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| Manitoba | 39e | 4e | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du Ministère de la Santé | 15 avril 2010 | Theresa Oswald | Minister of Health | NPD |

It's been a very busy year in the Department of Health and in health care across Manitoba with challenges, of course, progress, successes and achievements. The health-care system was tested last year in two significant ways, one of the most serious floods that we've seen in the last 100 years and, of course, a global pandemic.

The flood created a need for the health-care system to do further planning to be certain that emergency medical services would be available to those in areas difficult to locate. Public health resources needed to be at the ready, as did all facets of the health-care system. I would say we saw some of the very best of our health-care system on display during the management of the flood, and I would like to make special note of the contribution of the Office of Disaster Management during that time.

It's also worth noting that, as preparations and plans for the flood came to a close and the Office of Disaster Management was quite literally folding their tent, around noon one day news across the globe broke of pandemic H1N1, and that tent went up again. I want to, of course, say thank you to the people in the Office of Disaster Management, as well as officials within our Public Health branch who are tasked with organizing and supervising Manitoba's pandemic response.

During both of these crisis, our front-line health workers, doctors, nurses, health-care aides, medical technologists, all allied health professionals continued to be the backbone of our health-care system. The front-line staff and volunteers were particularly essential to our mass immunization clinics organized across Winnipeg and across the province.

Manitobans were also served very well by our former deputy minister, Arlene Wilgosh. Manitobans were not the only ones served well by her. She was the lead provincial deputy minister last year and, of course, all of Canada benefited from her professionalism and expertise, particularly during pandemic H1N1.

We are pleased, of course to welcome our new Deputy Minister, Milton Sussman, who is well known to many of our members, having previously served as deputy minister of Health from 2001 to 2005. Before returning to the deputy's office in March, Mr. Sussman was vice-president, community health services and chief operating officer of the WRHA, and we are very pleased that he's agreed to return.

Although our health-care system handled unprecedented events over the last year, including changes in leadership, we also continue to move the health-care system forward and make important investments to improving the care Manitobans receive.

In this time of worldwide economic uncertainty, we know that Manitoba is positioned well to weather the impacts of the global economic downturn. Our focus in Manitoba, of course, will be to sustain the quality health-care system we have and to maintain the improvements that we've made over the last 10 years. We know that Manitobans expect to maintain their health-care services and that this is the time for a balanced approach with continued, strategic investments.

Innovation, of course, will be our priority going forward as we strive to improve patient care, while also working to increase efficiency and managing costs.

As signalled in the budget speech, we'll create a Health Innovation Network to link system leaders, local health providers, researchers, the business community and, of course, importantly, advice from patients. We're going to look at their ideas and look for leading practices from across Canada and around the world to advance our health-care system and provide even better care for patients.

We're going to expand the use of lean management and process improvement in the health-care field to find even more efficient ways of delivering care and improving the patient journey.

We know that we've spent over $1.2 billion to expand and modernize the approximately 100 health-care facilities across Manitoba since 1999, and we are–presently have a number of projects under construction, including renovations to the Victoria Hospital emergency room, an Aboriginal personal care home in south Winnipeg and renovations to the cardiac centre at St. Boniface Hospital.

Of course, the health capital investments don't stop at Winnipeg's Perimeter, we have focussed on revitalizing facilities and adding specialized equipment in rural and northern Manitoba.

In the past year, we completed construction of the new Portage la Prairie emergency department, started construction on a new dialysis unit in Gimli and started construction on a new wellness centre in Eriksdale, just to name a few of the rural capital projects we're moving forward on. Soon we're going to begin construction on a new dialysis unit in Russell.

In September of '09, we started construction on the $24-million cancer treatment centre in Brandon which will include the first linear accelerator outside of Winnipeg.

We won't abandon our infrastructure plans during these tough economic times, planning will not be frozen and progress will continue on projects including the mental health crisis response centre, new access centres in northwest Winnipeg and St. James, dialysis in Berens River and Peguis, a new Flin Flon clinic and many others.

We know that we've worked very hard to bring more doctors to Manitoba, and since '99, we've seen a net gain of 345 more here in the province of Manitoba. In 2009, we saw a record increase of 57 more doctors in one year. We committed to hire a hundred more doctors over this mandate and at 110, we've met this commitment, but we'll continue to work to hire more.

This past fall marked the second intake of 110 first-year medical students to the Faculty of Medicine, continuing to deliver on our election commitment to expand medical school spaces up to 110 from 70 in 1999.

We made a conscious decision to maintain this level of training because of how important we know it is to the future of our health-care system.

Coming on the heels of a record-breaking 57 doctors in 2008, Manitoba saw another record-breaking year for health human resource recruitment in '09.

As many of you may have seen today, according to our most recent independent data provided by Manitoba's nursing colleges, Manitoba had a record-breaking net gain of 498 nurses in '09, bringing the total to 2,532 nurses added since 1999.

We've added 124 nurse-training spaces since '07. Our investments in nurse training have resulted in nearly a doubling of the number of nurse-training seats in Manitoba.

There are many aspects of the health-care system we're going to have a chance to speak about, no doubt, Mr. Chairperson, our improvements in maternal care, our efforts to continue to bring down wait times and our continued focus on improving patient safety.

I do want to make one more note before I close, Mr. Chairman. I want, for the information of the committee, I want to put on the record that ministers are already receiving a 20 percent reduction in salary as announced in Budget 2010, a year earlier than what is required under current law. As committee members will note, this reduction is included in the total calculation of expenditures and is reflected on pages 8, 9 and 11 of Budget 2010 Estimates of Expenditure and review. The 20 percent reduction will continue if the applicable legislation is enacted by the Legislative Assembly.

In those few seconds I have left in my allotted time, Mr. Chairperson, I just wanted to extend my sincere thank you to all of those working on the front line, to those people working so hard in our regional health authorities, to those individuals that go to work for the people of Manitoba every single day in the Department of Health who may not often hear public thank you's extended to them.

I want them to hear mine today. These people are dedicated individuals that care about the well being of their neighbours and of our community. And, for that, they are in all of our debt. That you very much, Mr. Chair.