

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| ALLUM, James | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | NDP |
| BINDLE, Kelly | Thompson | PC |
| CLARKE, Eileen, Hon. | Agassiz | PC |
| COX, Cathy, Hon. | River East | PC |
| CULLEN, Cliff, Hon. | Spruce Woods | PC |
| CURRY, Nic | Kildonan | PC |
| DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon. | Charleswood | PC |
| EICHLER, Ralph, Hon. | Lakeside | PC |
| EWASKO, Wayne | Lac du Bonnet | PC |
| FIELDING, Scott, Hon. | Kirkfield Park | PC |
| FLETCHER, Steven, Hon. | Assiniboia | PC |
| FONTAINE, Nahanni | St. Johns | NDP |
| FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon. | Morden-Winkler | PC |
| GERRARD, Jon, Hon. | River Heights | Lib. |
| GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon. | Steinbach | PC |
| GRAYDON, Clifford | Emerson | PC |
| GUILLEMARD, Sarah | Fort Richmond | PC |
| HELWER, Reg | Brandon West | PC |
| ISLEIFSON, Len | Brandon East | PC |
| JOHNSON, Derek | Interlake | PC |
| JOHNSTON, Scott | St. James | PC |
| KINEW, Wab | Fort Rouge | NDP |
| KLASSEN, Judy | Kewatinook | Lib. |
| LAGASSÉ, Bob | Dawson Trail | PC |
| LAGIMODIERE, Alan | Selkirk | PC |
| LAMOUREUX, Cindy | Burrows | Lib. |
| LATHLIN, Amanda | The Pas | NDP |
| LINDSEY, Tom | Flin Flon | NDP |
| MALOWAY, Jim | Elmwood | NDP |
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| MARTIN, Shannon | Morris | PC |
| MAYER, Colleen | St. Vital | PC |
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| MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice | Seine River | PC |
| NESBITT, Greg | Riding Mountain | PC |
| PALLISTER, Brian, Hon. | Fort Whyte | PC |
| PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon. | Midland | PC |
| PIWNIUK, Doyle | Arthur-Virden | PC |
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| SARAN, Mohinder | The Maples | Ind. |
| SCHULER, Ron, Hon. | St. Paul | PC |
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| SMITH, Andrew | Southdale | PC |
| SMOOK, Dennis | La Verendrye | PC |
| SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon. | Riel | PC |
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| SWAN, Andrew | Minto | NDP |
| TEITSMA, James | Radisson | PC |
| WHARTON, Jeff | Gimli | PC |
| WIEBE, Matt | Concordia | NDP |
| WISHART, Ian, Hon. | Portage la Prairie | PC |
| WOWCHUK, Rick | Swan River | PC |
| YAKIMOSKI, Blair | Transcona | PC |
| <i>Vacant</i> | Point Douglas | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 6, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I have a statement for the House. Order, please. I have a statement for the House.

I rise today with a heavy heart to inform you of the tragic loss of a valued member of the Assembly family. Craig Waterman passed away this morning in hospital for complications related to a brain injury suffered on February 25th.

Since 2007, Craig served the Assembly with distinction in Chamber Branch as a gallery attendant upstairs, as well as at many committee meetings. He also served on many occasions on the floor of the Chamber and as our acting Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms.

Prior to his time here, Craig had a long and distinguished career with the Winnipeg Police, with over 25 years of service. Very well respected in the police community, he was known as a tireless worker. As one police colleague said of him, when you want something done and done well, give it to Craig.

Craig's family was his life, and they are devastated by this sudden and tragic loss. His wife Shelley and children Dionne, Raquel, Nicole and Justin are left with an immense hole in their lives by Craig's passing.

Craig was a strong man but also gentle and caring. We were fortunate to have had him in our lives and we are all better for it.

Is there will of the House to have a moment of silence in honour of the memory of Craig Waterman? *[Agreed]*

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 10—The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Amendment Act

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Reyes), that Bill 10, The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Amendment Act, be introduced for the first time.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Education, seconded by the honourable member for St. Norbert—*[interjection]*

Mr. Wishart: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Norbert, that The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wishart: This bill will amend The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Act to address gaps that have arisen as the institute continues to develop within Manitoba's post-secondary education system. As the successor to the former Winnipeg Technical College, the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology provides post-secondary and post-secondary education in the field of technology and vocational training.

The amendments in this bill will provide the board with a clearer authority for the creation of parking by-laws as it provides to other Manitoba colleges. The bill will also require that the institution seek approval from the Minister of Education and Training to create, amend, or cease to provide a post-secondary program of study.

Madam Speaker, post-secondary education is vital to the health and prosperity of Manitoba. The amendments in this bill will ensure coordination and alignment of the post-secondary programing in the province while continuing to provide the breadth

and flexibility of a post-secondary educational opportunity to students.

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

**Bill 11—The Community Child Care
Standards Amendment Act
(Staff Qualifications and Training)**

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Madam Speaker, I'd like to move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 11, The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act (Staff Qualifications and Training), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Fielding: Madam Speaker, I wish to introduce Bill 11, The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act (Staff Qualifications and Training). I move, seconded by the Honourable Ian Wishart—sorry, the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill 11 be now read for the first time and ordered for second reading.

Madam Speaker, the bill will be—make changes respecting the child care education program approval committee, which currently establishes by Manitoba Education and Training CCEPAC has provided essential supports for the province since the 1980s. CCEPAC and a second, redundant committee will be eliminated by the bill. Their overlapping responsibilities will be assigned to a newly established committee under the Department of Families. This ensures that the Province will continue to review advice—I'm sorry, receive advice on academic programs and competencies for working in the licensed, early learning and child-care sector.

The bill is supported by my colleague, the Minister of Education, and is a key—and key stakeholders in the early learning and child-care sectors, Madam Speaker.

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

* (13:40)

Bill 12—The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member—Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen), that Bill 12, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act, be now read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wishart: Madam Speaker, this bill contains several long-overdue amendments to The Teachers' Pensions Act supported by Manitoba Teachers' Society, represented today in the gallery by MTS president Norm Gould.

I am pleased to be able to support the excellent work of the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund in administering this act by tabling this bill.

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

**Bill 215—The Civil Service Amendment Act
(Employment Preference for Reservists
with Active Service)**

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): I move that Bill 215, The Civil Service Amendment Act (Employment Preference—*[interjection]* Oh, excuse me, seconded—correction, Madam Speaker—seconded by the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Reyes), that Bill 215, The Civil Service Amendment Act (Employment Preference for Reservists with Active Service), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Curry: Canadian soldiers have served and continue to serve outside of Canada on land, sea and air since even before Confederation that we now celebrate for its 150th anniversary this year. A Canadian Forces member who's served outside of Canada is a veteran and should not be discriminated upon their return to Canada when seeking employment.

Members of the Canadian Armed Forces reserve are 'routinely'—routinely called to serve outside of Canada with Regular Force colleagues. Furthermore, Regular Force colleagues of the Reserve Force members often will transfer to the reserves.

This bill will end discrimination against those reservists who continue to serve in the Reserve Force and have also served outside of Canada on active service.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Lymphedema Awareness Day

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today on the occasion of Lymphedema Awareness Day.

In 2014 I introduced a private member's bill, Bill 209, designating March 6th to recognize those who live with lymphedema and raise awareness of the disease. That bill received royal assent on June 12th, 2014. I want to once again thank Ms. Kim Avanthay and Sherry Normandeau of the Lymphedema Association of Manitoba, who were very active in helping get that bill passed.

Madam Speaker, people with lymphedema face frequent and expensive treatments. It can affect anyone at any age, yet most people are not aware of this condition and how it is treated. Therefore, Lymphedema Awareness Day is a day in which we can take action to raise awareness of this under-reported condition and express our support for the people who live with it each and every day.

The Lymphedema Association of Manitoba's 5th Annual Symposium is this coming March 10th and 11th at the Deer Lodge Centre, and I encourage anyone who might be interested to attend.

To all members, I ask for and welcome your support for people with lymphedema, their friends, family, health-care providers and caregivers. Let's work together to make Manitoba a better place for people living with lymphedema.

In recognition of their important work for those with lymphedema, I would like to recognize: Susan Stratford, board president; Isabelle Thorvardson, vice-president; Kim Avanthay, board member; Susan Tole, board member; Claire Ann Deighton-Lamy, board member; Edith Mulhall, co-founder of the Lymphedema Association of Manitoba, who are here in the gallery with us today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Riverdale Place Workshop

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake): I rise in the House today to recognize an organization that has made an incredible difference in my constituency and the Interlake as a whole.

Riverdale Place Workshop provides vocational training and an activity centre for adults with special needs. My wife and I had the pleasure of visiting them last year and we were touched by the

tremendous work this organization does. We were greeted with handshakes, hugs and many, many smiles. Both of us were awestruck by the commitment and dedication from Alex Janower and staff at Riverdale Place Workshop and the huge sense of pride demonstrated by both the workers and the employees.

We are so proud to have this opportunity available in our community. Repairing pallets for Diageo, who is the manufacturer of the world renown Crown Royal, producing small crafts for sale and curbside recycling in Arborg and Riverton are just a few of the many activities that the Riverdale Place Workshop provides.

The workshop has been operating in Arborg for well over 40 years and has become a pillar of the community.

The employees and the clients work so hard to make Riverdale a success. A newspaper article a few years ago called Arborg a model of inclusion and so it is.

We all know that people with special needs still face stigma. Work is being done to break down these barriers and a community in my riding is showing the way.

Madam speaker, I am so very proud of Riverdale Place Workshop and the great work they do. Thank you.

Manitoba Chinese Business Gala

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): On February 3rd of this year, I, along with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and some of my colleagues on this side of the House, attended the 2017 Manitoba Chinese Business Gala. This was the first ever business gala within our growing Manitoba-Chinese community and a well-attended event. In fact, the event was sold out.

This inaugural event recognized the achievements of several members of the Chinese business community with their first annual Chinese Business Awards for excellence. In addition, we witnessed performances by the Sichuan cultural exchange performing troupe whom we had seen earlier the same day here at the Manitoba Legislature.

Last month's event brought members of our province's Chinese community with other business owners and business professionals. Great things can be achieved by working together towards common

goals to produce positive results for all those who are striving for business success.

My good friend and business owner Fisher Wang, whom happens to be a resident of the great and diverse constituency of St. Norbert, is one of many successful entrepreneurs who is helping our Manitoba economy grow. Fisher runs IDO Media and offers print and media services helping bridge local businesses to the Chinese community. Not only does he offer specialized services for his clientele, but has also helped our economy through job creation.

Our government is committed to encouraging the growth of our province's economy through domestic and foreign trade. The Manitoba Chinese Business Gala was an event that moved us closer to achieving this objective; to build upon the growing commercial relationship between China and Manitoba.

Thank you to entrepreneurs like Fisher Wang and his team at IDO Media for your contribution to the Manitoba economy and for organizing last month's first ever Manitoba Chinese Business Gala.

Xie xie.

Employment in Northern Manitoba

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Having lived in Flin Flon for nearly all of my life, I know just how vibrant and resilient Manitoba's northern communities are. The people of Flin Flon are proud of where they're from, and they want to be able to work and raise their families in the communities where they grew up.

Throughout the past few months, I've been actively meeting with my constituents all over the Flin Flon constituency and listening to their concerns. They're worried about this government's inaction as hundreds of workers face layoffs as a result of Hudbay's 777 mine closure.

* (13:50)

They're worried, as workers lose their jobs at the Port of Churchill as grain shipments have ceased. This government's order to lay 900 workers off at Manitoba Hydro, and their continuous attacks on labour and their refusal to raise the minimum wage have made it clear that they are not on the side of Manitoba workers in the North or in the south, for that matter.

This government needs to understand that bringing good jobs to the North means more than having a plan for tourism, which they do not have; it means giving northern Manitobans concrete supports for economic development beyond a flashy new website. It means investing in health care, education and training, not cuts.

In their Look North plan, the government intentionally excludes the Port of Churchill as a strategic advantage for trade, even though Churchill is Canada's only deep-water arctic port. Northern Manitoba see their communities' potential. It is unfortunate that this government doesn't. It's high time this government take action to help northern Manitoba.

As a proud northern, I will continue to be a strong voice in this Chamber for the people of my constituency of Flin Flon, and our NDP team will continue to fight for the jobs and the future of northern Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

St. Mary's QuickCare Clinic Closure

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): When it comes to quick access to health services, Manitobans have been let down by this Conservative government. Instead of having meaningful dialogue with the community and front-line health professionals, this government took a pass and closed the St. Boniface QuickCare clinic. Manitobans know that that isn't right.

Our former NDP team built several QuickCare clinics across Manitoba to provide non-urgent care close to home for families and for seniors. Staffed by nurse practitioners, the clinics were part of a larger movement towards community-based health care that takes the pressure off hospital emergency rooms. QuickCare clinics have been making improvements in wait times with more than 150,000 patients served across six locations.

Many provinces in Canada, in fact, have turned to community-based health-care options to address their long wait times, and Manitoba's been a leader in implementing this model.

The closure of the St. Mary's clinic represents a step backward in access to health care, especially since no additional service options are being suggested.

QuickCare clinics have proven to be an efficient use of health-care dollars. Because they are built

in converted store fronts and staffed by nurse practitioners, the costs are modest while still providing quality service alongside the larger health system.

Many families in Winnipeg, including my own, have come to rely on the clinics' quick and efficient service. The recent closure leaves a big gap in the delivery of health services in our neighbourhoods.

This government didn't even wait for their own consultant's report or their wait-times task force before making the decision to close this clinic, and now we know the status of all remaining clinics is under review.

This government's actions were ideologically motivated, and that needs to change.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to introduce you to some guests that we have in the gallery.

We have, seated in the public gallery, from HBNI-ITV system out of Fairholme School, 22 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Evelyn Maendel. And this school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Wishart).

On behalf of all honourable members here, we welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health-Care Services Funding Cut Concerns

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Last week, the Premier froze his pay only after taking a 20 per cent pay raise. That is a raise of tens of thousands of dollars a year and taken before he was even one year on the job. And then he headed off to Costa Rica for eight weeks, refusing to use email or keep in touch. It's not fair and it's not right.

It's unfair to the thousands of Manitobans who saw their minimum wage frozen this year. It's unfair to the many workers of this province that the Premier is attacking with threats of ripping up contracts and introducing Filmon Fridays. It's unfair to all Manitobans as he cancels billions of health-care investment for cancer care, community clinics and personal-care-home beds.

Will the Premier change course on his cuts to our health-care system?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the people of Manitoba, I would want to add to your statement, if I might, and offer condolences to the family and the many friends, and the staff here who worked with Craig Waterman, and to offer our best wishes and our condolences to Shelley and to their family as they move forward in life.

Again, Madam Speaker, the factual inaccuracies, I will say, of the member's preamble are many, and so I don't have adequate time to address them. But I would encourage her to understand that we are a new team, a new government that is willing to work together for the best interests of Manitobans. We're dedicated to that task. And I would encourage her to—not to repeat the false assertions, the fibs, the fables and the fabrications that she just put on the record of this place.

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

Health and Education Funding Financial Report Findings

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): It seems like the part-time Premier has work to catch up on now that he's back at the Legislature: two Cabinet meetings in a week and letters galore are being leaked to the press.

Now, leaked letters dated today's date are nice, Madam Speaker, but it leaves the impression that for weeks, if not months, the Premier was not where he needed to be: behind his desk working on Manitoba's interests.

It's unacceptable from a Premier, and it's disrespectful to the people of Manitoba, and it's especially galling that the cuts are coming are informed by reports that the Premier won't make public until he had brandished the knife.

Will he do the honourable thing and release the findings of reports into government finances today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I don't want to let this opportunity pass by, Madam Speaker, to offer our congratulations to one of the newest entrants into the hallowed Curling Hall of Fame of Manitoba, Mr. Norm Gould, who is with us today. It's hard to believe that it was 31 years ago that he and his team—skipped by a former member of this Chamber, my

predecessor, Hugh McFadyen, won the Manitoba Junior Men's Championship, went on to win the national championship, and then that close to winning the world championship. And it's just a sign of the qualities that Mr. Gould and I share of dedicating ourselves to a task, working as part of a team, working with a focused goal and being in a hall of fame.

Congratulations, Mr. Gould. We're proud to have you here with us today.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, other jurisdictions have publicly released reports and studies that provide recommendations in important matters such as health care and education.

For example, the Drummond report in Ontario is done openly and transparently and provided options to the public to consider, not just the Premier.

Instead, the Premier throws copies of the Manitoba reports in his suitcase as he packs his swimsuit and heads off to Costa Rica for eight weeks, refusing to make public the reports that the public deserved to know.

Will the Premier be open and accountable? Will he release these reports today?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, we're committed to and are behaving as we should in respect of openness and accountability, and we'll continue to do that.

What makes us different from our predecessor—and there are many things, Madam Speaker—but one of them is certainly the fact that their record was one of covering up payments, not to mention severance payments to former friends, former supporters; special contracts given out willy-nilly, without tender or competition, to favoured party donors and then covered up for years.

And now the members—their little rump on that side of the House was put there because they refused to demonstrate the very accountability that they are seeing on display by the new government of Manitoba.

* (14:00)

Premier's Schedule Government Responsibility

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): During the flood crisis of 2014, the Premier said he was at a family wedding

in Alberta, but it turned out he was on a two-week vacation in Costa Rica. Then the Premier told reporters he was on the way to North Dakota when, in fact, he was headed off for more holidays in Costa Rica.

The Premier failed to disclose his Costa Rican companies until he got caught. The Premier told us that he stays in touch when he's down at Costa Rica, yet freedom of information requests and his own staff revealed that he doesn't receive documents, doesn't even use email at his 7,700-square-foot hacienda in Costa Rica.

Why should Manitobans believe a word—anything the Premier says?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, I don't mind, I don't mind at all, especially from that member who showed no loyalty whatsoever and no support to his previous leader of his own party. It would be very clear that he would be critical of me, but he was more critical, in fact, of the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), who was his own leader.

So, Madam Speaker, I don't mind the false criticisms. I don't mind the false assertions. I don't mind the factual inexactitudes of the member. I don't mind the fibs, and I don't mind the fables, and I don't mind the fabrications, because we're the new government of Manitoba, and we're going to get the job done for Manitobans because we're going to put politics behind province, something the members opposite can't seem to do.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Swan: Well, tough talk from the man who asked Elections Manitoba to keep his Wellington Crescent mansion a secret from voters in Fort Whyte.

The Premier tried to detail for reporters his time away in 2016, saying that, we did five weeks last year, in total, in Costa Rica. Next trip, the Premier should pack a dictionary and look up the definition of a year: 365 days, 52 weeks, 12 months. And in calendar year 2016, the Premier was away for nearly eight weeks in Costa Rica without email, without receiving new briefing materials necessary to make informed decisions about the province.

How can Manitobans trust this Premier, when he can't even keep his own holidays straight?

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Pallister: I generally don't want to dignify the bottom-dwelling sort of accusations or tone of the

member opposite in his questions, Madam Speaker, but I have to in respect of one thing.

Every member of this Chamber, when they put their name on the ballot, is given the opportunity to disclose where they live and put their residence on the record. When I was in the Fort Whyte by-election, I was running against a gentleman who had been accused of sexual impropriety—something the members may have some familiar with in recent discussions they've had—a sexual predator, a previously convicted sexual predator, okay? As the father of two daughters, I preferred not to have this particular candidate for the office of MLA know where I live, because I was trying to protect my daughters, and I'll continue to do that, and the member should respect that and should not resort to these kinds of questions in this place.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Just like to draw to the attention of the House that the word fibs is also one of those words that is—has a connotation of—similar to the language that we have been prohibiting in the House, and I would urge all members to eliminate the use of that word as well. Thank you.

The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: The Premier's not been forthcoming about his time away, just as he's not been forthcoming about his plans for cuts to, and privatization of, the services Manitoba families depend upon.

Maybe the Premier can avoid the usual kinds of attacks he likes in his next response and answer one simple question for Manitobans today: How much time in the next year, that's 12 months, will he be on holiday away from Manitoba, developing property in Costa Rica and doing whatever it else he does when he's not working for Manitoba families in our province?

Mr. Pallister: Whatever success I've encountered in my life, Madam Speaker, has been as a direct result of my willingness and ability to focus and work as part of a team.

Whether in sports, in business or in politics, I understand about teams and I understand what a team doesn't look like, and Manitobans understand what a team doesn't look like, and that member opposite personifies why that group went down to sullen defeat last spring, Madam Speaker, because he refused to work as part of a team in support of his

own leader or his colleagues, as several of his fellow colleagues who were not elected did.

So, Madam Speaker, I do understand what a good team looks like. I understand how to get results, and Manitobans will judge our government on basis of those results, just as they judged the previous government on the lack thereof.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Health-Care Funding Concerns Programs and Capital Projects

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, Madam Speaker, the fact remains that, while the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) preoccupied with figuring out just how many weeks he'll spend in Costa Rica this year, he seems unaware of the impacts that his cuts are having on the health-care services that Manitobans rely on: cuts to personal care homes, cuts to CancerCare, cuts to community clinics. But these are only the cuts that we know about.

Will this minister release today an actual list of projects that have been cut from the health capital budget?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I understand why members opposite are preoccupied on this topic. Certainly, we know that the former premier, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), would never have dared to have leave the country when he was the leader with members like Minto in his caucus ready to start a rebellion.

We have no such problems in [*inaudible*]

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, this Premier and this minister's refusal to just come clean with Manitobans about their plans for our health-care system is distressing, to say the least.

Manitobans spend thousands of hours working to come up with plans to build health-care projects in their communities. They invest millions of their own dollars in these projects, but the Premier won't share with them what his plans are for their cuts. Now we learn that the minister is demanding millions in cuts from the WRHA.

Will this minister come clean and tell the House exactly what programs that Manitobans count on that are on the chopping block now?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, we know what the member says is untrue. We know that they made many promises about projects that they never intended to fulfill, that they never put any money aside for, that they never actually had any resources for those programs.

I think the question that needs to be asked of the member is why, when they were in government, did they tell these communities to raise money when they never intended to actually support them as a government, Madam Speaker?

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, health care is Manitobans' first priority, but this Premier (Mr. Pallister) is out of touch with Manitobans and his first priority appears to be himself, taking a 20 per cent pay raise, taking off for Costa Rica, rather than making those important investments in our health-care system. In fact, we've now learned that the minister is ordering RHAs across the province to make at least \$130 million in cuts this coming year.

When will this minister reveal which positions will be cut first? Nurses in The Pas? Doctors in Brandon? Health-care aides in Winnipeg? And will the Premier take responsibility and acknowledge that his cuts will negatively impact patient care?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm saddened that this member would have, again, go to the area of personal attacks. It seems that that's all he has left, and I understand that the government had many, many days of personal attacks on each other prior to the last election. I would have hoped that the result of the election, now almost a year ago, would have been instructive to the members opposite that Manitobans aren't interested in those kind of personal attacks. It's time for them to move on for them and start actually focusing on the issues that Manitobans are concerned about.

Education Funding Property Tax Increases

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Madam Speaker, it was disappointing to see the Minister of Education go around before his education funding announcement telling everybody that it wouldn't be austerity. Then he made his announcement, and school divisions and parents not only rejected it but said yes, that's austerity.

* (14:10)

Now we're seeing that school divisions are being forced to raise our property taxes. Now that we've seen those taxes go up as a result of the Premier's austerity plan, will the Minister of Education admit that he has, in fact, cut education funding?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I'd like to thank the member for the question, but he started with a inappropriate statement. We have increased funding for K-to-12 education in this province by \$13 million from previous years. That makes it record funding.

We are certainly working with the school divisions, and I have encouraged the school divisions to have a look at their bottom lines and look at their efficiency. We know from past experience that putting dollars into education doesn't necessarily guarantee you better results. We're interested in better results.

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

Mr. Kinew: The minister's talking about nominal dollars, so at best that's a nominal answer. We have to pay for things in real dollars, so we want real answers. That's an economics joke.

School divisions' costs are going up by more than 1 per cent this year, so when you adjust for inflation, the Premier has actually cut education budgets.

Will the minister confirm for this House, in real-world terms, that he has made cuts, cutting important services that parents and students rely on and breaking one of the PC election promises?

Mr. Wishart: Thank the member for the question.

I certainly want to confirm again that \$13 million additional was put into the K-to-12 system. Apparently, the member doesn't respect taxpayers' dollars very closely, because that is additional dollars.

I certainly want to work with the school divisions in this province and the teachers in this province to make sure that we get the best value for our taxpayer dollars and invest it in education, something the previous government didn't seem too focused on.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: I am concerned about taxpayer dollars. That's why I was concerned when divisions across the province started proposing property tax increases anywhere from 3 to 5 and a half per cent as a result of the de facto cuts to education funding.

Now, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) may think that he'll escape the blame because he's off-loaded the burden of raising taxes to the school divisions, but we know that taxpayers are connecting the dots. They know that their higher tax bills are a result of these education cuts.

Will the Premier commit to reversing course and increasing provincial funds for schools and teachers by more than the rate of inflation next year?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

I am certainly aware that taxpayers are—know where the dollars come from. In fact, they remember very well when somebody went door to door, and knocked on those doors, and told them they weren't going to raise taxes and then did. So I think that that is why we see such a reduced size of the NDP caucus across the way, simply because Manitoba taxpayers know who value their dollars.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a new question.

Education System Need for New Schools

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): The Premier has not rolled back the PST; therefore, the overall tax burden on Manitobans is higher under his administration than it ever was under the NDP. True story.

But what's concerning is the lack of new schools. Where are the new schools? The Brandon School Division chair, Kevan Sumner, told the Brandon Sun—*[interjection]*—the province is moving towards—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —hallway education because of the government's failure to support building new schools. *[interjection]* The member of Brandon East is asking where the new school goes. It goes near a causeway on the south side of the city that is currently a park.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: How can the minister commit to keeping class sizes small in areas with increasing enrolment when he won't build any new schools?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Well, Madam Speaker, that's another swing and a miss when it comes to factual accuracy, and we just want to take the opportunity to set the record straight for that member.

Manitobans don't forget, even if that member does, that it was the NDP that went door to door, said that they would not raise the PST, did so. But let's not forget that they first widened the retail sales tax, then they increased it.

Our fundamental commitment to Manitobans is: Manitobans don't pay too little tax, they pay too much; more than their western neighbours, more than most Canadians. We'll address that; they never did. It's not just about money, it's about value. We'll get value for Manitobans' dollars.

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

Mr. Kinew: The Finance Minister has his scissors out, but his plan doesn't make any sense.

Consider one school division in Winnipeg, the Winnipeg School Division, who are currently spending hundreds of thousands of dollars per year busing students from an area where they need a new school. If they would spend the money on the capital side, they would see the savings on the operating side to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. And that's just one school division.

When will the minister change his plan and build more schools so that school divisions can spend more money—more of our money where it belongs: teaching kids in the classroom?

Mr. Friesen: Well, the member should understand that just because he repeats it, it doesn't make it true.

Now, in Manitoba, that government—when they were the government they sharply increased capital spending, but it didn't equal into better results for Manitoba students.

We're talking about making good investments for all Manitobans over time. This member would like Manitobans to believe that it's just about spending more, but we all know that their record was spending more and getting less.

We'll do better for Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: Well, again, they promised that their announcement for education funding wouldn't be austerity. They made the announcement; it was austerity. I haven't seen an announcement so mishandled since the Oscars.

It's also going to impact the budget of these divisions, who will have to spend more money on transportation every year that they don't get a new school.

And our economy misses out, too, when we fail to invest in capital spending. If we miss another construction season, we miss the opportunity to put more Manitobans to work with good-paying jobs.

Will the minister pull a U-turn on his plan for no new schools and announce a new school in northwest Winnipeg and Brandon in this year's budget?

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: Sounds like someone gave that member the wrong envelope, but I'll seek to set him straight.

Madam Speaker, I feel like Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride*, where he keeps saying, I don't think that word means what you think it means.

Madam Speaker, the word he uses means meanness and bitterness. Manitobans were very bitter after the pill they were made to swallow when they first promised not to, and then raised the PST.

We'll do more for all of Manitobans, but we will not accept their use of that word. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Diabetes Prevention Plan Funding Commitment

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I note that the Premier has written to the Prime Minister to say that he's ready to sign on to the health-care accord, but that Manitoba needs additional funding for diabetes, for indigenous health and for kidney disease.

These are important funding areas for which we have advocated. But before we support this plan, we would like answers to three questions.

My first question: Will the Premier provide an assurance that, if received, some of the funding for diabetes will go to the implementation of a focused and effective plan to prevent diabetes?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, as you are quite aware, and I believe members opposite are quite aware, we have been endeavouring to implement a very clear and focused plan to protect Manitobans—and all Canadians, in fact—against federal Liberal health cuts.

* (14:20)

I would encourage the members of the NDP to join with us and support us in this effort. I would encourage them not to put their heads in the sand for partisan purposes, but, rather, to speak up against something which is clearly going to jeopardize the sustainability of our health-care system nationwide.

And I, frankly, resent the position the Liberal caucus in Manitoba has chosen to take of representing Ottawa to Manitoba rather than representing Manitobans' views to Ottawa.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member of River Heights, on a supplementary question.

Indigenous Health Care Suicide Prevention Funding

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, we stand up strong for Manitoba. I thank the Premier for his reply.

I'd like to remind the minister and the Premier that the Liberals wrote a 67-page report on diabetes and its prevention, which showed that the government can save a lot of money through preventing diabetes.

My second question relates to the area of indigenous health. Suicides are a major issue which have a devastating effect on many First Nations communities.

My question is this: If additional funding for indigenous health is granted, will there be specific funding to go toward implementing a focused and effective plan for the prevention of suicides?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, while I appreciate that the member for River Heights wants to negotiate the CHT on the floor of the Legislature—and I actually do appreciate it, because it's as close as any Liberal in Canada has come to actually negotiating with Manitoba when it comes to the CHT—it probably isn't the appropriate place.

I would encourage him to speak to the premier in Ottawa, his friend, Prime Minister Trudeau, to actually ensure that there's real negotiations

happening with Ottawa and Manitoba that would also look at a long-term, sustainable solution to health-care funding, Madam Speaker.

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

Mental and Brain Health Federal Funding Commitment

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, we are standing up for Manitobans and the need to make sure that we are effective in keeping people healthy. I thank the minister for his reply.

One of the important categories the federal government is keen to fund is mental and brain health. There is a great deal of money that can be saved in health care by preventing problems, as we've shown in our brain health report last fall.

My question to the minister is: Will he commit that some of the federal funding for health care will go towards implementing a focused and effective plan for preventing brain and mental illness?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Member of the media asked me the other day, in respect of the issue of federal support for health care, if I didn't agree that the federal government had won in their negotiations.

There weren't really any negotiations, and certainly the federal government didn't win in respect of trying to pick off provinces one at a time, making special side offers to Liberal premiers to buy them off in terms of the negotiation around something as important as health care. Surely we deserve better than that. Canadians deserved a negotiation and a discussion between the Prime Minister and the premiers. They did not get one. Instead, they got a my-way-or-the-highway approach.

So, I remember what it was like in the 1990s when the federal government at that time, of which the member was a part, gutted the transfers for health care. And I remember the price that was paid by front-line people in that respect, principally patients and people seeking care, seeking test results, seeking procedures to be done, who had to wait, who had to go without, who in some cases chose to go elsewhere and in some cases died as a consequence.

I remember that, and I see the situation that's emerging now as dangerous. So I would encourage the member to change his views and to try to take a stand for Manitobans, and I'd encourage the NDP to do the same. We most certainly, on this side of the

House, are standing up for Manitobans and Canadians for a sustainable health-care system.

Children's Advocate Expansion of Role

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Madam Speaker, the government has a comprehensive agenda to improve the lives of children in care.

In the last session, we saw The Protecting Children (Information Sharing) Act pass. Building on that legislation, the minister has introduced a bill with respect to the Office of the Children's Advocate.

Can the minister update the House on this bill?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Thank you very much for the question.

This—and I'm very proud to introduce the legislation that's before us. This is something that, in my opinion, should've been done a long time ago; the Hughes inquiry, brought down over three years ago. What this does, as legislation, it does a number of things. It enhances the role of the advocate in terms of the services they'll be support of. It adds accountability and transparency and adds a number of the recommendations, over 11 recommendations that—put forth in the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry by Justice Hughes.

We encourage all members opposite to fast-track this legislation, stand with us to provide more accountability through the Children's Advocate.

Thank you.

Community Places Program Funding Freeze

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, when this government's reckless agenda of cuts and austerity hits in Manitoba communities, the people who live there are hurt. I cannot understand why this government would have chosen, in this current fiscal year, to effectively eliminate a very successful program which has been operating for decades, has survived multiple changes of government in this province. And yet, that's exactly what they did.

Can the government please explain why they froze the money—all the money—for the Community Places Program this year?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, it's always entertaining for the questions from the member from

Wolseley, but his previous government that he was a part of were very loose with the money, and they spent a lot of money with no results.

Our government is about getting results, so we're reviewing all our programs to make sure that there is value for the money of the taxpayers of Manitoba.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, Madam Speaker, that's a very tragic answer. The Community Places Program was designed so local communities that were short on funds could actually contribute their time and have that count as an in-kind donation so they'd be able to access funding to fix up their community in some way. And the myth that this government has no money is revealed in their own documentation. I would refer the member to page 30 of his own budget which says the Premier's additional salary last year was \$56,000; this year it's \$78,000. For ministers, it was a \$14,000 increase.

Will the minister re-allocate his increase back into the Community Places Program?

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, the free range of false assertions continues with the member from Wolseley.

Manitoba communities will continue to build and they will continue to develop, and—alongside with the provincial government as we seek value for money and we review all programs and make sure that Manitobans come first, not like the NDP, who put themselves ahead of Manitobans.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: Madam Speaker, Manitobans can see perfectly clearly who it is that comes first in this province. It is that minister; it is all the other ministers; and it is the Premier. If they have forgotten the size of their salary increases, I have them available here. Let's table them—three copies—showing quite clearly a \$22,000 increase for the Premier this year. I will add it's been locked in now, under their so-called salary freeze, for four years: \$14,000 increase for each and every minister.

Manitobans are asking themselves very clearly: Who is it that comes first in this province? It doesn't appear to be Manitobans; it appears to be the front bench of this government.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the soft lob question from the newly married member from Wolseley. What I have to say to him is this: The NDP members opposite got into balanced budget law, took away the provisions that caused them to have to take salary reductions when they ran excessively large deficits, which is the only thing they were exceptionally good at doing. They gave themselves a 20 per cent increase in salary when they did that.

At the same time as they were doing so, they were raising the taxes on Manitobans in their own homes. After they had promised not to, the members opposite were giving themselves a bonus in salary, but that wasn't enough for them, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Who came first for them? They introduced a vote tax and they started taxing Manitobans so they could pay themselves and their political party even more money.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans know which citizens of this great country had to endure the greatest—the greatest—increase in personal tax load of any Canadians: it was Manitobans, because that group—well, actually, it was a larger group—then put themselves ahead of all Manitobans. We're with Manitobans; we're protecting Manitobans' best interest.

Collective Bargaining Agreements Wage and Pension Concerns

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, on April 13th, just days before the election, the Premier promised Manitobans that he wouldn't open collective agreements. He said he wouldn't re-open collective agreements because the honour of the Crown was at stake.

Now, just before Christmas, we learned that the Premier actually plans to introduce legislation that may very well open collective agreements and reduce salaries and pensions. Workers need to know this Premier's plans for cuts to wages and pensions.

Will the Premier table that legislation today, or will he keep threatening workers?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Well, once again, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to

have the opportunity to put some accurate statements on the record.

We were very clear. After we became government we assessed the damage that the NDP party had done to Manitoba, a billion dollars, almost, of a deficit they left with Manitobans after they said they were heading in the right direction. We were very clear with Manitobans that the path ahead would not be one of misrepresentations to Manitoba, but it would be about a clear understanding of where we need to go as a province, and putting the efforts and making the strides necessary to go there. Labour is part of this conversation. We welcome the conversations that we've had and we find many points of agreement. We know that the work is for all of us to do.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Lindsey: Madam Speaker, the Premier takes a 20 per cent raise, spends two months a year in Costa Rica, and then he picks a fight with working people, threatening the constitutionally protected right of workers to collective bargaining.

It's not fair, Madam Speaker, and it's not right. The Premier should not take a 20 per cent raise and then turn around and impose wage freezes and cuts on working Manitobans.

I ask the Premier today: will you—will the Premier return his 20 per cent raise to Manitobans?

Mr. Friesen: This member repeats the same misstatements that his predecessors did earlier today. Those members all understand what the balanced budget provisions were set to do. They understand that, when they failed to make their targets, they finally erased with their eraser any reference in that legislation to ministers taking salary reductions. They entrenched those salary increases for themselves, didn't give those things back.

Madam Speaker, we won't do that; we'll be accountable.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Lindsey: I didn't hear him say he was giving it back.

Madam Speaker, the Pallister government has consistently kept their agenda hidden from Manitobans. Constantly surprising Manitoba workers isn't what is acting in good faith. Manitoba workers

need to know what this government's plans are, and they deserve to be treated as equals.

Will this minister stop disrespecting workers and introduce his legislation today so that workers can get on with their lives? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Thank you to the member for the question, because it allows me to speak about respect, respect that we all have on this side of the House for integrity and for the relationship we have with Manitoba working families.

Now, the previous administration went to the door; walked up to the door, knocked, looked working families of our province right in the eye and they said we promise we won't raise your taxes, Madam Speaker. And then they jacked up the taxes of working men and women on their benefits at work that they purchased to protect their family, to protect their children. And they jacked up the taxes—that's how much disrespect they had for working families—on their home insurance, the very homes where they walked and knocked, they jacked up the taxes on those homes and the people in them had to pay multiple—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —more in PST as well.

But then they went further. Madam Speaker, they actually broke the law that protected Manitobans' rights to have a vote on that tax hike, went to court and 25 or 32 or whatever of them thought they were more important than all Manitobans, and they got what they deserved. They aren't—and we know who the most important are in this province: working Manitobans and their families.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Bell's Purchase of MTS

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

The background of the petition is as follows:

Manitoba telephone system is currently a fourth cellular carrier in use by Manitobans along with the big three national carriers: Telus, Rogers and Bell.

In Toronto, with only the big three national companies controlling the market, the average five-gigabyte unlimited monthly cellular package is \$117 as compared to Winnipeg where MTS charges \$66 for the same package.

Losing MTS will mean less competition and will result in higher costs for all cellphone packages in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government do all that is possible to prevent the Bell takeover of MTS and preserve a more competitive cellphone market so that cellular bills for Manitobans do not increase unnecessarily.

This petition was signed by many fine Manitobans.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, today we are going to proceed with Interim Supply.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Interim Supply this afternoon.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the chair.

* (14:40)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We have before us—our consideration to two resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

The first resolution respecting operation expenditures for Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that the sum not exceeding \$4,700,000,000—okay, sorry.

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$4,700,000,000, being approximately 35 per cent of the total amount authorized by The Appropriation Act, 2016, to be voted as set forth in Part A, Operating Expenditures of the 2016 Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2018.

Does the Minister of Finance have any opening comments?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Yes, I do. I welcome the debate this afternoon on Bill 8, The Interim Appropriation Act. I look forward to the discussion that we'll have this afternoon around the amounts that are proposed for appropriation and I would look for the support from all members of this House to ensure that government has the ability to continue to operate into this new part of the new 2017-2018 fiscal year in advance of a date at which the main appropriation would be passed.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the official opposition Finance critic have any opening comments?

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Mr. Deputy Chair, we're debating a bill on Interim Supply today because the government simply is unprepared to govern.

The Finance Minister had a clear choice to bring in a budget at the beginning of March when we came back into session. He chose not to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Finance Minister is simply unprepared, not ready to proceed with a budget, and so we find ourselves today forced to debate an Interim Supply bill in which—certainly reflects absence of government preparation, absence of government planning, absence of government priorities beyond the simple austerity agenda that the Finance Minister constantly talks about, constantly threatens the people of Manitoba with, and yet here we are today, several days into the March session, and we find instead a Finance Minister unprepared for the tasks at hand.

But we understand why that is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We understand that he has a Premier who he's not been able to get in touch with for several months who was simply not around to discuss with him some of the budget measures and the implications of those budgets, and so the Finance Minister, in addition to his own unpreparedness, has

not had a Premier available in order to talk about the things that are essential to the people of Manitoba.

Now, the consequences of this intolerable delay are many and they're manifold. The first of these, of course, relates, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the anxiety and uncertainty that the Finance Minister continually continues to create for Manitoba families. Those folks today who are employed are wondering whether they're going to have a job after April 11th. They're going to—uncertain whether they're going to be able to pay their mortgage, uncertain whether they'll be able to send their kids to post-secondary education, uncertain whether there'll be a child-care-centre space available to them, uncertain whether the programs and services that they rely on in our health-care system will be available to them.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Finance Minister has created a level of uncertainty which is probably unmatched in Manitoba politics, and this is something that causes, as I said, great anxiety, great uncertainty, for the people of Manitoba and represents a significant failure on the part of the Finance Minister who walks around telling Manitobans to get ready for very, very tough measures, and yet here he is, on this day, forcing the House to debate an Interim Supply bill when he should have been coming forward with a budget right from the start.

The second consequence of his inability to be prepared, Mr. Deputy Speaker, simply relates not only to the anxiety and the uncertainty that I referred to earlier, but also speaks to the impact on the Manitoba economy, going forward.

He well knows, despite the misinformation that he constantly puts on the table, Manitoba, when he came into government, had among the lowest unemployment rates in the country and had the best projected growth rates and job creation rates in the country as well. That's no longer true, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a result of his inaction, and that's represented by this Interim Supply bill today, Manitoba now is starting to fall behind other provinces in Canada, others who have taken on the task, the challenge, of investing in good jobs, creating certainty for their citizens, the Finance Minister has done anything but that and has decided instead to create significant uncertainty and has a profound impact on the Manitoba economy.

My friend from Wolseley, in question period today, talked about the very important Neighbourhoods Alive! program. It was unfortunate

that the Finance Minister was unprepared to answer that question today, and so we had the Infrastructure Minister, who doesn't actually understand the Community Places Program, get up, give a—*[interjection]*—yes, it was, as my friend from Minto says, it was pretty clear, given absolutely stunningly inexact and—answer to that question at the very time that Manitoba families and Manitoba communities are relying on a very critical program to continue to build community capacity.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member's time is up.

Questions

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is open for questions. Is there any—the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Can the Finance Minister tell this House today why has this government delayed the release of their budget?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): The NDP government, in the fall of 2015, spent money. They incurred expense. They submitted receipts. They called the exercise a prebudget consultation. In fact, when they came back in the dying days of the NDP government, there was no budget to produce.

We announced last week that this government will produce a budget on April the 11th. What has proceeded that topic and what that member skirts over is the fact that we proudly say that we have had the most comprehensive prebudget consultative exercise in the history of the province of Manitoba. We won't apologize to that. We will not apologize for all the Manitobans who had their say in the lead-up to this budget that we will deliver on that date and show Manitobans the progress that we have made, progress that they were unequal to make year after year for 16 and a half years.

Mr. Allum: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not sure what question the minister was answering—

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview first.

Mr. Allum: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Déjà vu all over again.

I'm not sure what question the minister was asking—answering there, so I'm going to ask him again.

This is a matter of critical public interest. The government knew very well that the first day of this session was going to—of our return to session was going to be March 1st. The minister had an obligation to the people of Manitoba to be prepared to enter this House on March 1st with a new budget.

So I'm asking him again: Could he please tell this House and, by extension, the people of Manitoba, why he did not release a budget on March 1st? Why was he critically unprepared?

Mr. Friesen: This member at every opportunity demonstrates to all the members in this place that he fails to get this exercise right. He does not understand what the purpose of this debate is this afternoon. He cannot constrain his enthusiasm for false information. I thought that maybe the time away would do him some good and produce in him a more pleasant disposition. I was wrong.

*(14:50)

We can have this afternoon in this place a debate about this appropriation, or we can have this process dissolve into the silly name-calling that he always wants to go to. Let the record show that the very first statement he made this afternoon was another unfounded attack.

My question to that minister is, did his government bring a budget on the first day of every session for the last 16 and a half years? Because what my record shows is that there were Interim Supply bills and special warrants year after year after year. I draw this member's short attention to 2015-16, and I note an interim appropriation act passed on June the 24th. Does he remember that day?

Now, he said for a government to pass an interim appropriation act was evidence of unpreparedness. His government passed that on June the 24th, 2015. But it goes on. They passed a special warrant in the same year on March the 25th. Now, he said that any government that brings an Interim Appropriation Act is a government that is unprepared. Was his government unprepared on March the 25th, 2015, because they didn't bring a budget that was sufficient for every eventuality in the case that the budget should not pass within the first month of sitting? The member is being absurd.

Twenty fourteen, his government brought an interim appropriation on March the 27th. I turn his own words back to him: Was the government so unprepared—to use his language. Was it such an

intolerable delay—to use his language. The member should reflect that any charge that he brings on this government that has already committed on the second day of sitting to bring a budget in the next four weeks is a charge that he lays upon himself.

The member descends into this absurd this—that-was-then and this-is-now kind of debate. I would prefer a different kind of debate this afternoon. I believe the other members of this House would too. I believe that members of the Liberal Party would like a different debate.

I note, time and time again, how that member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) starts the afternoon. And then the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) actually asked the questions that the member for Fort Garry-Riverview—as the critic—should have been asking, substantive questions that reflect on the bill in front of us.

So we have a choice because this is all about choices. We can do this the way that the member for Fort Garry wants to do this. It will burn up a lot of time. We have some very serious people in this Chamber. We are well served by the Clerk's office and their representatives. Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, you're in your place and I notice everyone else is in their places.

Let us demonstrate to Manitobans this afternoon that we can do better than that discourse. Let us demonstrate that their government and ours has brought an interim appropriation act. That member knows full well that had we dropped a budget on the table on March 1st his government wouldn't have given safe passage for that bill in the next three weeks. He understands that on April the 1st we are in a new expenditure year. Government does not have authority to spend. Government must seek by appropriation authority to spend: Part A; in Part B the member will know he does not require Loan Act authority because that bridges years. But he will know that we have liabilities. We have some multi-funding-year requests that we much—must cover off today.

So the member must understand the implication of the line that he's taking. Essentially he is saying, if he intends to roadblock this process, he does not want civil servants to be paid. He does not want the government to fulfill its contract obligations, and anything that he says about intolerable delay he knows reflects sadly on his own government's record that brought interim appropriation acts. He will understand that interim appropriation acts happen

when we're in session. He—but they brought special warrants, as well, and if that member is following debate, he'll understand that special warrants are brought in the case that we're not in sitting.

I would reflect on the fact also that their government favoured special warrants, why? Well, because the House wasn't in session and they hoped that the opposition to whatever they were doing will be less.

Why was their government not in session more often? Because they didn't favour longer sitting days. Those were agreements and negotiations that we had to fight for years to get. We now go from being one of the provincial legislatures with the least amount of sitting dates to one of the provincial legislatures—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Allum: Let the record show, and Hansard won't quite convey, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the emotion that the Finance Minister just displayed. We've quite clearly touched a nerve with him. He wasn't able to get a budget prepared on time for the people of Manitoba to reflect on and to digest and to understand and to fully appreciate the full implications of what he has in store for them. And so, instead, he puts forward an Interim Supply bill to make up for his own dallying, his own delays, his own procrastination, and his own preparedness.

We're sorry for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that he's not prepared, that he came into the House on March 1st unable or unwilling—or both—to come clean with the people of Manitoba about what his plans are for them. So we wanted to talk about these questions that are involved in his Interim Supply bill today, but let the record show that he's a little unnerved by questions around the very motion that he's brought forward to this House today.

So let me ask him, then, if he can—at all—appreciate the negative impact this delay will have on the programs and organizations that rely on government funding. Does he appreciate the uncertainty that he's creating, and the anxiety that he's creating by this intolerable delay?

Mr. Friesen: Let the record show that the entreaties I have made to the member to Fort Garry-Riverview to centre his questions and debate on the actual substance of the legislation that is in front of us this afternoon have gone unheeded. He wants to have a discussion that I don't wish in this Chamber. I'd like

it to be on the substance—the content of the interim appropriation request.

But let the record also show that, when that member uses the words like government unprepared and intolerable delay, I remind him that, in 2010–March the 24th, his government brought an appropriation interim act. In 2009, he brought an interim appropriation act in March the 26th. He brought a special warrant in 2008, on March the 12th. He brought a special warrant on March the 14th, 2007. He brought an interim appropriation act on June the 14th, 2007.

The list goes on and on. What's my point, Mr. Chair? My point is that he's somehow trying to weave a tortured narrative, here, that somehow for a budget to come 20 days after a sitting date is somehow something gone awry. He doesn't realize that this House has gone into sitting months—multiple weeks in advance of when the House used to come into sitting.

In the first year I was elected—in 2011—I share that year of election with the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum). Does that member remember that we sat in a truncated fall sitting of possibly nine days before the House rose? Does he remember how long we had to prod at that government to recall the House in the spring? It may have been mid-April before we sat in that year. And I challenge him to use the resources at his disposal—look up that date now and prove me wrong. Look up that date. Tell me if this House sat on March the 1st in the year after we were elected.

Well, he knows the answers to those things, and so do I. This House sits now earlier than it used to. The member for Minto (Mr. Swan) knows that. It took considerable effort to accomplish that goal. As a matter of fact, there are former members of this Legislature, including Steve Ashton and Dave Chomiak, who said these rules were a long time coming. We sit earlier, we will deliver a budget earlier than they did most years. And all Manitobans can look forward to the accountability that comes with that budget. A real budget. And not the fake kind of document that that desperate government dropped on the table in the dying days of their mandate and said, well, we know it doesn't really look like a budget, but we'll call it one, we'll keep it really quiet and we'll see if any Manitobans notice. Well, guess what? They noticed.

We're proud of the work that we've done in the time since we've been elected, proud of the outreach

that every one of the members of government has done in their own jurisdictions. We're proud of the in-person meetings that we held in every—in multiple communities. We're proud of the online submission tool that we developed that has garnished an awful lot of attention and good submissions from Manitobans. We're proud of the portal that we developed for civil service to be able to have an identity-undisclosed manner in order to feed ideas into government; ideas that, for too long, they were prohibited from giving because they feared reprisals from their bosses. Their general talked about that culture. We favour a different culture. We favour a different approach.

*(15:00)

Let this afternoon's debate be about this document. Let's have a debate about these numbers. Let's talk about putting these things in place. Let's understand, though, the dialectic, here. We either have the silly discussion that the member of Fort Garry wants to do with all of his accusations and various unfounded assertions, or we can have one here that puts money in place and expenditure authority to allow the government to pay bills, cover contracts and deal with environmental liabilities that have accrued in places like the member for Thompson (Mr. Bindle), where he represents. So let's have that discussion this afternoon. I implore that member again.

Mr. Allum: Given the—it's pretty obvious that, given the length of the minister's answers here, that no one is trying to procrastinate and delay more—more—than the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen).

And the reason for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I've—invite you to allow us to have the floor so that we can continue to ask questions of the Finance Minister here—but the reason why he's having five-minute answers is because he has no legislative agenda. There's nothing for us to debate in this House because he has nothing prepared.

He tells us earlier, he gives these lectures to this side of the House about special warrants. I have an order-in-council here dated February 8th, 2017. He's already—has his own special warrant for funds. This is how unprepared he is. He's already needed a special warrant and now an Interim Supply procedure because he either doesn't know or he can't make up his mind just how harsh the medicine it is that he has for the people of Manitoba.

So I want to ask him now, one of the things—one of the rare things he's done, because he's been in hiding more than the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has been over the past several months—but one of the things that he did last year was to contract with a private sector consulting group to do a—what he calls a value-for-money audit.

Will he release that document to the House today?

Mr. Friesen: So maybe the reason that the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) has not been able to see me more often is because I'm at the Legislature every day. So I don't know where that would put him, but he's reflecting on my presence here. It must mean that he has some knowledge. I can only suggest that he's not here if he hasn't been able to see me, because I can tell him that I spend a considerable amount of time, and that's an understatement.

In the Cabinet room, in my Finance Minister's office, stakeholder meetings continue even now in the middle of our Estimates process, even in the lead-up to the delivery of the budget on April the 11th. That's the work that I've been at. That's the work that the entire PC caucus has been at, and we'll continue to be at that work because it matters and we all signed up for this job to work hard and we'll continue to do so.

But I want the member to make the correlation between the false assertions he puts on the record and the duration of my answers. If he wants to get at the substance of his document I guarantee for him that I can keep my answers more brief. But if he puts six—assertions on the record that aren't accurate, I will use my time to clear up those things. I will not let those inaccuracies stand.

Now, perhaps it is the member's idea this afternoon that somehow he can get under my skin, that he can goad me. Well, he can continue on that path. We can have this discussion. I know one—I know no one more easily goaded than that member, but I'll answer the questions.

He asked a question about the KPMG report. I guess, first of all, the preamble to this answer is that, well, that government obviously trusted no one. They didn't trust themselves; they didn't trust each other. They didn't trust Manitobans because too often their prebudget consultations are what masqueraded for that, were truncated. They happened only in their

own backyards of reducing amount of members year after year and they didn't produce results.

The exercise that we've engaged in is sincere, is robust and it has produced results. There's great advice out there by Manitobans, Manitobans in industry, in business, in the private sector, in the non-profit sector, people who are running our non-profits, our arts organizations, our sports organizations, building 'capass' in the province, putting money at work, meeting payroll. We care about their opinions and we have engaged them. We have endeavoured to hear from them. It's a listening exercise.

So now I want to understand the member's position. So is he saying there's no—there's no good advice that could come outside of Cabinet? I disagree with that. Is he saying that somehow it's not fair? Well, it is fair. It was a tendered contract. So the contract itself was fully measured and anyone could apply to assist the government in that way.

Was it a departure from the norm? Well, indeed, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, it was not, because it seems that the previous administration did the same exercise. I believe at the time it may have been Deloitte, but I could stand to be corrected, that they contracted with in 1999 two reviews. And the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) will remember it was a Deloitte report, produced on November 19th—not the report, mind you—simply the press release that disclosed to Manitobans the existence of a third-party contract.

And what was it intending to do? Oh, I know, it was to outline 10 steps the government was taking to address a fiscal situation. Well, imagine that, including a health review, look at that, and a financial management and accountability review, all of those they undertook. The difference is it would seem that history would reflect that they didn't learn the lessons or listened to their third party because they continued on their same path of over-expenditure, which really is the risk to all of Manitobans, whereas we commit to a different path to listen to those Manitobans who have consented to give us their opinion, both those and KPMG, but, more importantly, all of Manitobans across this great landscape of a province that we call home.

Those suggestions, that good advice, will be contained in the budget that we'll be standing to deliver on April the 11th.

Mr. Allum: Will the Finance Minister release his value for audit reports today or—and, if not today, then when?

Mr. Friesen: This member is learning. He's learning that if he doesn't contain in his preamble a number of inaccurate statements or accusations that we can actually get down to business.

Okay, so here's what we have told all Manitobans, that we will be accountable for the advice that we have received, that's our pledge. We've said in the hall, we've said to the media, more importantly we've said it to all Manitobans.

We will continue to act on the advice that we have received from the KPMG report, two reports in essence, the fiscal framework review and also the health accountability review. The first of those, of course, reported both phase 1 and phase 2 and received as advice to government, and then, of course, the Health review. We will determine the exact manner and form in which that advice will be made public to Manitobans.

But getting to the subject of accountability, by all means, to answer the member's question, we'll be accountable to Manitobans for the advice that we received. Contrast that with the former government's view contracting at some times at some points for advice to government and not even disclosing to Manitobans the existence of the report for which they were spending hundreds of thousands of dollars.

I remember one instance in particular where in a committee stage the minister finally divulged the existence of an expensive report, and when asked if he had actually done anything with it, I think all he was able to say is that it was collecting dust on a shelf.

Our first commitment to Manitobans, this report is not collecting dust on the shelves, advice to government will be received. We have to fix the finances. We'll use any good opinion that the member for Fort Garry-Riverview can refer us to. Number two, we'll be accountable for the advice we received.

Mr. Allum: When will the Finance Minister release the value-for-money audit? When?

Mr. Friesen: I guess I'll give him his answer. But not until I say then, why was it—if he is so insistent now on a date, why was it that in the past his government when actually undertaking to contract with third parties at times did not even disclose the

existence of the aforementioned contract to Manitobans who were paying the freight on that report. And only when it was disclosed—I think actually, even now, I think there may be a report or two that the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) could sign off on. I wonder if he'll do so and actually allow Manitobans to review some of the reports that sat on the shelf and collected dust, reports that they did not actually even acknowledge existed.

The member wants the report and we've said as well that we will be responsible for Manitobans for their advice that we've received. We'll determine the exact manner and form and date on which that could be released.

I assure him that the budget date is coming sooner rather than later, a commitment that we make that they could not always make when they were in government. So the advice will be received. We will show Manitobans in the budget how we have used that advice and the advice of all Manitobans and then will disclose subsequently the content of that advice.

*(15:10)

Mr. Allum: You know, it makes me wonder if my microphone's not working properly, because the minister seems unable to answer a very simple question: When will he release the value-for-money audit? If he needs 15 minutes now to run to his office to get it, we can have a little bit of a recess, here. He can do that. We know he's given it to his outside consultants that he's hired. So we're asking him, today, so that Manitobans can have a complete and comprehensive debate around his budget measures.

We're asking him to tell the people of Manitoba here, it's okay to—if he wants to not answer my questions but, on the behalf of the people of Manitoba—behalf of the people of Manitoba—will he simply come clean and tell us the date upon which he will release, in full, the-value for-money audit?

Mr. Friesen: So the member for Fort Garry-Riverview understands that advice can be sought by a sitting government, and the advice is taken and it's contemplated and it's acted upon. He knows that process. The reason he knows the process is that it somehow—it's not somehow a principle that exists only right now at this moment in time; it's a principle widely regarded by governments that they will solicit for advice, will hold that advice for a while, and then they will use the advice, or choose not to, or a combination of that, and then they'll disclose in a form the manner of the information they've collected.

Now, the member knows that. The member knows that his own track record as a government wasn't good when it came to either identifying the actual existence of reports or disclosing them. The member is trying to go down a path, here, where he says somehow, perhaps this government won't be accountable for the advice they've received. Well, I can—I want to disabuse him of any such notions. We will be accountable. We understand that Manitobans are the most important. We understand it's their money. That's why we favour cleaning up those finances, because we understand that it is not our money, it's the money—it's Manitobans' money. That's why an almost billion-dollar expenditure left unaddressed by the previous government must be addressed, because it's about confidence. And on that, I will give him this: he is right in this, in that accountability matters.

Accountability matters; for too long the previous government held to the view that, somehow, they wouldn't be accountable to Manitobans, and Manitobans proved them wrong on April 19th of last spring. But the member knows full well the nuance that he does not actually want to address in his preamble, and that is advice to government could be advice that we plan to act on. It could be advice that we don't plan to act on. We don't have that control to confine a third party.

I don't control the opinion of Manitobans when we ask them for advice for our budget. And I can assure this House we receive everything, soup to nuts, when it comes from suggestions of how to improve government—soup to nuts. And you don't know what you're going to get; it's like a box of chocolates. And, honestly, the advice that we receive from Manitobans, it does not then follow that we will act on every suggestion. And, obviously, we can't, because we'll have suggestions that are polar opposite—many of them, some of that because there's a different ideology, some of that because there's a different perspective, some of that because there's a different set of experiences. You know, I don't think anybody's misguided, they just have different opinions, and that's what makes us a great province: the fact that we can have contrasting opinions, but we're still building a great province together.

So there's advice in that report. We're acting on some of it, we're contemplating some of it. We've had a phase 1 and a phase 2, and that member and all of us understand that, really, what matters most is phase 3. And, no, I'm not disclosing the existence of some kind of secret phase 3 report that we've

declined to tell Manitobans about. Phase 3 is simply get 'er done—get 'er done—results. It's about implementation. It's about putting that good policy to work, pushing it into reality, measuring it along the way, clearly defining what we set out to do and then getting it done.

We will be measured on our results. That previous government was measured for their lack of results. And we will be accountable for the advice that we receive along the way.

Mr. Allum: Well, you know, I like the Finance Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair, and yet I find that since he's assumed his position as Finance Minister, he's changed dramatically in how he comports himself.

I'm asking him—we're asking him, on this side of the House, a very simple question: When will he release the report? And the reason we ask is for twofold. Manitobans deserve to see the substance of what his private sector consultants have recommended so that there can be a full and complete debate about what the future should hold. But, secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for a government and for a Finance Minister who talks about value for money and then won't let Manitobans see if he, as Finance Minister, got value for money for the reports that he has commissioned is the highest degree of a double standard I've witnessed in my—in the House in my five years here.

So let me ask him this. He won't tell us the date; that's on record. His members laugh, laugh out loud when they talk about what the public has recommended to the Finance Minister. So let me ask him this: How much has he paid to his private sector consultant for the value-for-money audit? How much has been spent on that to date? Can he just tell us that, please?

Mr. Friesen: Yes, I'm not actually certain why the member is asking questions that he'd know the answer to. There was nothing in the cost of the report that was disclosed. It was a fully tendered contract. It would have been an OIC on the report.

So we can continue to go down this road, but we could also just instead move on to the subject of the afternoon. The member has months of question period ahead and I invite any question, any subject he'd like to bring in the question period 40-minute format.

This afternoon I am hoping to get to Bill 8, but of course that is largely on him. He's asking questions for which the answers are in the public

record. That's how he'd like to spend his time. He can continue to do this, but I believe that his party still has research capacity. All they have to do is look up the OIC.

Mr. Allum: The 'heightist'—highest degree of arrogance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is when a Finance Minister is asked a direct question as to how much he spent on his value-for-money audit and then won't give us the answer and then lectures us about other ways in which we can find it.

On behalf of the people of Manitoba, I am asking him now to come clean. He won't tell us when he'll release those reports because he doesn't want to release them. So we're asking him: How much has he spent on his secret, private advice from his private consultants? How much?

Mr. Friesen: Okay, so the member's incorrect again because the process is not secret. I think too often in the past the process was secretive, because the NDP government did not always disclose to Manitobans the existence of a contract into which they had entered to provide advice to themselves.

So I reject the notion of secrecy. No, that was the approach before, when quietly, year after year, the member—former member for Infrastructure was pushing out direct contracts to friends with Tiger Dams.

This is exactly the opposite. This is government disclosing that it will seek advice from a third party. This is about a government indicating that it will be a fully contested process, that any applicant who wants to could submit a bid for the aforementioned contract, and that is exactly what happened in this case. Government contracted. It is publicly displayed. This member is eating up time of the House to get the Finance Minister to disclose a number that is fully in the public realm.

Now, if he wants to use the time this way, we can do it. He knows and I know the value of the contract is \$750,000. We've been down this path before. He's asked the same question in the House before. I can give him the value again.

* (15:20)

But I think what I'm trying to stress, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that it's about value.

So the member similarly spent sums on advice to government when they were in government. I would believe that there's value in the money we spent, but if you actually control cost and then look at the

report that the former government paid for their similar report from Deloitte & Touche—as they disclosed on November the 19th—I would argue that theirs was a more expensive report, but I would argue, more importantly, that theirs did not get as much value for money. Was it because of any fundamental flaw in Deloitte's work? I would say no. I would submit it's because the government did not receive and act on the advice that was provided to them. Because the Deloitte report talked about hitting your targets, and we saw, especially after 2009, that that former government lost all their enthusiasm for hitting their targets.

This government will be judged on its results. I have nothing to hide; \$750,000 is the price of the contract, but it's the same price as I disclosed to that member months ago.

Mr. Allum: That wasn't so hard for him, now, was it, to just be able to give the cost of it? It was like having to drag it out of him to get a very simple answer to a very straightforward question. We're going to hold him to that amount of money that he says he spent on it because our hunch would be that he spent considerably more on that, and we'll—but time will tell and we'll see.

But let me ask him this, then, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The government has taken a number of austerity measures already. So can he tell us today: Were the cuts to CancerCare in Winnipeg, were the cuts to personal-care homes in Winnipeg and Lac du Bonnet, were the cuts to community clinics in The Pas and Thompson, were the cuts to community clinics in St. Vital and St. Boniface, were these all recommended by his value-for-money audit?

Mr. Friesen: The member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) likes to repeat that word. That word does not mean what he thinks it means, but we can have that discussion because I won't hesitate to push back his use of that term.

The word austere means bitter, and I would suggest that Manitobans know what austerity is because they experienced it under the NDP government. It is a meanness; austerity implies meanness. There is no better evidence of an austere approach than a former NDP government who, facing year over year of failure to move expenditures in line with revenues and showed an alacrity for the tough work, that they would then go so far as to promise Manitobans one thing and do the exact opposite: saying no tax increases and then bringing historic retail sales tax expansions to things like

haircuts the same year as they brought up significant gas tax and they applied tax to insurance policies. That's bitter. That's a bitter pill. For retired Manitobans to pay that 8 per cent more—first 7 and then 8 per cent more to haircuts and personal services over \$50. The insurance industry scratched their heads over the idea of attaching the tax to a contingency to an insurance policy. This had not been contemplated.

So, if the member wants to look for evidence of austerity, then he needs to look in the mirror. And I would say one of the best examples would be: when it was clear to the former government that their previous expenditure deficit of \$425 million, or thereabouts, was looking north of \$800 million, and how did they spend their time going into the next election? They promised, out of the blue, \$600 million of additional capital commitments, commitments they had no intention, no capacity, to fund. But then to top it off, the cherry on top, for a government that had deteriorated six hundred, four hundred million dollars—and they knew, because they had access to the numbers. They tried to bribe seniors with their own money, saying, hmm, what do you get right now for your Seniors' School Tax Rebate? We will more than quadruple what you get. That's bitter. That is bitter. That's austere. That's mean.

So, if the member wants to use that word again, I will give him the lecture again on what it means. Contrast that with sustainability. Was it just a week ago that the Fraser Institute came out with a report that talked about stability for provincial government expenditure and actually cautioned provinces that would lose their enthusiasm for driving down costs so that revenue and expenditure were balanced out, and said that is the real cost for instability is a long-term, ineffectual strategy to deal with overexpenditure.

Now, I ask the member: Does he want to use that term again?

Mr. Allum: There are—you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, today the Finance Minister, utterly unprepared to do his job, comes in with an Interim Supply procedure that we were given notice about earlier this morning, I think. [*interjection*] Yes, so utterly unprepared.

He's asking this House to just look the other way to get this Interim Supply measure passed, and I'm quite comfortable with saying that I think that will happen. But then he has to explain the consequences

of his actions to date and the consequences of his inaction to date. I just asked him a very simple question: Have the health-care cuts—and I know my friend from Concordia will be following up on this—were the health-care cuts that have been announced to date—CancerCare clinic, a 21st-century cancer-care facility, community facilities, personal care homes, even in one of his own members' constituency in Lac du Bonnet—were these included in his value-for-money audit?

It's a simple question, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could he simply give a simple answer?

Mr. Friesen: Our government has been perfectly clear since the day that we were elected that we were given a mandate by Manitobans to fix the finances, to rebuild our economy, to restore our services after a decade of debt, decay, and decline.

The member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) is talking about a press release in which we—which were calling on RHAs to meet certain targets when it comes to finding efficiencies. Now, this member will have read the weekend paper. I noted that the CEO for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority seemed equal to the task. He expressed that he felt like there were areas where the WRHA could meet these targets. They could look for—he referred to finding efficiencies in procurement, opportunities that had been hitherto largely unexplored to buy in bulk. I agree with that assessment. That was an opinion we also received from Manitobans as a result of the open process.

What the member is not acknowledging is that the RHAs, last year, booked a combined deficit of \$66 million. Now, it's interesting to me that the member expresses no concern about the stability of our health-care system that would come with a ballooning deficit, because he'll know, as well, only a few years before that there was no deficit at the WRHA. Now the WRHA's deficit is a large expression of that \$66 million. Please note that, this afternoon, that that member has shown no concern for the stability of the health-care system.

Our government's been clear. We want to protect the services that Manitobans need in health care, social services, and education. The biggest threat to the stability of our services—those front-line services—is the inability over time of government to meet its financial obligations. It is the legacy of the NDP party that we are less able today to meet those obligations. Thirty—\$20 million more in debt service

charges than just one year ago. Just as a result of the volume of obligations that we have as government. They just shrugged their shoulders. They said, oh well, \$66 million in RHA deficits? Oh, well, says this member for Fort Garry-Riverview. Lucky for him, the CEO for the WRHA did not say oh, well, when he was asked this weekend what he thought about that. He said they could make strides.

* (15:30)

This member also won't tell you what percentage of overall expenditure those targets represent for those RHAs. His own member this afternoon, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), talked about \$15 million more in educational funding for the year, or it might have even been a little bit more, and he called it a nominal amount. He referred to \$13 million as a nominal amount.

Well, I don't know what kind of household he grew up in, but I was never, never trained to treat \$13 million as a nominal amount. My father owned a small business. He had 20 people on payroll. He held that mortgage during the early 1980s. They had millions in borrowed costs, and I remember the level of stress in our house—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up. Time.

Mr. Allum: Well, I'm pleased that the minister segued or pivoted on to education. He won't reveal—to date, he won't reveal when his value-for-money audit will be released. He tells us the basic amount of what it costs, but he won't tell us how much more it's cost since then. He won't tell us whether the significant and probably irreparable cuts to health care were contained in his value-for-money audit.

So let me ask him then: Is he—does he fully appreciate—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Mr. Chair, it was recently asserted by the member from Fort Garry-River—sorry—Fort Garry-Riverview, that we'd only communicated with the members opposite this morning that Interim Supply was scheduled for today. That is inaccurate, and I just want to put on the record that the NDP were aware the April budget would have required Interim

Supply on Thursday when we announced the budget date, so that is a misrepresentation of communications, and I just wanted to state that for the record.

Mr. Chairperson: Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader) Yes, on the point of order. I mean, clearly this is no more than a dispute over the facts. This is not a point of order at all.

Mr. Chairperson: So it is on dispute and so that we—of the facts—and we encourage it to be in the—when it comes to the House, to debate on that point. It's not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Allum: So we tried to review what we haven't learned from the Finance Minister today, and it's quite a bit, so he's moved on to education. He presided over an education budget along with the Education Minister. We don't think the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was involved at that date because we were pretty sure he was away somewhere else, but he presided over an Education budget that had the lowest increase to education funding since the 1990s.

Now he wants us to say that—he wants to say that his 1 per cent increase, not even close to covering the rate of inflation, but his 1 per cent increase across the board to education was a significant increase because, in his opinion, \$13 million, I suppose from a family budget point of view I wouldn't know, but he might. It's a lot of money, but, at the same time, we have the Health Minister saying that a 3 per cent increase to the Health budget is a cut, so—from the federal government.

So could the Finance Minister explain to us what he thinks an increase is and what a cut is, because he's giving incredibly mixed signals to the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: There's a CBC radio show called Madly Off in All Directions. I wonder if the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) listens to the show.

Let me bring him back to the subject at hand. We have this afternoon in front of us a resolution respecting the Interim Supply bill. I think I can help the member out here, because he seems unfamiliar with the rules of an Interim Supply bill. The Interim Supply bill does not authorize new expenditure in terms of new program money for a coming year.

The Interim Supply bill seeks a percentage of overall appropriation authority in order to allow government to keep the lights on, to pay the bills, pay the contractors, pay the staff, play—pay the cleaning staff, pay the clerk staff, pay civil servants. This is what we are seeking to do this afternoon.

The minister is trying to have a debate about the 2017-2018 budget. But if he understood the process, he would understand, nothing in respect of this afternoon's resolution concerns new program spending. As a matter of fact, that member for Fort Garry-Riverview can have the satisfaction of knowing that there is no reflection on new program areas. For that he will have to sit on his hands for a few more days. And, on April the 11th, he will have full knowledge when this government stands and delivers a budget in just a few short days—many, many weeks in advance of most times when Manitobans would learn of the budget from the NDP who only used to sit in May or April.

So let us return to the subject. Let the member concern himself with the sums that are proposed. Let him concern himself with the sum for Part A, for Part B, Capital Investment. Let him concern himself with the sum that would be voted for other and various smaller expenditures. And let us turn our attention to this work.

He will have all the time that he requires to be in the Committee of Supply for Education, to be in the Committee of Supply for Infrastructure, to be in the Committee of Supply for Finance, to be in the Committee of Supply for Health, but let us turn our attention to this bill, or let us clearly understand that there is some agenda that he has this afternoon.

Now, maybe it is because his members are not prepared to speak on the bills that we are introducing, maybe it's because they're simply unprepared, maybe it's because not only are they not prepared to speak on the bills, maybe it's because they're not speaking to each other. We don't know.

But whatever the case may be, let's concern ourselves with the resolution that is here. I would welcome the efforts of the member. There may be others who still want to ask questions this afternoon. Let's have the discussion. Let's move on this afternoon. We're here for Manitobans, all of us, essentially. Let's do this work that they're calling on us to do this afternoon.

Mr. Allum: We are trying to get some work done here. We're trying to get some answers from the Finance Minister about the consequences of his actions to date, about the consequences of an inaction to date and his inability to come into this session on March 1st, when we—when he knew what the calendar said, when he knew what the date was, that we were going to be here on Wednesday, March 1st, and he wasn't prepared to speak directly to the people of Manitoba with a budget.

That's why we're asking questions today. We're trying to get a handle on not only if he fully recognizes the implications of his actions and inactions to date, but if we can get a handle on what he's projecting for the people of Manitoba going forward. They deserve answers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and he's not giving any.

And it is one of the most painful performances to date that I've witnessed in my five years here of a Finance Minister who's unable to have a civil dialogue about the implications and the plans he has, because he's unprepared. And that's not good for a Finance Minister a year into the job. *[interjection]* Yes, I know. While others are going to want—is going to want his position, because, of course, they want the locked-in raise that he got that none of the members of his backbench got. They're willing to make sacrifices, he's not. That's become pretty clear. He's asking the people of Manitoba to make sacrifices; he's not prepared to make sacrifices himself. It's become the highest order of a double standard that he's operating on that we find so troublesome and why we're trying to get some answers for him today—from him today.

* (15:40)

So can he tell us, if he would—he—so far he hasn't been able to tell us anything, so let us see if he can answer this one: Can he tell us when the government will table their anti-labour legislation rolling back contracts on duly signed contracts for our public service—public sector workers?

Mr. Friesen: So, Mr. Deputy Chair, you will adjudicate these proceedings and I will not reflect on your chair, but I will make the comment that the member has more than adequate time in the legislative calendar for him to address all of these questions. We have 100 hours in voted times for the Committee of Supply. He'll be able to have a fulsome conversation with all of our ministers.

I'm attempting to return us—albeit I'm being ineffective in this way—to return us to the content of the bill—or the resolution that's before us this afternoon. The member continues to push toward a discussion on the 2017-2018 budget. The Interim Appropriation Act, if he is unaware, is designed to vote authority for a government to spend into a new fiscal year a percentage of overall appropriation.

He's asking questions about budget. He's asking questions about new program spending. But it's very clear that this bill does not authorize government for new program spending. An interim appropriation act does not authorize a government for new program spend.

I would assure him that the civil servants would be there to flag to us and say, oh, that—you cannot do that in this. That's why we vote the budget. I wonder if we have that member's commitment, though, because, I think, if I can reflect this afternoon—and we've been at this for a while and we can continue to go down this path—we haven't even made it to an introduction of a bill for Interim Supply. We're still on a resolution phase.

I wonder the extent to which this reflects on the opposition party's relative disinterest in seeing a budget actually passed in this province for this year.

We have a robust legislative agenda. We're happy to talk about it, but this member does not seem to understand that this is not the context to talk about new program spend. He'll have an opportunity; it's called the Committee of Supply. He has that opportunity every day in question period. He has that opportunity in bill debate. He has that opportunity at the committee stage. He has that opportunity in the question-and-answer format that we've adopted that follows second reading. This isn't it.

This is a 35 per cent of total appropriation vote. This is the resolution that corresponds to that legislation. If the member would focus on that task, I think we could move along this afternoon. But—as for his allegation that somehow these proceedings are uncivil, let us reflect on the fact that the very first thing he said this afternoon was that the government was unprepared, and that's why they were waiting four weeks to bring a budget, and that's why they were bringing in Interim Appropriation Act.

And, Mr. Deputy Chair, I cannot help but kind of chuckle over that, because they brought an interim appropriation act probably about 12 times. They brought a special warrant probably 10 times in

the 16 years. If his charge is accurate for this government, it reflects on himself.

This is a routine bill. We should never escape the fact that it's Manitobans' money. We should never let it escape our gaze that it is a lot of money. But it is money necessary for programs and expenditure and capital investment. And, if this member is against capital investment, if he's against paying teachers and civil servants and nurses and doctors, if he's against paying for Pharmacare, let him say so now, because what he's doing is obstructing this process this afternoon.

Mr. Allum: The Finance Minister comes to the House today utterly unprepared. Not only does he not have a budget, doesn't have any answers, he can't give us his—any plans; he's not sure what he's doing; he's actually—seems to be out of his element.

And I'm sorry to say that, because we have higher expectations for him than we do for the Premier (Mr. Pallister), and yet he seems to be falling into the same way of thinking as his Premier.

He comes to the House today asking for an interim supply bill, and he should have had a budget instead.

So we're trying to ask some very—questions that are pertinent to the people of Manitoba, the people that we're representing to the families, to the community organizations all uncertain about what their future holds precisely because the Finance Minister has been walking around threatening everybody that their cuts are coming, they're going to be severe. So we would like some answers before he—we can get on with getting on to his supply bill.

So I'm asking him again. Is the government going to rip up existing collective agreements and impose mandatory days off? Is that part of his plan for the people of Manitoba?

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: A point of order—the Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Micklefield: On relevance, these haphazard sort of fly-by-night comparisons to the Premier and the Finance Minister have absolutely nothing to do with the extraordinarily important bill before us which allows us to continue government operations. There's nothing unusual about this. This has been happening for—year after year and somehow the debate has shifted off into the gutter and now we're comparing one minister to the Premier, and I would

just like to say that is not relevant, that is not pertinent, and I would ask if you could ask the member to stay on track, stay on topic.

Mr. Chairperson: Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Maloway: There's—very traditional in the House here to extend the largest amount of latitude possible in debate, and on that basis the member has no point of order at all. The member has been addressing the issues at hand here, been staying on topic and relevant. So I don't see any point of order here at all.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, I just want to remind all the members here at the House that we are debating the interim spending of all the expenditures to resolutions, and also the interim spending covers all government expenditures so there's a broad base on this. It's not a point of order.

So—but we also want everybody to be respectful—*[interjection]*—order, order—we also want everybody to be respectful for one another that are in this House when it comes to the Premier or to the ministers and to all members of the House. All members should be respectful.

* * *

Mr. Allum: That was a wise and sage ruling on your part, and it might've been better if the Finance Minister spent just a few minutes actually trying to answer a question accurately with factual information instead of going all off all over the place in his answers, casting aspersions, getting angry, getting mad, when we're simply doing our job on this side of the House, asking questions that the people of Manitoba are demanding to know.

He knows full well that even the Winnipeg Free Press wrote an editorial last week saying, could the government begin governing. And so we're asking him today to actually start governing. Start answering the questions that people want to know. Stop creating the anxiety and uncertainty that he's creating in households all across Manitoba by stonewalling and refusing to answer questions.

* (15:50)

In the Throne Speech last year and again in the media, the Premier has threatened to pass legislation that will rip up existing collective agreements. So I'm asking the Finance Minister now: Will he confirm the Throne Speech plan to rip up existing collective agreements?

Mr. Friesen: The sea of misstatements and inaccuracies on that side that we will try to 'navigate' and chart a path through, but the member's essential thesis seems to be this, if I can sum up: For a government to bring a budget on April the 11th shows that the government is unprepared to govern, okay? So accepting that thesis, let's do a little test, and my colleagues can give a pass-fail to the previous government.

The 2015 Manitoba budget delivered, was it before April 11th? No, it was April 30th. Fail.

The 2013 Manitoba budget delivered by the NDP, was it before April 3rd–11th? April 16th.

Some Honourable Members: Fail.

Mr. Friesen: The 2012 Manitoba budget, was it delivered before April the 11th? No. April the 17th.

The 2011 Manitoba budget, was it delivered before April 11th? April 12th, missed it by that much. Fail.

So coming back to the thesis put out by the member for Fort Garry-Riverview: A government that does not bring a budget by April the 11th is a government that is unprepared to govern. Does the member understand that the criticism he attempts to level against this government is criticism that comes back tenfold against his own government? I would submit it probably does not. I think that this lesson, like so many others, is lost on that member.

As for his assertion that somehow I am angry or objecting, I'll answer every question with serenity and politeness that he wants to answer. I only wish him to focus his energies on the subject that is at hand this afternoon, the subject, once again, being an interim appropriation act, a routine facet of a parliamentary system, the mechanism by which the Legislature would vote authority for a new fiscal year, not new programs, but existing authority to a ratio of overall appropriation.

If the member would like to contain his comments there, we could move these proceedings along. If he wishes to make silly and inaccurate statements all afternoon, we can do that too. I would just submit that Manitobans are not as well served by the second course of action.

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Finance Minister gave four examples over 17 years. Already, within less than 12 months, he's had one special warrant and one Interim Supply bill. What would you call that, folks?

Some Honourable Members: Fail.

Mr. Allum: Yes, I guess so.

He's just not—you know, it's quite—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Allum: It's quite—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, order, order.

The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview.

Mr. Allum: Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe I have the floor, and it's discouraging when a member of the opposition, asking questions on to the people of—on behalf of the people of Manitoba have to consistently get more volume over the members of the government backbenches, who have clearly demonstrated this afternoon no interest in exercising their sovereign rights as MLAs, no interest in actually protecting the needs and interests of their communities.

We're asking about the cuts that the government has already taken and the cuts that are almost certainly coming that are going to affect every single community and every single household in each of their communities, and they don't have the backbone to stand up to the Finance Minister. Well, on this side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do have the 'backbone' to stand up to him, and we're going to continue to do that, whether he likes it or not.

So let me ask him: He's already floated a trial balloon on the Education Property Tax Credit. Will the Education Property Tax Credit remain intact as part of his budget?

Mr. Friesen: I wonder if the member is fully aware that there actually is a reconciliation of hours, that the time that is burning off this afternoon does not exist in isolation, but, rather, it actually infringes on the hours that are expressed for Committee of Supply. So, understanding that, the member is indignant, and he jumps up and down asking questions about 2017-2018 Budget. And the very answers that he seeks are answers that he is taking away from himself. He is removing that opportunity by insisting that he wants to prolong—and agonizingly so—the process this afternoon.

Now, we can stay in this place, but he is, on one hand, asking for answers about departmental expenditure authority, appropriations in the

2017-2018 year. So he should get those answers, and the member has a right to them. The place to ask those questions is in the Committee of Supply, a process that will happen immediately following the introduction of the budget should the House leader for the Opposition be amenable to the idea, because it's demonstrated in this place, today, it's one thing to get consent to bring a process to this Chamber, it's a whole other matter to get goodwill among members to try to actually drive the process forward.

Now, that goodwill exists on the government's side this afternoon, but if that member really wants the questions answered that he is posing this afternoon, he should understand that he is burning off of the clock of valuable time that is dedicated on the basis of an agreement to allow him the opportunity as a member of this Legislature to have those answers.

So the ball is in his court.

Mr. Allum: I don't need the Finance Minister, in order to be on this side of the House, need to tell us how we should spend our time trying to hold him accountable for a series of non-answers that have come forward from him, not merely today, but every other day that we've been in session. And every day we're out of session, for that matter.

I just asked him about the education property tax credit. He wouldn't answer that. So can he tell us now: Will the Rent Assist program be fully funded in this budget next year?

Mr. Friesen: Let's drive this process forward.

We have in front of us a resolution. The resolution calls for an amount of \$4.7 billion to be appropriated for the start of the next fiscal year. Let's get down to the business. Let's have a discussion about these appropriations. Let's talk about this spending authority. Let's get this process done.

Mr. Allum: If the Finance Minister had brought in a budget the way he was supposed to do, the way he should have done, the way he was obliged to do—but, unfortunately, he was unprepared to be able to deliver a budget because he's not quite sure what he wants to do. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) was away in Costa Rica, wasn't able to give him the info, the direction that he needed and so, consequently, the people of Manitoba are left waiting for the Finance Minister to get direction from the Premier. And so he brings an Interim Supply motion to the House because he doesn't have any other way to get the job

done. And that's a sad commentary for a government less than a year into its mandate.

I've asked him about the EPTC—he couldn't answer. We asked him about his value-for-money audits. Couldn't answer. We asked him about cuts to education. Couldn't answer. We asked him about whether rent assist will remain intact. Can't answer.

So now I'll ask him again another question that maybe he can just try—try to answer. In the last budget, he took the affordability section of the budget, accounted to three, four, five pages. He grabbed it, he ripped it right out of the budget so that the people of Manitoba know. Will he include an affordability section in his budget after April 11th?

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: On a point of order, the Government House Leader.

Mr. Micklefield: Mr. Chair, I'd like to raise the issue of relevance.

*(16:00)

We're being asked about the upcoming budget, which has not yet been tabled. We cannot discuss things not yet tabled. What has been tabled is—there are things that, you know, towards the—for example, the child advocate bill, which clearly the members opposite are trying to avoid debating. Instead, they're looking for teaser moments here and there, what little information can they get out of us on something which we have not tabled, and will not be tabled 'til the date specified.

So, on relevance, I would like you to ask the member, please, to say on topic. And this—the budget which will be released is not what we're talking about today.

Mr. Chairperson: The opposite and—House leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Maloway: You know, this is the third point of order now that the member has brought up, more or less on the same topic, and, in terms of relevance, the relevance is normally—people are given a very broad latitude on this question of relevance. The questions that the critic is asking certainly pertain to the Interim Supply questions which is what we're here to discuss today. This is simply the first part of the process which is a question-and-answer period, and we are following that. And there are—more of our members will have more questions of this particular minister and others.

So I would submit that there is a—just a dispute over the facts here, that there is no point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: On that point of order, I just wanted to say to the House that these are very broad when it comes to all government expenditures, that we can be asked all the different questions on the facts, and so it's not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: So we'll continue with the questioning and go forward on this. Is there more—any more questions on—from the opposition?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I just asked the Finance Minister a question. The House leader—or, Government House Leader (Mr. Micklefield) got up and made a point of order. Maybe the Finance Minister might answer the question.

Mr. Friesen: Well, actually—

Mr. Chairperson: Can you—

Mr. Friesen: The member is procedurally incorrect, because the House leader for the government's side interrupted his discourse, so I believe, probably, the question will return to the member to finish his statement. I don't think there was a framed question in his last assertion. All I heard were innuendos and allegations.

Mr. Chairperson: Can I ask the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) to ask that question—or, repeat that question?

Mr. Allum: Well, okay, I—you know, I guess—well, I'll ask the Finance Minister to try to pay attention so that he can follow along the question.

We asked—I reviewed the fact that he hasn't asked—answered any questions about why he delayed the budget. I reviewed the fact about—that he won't release his value-for-money audit. I've reviewed his record on his cuts to health care. We've reviewed his record on cuts to education. We've asked him if he would ensure that the Rent Assist program was 'kempt' intact; he won't answer. We've asked him these kinds of questions because he's present—precisely because he's presenting an Interim Supply bill today in the absence of being prepared for a budget.

So what we want to know now is what we just asked him, is that he ripped the affordability section out of the last budget, the budget that—from the—for—that this Interim Supply bill actually covers. So could he tell us: Will there be an affordability section

included in the next budget? It's a simple question. If he could just give a simple answer, that would be great.

Mr. Friesen: Well, perhaps the issue is one of definitions. Perhaps the member for Fort Garry-Riverview thinks that by the title Interim Appropriation, he may believe it actually means free-for-all. It does not. It actually refers to an interim appropriation.

So, yes, this member is, you know, on about a number of things this afternoon, many of them pertaining to new commitments for the 2017-2018 year. Those are out of scope for the purposes of this resolution.

Now, it doesn't stop him from asking them; he can ask them all he wants. It's not scoped within this discussion. But moreover, there is an inaccuracy in something that the member keeps coming back to, and I want to clear it up now. The member's making an assumption that an interim appropriation act would not be necessary if we were to have introduced the budget today. He's wrong.

So he needs to understand the rules of this Legislature better. The Interim Appropriation Act would still be needed. It's needed up until a time that we have voted authorization through the main appropriation. The Interim Appropriation Act is needed until, essentially, a budget is passed.

So, essentially, the question comes back to this member. If the government were to have dropped a budget on the table today, is he signalling that the opposition party would have supported that budget and agreed to have it passed by June the 1st? Because I would like to get that commitment out of the member today.

We're bringing a budget that will serve all Manitobans, that will move us in the right direction. This budget will be about—it'll be about trajectory, will be about quantum, will be about getting back to balance, it'll be going in the right direction. Protecting front-line services and protecting services.

But is there a commitment from that member, as the critic for Finance, that his opposition will support that budget and see it pass by June the 1st? If there isn't that commitment, he needs to understand that his process of blockading this afternoon means that there are paycheques on the line. There are contracts on the line.

So I don't know what this member's point is this afternoon, but the appropriation act is needed whether the budget comes today or on April the 11th. And I would argue that we would be well served to get to the business of this afternoon.

Mr. Allum: The minister brings an Interim Supply procedure when he should have brought a budget into this House. And we're asking questions around profoundly important questions of public policy which he's refusing to answer.

Now, the members on this side of the House are going to go knocking on doors and we're going to say, we asked the member about the budget, we asked the member—the minister about the budget, and he told us it was about trajectory and it was about quantum. Now, there's an answer for the record books.

Now, when we're asking him if he will keep the Rent Assist program, he's going to say, well, it's about trajectory and quantum, not a yes or no to Rent Assist. Will he be keeping the EPTC? No, it's about trajectory and quantum, not about the EPTC.

You see, the matter—the difficulty with the Finance Minister's position is that we're asking him questions that affect the people of Manitoba, families in this province, people that the members across the government represent, and he's refusing to give them the answers they need, if only to take away the anxiety and the uncertainty that they're feeling by his several months' worth of sabre rattling.

And so we're trying to get onto the real issues that matter to Manitoba families. We asked him if the affordability section will be in the budget.

We'll also go on to know, in the last budget, budget which this Interim Supply covers, didn't include any projections. Will the next budget include five-year projections, as it should?

Mr. Friesen: To be clear, the previous government didn't include five-year projections, but they would include previous year, they'd include current year, and then they would look out from there. In that same manner, of course, that—of course we will include multi-year projections in this budget.

But on the member's previous point, that somehow he says, if only to take away the uncertainty of Manitobans, well, we know that member well enough to know that he has no vested interest in taking away the uncertainty of Manitobans. This is the member who went out just

before the last election and told Manitobans in his constituency that, if the PC government was elected, that every teacher and nurse would lose their job. That's what that member said.

So we know what his ambition is, is to foment. It is to agitate. It is to irritate. So Manitobans should not be fooled into thinking that that member has any interest in taking away uncertainty.

That's what we're doing. That's our job. That's what we were hired to do, is to take away the uncertainty.

That overexpenditure—what was it that Moody's said about the previous government, it was, oh, adjustment fatigue, to describe the lack of earnestness over time of hitting their targets. It's that that the Fraser Institute referred to last week when they talked about the real cause for uncertainty in economies, governments that lack the ability, the competence, the interest in matching revenues to expenditures over time.

* (16:10)

We are talking exactly about the thing that he seems to be getting at, which is stability, sustainability. There is no certainty in a money-losing business, is one axiom that my Premier (Mr. Pallister) sometimes shares. And he's correct. You want stability in an organization; you want predictability. Manitobans want that.

If it was just about more money, we'd be top of the pack, because we're arguably the highest in terms of per pupil cost in education, but we have some of the worst outcomes for science, reading and math. If it was just about money, we'd be top of the pile when it came to health-care delivery. We have some of the longest wait times, and, at some points in the journey, some of the longest wait periods in terms of suspicion, diagnosis, referral, treatment, recovery. That member knows it.

There is no straight shot between spending more and getting results. That is just about hard work and insisting, developing a framework for decision-making, new ideas, a commitment to innovation. That's the work that we'll do.

The member's comments continue to be best directed at ministers in the Committee of Supply, but I've answered his first question. I don't know if he was paying attention when I answered it on multi-years, but, if he wants to hear it again, he can hear it. In any case, we're looking forward to April the 11th

and the ability to update Manitobans—oh, and just to come back to the other thing the member said. So, if he doesn't like the word trajectory, I'll substitute: Direction—going in the right direction, and that, perhaps, is a phrase that he has heard our government use. Substitute making progress for quantum. We have to improve the services.

So we can have that discussion this afternoon, or he can continue to bluster all afternoon, and he has that ability. But I'm happy to have the conversation. I would be more happy to have a conversation about the \$4.7-billion interim appropriation that is necessary to meet payroll, to meet contract costs, and to keep us paying our budgets.

Mr. Allum: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to cede the floor temporarily to my friend from River Heights to ask a few questions, but we know that the minister is moving in Interim Supply a motion today because the government had simply refused to reveal their budget plans for the people of Manitoba. We know that there have been cuts already, profound cuts, to the programs, services and the jobs that Manitoba families were relying on.

So can I ask the minister for a short answer so the member for River Heights has the opportunity to ask some questions too? Will he be communicating with community organizations prior to April 1st to let them know about their future so they can have some certainty, some stability, some sustainability in their operating lives?

Mr. Friesen: Could the member indicate which organizations he's referring to?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview?

Could the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) repeat the question that he had for the comment?

Mr. Friesen: Was the member not listening to the question? I asked him to please indicate the list of organizations that he's referring to.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), on the question that the minister had.

Mr. Allum: He's asking me questions now?

Mr. Chairperson: Well, okay. The honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the Finance Minister: We're presented with an Interim Supply motion today. One of the things that I would have expected would have been that we would

have had the third quarter report—financial report—so that we know where we are.

Can the minister tell us why we don't have the third quarter financial report?

Mr. Friesen: Now, there's a good question and one that the member will have the answer to very soon.

As the member knows, since we were elected we have endeavoured to ask some questions about how government is reporting, what the value is when we do it, and how we can tighten up that process. The member and I both understand that the Auditor General has reflected in the past on the reports that Manitoba issues quarterly and on when they come out and on what value they add. This is ancillary to a previous discussion that the member for River Heights and I have had about the value of the first quarter report.

Honestly, year after year, even when I was a critic for Finance, I wasn't sure exactly what value it added. It takes an awful lot of work to consolidate and yet it tells us very little about the year and what the direction is that the government is moving. But we can have that discussion because we know that there's also political considerations to not providing it.

For third quarter, here again in a few—probably very shortly I'll be able to reflect with more detail on this. But I think, suffice it to say, that the third quarter results will be coming out in the province of Manitoba very shortly.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm glad to hear that the report is coming out shortly. I'm disappointed that we don't have it before us now as we debate Interim Supply because it would've been very useful to have and to know exactly where we are.

We are now more than 60 days after the end of the quarter, and as the minister will remember, for the other provinces I think the average was 34 days that they were able to get their reports done after the end of the quarter. And we would—I'm surprised that the minister really so far is not doing any better than the NDP were doing when they were in power. So I'm hoping that this is going to change.

Is the minister going to move to try and get these quarterly reports available more quickly so that, as the Auditor General noted, they'll be more relevant?

Mr. Friesen: Just at the point when I thought we had a rare moment of unanimity and point of agreement

the member for River Heights makes another allegation.

Well, I can assure him that this issue has my attention, and he can go back and look on record too. I've made comments here. I care about the reporting that we do and I care about the timeliness of it. I can tell the member that what has proven to be a thorny issue has been the issue of moving those consolidations in after the core government, and I would invite his advice over time. We're getting good advice now on—can we say—on a better framework, to be able to sift that data into the reporting entity.

So let's just land on this. This issue has my attention. I have made commitments to the whole province to shepherd this process and to get us to a better place in terms of those reports. This has to do with everything from the volumes that we publish. It has to do with the thresholds for disclosure. It goes to the whole issue of accountability, and I would say even on those subjects stay tuned because I think that there'll be bills coming your way that speak to some of this. But on reports, I accept the member's words. We'll be moving very quickly to publish our third quarter reports to update the province, and the member should understand that by no means the date by which it'll be received this time should reflect and somehow indicate that that will always be the date on which that is done.

Mr. Gerrard: I am pleased that the minister is putting some emphasis on this and I would hope that we would be able to get to what the average practice is in the other jurisdictions, which as I said was I think was about 34 days, which would mean that we have this in—relatively early in February for the third quarter report, and that certainly would be much more useful.

If it is completely impossible to get the material for the summary budgets in certain respects, it would be very valuable to at least have the core budget, all the details. But I think that we have moved to the summary budget and there are, of course, difficulties with doing that too. But, you know, there are options that the minister has got to make sure that this is done in a timely way that can be helpful to all of us.

* (16:20)

The fact of the matter is that, you know, if it's useful for opposition but it's actually much more useful for government because it allows you to track where you are in terms of the expenditures that have

been made and the—when you can't track what's happening with expenditures, you put yourself in a difficult position and particularly if you're coming toward the end of the year and all of a sudden you're over expense, and, you know, as the minister well knows, it's been many years when there's been overexpenditures, and does he—does the minister expect that, you know, things are going to be on target this year to meet the expenditures laid out in the budget, or are we going to be overspent, or does the minister not know because we don't have a third quarterly report?

Mr. Friesen: I appreciate the suggestions of the member when it comes to the issue of what to focus on, core and summary reporting. And, of course, we know that it is the summary budget, of course, that is tested and audited and is subject to generally accepted accounting practices. It's that document that is the authoritative one.

We also know, in the past that there has been that move to focusing on the summary line. Of course, the challenge in this context is with a rapidly accelerated Hydro expansion plan that was really the brainchild of the NDP, but now the reality of that challenge coming home to roost in terms of the challenge to Hydro in the interim, then, of course, you know, focusing on some recreates other challenges. But we're working through, and I appreciate the advice. We're trying to find the best mechanism, the best use of staff time, best use of civil service time. I think what will be helpful in this process as well is for government to clearly say this is the day that which will be received and then to also have measures by which we can insist on that.

On the subject of accountability in budget year—welcome the opinion of the member—Treasury Board is working at this as well. And although we don't speak about those deliberations, on a submission-by-submission basis, I can say that we're adopting new practices to early in, early on in a budgetary year, be able to measure programs so that if there is going to be evidence of overexpenditure, it can be addressed sooner rather than later. I think about the way certain jurisdictions in US states will often even bring up, you know, an updated budget halfway through expenditure year, and, indeed, the federal government, you know, sometimes will bring that kind of measure. I don't know. In the future, I think what's important will be an ability to identify programs of concern and then to be able to provide instructions and say, well, what can we do? What can we do in order to land closer to target areas because

that really is the challenge is in your measurement and then hitting targets?

On the other subject that the member addressed, yes, when it comes to, you know, this particular third quarter report, I won't speculate today in advance of actually tabling that document and giving that report, but I can certainly say that we are working hard every day to make sure that we're making decisions on basis of, well, of affordability, of sustainability and stabilizing our finances.

Mr. Gerrard: The—one of the concerns, and it's a historic one, in the way that things have been run, and the minister put his finger on it in the sense that the budget will provide money for those basic services that we have had, but it won't provide money for new programs until the budget is passed. And the result of that has been new programs often don't get started into well into the fiscal year.

Is the minister doing anything because of this gap in being able to start new programs that will, you know, accelerate the ability to start new programs and get them off the ground sooner rather than having to wait such a long time before they can really get started?

Mr. Friesen: This is one of the challenges of the—of our Legislature and, indeed, a challenge of provincial legislatures in other jurisdictions. We are bound by our rules. We have new and improved rules in the Manitoba Legislature, and there are a number of rule changes—significant rule changes that came into effect—looking for guidance here, it was probably put in place in earnest for the start of this Legislature. We had some exposure to those new rules in the past session of the Legislature, the past—yes, in the past Legislature, when it came to things like the ability to ask questions and receive answers in the context of second reading.

So we've seen improvements to our rules, and I know it's easy to be—what do they say?—the armchair quarterback, not having been one of the principal agents to guide that process, but, of course, all of us members at that time having input into the process.

One of the areas, I think, that is still for us to strengthen would be a commitment from all members for the benefit not of a sitting government, but for the benefit of the Legislature itself and the efficiency of our year to be able to pass a budget in the spring. And I know that the member knows as well, and I know as well, that there is no provision

that ensures that a budget passes by that first week in June, when we will now rise.

Now, one could argue and say, well, that's good for democracy, because it holds the government to account. I'm speculating here, but there's arguably nothing that is accomplished by sitting into October and November and continuing to discuss that budget that couldn't also have been accomplished from sitting longer hours during the day, sitting into evenings, extending by a week or so in June.

What I'm getting at is this: that considerable resources, as the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) knows, goes into that process when the Legislature doesn't hold the best practice. So, yes, there's accountability that is there for all Manitobans through this process. We would never argue that we need to take away accountability, never argue that we need to take away the robust debate that happens in this place. But, when we hold the passing of a budget to the fall, we clutter things up. We end up doing bill debate in the spring and then other bills get pushed back late into the session and get squished alongside the Throne Speech and the whole year becomes encumbered with considerations that did not need to be there behind the scenes.

What it also means for our civil service is that we take civil servants and say, well, now we need some other interim supply bills. Now we need to create other conditions by which government has expenditure authority well into the fall. And, while it looks rather automatic in this place—that bills just somehow magically land on the desk—we know it is not so. We know that an awful lot of work—Treasury Board Secretariat, departments, authority needed for Part B, the loan act, too, if it's into the fall, Part A, Operating—all of that work needs to be done.

If we could somehow turn our attention—if there was a spirit of collaboration and co-operation in this place, perhaps the next challenge we have is to figure out a way how to pass that budget in June, take the time that's necessary to do it, but return to that good process of bill debate in the fall, Throne Speech, spring Budget—spring session, Committee of Supply, vote in the budget, pass that BITSA bill.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for his comments.

One of the things that's fairly clear to me is that, when you have the budget delivered earlier, you will have more time to make sure that it is passed by June the 1st. And so there could have been potential advantages for the government in having the budget

ready for March the 1st, and then the likelihood of getting it fully passed by June the 1st would be that much higher.

That being said, the government has chosen to wait until April the 11th, and—you know, so we're in the situation that we are now, that we have to be debating bills. And that's not a bad thing. I mean, it is good to be debating bills, but it—there's no doubt it would also—the government had a choice here in terms of when the budget was brought forward and when bills are brought forward.

* (16:30)

And the rules can be altered and so on, but I think it would be, you know, unreasonable to expect that if the government brings in the budget late, that everything is going to be able to get done by June the 1st. So I'd like to comment and I think that the—one of the things that the NDP tried and failed to do is to have a multi-year budget for universities.

Is the minister looking at moving back to trying to do a multi-year budget for any parts of his overall budget so that it would speed things up and, you know, give people more time to plan?

Mr. Friesen: First of all, I want to thank you for the member's endorsement of our strategy because, as I explained to the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), I'm glad to see the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) recognize that we are bringing this budget earlier than five of six previous budgets of the NDP, who had more time on the clock, arguably, and much more time in government. In the process there should have been an efficiency that would cut to having done the Estimates process 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 times; you would think that they could have accelerated, and yet, in 2015, they only brought a budget on April 30th. In 2014, they only brought a budget—or I think it was 2013—they only brought a budget on April the 16th. In 2012, they only brought a budget on April the 17th. In 2011, they only brought a budget on April the 12th. There was even a year in there when they brought a budget in May, I believe. The 2000 budget was in May.

Now, I point that out because this member will never find me making excuses, but I will say that there's a learning curve. And I can indicate in this place that all Manitobans should be very proud of the work that they will never discover has taken place behind the scenes by the Treasury Board, by the ministers who have acquainted themselves with the operation of their offices, of their responsibilities at a

rapid pace, tipped head-long into that Estimates process in August—in September, sent instructions to departments, worked tirelessly, and I note for the record that that budget in May would have been the member for St. Boniface's (Mr. Selinger) first budget because he would have been the Finance minister at the time. That budget was brought in May, and the next budget was equally brought around April 11th. So I think that there needs to be a reasonable acknowledgement that this is the first time around for our group.

And so I would say we have made a rocket-like pathway to this budget, and I think that the evidence will be in this next budget. You will have evidence of multi-year projections; you will have evidence of direction the government is going in. I think that Manitobans will have assurances that we're putting our money where our mouth is, that we're leading by example, as last week's announcement indicated and helped to express, that all government members were agreeing to not take salary increases as the result that we are expressing that these are challenging times and we need to lead by example.

So the budget is not later—it's actually earlier—than five of the six last NDP budgets, and I believe that over time we can align our thinking on the exact right date for the delivery of the budget. But I would say this, that we do gain certainty through this new rules agreement, whereby we know approximately when the House goes back in session, we know when we recess. This will add certainty where certainty was never given before.

On multi-year budgets, I think there's merit in the—in further discussion about multi-year budgets. This is about predictability. This is about assurances. And we're asking—you know, the government is being asked to provide multi-year projections, and we will be asking others to provide that, to say what will be your requirements this year and next, and it will be helpful, over time, I think, to have the discussion about whether maybe the best way to get to that is, in certain areas, to adopt a better sense of where we're going. The best way to get the context to be able to commit to multi-year is to get our financial house in order so that we have that assurance of government looking out. You don't get that when you've raided the financial fiscal stabilization account, reduced it to zero, run up a billion-dollar deficit and promise \$600 million of additional capital investments that you had no intention to make. Who did that? Well, that would have been today's NDP.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I think the minister's stretching it when he says that I was endorsing what he's doing.

The—as I was pointing out, there are certain advantages of bringing that budget in at the beginning of March and having a greater certainty of having it pass by 1st of June.

You know, it is interesting, and I will talk to the minister about some of the things that have happened over time.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Deputy Chairperson, in the Chair

If you go back to the year 2000, at that point, we were sitting in the summer. And so things got finished up, and even if the budget was a little late, we would be sitting through July and August.

At some point in the middle-2000s, I think it was 2005 or '06, somewhere in there, we moved so that we had a finite end date, ordinarily, for the session, which was, say, to 10th to the 14th of June, somewhere in there. And the concept was that we can end it earlier and that the NDP would start the budget process earlier.

Well, the NDP didn't start the budget process earlier, and so that created a lot of problems. And the—now, in the most recent revision of the rules, we have finished now, got things to wind up for—as the minister says, for June the 1st. So this is, you know, 10 days to two weeks before we were often finishing up under the previous rules. And the expectation would be that the budget would be delivered earlier on so that there would be an opportunity to finish debate.

And so it is not unexpected. In fact, it would have been very disappointing if the government had not finish—or, started the budget process earlier than the NDP had been starting it. In fact, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) is not taking into consideration that the end point of the session has been moved up and that, you know, this requires that he present the budget at an earlier date in order for us to get the work done that we need to do.

So I hope in future years the Minister of Finance will be able to accelerate the budget process so that it can be ready earlier on. And we would, you know, expect that would be the case, and hopefully, if the minister can also get the quarterly reports out in a timely fashion, that will also help in making sure that things are speeded up.

It seems to me that with current, you know, technology, ability to do the accounting on use of very highly sophisticated computer systems, that it should be easily possible to actually have those quarterly reports out significantly sooner than they have been in the past. And I would ask the minister what he is doing with regard to technology and how it can be used to help us make sure that the accounts are, you know, more up to date and that the results of that accounting can be available more quickly so that we have those third quarterly reports more timely and the budget can be more timely.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question, and I reflect that when we publish the second quarter report, the member may have remarked that we did so electronically, posted it immediately to the government website and declined to go and print a whole bunch of copies and walk them over in the hallway.

* (16:40)

We understood that the digital format would serve to provide more timely notice. It addresses issues of accessibility, so, if people are living in Thompson or if they're living in Waskada or if they're living in, you know, St. Vital, everyone can have the same instant access to those documents.

We don't require to publish things in the same manner as they did when I was first elected in 2011. They were still dropping a volume 4 of the Public Accounts on the desk, and if anybody knows, you'll have a chuckle because, of course, that's the volume that, you know, it's as high as it is long. That's a heroic effort in binding technology is what that group of papers is.

So we chose to say, well, let's modernize our thinking on the way we disclose. We have to have in mind what is the information we want to convey; what is the most efficient way in which we convey it. What is efficient for our staff resources, who have to collect and compile and then present this material, and we'll be adding our thinking on that to the budget documents as well. And I'll give the member this commitment: we're committed to the use of technologies in not just the delivery of reporting materials but in the operation of government.

We need to understand that there are opportunities, much the same as I spoke earlier this afternoon, I happened to remark that the president and CEO for WRHA had stated on the weekend that he thought there were opportunities for the WRHA

to do better in procurement, looking at better ways to purchase, and I can't help but think that he probably had in mind the area of IT as well.

We have requirements that we need, but so does everybody else, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, Ontario. We're going to work well with our neighbours. We're not going to take the view that somehow we need to shut out outsiders. If there are economies of scale that we can get to and purchase technological equipment on a more cost-effective basis, we're going to do that.

This causes me to think about co-operation of provinces that has been successful in driving down drug costs. We believe there's more that can be done on that front. We believe that there's more that can be contemplated within the construct of the New West Partnership, and the Agreement on Internal Trade. I think, you know, we've all heard the criticism it can be easier to do business with the Midwest US states than it can be with your neighbouring provinces, and that there should be no good reason that that is maintained.

So we'll continue to look for those opportunities on IT procurement, on procurement in general in the operation of government, and part of this will be, of course, we need to turn our attention to a total modernization of IT systems.

We spoke in this House about the fact that the NDP allowed their—the comprehensive communications emergency network to age and age and age without contemplating how it would replace it. As a result of that dragging its feet on that process, we've lost opportunities. Manitoba Hydro has built their own internal emergency communications device. The City of Winnipeg built their own. They said we won't wait forever for you to do that.

We're proceeding now, but it's a huge expense to the Province of Manitoba. And opportunities that could've meant spending less, they simply allowed themselves to forgo those opportunities. We need to get this right. We have an aging IT network in many areas of government, and we will need to turn our attention to that. And we know that IT—there was a recent Winnipeg Free Press article that said IT is expensive, and no one understands it. It never comes in on time or on budget, and although that is a very broad statement, it's a challenge because we don't understand. Experts understand that. We need to wrap our heads around how we get better money—better value for Manitobans' money.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: The honourable member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: No, I asked my colleague from Minto.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I know that in February when the special warrant was signed, there was some information given about overspending in a number of different portfolios, and one of those was in the area of Justice, and particular in the area of Corrections. I wonder—I recognize the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) will not have the information at his fingertips, but it can easily be obtained overnight.

Would the Minister of Finance be able to provide me with the current adult population in Manitoba's correctional facilities?

Mr. Friesen: Well, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) is correct. I don't have that information at my fingertips, because I'm not the Minister for Justice. And so he should understand that that's not what these proceedings are about. But he does have the benefit—he has the benefit—of the Committee of Supply. And the member could ask me today what those current incarceration rates are, but he knows full well that that's not what this afternoon is about. We are in an exercise this afternoon pertaining to a resolution on the Interim Supply.

Now, if he'd like to ask that question in question period tomorrow—he doesn't have to wait a whole day; he has to wait less than 24 hours, because he can stand up—so, if he would like to provide notice that if he's asking that question tomorrow in question period, the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) would only be too happy to answer it.

However, he is mistaken about something else, and that is he's confused about a process in year, and that is there is another process he's referring to whereby, within appropriations, government must seek a special warrant to be able to move expenditure between appropriations. Government—this is a control, and a sufficient one, on government, so you cannot simply move authority sideways. Even if you are underexpended in three areas and you have a fourth area of programming that is overexpended, you must seek authority, then, to move that capacity to deal with—in—over expenditure where it lies. It's probably this exact type of issue that he is referring to. It is routine. It is not extraordinary. It happens in here.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

But, if he would like to have that conversation, I would be only too happy to have it, because he would find it remarkable how this year's request compared to the year before and the year before and the year before that. Why is that? Because we were committed from the outset to making sure we were working hard to get maximum value for Manitobans' money. In previous years, those considerably higher results speak for themselves. They speak to the inability or the lack of earnestness or the lack of diligence on part of the former government to insist that programs spend what they said they required to spend.

Mr. Swan: I'm not sure if the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) was listening to the ruling that the Chairperson gave earlier on this afternoon. We are in proceedings dealing with an interim appropriation. And the Minister of Finance should have heard the ruling, which was that these proceedings deal with all of the spending of all government departments for a period of time.

And I have asked a specific question. I have understood that I don't expect the Minister of Finance to have that information at his fingertips, but it's information he can easily obtain overnight and provide it to me tomorrow.

The question, again, is: What is the current adult population in Manitoba's jails? Is the minister prepared to give that undertaking? Or is he refusing to answer a question that I'm asking as the Justice critic on a very important matter for the public finances in Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: Well, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) knows full well that the Minister of Finance, who was told by the House leader that we had agreement from the Opposition House Leader to this afternoon consider the Interim Supply bill and resolution, would have come to these proceedings prepared to talk about the \$4.7-billion request for authorization, the part B capital that would be required, the liability amount that we would need to address interim before the passing of a budget, that the Finance Minister would have come prepared to talk about the other additional areas of expenditure that would be required interim, including multi-year funding agreements. And that's exactly what I've come prepared to do this afternoon, and, if the minister—if the member has questions pertaining to these matters, he can.

* (16:50)

The minister somehow alludes that I would be refusing him. No, I wouldn't. What I would be asking is why, if this is a burning question today, did the member not take the opportunity in question period? It's not that he has to wait for the answer. It's that he decided to forgo the opportunity to ask the question of the Justice Minister, the Attorney General (Mrs. Stefanson), only hours ago. And so here is the Justice Minister having no questions posed of her, but if it was such a burning question, why did he not avail himself of the opportunity to ask it in the appropriate time earlier today?

But I do want to assure that member that if he brings that question, if he can get agreement on that side—now, I don't know. There's only 12 of them, but maybe it's a difficult thing to get agreement about who's asking what question. I don't know what goes into that process across the way, but, judging from the disjointed way in which they ask questions, maybe there isn't a lot of collaboration that is done in advance of that 40-minute exercise. But he can ask the question tomorrow and I will provide notice to the Attorney General that the question is coming her way.

Would he give us that confirmation that that's his question for tomorrow?

Mr. Swan: Well, I wasn't going to put discussions from House leaders on the record, but the Minister of Finance has chosen to. I was supposed to be able to ask the question of the Minister for Justice this afternoon in order to move things ahead. I thought that I would give the Minister of Finance the opportunity—I would give the Minister of Finance the opportunity to get that information from the Minister of Justice and provide it to me tomorrow.

If the Minister of Justice is refusing to answer a very specific question about something which I know is a driver and is a challenge for him, setting the budget and dealing with the interim appropriation, that's fine. He can refuse. We will draw whatever inference we want from that, and we'll move on to other questions.

But I'm going to ask the minister again, in light of the fact that I'm not able to ask the question of the Minister of Justice, which we'd arranged would happen this afternoon, is he still refusing to provide that undertaking to me?

Mr. Friesen: Well, once again, I can tell that member that he's welcome to ask that question. Now, this afternoon I noticed that the member for

Fort Rouge asked two sets of questions in question period. So he asked a question and then had two supplementary questions. Then he stood again and asked a question and had two supplementary questions. So the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) had two questions, but the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) said he wasn't available to ask his question in question period.

Well, it sounds to me like they've got some disorganization on their side of the benches, or they sound to me like they have some lack of commitment to equity and equal opportunity on that side. So either the member for Fort Rouge is running roughshod over the opportunity, and I doubt that would be the case because he seems far more accommodating than that. I've known him less long than the member for Minto. That's why I make the claim. But the member for Minto, he had opportunity, and maybe if he could get the agreement of his colleagues, he could have had the answer to his question hours earlier.

In any case, the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) will be back in fine form tomorrow in question period, and nothing prohibits this member's opportunity to ask that question. Now, he knows full well that I'm not looking at a device and I'm not having pages run back and forth, so if he's asking in principle, is there a commitment from this government to provide answers to questions—absolutely. We'll be here every day answering questions in question period, in bill debate, in committee stage, in the question and answer periods, and we'll be accountable not only to Manitobans, but we'll provide answers to the opposition parties as they ask those questions.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm actually shocked that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) has such a lack of understanding of the interim supply process that he will not give an undertaking to answer a very, very important question for a matter which is a driver for expenses for the Department of Justice, but certainly for him in his role of the Finance Minister, and I'm gravely concerned that he's refused to provide a reasonable undertaking on an afternoon when, even though it was agreed by the House leaders, I'm unable to ask questions of the Minister of Justice.

So I'll move on to another important question for the minister, which I expect, as the chair of Treasury Board and as the Finance Minister, he would have the answer to.

Of course, we read even today in the Winnipeg Free Press that there continues to be a shortage of sheriff's officers in the province of Manitoba.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Finance to undertake to provide how much overtime for sheriff's officers is included in this interim supply bill that we are going to be asked to vote upon in the next couple of days.

Mr. Friesen: Well, the member is asking the questions, and he, at one time, was the minister of this department. What the minister is not disclosing in this Chamber is that he knows that the ongoing challenges that he refers to in fully staffing were his own challenges. They were challenges that did not miraculously start on April the 20th. They had been challenges that the department has expressed for a long time.

I know this even because I used to sit in on the Committee of Supply, and I used to listen to the exchanges that took place with that member for Minto, who, at one time, was the minister of Justice. I can recall the conversations at that time about the challenges on overtime, the challenges of staffing, the challenges of turnover. And they're real. And they're considerable. And I think what was—what is in place now is a commitment to look at new ways. Innovation and solving issues simply wasn't in place because the numbers didn't markedly improve when that member was the minister.

Now, somehow, to assert in this place that I am being 'obstinate' or unhelpful—well, this member will understand. If he asks me right now what the government's commitment will be on x, y, z in a particular area of core government, I only brought a few binders with me this afternoon; there's a limit to what I can carry into this Chamber. Now, I have considerable materials here in front of me and I can be helpful to him in a number of things, but I think the best thing I can do for that member is give him the commitment that tomorrow he can advocate for his question with his peers and he can come to question period and he can ask the question. Nothing prohibits him from doing so.

I must claim, Mr. Chairperson, I'm a bit perplexed by how apoplectic he has become on this matter.

Mr. Swan: Well, here we have a Minister of Finance who complains when the questions are too general, and now we've a Minister of Finance who complains when the questions are too specific. Like my friend,

the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), I'm not sure if the microphone's not working properly.

What I've been asking the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) to provide is an undertaking to give that information, so we can come back to deal with what will be his bill, his responsibility for interim supply, so that, as members of the opposition, we can ask and receive—ask for and receive information on issues which are very, very important. So I'm going to continue asking questions, and, hopefully, this evening the Minister of Finance can revisit his position. He can speak to the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson), and get these answers to me tomorrow.

Now, we know that, from the Estimates on June 9th, 2016, until a Public Accounts in the fall of 2016, the number of people in the adult jail had increased by 7 per cent. I'd like to ask the Minister of Finance for an undertaking to provide the number of additional correctional officers that have been hired to deal with this huge increase in the number of people in Manitoba's jails.

Mr. Friesen: Well, time is quickly elapsing, but if the member is looking for a commitment to provide these answers, certainly we'll provide him the answers. The best way to provide that would be tomorrow in question period.

But, you know, this member, I know, has personal relationships. We all walk the same

hallways and exit and enter at the same doors, and I'm sure that, you know, he could approach the minister directly. If there's a burning question he has, perhaps she can even directly provide that information.

But let's be clear that, in the few moments elapsing here, we had an opportunity today. We had before us a resolution, had to do with the interim appropriation act. We've spent hours, now, chatting. But what we haven't done is actually advanced this resolution. We have not advanced the bill. We have not yet advanced through the discussion stage on this. And I'm concerned because, if this NDP is against passing this budget, they should say so. If they're against adequate authority for 'expensure', they should say so. And it will not be to the benefit of Manitobans that they continue to drag their feet on this.

They're being obstructionist, they're being unhelpful, they're being uncooperative, and they had an opportunity to do better this afternoon.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 6, 2017

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