs of police who stood with us as we rolled out this bill. It's the—his former colleague out in Brandon, Chief Bates, who's saying this is making a difference. It's our Winnipeg Police Service who's showing us the stats, in real time, that it's making a difference.

You know, members opposite—the member opposite called it window dressing. Is a 23 per cent decrease in youth knife crime window dressing? Like, these are his words. He's got to stand behind them or not. And so far, the member opposite has shown absolutely no courage here this afternoon, to be clear with Manitobans where they stand.

When it comes to violent crime, when it comes to youth crime, we have tools at our disposal. Pass the bills that are before the Legislature. Let's make Winnipeg and Manitoba safer.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I've participated on both sides of Estimates for quite a few years, and it's interesting that the minister seems so angry. I'm not sure who he's performing for in the public today. I'm not sure if family members are tuning in or what's going on, but we will move on from that.

I do know that when we do have Estimates, usually we talk about a global way of asking questions and getting some answers.

And I do know that probably—I missed the first few minutes of the minister's opening statements, but I'm assuming he introduced his, not only political staff, but his department staff, so I would like to thank everyone for participating in these Estimates process.

* (16:30)

On the 16th of April, I had asked some questions in question period in regards to a meeting that the minister joined me with meeting with some constituents, and I handed the minister a letter from one of my constituents.

I'm asking the minister if he had the opportunity to read it and have drafted a response to my constituents.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: I think the member opposite is switching gears here, if I'm understanding him correctly, to MPI questions. I'm just wondering if he could—because we're just sort of making sure we have the correct folks and documents in front of us—if he can just repeat the question that he just asked so that we can see if we can get the answer for him.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ewasko: So instead of looking to the department for some answers and getting ready for some kind of inflammatory comments, I guess I'd like to ask the MLA for Keewatinook—I'm not sure if he has something to say. But I would like to ask the minister, and this is something he can answer, I'm not sure.

The letter that I handed him on the 16th of April, had he read it and has he already drafted a response to my constituents?

The Chairperson: We are here to discuss the Estimates of the Department of Justice, so I would ask member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) to relate it back to Justice, to rephrase his question and relate it to Justice if it's regarding Department of Justice.

Mr. Ewasko: Well, now that—thank you, Mr. Chair, and now that we've got the right camera and the Justice Minister is figuring out what's going on there with his department, I will ask and I will rephrase it.

I asked the Justice Minister if the letter that I handed the Justice Minister on April 16—if he's had the opportunity to read it and has he passed it over to his department, or has he started to draft a response to the letter from my constituent, which is a constituent that he had promised there was going to be some action and follow-up from the meeting from December 3.

The Chairperson: Order, please.

Once again, member for Lac du Bonnet, thanks for the question, but we are here to discuss the Estimates of Expenditure for the Department of Justice, so I request the member to clarify if the letter he is mentioning is related to something in this book.

Mr. Ewasko: I guess for clarity, since the Justice Minister, who is responsible for MPI, can't answer the simple question on his own, whether he read the letter that I gave him on April 16 and has he drafted the letter or has he sent it to the department—so I will change my line of questioning because, obviously, the minister, as he said himself, is new to this and we'll change the line of questioning to specific justice questions.

And then, hopefully, in the near future when MPI does come up, I guess I'll be able to ask the MPI department whether they've actually read the letter that was handed to the minister, to read the letter and get a response to my constituents, considering they've been waiting since December 3. And that's one set of constituents out of four or five that had some major concerns with Manitoba Public Insurance and the minister had promised some action and even today, dodges some questions—simple questions that I have, but that's okay, here we go.

So in regards to the Milner Ridge correctional institution, how many vacancies do we have from—for correctional officers at Milner Ridge?

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, so I hope I don't get called out of order here by the—by our wonderful Chair, but very happy to answer the member's question about his constituents.

Yes, you know, I mean, there's different ways to do this job and there's different ways that every member gets to decide how they conduct themselves in terms of, you know, their straightforward actions versus like, I guess, some kind of weird politically motivated gotcha type strategy.

But it was pretty stark on the day that the member opposite brought his constituents down to the Legislature because the member for Lac du Bonnet organized a bunch of folks to come down to talk to me as the Minister of Justice, and he didn't call me ahead of time and say, hey, I got some people, they got some concerns, would you meet with them.

He didn't, you know, even within question period be like hey, like, I'm going to ask for a meeting. I don't know what your time looks like, but if you want to do it, we can do it; if not, we could find another time. Like, he didn't do any of those things, right?

He got up, he puffed out his chest, his biggest, sort of, I'm Mr. Important, kind of look on his face. I won't go any further about that, but he got up and he says: I demand a meeting. And so, I said yes, great, please. This is my favourite part of the job, meeting with Manitobans. It's what I love to do.

And I will say, not to throw any staff under the bus, but I will say my staff said: Minister, you've got, like, an entire afternoon of stuff that we now have to rearrange. So they weren't too happy about having to do that, to rearrange my schedule, but I was over the moon. And the people that he brought forward were amazing.

I met some amazing people from the Lac du Bonnet constituency, from different parts of the province, that I would never had an opportunity to meet before. And I thought it was really, really nice to be able to just listen to them, to hear their concerns first-hand and, you know, I—we walked out of the meeting, I said, I'm not—there's no magic wand here. I can't necessarily solve every issue that you've brought forward, but I appreciate that you've brought it forward.

And again, we could have done this any time. We could have done this any time with any Manitoban. Like, I don't say no to anybody that wants to meet. Let's meet, let's talk. If you're coming in an honest way and a straightforward way, let's get to work.

* (16:40)

And so, anyway—so I mentioned that the member opposite puffed out his chest because, like, I guess he thought, in his mind, he was a minister before. He said no to meetings all the time. He said he wouldn't meet with real people. So I think he thought—like, he gamed this out in his mind, and he's like, the minister's going to say, you know, forget these Manitobans; I don't want to meet with them—or I was gonna be, like, a jerk or something. Like, that's what he thought I was going to do.

And no—no—we're going to listen. And I really appreciated the conversation that we had.

But, then again, so this is what happens, right? So I meet with these individuals and I meet with MPI, and I say, like, we need to get to work. Here's the—you know, this is what I understood were some of the concerns. MPI reaches out. Our staff who work, who look after casework, reach out to these people. And they start, on a granular level, going through all the issues that they have and trying to resolve issues where we can.

That's what you do in government. That's just, like, the most basic thing that Manitobans should expect.

And then, after that, after all of that work and after all of that sort of honest work that we've done to get these issues resolved, just a couple weeks ago, the member opposite, again, puffs out his chest and he says: I have a letter. Why isn't the minister responding to this letter?

And, well, what do I do? I scramble right away: Whoa, okay, I haven't seen this letter, what's going on? Well, it turns out it was from the day before, and our office hadn't received it yet.

Like, this is the kind of dishonesty that Manitobans clearly rejected. And the member opposite gets to decide how he conducts himself—

The Chairperson: Order, please.

I would caution the minister about using words like dishonesty, which are dangerously close to unparliamentary language.

Mr. Wiebe: I think the ruling today—anyway, I would—you know what? I'll leave it at that.

I—what I will say, honourable Chair, is there's a way to conduct yourself here that is straightforward, and the member opposite doesn't want to do that. We've had—two times we've met with this folks—person, another meeting is scheduled and the letter is being responded to by April 25.

Mr. Ewasko: It's unfortunate that Manitobans, again, are seeing the condescending, unbecoming-of-a-minister behaviour yet again.

The Chair had asked me to repeat the question multiple times because we're not in the Justice Estimates. So I asked the question, did he read the letter? I didn't say he didn't respond to the letter, so the minister, once again, is putting—is misleading Manitobans. And, basically, I handed the letter—yes, the letter was dated from the day before, so I handed him the letter. So between April 16 and now, hopefully he had a chance to read it.

That's all I asked him here today, and is there a draft response going to the constituent. So did he hand it to, you know, the powers that be within Manitoba Public Insurance or did he not?

And he went on this diatribe of, you know, again, condescending behaviour, but there's nothing new with this minister. He's been elected—matter of fact, longer than me—and this is the behaviour that seems to continue.

So I'll ask the member again because we're in Justice Estimates: What are the vacancies for correctional officers at Milner Ridge?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: So, we'll check Hansard to—maybe I misunderstood, you know, thrust—pull and thrust—whatever the term is, in question period. Maybe I misunderstood when the member opposite stood up and said, hey, I got a letter for you—in some kind of, like, gotcha moment.

It just—it—I think it turns off Manitobans. I think it does. I think that they go, why—like, wait a minute. Like, why don't you guys just work through this? Why don't you guys just solve these issues? Why don't you meet with people and talk to people?

And, like I said before, I'll be very clear: It is my favourite part of the job. I'll do it absolutely any day of the week. I love meeting with people. I love hearing different perspectives. I love learning new things, and I love solving problems.

You know, I've been very clear about Manitoba Public Insurance. When we inherited the mess from the previous government—and, like, I mean I—we could spend all afternoon talking about the mess. It was epic. It was literally unprecedented in this province, a province where we pride ourselves on labour peace, on a balance, a negotiation and respect with working people, which was broken under the previous government; which was, you know, which was so eroded that it resulted in the—a strike which, I'll mention, was right outside my back door, one of the strike—the picket lines. And I spent a heck of a lot of time on that picket line standing with workers, going, yes, you shouldn't have to put up with this.

And so I mention that because I think it speaks to, like, the damage that was done within the corporation but, more importantly, I think that the mistrust that it sowed amongst Manitobans in their public insurer.

I think that's the end game. I think that's what members opposite actually are trying to do, is they're trying to break these systems. They're trying to break our public institutions. They're trying to, you know, erode democracy, erode our Crown corporations to the point where people say—they throw up their hands and say, I don't care; or, I'll believe any crazy thing that I see on the Internet; or, I'll allow the PCs to sell off our Crown corporations. I think that's the larger picture, the larger game that's being played.

But the member opposite, like on a more personal level, I think he just does a disservice to all Manitobans. Because he brings that kind of, like—I don't know how to describe it in a parliamentary way.

But it's, like—it's the kind of way that—it's just not necessary. Come to me, let's get to work, let's figure out with your constituents what we can and can't do. Then when we decide, oh well, you know what? There's actually—sorry, there's nothing we can do. And there's a system that can be changed and you've got a great piece of legislation you want to bring forward, bring it forward, and we'll have a debate in the

Legislature and Manitobans decide, is that good legislation or bad legislation?

Like, that's what we do here. And member opposite instead, he's like—he's got this, like, you know, well, you—I brought this letter. Why didn't the member respond? But we did—multiple times. We had multiple meetings with this individual. I know MPI's reached out, our office has reached out. I sat with this person, I read their letter. I'm willing to meet with them, I'm listening to them, this is what—right? So we're going to continue to do that work.

And, you know, the repair at MPI, it's another great example where I feel like I've spent three years repairing damage. If you—if we had started at square one, who knows where we'd be today with the great things we could do at MPI. But like cleaning up Nova, getting a new CEO, getting the glut of management that was hired up under the previous government out of there and back to the front lines.

We've seen the numbers, the customer service satisfaction surveys that are done. It shows that we're trending in the right direction. I'm encouraged by that. There's a lot more work to do. We're going to continue to do that work, and we're going to continue to repair the damage, work with the board—another thing the members opposite couldn't do—and clean up the mess and give people better service while we keep affordable rates. Because that is an incredibly important thing, the advantage that Manitoba has.

Member opposite needs to follow along. We've talked about corrections. I'm happy to keep talking about corrections, but I've been very clear it's zero per cent vacancy. And that includes Milner Ridge.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

A gentle reminder to all members, again, to put their questions and answers through the Chair, please.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, Manitobans, you see that this not only minister, Justice Minister, but he's the—also the Attorney General of Manitoba (Mr. Wiebe).

And you see the behaviour by this minister, condescending behaviour. And don't get me wrong—you know, probably I'm not on his Christmas card list. But that's okay, because I don't need to be friends with the minister. I just need to be friendly. And so I'm asking friendly questions.

And so when he talks about me going and—I don't know what he said—puffing out his chest, and those types of things—that's not how it played out at all.

On December 3, I booked the meeting room. I had asked the questions. The minister failed to answer. He's going again—you know, for those of you at home, I'm not sure if there's a room view of committee room—but I'm not sure what type of childish behaviours or attitude he's been taught on the NDP front bench training. But this is unbecoming of a minister.

* (16:50)

So I've asked him a simple question about vacancies at the Milner Ridge correctional institution. He said, just at the last couple seconds after a big long diatribe, zero. Okay, there's zero vacancies for correctional officers at Milner Ridge.

My simple question to him was whether he had read the letter or not. It was a one-pager—very easy reading—*[interjection]*—handed to him on the Thursday, April 16, obviously. And he's laughing at that. I don't quite understand why. Just whether he read it or not—and it was written the day before. So I wasn't asking for a response from the department to that letter, you know, within the next day or so.

So I have no doubt from the—from what I've heard for—from all across this great province of ours—north, east, south and west—that this minister fails to respond to many of his emails and phone calls and those types of things. And when I was—had the privilege and the honour of being a minister of the Crown, I took meetings.

So I did thank the minister at the time, as well, on December 3; thank you for taking the meeting, thank you for meeting with my constituents. As the minister knows, the meeting was very emotionally charged. It wasn't—it definitely wasn't a meeting full of anger; it was a meeting of frustration from families that have been dealing with a system that have forgotten them.

And the minister had committed to moving forward and to having, you know—seeking some action. And, matter of fact, he said in the meeting that one of the situations should be cleared up fairly quickly because the member actually shared a personal story of his own, and I'm not going to share it today on the record. But it's frustrating and disheartening to see a minister of the Crown respond the way he has, and so we'll stay on the Justice Estimates.

And so, just to make sure that I have this right, there's zero per cent vacancy at Milner Ridge. How many inmates are presently in Milner Ridge? And how many total staff, including correctional officers, are there at Milner Ridge?

The Chairperson: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Wiebe: So, quoting directly from Hansard—you know, this is the member opposite who's the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko). He says, what have they received—speaking about his constituents: "What have they received, Honourable Speaker? No contact from this minister or the department. So I ask the minister today: Why not?"

Okay, so this individual has had three—including the meeting with me, four—separate meetings around Manitoba Public Insurance and their specific concerns. That's with staff in my office, staff at MPI and myself. The letter that he dropped during question period, instead of walking over to my office the day before, was on April—was dated April 15?

An Honourable Member: Correct.

Mr. Wiebe: Correct?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Wiebe: I got it on April 16. And April 25—which is tomorrow, two days from now—we're responding. Like, he asked if I read it. I said yes. He's got us—he's got to pay attention.

Yes, I've read it; of course we've read it. We're responding because we want Manitobans to know that their government is a listening government, that it's a priority, that we can't fix every issue that they have all the time, but we certainly can work with them and to enhance the support that they're feeling, especially from their public insurer.

He's asking about Milner Ridge—and again we're going back to corrections, and that's really encouraging to me, because I'm glad that the members opposite are finding a newfound respect and appreciation for the work that our correctional workers do.

But, you know, I asked the member opposite, for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen)—I said maybe he should find some moral courage and stand up and say closing jails is bad. I asked members opposite: Are they even willing to say it was a bad idea to close the Dauphin jail? He hasn't done that.

But now we've got the guy who was at the table. That came across the Cabinet table. I'm looking at members on this side of the table here today. Could you imagine that that came across the table at Cabinet and it said, where, without warning, without consultation, without any work in community, without any understanding of the needs in corrections, the number of beds we need, the impact on our economy, the impact on the number of jobs, without any of that, this is what your Cabinet briefing says: We're closing—

we're going to go in the dark of night and close the Dauphin jail. Could you imagine?

Like—and so it's—look, I can't imagine it, but the member opposite was actually sitting there. So he can just tell us, what did he do? Did he just stay quiet? He just sat there and he just said, okay; that's great. Checkmark. Or did he go whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. This is not the right thing to do. It's not the right thing to do for safety in our—public safety in our province. It's not the right thing to do for inmates in our province and their safety and it's not the right thing to do for our correctional workers. It's not the right thing to do for the people of the Parkland and the jobs and the economy.

I mean, like, go down the list. Did any of that ever come out of his mouth? And maybe it did, and now he can just say really clearly, closing jails is bad; closing ERs is bad. Like, they could just say these things. This is not controversial. Everyone knows that Heather Stefanson was the worst premier ever in this province's history. Everyone knows that Brian Pallister slashed and burned his way through the services that Manitobans count on. So you're not breaking news here, guys. Just say it and be clear about it. It's a bad idea to close a jail

Milner Ridge is an incredible facility, and I'm sure the member opposite knows personally, probably, some of the folks that work there. I started my comments—he mentioned he missed some of the comments in the beginning—I started my comments by talking about how incredible the work that our correctional workers do throughout our Justice Department.

But our correctional workers, I talked a lot about that, and I just want to reiterate that for the people at Milner Ridge because they are doing incredible work. We're seeing new programming and new opportunities that are there. I don't have a specific number. He's looking for a number for staff, you know, when it comes to exactly what's at Milner right now, but what I can tell him is because of the structure of how we count staff, there's a zero per cent vacancy, but we need to do better and that means bringing in the full-time workforce program

The Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Just wanted to share with all members that the Chairperson does not rule on quality or content of minister's answers, but I want to remind all members that we are here to discuss supplements to the Estimates of the Department of Justice.

Mr. Ewasko: And, once again, even though the minister has been here even longer than I have, still comes across as a rookie, not knowing—*[interjection]*—and can't, unfortunately, listen to the Chairperson who's in charge here. And I know that the Education Minister sounds like she has some questions for the Justice Minister, but it's our floor, so we'll keep asking there.

An Honourable Member: I'll just heckle you.

Mr. Ewasko: Oh—she says she's just heckling me, so we'll let her continue on, and again, Manitobans have already seen how both of those individuals are unbecoming of a minister. *[interjection]* And she's still going now.

So when we talk about Milner Ridge, and I just was waiting for time to talk because the Justice Minister had asked me—of course I was off the microphone because it's his floor at the time—asked me about the date of the letter and I said, well, it was the day before, and I mentioned April 16. So it is April 15, and so it sounds like the minister is going to be having the department respond to my constituents on April 25. So that will be in the next couple days, that's great.

Just—I know that the minister talked earlier about Perimeteritis, and I hope he has the opportunity to leave the Perimeter. I know that he leaves for other things. I know at one time we shared conversations about locations of various cottages and that as well. But invite him to the Lac du Bonnet constituency where the Milner Ridge is located and—

The Chairperson: Order, please.

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

CHAMBER

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

* (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 Public Service Delivery.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

An Honourable Member: Yes I do.

The Chairperson: The honourable Minister for Public Service Delivery.

Hon. Mintu Sandhu (Minister of Public Service Delivery): Good afternoon, honourable Chair.

Before I speak about 2026-27 Estimates for Public Service Delivery, I want to sincerely thank the public servants of PSD and our partners across government. I thank them for their professionalism, commitment and dedication.

The work in these Estimates comes from steady effort, careful planning and collaboration with other departments. Because of this work, government service stays reliable, public infrastructure continues to support Manitobans every day. Our staff show the value of public service: they work hard, respond quickly when needs change and help make sure government programs run well and on time. Their work includes maintaining buildings, managing capital projects, delivering key regulatory and registry services.

I also want to recognize the important role of our partners across the government. Working together across departments is essential for strong and timely public service. With the shared planning, open communication and joint problem solving, we can address complex issues and deliver results for Manitobans across the province.

As we review the Estimates for the next fiscal year, it is important to note that the work of PSD staff and our partners affect the daily lives of Manitobans. Their work helps ensure staff have a safe workplace, programs have reliable infrastructure and the public can count on their—on fair and consistent services.

The investment and action in these Estimates are not only financial decisions; they also show our responsibility to provide the best possible service to communicate across Manitoba. I am grateful for the hard work shown by everyone involved. I thank them for their continued contribution. Because of their combined effort, we can deliver on our responsibilities and keep the high standard of public service that Manitobans accept and deserve.

Public Service Delivery is the government internal service organization. Much of our work supports other departments. PSD helps departments by planning, building, maintaining and updating government infrastructure. PSD also delivers regulatorily and registry services. These services protect the public under our consumer protection mandate. In practical terms, this means helping ensure staff have a safe workplace, programs and reliable infrastructure and the public can count on fair and consistent services.

One important goal of PSD is to help ensure government programs are supported by facilities, reliable systems and strong oversight of a capital project and

purchasing. This focus on good management and accountability is shown in the 2026-27 Estimates.

A central part of PSD's work is managing government-owned assets and delivering capital projects that support services delivery across Manitoba. Budget 2026 includes a record \$3.8-billion provincial capital plan, with infrastructure investment every region of the province. These investments help maintain existing assets, need—and services needs and help ensure public facilities stay safe, functional and suitable for their intended use.

Within this provincial plan, PSD has a direct capital budget of \$90 million in 2026-27. This funding focuses on maintaining and updating core government assets. It supports the continued operation of facilities that house critical programs services and services used by Manitobans every day.

Key PSD capital investment encodes about \$54 million for the operation, maintenance and upgrade of more than 300 government-owned buildings across the province, from office space to service facilities; \$10 million each to continue restoring and preserving the Legislative Building as part of a program running to 2034.

These investments help keep services running, protect public safety and reduce long-term costs by addressing infrastructure needed—needs in a planned way.

In addition to managing its own assets, PSD is maintaining our organization that deliver capital projects for a state client department. PSD provides project management, procurement services, technical support and oversight. In 2026-27, PSD is supporting \$672 million in capital projects for the partnered departments. These projects support education, housing, justice and other public priorities. This work includes projects associated with school construction, including four new schools to support growing and changing communities, affordable and social housing projects, as part of the Province's better housing investment, justice infrastructure, including early planning for the Dauphin Centre for Justice to support regional justice services.

Across this work, PSD provides clear oversight, cost control and support to help projects stay within the approved scope, schedule and budget. Public Service Delivery is also responsible for government-wide procurement and supply chain services. This helps ensure goods and services are brought fairly or fully in line with the policy and financial controls.

The department also works to improve internal system process and control. This helps ensure departments across government have the support they need to deliver programs well and efficiently.

Through its consumer protection mandate, PSD delivers services directly to Manitobans. These services support fairness, clear rules and the administration of key programs. These services include the Residential Tenancies Branch, the Residential Tenancies Commission, which deliver services under law related to residential tenancies.

* (15:10)

The Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission, Vital Statistics services, land title and Personal Property Registry services. Together, these programs are an important part of PSD's service delivery work as set out in Estimates of expenditure.

Public Service Delivery support program operation by maintaining public assets, delivering capital projects for the department, providing procurement services and delivering consumer registry programs. The 2026-27 Estimates show PSD's ongoing focus on good management, accountability and effective service delivery. This work helps ensure government programs have infrastructure, systems and services they need to support Manitobans.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

The Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

The Chairperson: The honourable member for Borderland.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): We all want to see Manitoba grow. We all want new schools, modern hospitals and infrastructure that keeps our community strong. But we should also want to see those projects built fairly, with accountability, competition and value for the taxpayer. Unfortunately, the Manitoba jobs agreement does none of those things.

Clouding the re-announcement of four new schools, the NDP, without any consultation with the public or construction industry as a whole, or any other stakeholders, signed a deal that gives all the control of those projects to select—to a select few while ignoring all other potential builders in the industry. This isn't about helping families or strengthening our communities.

It's about rewarding political allies at the expense of the vast majority of Manitoba's construction workers and at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers—at the expense of all Manitobans.

This deal hands guaranteed work and exclusive control to about 8,000 unionized workers, while shutting out more than eight per—88 per cent of the skilled tradespeople in this province, men and women who work for open-shop companies or belong to progressive unions. That's not fairness. That's discrimination against thousands of hard-working Manitobans who pay taxes, follow safety laws, train apprentices and build our communities every day. Contractors and businesses that treat their employees well are being completely excluded by this jobs agreement, unless the employers relinquish all control to the government through this anti-competition jobs agreement.

And all the other hard-working Manitobans are paying for this with higher school taxes, higher education property taxes, higher income taxes and likely the NDP will be raising the sales tax next. We are seeing billions of dollars of deficits—and no wonder, as the NDP are sending money out the door as fast as they can with uncompetitive deals like this jobs agreement.

Let's be clear. This deal doesn't create jobs. It limits opportunity. It doesn't build more schools. It drives up costs, which will result in less new builds and less new schools. And we've seen this story before. In 2018, the British Columbia NDP government introduced a similar plan. They called it the Community Benefits Agreement. The promise was familiar: more training, more local hiring and better value for taxpayers. But the result was the exact opposite. Projects under that system became mired in red tape. Costs skyrocketed, delays became common and thousands of qualified workers were denied a fair chance to participate, simply because they didn't carry a union card from the right union.

On one BC bridge project, the government's own cost breakdown listed a premium for CBA, a surcharge of \$6.6 million on a \$106-million project. That was the third largest cost item on the job, behind only steel and excavation. It didn't go to safety, training or materials; it went to politics, plain and simple. And that's what we risk here in Manitoba.

And we should also remember our own history. The Red River Floodway expansion used a similar union-only model and many skilled Manitobans were denied work on that project. It was unfair then and it's unfair now.

Supporters of this new jobs agreement will tell you that open-shop contractors don't pay fair wages, don't follow safety laws and don't train apprentices. And that's simply false. We already have a Construction Industry Wages Act that sets fair pay for every worker. We already have provincial safety laws that apply to every employer. And open-shop contractors—who represent the majority of our construction industry—invest heavily in training, safety and apprenticeships, because their reputation and livelihood depend on it.

The truth is simple: Manitoba's construction workers, union or not, are among the most skilled, professional and safety-driven in the country. They deserve equal opportunity, not political exclusion. At this time of rising NDP deficits and the need to get our economy back on track, after the impact of tariffs, inflation shocks and a pandemic, we should all be welcoming competition to get the most value for taxpayer dollars being invested so that our children and grandchildren are not saddled with this NDP debt.

This NDP side deal is going to mean less roads, bridges, hospitals and schools will get built. So what does this jobs agreement really mean? It means less competition. It means higher costs. It means fewer schools, hospitals and bridges for the same amount of public money. It discriminates against Indigenous-owned businesses, most of which are not part of these select unions. It shuts out family-owned companies that have been building Manitoba's communities for generations. And it tells thousands of qualified workers, qualified Manitoba workers, that their skills don't count simply because of who they work for. That is not the Manitoba way. We believe in fairness, we believe in opportunity based on merit and we believe that public projects funded by public dollars should be open to every qualified company and every qualified Manitoban worker.

The Kinew NDP should step back from this costly mistake before it's too late. Let's learn from the failures in British Columbia instead of repeating them here. Let's restore open tendering, the principle that every qualified contractor can bid and the best value for taxpayers wins. When governments restrict competition, taxpayers always pay more and get less. When governments pick winners and losers, innovation suffers and public trust erodes. But when we keep bidding open, transparent and competitive, everyone wins. That's how we build not only better schools, but a stronger Manitoba, one based on fairness, merit and respect for every worker in our province.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Would the minister like to introduce the staff in attendance?

MLA Sandhu: I would like to introduce the staff with me today: Deputy Minister Brenda DeSerranno, Director of Ministerial Affairs Julia Antonyshyn, Assistant Deputy Minister and Executive Financial Officer Jason Perez, Assistant Deputy Minister of Asset Management Division Brent Timmerman, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister of Procurement and Supply Chain Division Kunnal Sharma, Assistant Deputy Minister of Consumer Protection Division Kathryn Durkin-Chudd, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister of Capital Project Planning and Delivery Division Cheryl Lashek.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: And would the critic like to introduce his staff?

Mr. Guenter: Sure. With us today is Mark Stewart, member of PC caucus staff.

* (15:20)

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Guenter: I'd like to ask the minister: What is the current ratio of front-line staff to that of administrative or support staff?

MLA Sandhu: I just need clarification from the member opposite. Does he want to know the administration staff in the minister's office, or all the divisions?

Mr. Guenter: Yes, the department as a whole.

* (15:30)

MLA Sandhu: I just want to let the member know that the minister's office has five positions and the deputy minister's office has four positions.

And in the department, we have a total count of FTEs: 875. Out of this 875, many, many folks provide those front-line services. Again, we have to work with the Public Service Commission to ask what the member is asking, but in case—if he is just want to know from minister's office, that's where we have five positions at deputy minister's office, there's four and total nine position administration staff positions at the minister and deputy minister's office.

Mr. Guenter: I'd ask the minister if he'd be willing to undertake to get that information to us. We'll be in Estimates again tomorrow, or at any point in time, but it would be good to have that information.

I'd also like to ask the minister, when's the last time that the government—that his department polled Manitobans about their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the services that his department provides.

* (15:40)

MLA Sandhu: I just want to let the member know: most of the department that we work is for the government's other divisions.

Asset Management division looks after all the government buildings that the Manitoba government owns. Procurement and Supply Chain division, we procure stuff for the Manitoba government. Capital Project Planning and Delivery division just works for capital planning for the government and for a consumer protection division that's where is mostly interacts with the public.

Under that we have brought in quite a few good bills to help Manitobans. We—under that division, we banned property control in the grocery sector so that there's more competitions, and that's very well received and most of the other provinces are also looking at this, so they want to learn from our experience as well. And we introduced the largest expansion of rent control in decades, reducing above guideline increases and bringing thousands more units into rent regulation.

It was unfortunate the members didn't want to allow the bill to pass, the Bill 13. This was really a good bill and this is where both landlords and the renters asked for this, actually.

So, I maybe just want to let the member know what was in the bill, actually. So it was rent regulation

review, requiring a review of rent regulation every five years to keep rules up to date with market conditions. Landlord registry, receiving land—requiring landlords to register more information about each rental unit with the Residential Tenancies Branch. This is where we have heard from many, many Manitobans. Sometimes they don't even know who is their landlord and who is the property manager. So, it's good to have that information in case of emergency in that facility, so that way our division can provide those information to the renters.

And it's also included removing past order from the public registry after seven years except public-safety-related cases. This was where we heard from many, many Manitobans that, you know, what people are having a hard time sometimes, like they were drunk, they weren't really thinking, and now they're like 40s, 50s but they cannot rent the unit because of their past actions. They have made life better; they're successful and this is, again, heard from many, many folks and this was in the bill as well.

Increasing the administrative penalties for non-compliance from \$5,000 to \$10,000—that was also something people really were asking for it, and there are even landlords said—you know what, there are certain landlords that don't want to follow the rules and we will not—cannot even force the penalties on their first offence. Our department will work with them to rectify the situations that there are, and if they don't comply, as the last resort is to have that penalty. And also it was a landlord must give a 24-hour notice before showing an occupied unit to prospective tenants.

So this was really a good bill. I have no idea what members made a big deal out of this. Again, this is—again, renters as well as landlords. I have many, many meetings with them. And both sides said, yes, this is the kind of bill that we need for the protection for the renters.

And for landlords, we're saying there are certain landlords that don't want to follow the rules. So we required that kind of bill to make sure everyone is aligned. If they don't follow the rules, there's penalties that can be applied on any orders. If there were certain orders last time, now there is on any order.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Guenter: Well, that wasn't anywhere near what I was asking about, but we got five minutes of rambling from the minister about other matters. And if he wants to talk about those matters, I'd be happy to talk about them as well.

And I'd like to read into the record a—some words by Don White, someone who is in the industry and understands—would understand exactly what the minister is talking about. And he said that he was reading recent comments from the minister in the Winnipeg Free Press. And he said he was—he says, I'm less concerned about the legislation being controversial and way more concerned that he—being this minister—finds industry feedback laughable.

He went on to say that when a—when the minister says he only has to laugh—which is what this minister said—and suggests that people haven't read the bill, while property owners, lenders and contractors are pausing tens of millions of dollars in real capital work and laying off staff, it tells me the public—that the public consultation was never meant to be a serious conversation. It was rhetoric.

Don goes on to say: Our professional property industry has briefed this NDP government multiple times on how significant these proposed changes are. Brushing that off with a laugh is not leadership; it's contempt. That's pretty damning.

Let's be honest about what is going on here. You cannot bring more units under rent control and slash the recoverable portion of capital costs and pretend that won't change behaviour. Owners will defer repairs, cancel upgrades and think twice about building and investing in Manitoba. You cannot keep loading more costs and risk onto private rental housing and then act surprised when capital quietly leaves the province. You cannot demand better, safer, newer housing from private owners while designing rules that make it irrational to invest.

And I would just go on to note, the globe—the Winnipeg Free Press reported in an article last Friday, April 17, entitled, Tories delay contentious rent-focused bill. I think one of the most alarming pieces in that article is this right here: Globe Property Management said it has paused \$10 million in capital spending. That's \$10 million in Winnipeg. The firm applies for above-guideline rent increases to recoup costs of renovations that have been completed. I suspect most landlords are going to continue to be in a holding pattern until the decision has been made, said Ron Penner, Globe's chief operating officer.

Con-Restor Technologies has delayed four projects owing to the proposed changes, resulting in roughly a dozen staff being laid off. It's just kind of kicking the can down the road right now, owner Stephane Phaneuf said. No one knows what is actually going to happen.

So, it's clear that, again, the minister is putting forward legislation, this NDP government is putting forward legislation that will discourage investment in rental stock in Manitoba at a time when we need a greater supply of units to bring down rents. This bill is going to have the effect—the bill that they have brought forward is going to have the opposite effect and lead to less investment, fewer available units and higher rents as a result.

And, at the end of the day, this minister across the way—who's, again, laughing—has put forward a bill that is really an anti-tenant, an anti-renters bill that will reduce investment in rental units, decrease the number of available units and lead to higher rents.

And so I think that that's appalling and the minister should take a closer look and do a better job of consultation. I'm concerned at the lack of consultation by this minister, by this NDP government. They've made drastic policy decisions that are having a very severe impact in Manitoba.

* (15:50)

And so I wonder why it is that this minister and his colleagues and the Premier (Mr. Kinew)—this government as a whole—why don't they undertake to do any consultation before making such drastic changes.

The Chairperson: Before the minister has an opportunity to respond, I just want to remind everyone that bills before the House aren't part of Estimates. So I would like to remind all honourable members of our rule 43, which states: No member shall revive a debate already concluded during the session or anticipate a matter pointed for consideration on which notice has been given.

So Bill 13 is currently under—is currently before the House, and I would suggest that it would be more appropriate for the members to comment on the bill at the committee meeting considering the bill or at third reading. While I recognize that there is a connection between the bill and the Estimates under consideration, I would also ask members to focus their comments on the matter currently before the committee.

MLA Sandhu: Thank you to the member even though there was no question.

Honourable Chair, I have a lot of respect for the industry. That's why I have met with them repeatedly to discuss rent regulations. That's where the member is not understanding a difference between the bill and the regulations.

The RTB meets with landlords and tenants every month. We are consulting with Manitobans. We recently concluded a 30-day public engagement that had a large response from the public. I will take a look and go through those comments from the public, and as we develop the final regulations, those comments will be made in there, in the final regulations.

* (16:00)

So, again, the member is still—again, maybe, hopefully, he understands now there's a bill and then there's regulations, and this is—we are talking about the regulations, so.

And also, honourable speak—honourable Chair, we are making life affordable for Manitobans. When we were running in the elections, we promised that we are going to cut the gas tax per year. We did that for the whole year. Then we made a permanent 10 per cent gas tax cut. We froze the price of milk. We stopped predatory pricing at the grocery stores. And also, honourable Chair, we cut the gas tax—you know, as I said earlier—to save money for Manitobans, so they can go out and spend and enjoy their meal out. We also froze hydro rates for a year.

We reversed the PC cuts to the renter's tax credit; this is where they brought this to \$575. Honourable Chair, who are those renters? Those are the folks on low income, newcomers, students and also seniors.

And what we did in the budget, we increased our renters tax credit to \$675. Those people deserve to have that restored because, again, Conservatives is always good at giving a break to the rich, rich people. We will stand with everyday Manitobans. We are also getting families a real \$10-a-day child care. And also introduced in this budget: people with low-income families—free child care, thus a real savings for the families who really need it.

What is the PC's record when it's coming to affordability? They had a chance—they had the chance to cut the gas tax. Did they do it? No. They continued to collect that 14 cents per litre from Manitobans. They had the chance to freeze the milk prices. Did they do that? No, they didn't do that either.

Again, every day I will continue to stand with Manitobans. We will continue to listen to Manitobans. We are out in the public, listening to their concerns. This is the direction from the Premier (Mr. Kinew) to single MLAs, as well as ministers: Go out into the public, listen people's real concerns. Bring those to the table, let's solve those issues that people are facing. I will continue to do that.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Guenter: I don't know if the minister is confused about his own file. He talks about the bill and he talks about the regulations interchangeably.

In fact, he did that in a—with the CBC in an article that they put out March 12, headlined: NDP plan to expand Manitoba rent control protections.

And in it the minister talks about the proposed regulatory changes, as well as Bill 13, which he called the largest expansion to rent controls in decades.

But, just to be clear, I was talking about the proposed regulatory changes which would raise the rent-exempt threshold from \$1,670 a month to \$2,000 for units and buildings 20 years old or older, and other associated—as well as cutting other associated proposed regulations such as cutting the capital cost allowance by 50 per cent.

And so where does that leave us? Well, as I said earlier, Globe Property Management said it has paused \$10 million in capital spending. So, think about where—what kind of picture that creates for Manitoba renters—you know, young families, perhaps, seniors, those vulnerable Manitobans, those who are perhaps lower income or struggling to get by, struggling with affordability in this NDP economy—when you have capital leaving the province and investors not investing in rental stock, in improving rental stock in Manitoba and in expanding the supply of rental units in Manitoba. Think about what that means for you as a renter.

Again, Globe Property Management said it has paused—this is recently. This isn't old news. This is current news. This firm has paused \$10 million in capital spending in Manitoba. I suspect most landlords are going to continue to be in a holding pattern until the decision has been made, said Ron Penner, Globe's chief operating officer. Con-Restore Technologies has delayed four projects owing to the proposed changes—this NDP government's proposed changes, the ones that this minister's been talking about—resulting in roughly a dozen staff being laid off. It's just kind of kicking the can down the road right now, owner Stefane Phaneuf said. No one knows what is actually going to happen.

I think that is a pretty damning indictment of this government's handling of the rental issue in Manitoba and affordability for renters and providing affordable rental units in Manitoba. And, by the way, that \$10 million that's been paused, that's not going to local contractors who spend that money and recirculate that money in our economy.

So the minister, again, should perhaps do a little more consultation, and that's what my question was about previously, which, again, you failed to answer. But the minister should do more consultation. His NDP colleagues should do more consultation with Manitobans, perhaps not be so bent on pursuing their ideological priorities but, rather, be a practical—have a practical perspective that's grounded in the realities of what Manitobans are facing and what they're actually asking for. And, again, they're not doing that.

And we see that especially with the imposition of a one-to-one apprenticeship ratio which, for the first time in years, Manitoba is seeing fewer new apprentice registrations in Manitoba. For the first time, we have an actual decline in the number of Manitobans registering to become apprentices, and that's troubling.

And we have the minister getting up in question period and talking about how they—there are more apprentices. Well, that's only because there were many Manitobans who took advantage of the opportunities made available to them by the previous PC government, and those apprentices are now graduating and becoming journeypersons.

And so what's concerning is, is the imposition by this NDP government of policies that are really economically damaging and doing so without any consultation. I wonder why the minister didn't consult with industry leaders before implementing the MJA.

The Chairperson: The minister's time has expired—member's time has expired.

* (16:10)

MLA Sandhu: I had many, many conversations with industry: WCA, Manitoba Heavy, rural—it's called the rural construction association. I had not one, but many, many, many meetings on MJA, as well as I have a quarterly meeting with WCA.

Both congratulations to Ron [*phonetic*] and Chris [*phonetic*]. I hear they're retiring. So—and welcome to the new folks who will be taking over on their positions; Darryl. And so it is that conversation will continue. Our quarterly meeting with WCA will continue.

What is actually Manitoba jobs agreement? You know, maybe member was also offered a briefing on this. I heard he refused to even listen. What is in Manitoba jobs agreement—is and what this tax about? This is how we protect jobs for Manitobans. This is how we train the workforce for the future. There's more apprentices than ever before.

Every single person who works on MJA is better off; they make more pay. It's all about fair wages, safer work site, better benefits. I don't think so, in my life as elected official since 2019, I haven't met anyone who wanted to make less money. Any workers.

So we are listening to those folks at the front line who are building Manitoba, who has been building Manitoba for generations. We will continue to listen to the workers. We will continue to listen to the industry as well. As I said, I had many, many meetings and—you know, again, training the workforce for the future, turning those construction sites into training sites. That's really, really important.

As we move forward toward Churchill, you know, there was really, really excitement—exciting news out of Ottawa. And we have to have a workforce that delivers, that builds Manitoba, that builds the Port of Churchill.

And, again, this is all about prioritizing Manitoba workers. We know Conservatives don't like Manitoba workers. In their seven and a half disastrous years, what they did, they were at the workforce from Saskatchewan and from Alberta.

Under us, your NDP government, you will have Manitoba licence plates at the work site. That's our focus. Our focus is Manitoba workers that will stay every single day. I encourage the member opposite: have that opportunity to learn more about MJA. Let's listen to the workers. Let's see what is in the MJA so the member can maybe better understand.

* (16:20)

Next time comes to the House, maybe he's going to have friendly questions where he's going to say, Minister, thank you very much. You are doing an awesome job. You are protecting Manitoba jobs for Manitobans. This is a \$3.8-billion capital project happening this year under our NDP government, and I really look forward to the member getting that briefing regarding MJA.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Guenter: Well, is the minister suggesting that industry leaders are lying? Because he's saying he consulted with them, but I have in front of me a press release that the Winnipeg Construction Association put out on September 16, 2025, in which they say: The Winnipeg Construction Association was surprised by the provincial government's announcement on the signing of its first Manitoba jobs agreement with Manitoba Building Trades earlier today.

It was a little surprising to see that announcement since WCA represents the firms that will be bidding on these large construction projects and we weren't consulted, said Ron Hambley, WCA president. Our members are both union and open-shop construction firms, which gives us a unique perspective and voice on project labour agreements. It's unfortunate that the government didn't feel that perspective was worthwhile.

So who's telling the truth, the minister or industry leaders? But the minister says he's consulting with them. He talks to them all the time. I wonder if he talked to them before they put out a joint industry alert regarding the Manitoba jobs agreement on February 10, which is titled, Alert: Onerous Conditions on Projects Subject to the Manitoba Jobs Agreement.

And they go on to say that the MJA poses an increased risk for prospective general and trade contractors, and all contractors bidding on projects subject to the MJA should be aware of the following implications: (1) increased administrative and compliance burden; (2) unionized work site requirements. And they go on.

So, to be clear, this joint industry alert is the construction associations—the three major construction associations in Manitoba coming together to tell all Manitoba construction firms to beware of bidding on public projects put out by this NDP government.

I wonder if the minister consulted with the construction industry before they wrote an editorial on February 24 entitled, In search of a better way to build Manitoba, in which they say the practical consequences of the MJA are clear: fewer bidders, reduced competition, increased administrative burden and higher project costs. They go on to outline numerous other concerns.

I wonder if the minister consulted with the industry before they put out another press release on March 19—and this is the Winnipeg Construction Association, Manitoba Heavy Construction Association and the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba, representing the majority of vertical and heavy construction industry across Manitoba. When they requested Manitoba's Auditor General review, the 85-cent per hour, per worker charge collected on MJA-covered projects that flows directly to a union body on top of existing dues with no public oversight, no explanation and no end in sight, and yet taxpayers are paying for it. That's for immediate release March 19, put out by the three leading construction associations in Manitoba.

I wonder if the minister consulted with construction groups before they went to the media and the CBC put out this headline: Construction groups raise concern over charge for contractors on public projects, citing zero transparency. It sounds like, if the minister is talking to industry, it certainly isn't going very well and he certainly isn't listening.

Well, what's also troubling is that 88 per cent of Manitoba construction workers have chosen not to be affiliated with Manitoba Building Trades or member unions; 53,000 Manitoba workers operate in open shops. They've chosen not to be unionized. I wonder how the minister explains how he can defend a policy in which he's given 100 per cent of the power to an organization that speaks for less than 12 per cent of the workforce in Manitoba.

* (16:30)

MLA Sandhu: Again, these bids are open to unionized shops and open shops.

So, again, I don't know. The member was talking about 88 per cent, 12 per cent, and he's trying to divide Manitobans. We are continuing to listen to Manitoba workers. And in the member's questions since he started asking these questions in this House, I haven't heard from the member that he has spoken with workers. Not a single time. So this is odd. You want to only listen to one side. Why you don't want to listen to the other side, and this is where you will know exactly why this is beneficial for Manitoba workers.

We want those Manitobans to find a job here in Manitoba instead of going out of province looking for that opportunity well away from their families. We want to stay those—they stay with their families here, have those jobs.

And I also just want to let the member know that we are setting up a MJA industry table to get their feedback from people in the construction industry. This table includes members recommended by WCA, Manitoba highway, and Construction Association of Rural Manitoba.

And also I want to thank our MJA team. They did a phenomenal job. They are out there meeting with industry many, many, many times. They had attended trade shows, conferences, hosted a workshop, and held bidder's conference, not just once; many times. They were at also—WCA did an industry information session on MJA, and our team was there to provide the information that industry was looking for.

So, once again, thank you to the MJA team for your hard work.

And, as I said, these kind of PLAs or Manitoba jobs agreement has been used in Canada since 1950. This is nothing new. This has been used in pretty much every single province: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario.

And even the federal new project, most of them, they include this kind of agreement. And also, we have heard from federal opposition leader, Pierre Poilievre, supports this kind of project, this kind of agreement. Maybe member can have that discussion with his federal leader on this.

This is important. This is putting Manitoba workers first. This is listening to them and also listening to the industry as well. Not only the MJA team: our deputy minister's department, myself, have many, many meetings with Manitoba Heavy, WCA, Construction Association of Rural Manitoba. We have many meetings. We have discussed many issues related to MJA, as well as, you know, general discussion related to construction industry here in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Mr. Guenter: You know, the minister spends time talking about federal politics and federal policies. If he's so interested in federal politics, then I'd welcome him to run for federal office. But as far as I'm concerned and this PC team is concerned, we're here to speak for Manitobans.

That's why we're here today in this Manitoba Legislature. So at least we, on this side, in this PC team understand that that's what we are here to do. We're here to do a job and that is to speak for Manitobans, especially those Manitobans, those 53,000 Manitobans who have been disadvantaged by this NDP government when it comes to the Manitoba jobs agreement.

The minister—it's so rich for the minister to say that, well, they want to divide, no one's precluded from bidding on projects, everyone can bid, which is complete and utter nonsense. They're the ones dividing. They're the ones dividing the 12 per cent of unionized workers from the 88 per cent non-unionized workers.

And that's highly unfortunate because up until now, we've had a situation on construction work sites in Manitoba for the last three decades, if you ask industry leaders—and maybe even it goes back even later—but they'll say there's not been a strike in three

decades and maybe longer. There was one strike during the Red River Floodway expansion, actually, about 20 years ago, and that happened in a unionized shop.

But there's a reason why 88 per cent of the 60,000 Manitoba workers are non-unionized. There's probably several reasons, because it's up to them, right? And I know this minister and this Premier (Mr. Kinew), the NDP premiers, NDP government, doesn't understand the concept of worker choice.

But probably, one of the reasons why 53,000 out of the 60,000 Manitobans have chosen not to be unionized, is because non-unionized shops pay—most of them—pay 5—between 5 and 30 per cent more than The Construction Industry Wages Act minimums.

In fact, many of them pay more than unionized shops. So, let's just be clear about that, but when the minister says that we're the ones dividing and that he's—he and his team—my apologies—are leaving this open, are not precluding anyone from being able to bid on public work or public projects such as schools, hospitals, roads and bridges.

* (16:40)

Well, let me take him back to his very own Manitoba jobs agreement which I'm not sure he's read, or he's not being forthcoming about what's inside of it. Because, in section 20.2.5, there's this phrase in black and white: Where multiple candidates are deemed job qualified for a vacancy, Manitoba residents that are members of a union will be given preference over Manitoba residents that are not members of a union.

So there it is in black and white. This own government's Manitoba jobs agreement says that—

An Honourable Member: Read it again.

Mr. Guenter: —where Manitoba residents—and I'll read it again. I hear someone saying read it again. Where Manitoba residents that are not—Manitoba residents that are members of a union will be given preference over Manitoba residents that are not members of a union.

And for the minister, that's in section 20.2.5 of the Manitoba jobs agreement. So let's be very clear: This NDP government is dividing Manitobans. They're dividing the 12 per cent from the 88 per cent. They're not respecting worker choice.

And there's good reasons why Manitoba workers would want to be non-unionized and work for an open

shop, why 88 per cent of them do. And this government is disrespecting that.

But if the minister is so certain that the Manitoba jobs agreement is a good deal, I wonder if he would commit to an independent review after one year. Before any expansion or extension, require an independent review assessing competition, better participation, costs, timelines, apprenticeship outcomes, workforce inclusion and regional impacts. And make sure that these results are publicly released and tabled in the Legislature.

Can he do that?

The Chairperson: The member's time has expired.

MLA Sandhu: Thank you to the member for the question.

It's going to give me a great honour of putting a few comments. So what member is suggesting—that those 53,000 workers shouldn't make more money? That's what he is telling the House today. As—also, it was reported in the media as well—half of those contracts went to open shop and half of them went to the union shop. So, again, anybody can bid on these contracts. This is open to everyone.

And also, as I said earlier, you know, honourable Chair, these kind of projects has been—the legal framework has been used since the 1950s in Canada. Well, I just maybe should highlight for the member what other provinces are doing.

Maybe I'll start with Ontario. PLAs have been used in Ontario since the late 1990s, particularly on large industrial, institutional and infrastructure projects, with the stated goal of improving labour stability and project co-ordination. They are also widely used in the private sector, including by large multinational firms undertaking major capital projects.

Just want to let, maybe, member know about what British Columbia is doing on this. British Columbia has a long history of using PLAs and similar frameworks, particularly on major infrastructure and resource projects, including hydroelectric development and transportation infrastructure. More recently, the Province has used community benefit agreements, which are modernized from PLA, that incorporate additional policy objectives such as local hiring, apprenticeship target and inclusion of under-represented groups. These agreements have been applied to major public projects including transit, hospital and bridge construction.

In Alberta, honourable Chair, Alberta has used PLA-type framework on large-scale industrial and energy projects, particularly in the oil sand sector. In these cases, PLAs has been used as a tool to manage workforce scale and complexity, including accommodating both unionized and non-unionized contracts within the co-ordinated labour framework. Using Alberta has been a project-specific and industry lever.

* (16:50)

So, again, Manitoba is not the only one. Other provinces are using it.

And this is, again, we are developing our workforce, and the work—where they will be working to develop the Port of Churchill. It is really, really good news for Manitobans.

And, recently, the survey came out: More than 78 per cent of the people want to see the Port of Churchill developed, and we agree with them. Mark Carney agrees with the Manitobans. Our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has put this project on the national stage, and this is where we need that workforce development that—so they can build that port.

And we will continue to listen to both the construction industry as well as Manitoba workers. Again, I'll encourage member opposite—against—'til this time, he never mentioned that he have met any workers who want to make less money. I'm sure every single person will be better off because of the MJA.

Thank you, honourable Chair.

Mr. Guenter: What I had said—you know, it's unfortunate. The minister—I don't know, I guess he's just trying to kill time or something and get through this afternoon. But this is the way it's been for the last number of weeks and months trying to get answers from this government on this really unpopular Manitoba jobs agreement.

You know, again, 88 per cent of construction workers in Manitoba, in this sector have chosen not to be unionized. I don't know why the minister doesn't respect worker choice. And I said one of the things—one of the reasons out of the many, perhaps—but one of the reasons why 53,000 Manitobans would choose not to be unionized is because they make more money working in an open shop rather than being unionized. There are all kinds of benefits to not being unionized.

But, again, it's about the principle of worker choice. If one wants to work for a union, well, that's fine. You know—and we already have—Manitoba has The Construction Industry Wages Act that sets minimums.

And the—you know, it's just ironic, too, that there were unions that opposed higher CIWA minimums. You know, explain that one to me. But I think the minister—you know, to allege that—anyway, it makes up—makes stuff up. It's not worth responding to. It's not worth responding to.

I think the serious the serious concern is the—

The Chairperson: Order.

I'll just caution the member on insinuating or stating that ministers are making stuff up.

Mr. Guenter: All right. The—one of the major concerns with the Manitoba jobs agreement is the imposition of an 85 cent per hour, per worker charge that's collected on MJA-covered projects. And it flows directly to a union body on top of existing dues.

So this is something that the construction industry has said is entirely unprecedented. There's no public oversight. There's no explanation. We've asked questions. The industry has asked questions. Where is this money going? What's it being used for?

And let's be clear, this isn't chump change. I mean it's 85 cents but per hour, per worker, you add that up on four new schools that are supposed to be built, that comes to \$250,000 per school. That's \$1 million across the four schools. And that's just those four schools.

You tack on hospitals, you tack on roads and bridges and all public projects. And, again, these are projects that 88 per cent of Manitobans—because they're non-union, they don't have a membership card—this government will treat them like second-class citizens. That's been made abundantly clear. There's two tiers of Manitobans here in the eyes of this NDP government.

But collecting this 85 cents—and, again, it could go higher. This number could be higher. It's at—it's completely at the discretion of the Manitoba Building Trades, this NDP government's political allies, who are collecting these funds and have set up this slush fund and are running these really slick ads for the NDP at the moment.

So where is this money going? We haven't had any answers to that question. You know, what's it being used for? I don't know why it's so hard to explain something, unless you were trying to hide, to hide the facts.

So, you know, I've given the minister many, many opportunities in this House in question period, and I'll give him an opportunity here. And I just encourage him too, to keep in mind that, look, these are questions that are being asked by the construction industry experts, by construction industry leaders. They have these same questions. Ron Hambley said—he's with the WCA—again, someone that the minister said earlier, and I guess we'll have to take the minister at his word, you know. But I definitely take it with a grain of salt. But the minister did say that he talks regularly to these individuals.

So this is what Ron Hambley said. He said, this fee is being sent directly to the Manitoba Building Trades without any clear oversight. Nobody in government has explained how the number was set, what it's supposed to fund or who's watching the money. At the end of the day, taxpayers are the ones paying for it.

So could the minister respond to Ron Hambley, perhaps, and Chris Lorenc and Darryl Harrison and the many others, and explain where exactly that money is going?

MLA Sandhu: Again, I have seen this in this House, as well outside the House. Nobody believes what their leader says in this House and then goes outside the House. So, again, nobody trusts PC leader.

But I do have some numbers for the member. Earlier, he asked—front-line workers, we have a 63.2 per cent; and administration workers, 36.8 per cent. So those—that was his first or second question. So I want to thank all those workers working hard on behalf of Manitoba government and have all those peoples providing that excellent service.

And, you know, Vital Statistics—I remember visiting their office, and turnaround time came almost six months, three months—

The Chairperson: Order.

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

And call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

The Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Ministerial Statements		Criminal Activity in Manitoba Housing Units	
Spring Flood Update		Bereza	1518
Naylor	1507	Smith	1518
Guenter	1508	Environmental Initiatives	
Earth Day		Dela Cruz	1519
Moyes	1508	Moyes	1519
Nesbitt	1509	Emergency Wildfire Response	
Members' Statements		Wowchuk	1519
Annual Free Tax Clinic in Assiniboia		Bushie	1519
Kennedy	1510	2025 Wildfire Season	
Child-Care Availability		Ewasko	1519
Robbins	1510	Kinew	1520
Kerry Auriat		Chronic Absenteeism from School	
Balcaen	1511	Wasyliw	1520
Access to Information Requests		Kinew	1520
Wasyliw	1511		
Oral Questions		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Economic and Affordability Pressures in Manitoba		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Khan	1512	Committee of Supply	
Kinew	1512	(Concurrent Sections)	
Manitoba Jobs Agreement		Room 254	
Khan	1513	Business, Mining, Trade and Job Creation	
Kinew	1513	Moses	1521
Economic Investment by Small Businesses		Narth	1523
Narth	1515	Room 255	
Moses	1515	Justice	
Manitoba Jobs Agreement		Wiebe	1537
Guenter	1516	Balcaen	1539
Sandhu	1516	Ewasko	1552
Emergency Room Wait Times		Chamber	
Cook	1517	Public Service Delivery	
Asagwara	1517	Sandhu	1557
		Guenter	1559

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