

First Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
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| ALLUM, James | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | NDP |
| ASHTON, Steve, Hon. | Thompson | NDP |
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| PEDERSEN, Blaine | Midland | PC |
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| WIGHT, Melanie | Burrows | NDP |
| WISHART, Ian | Portage la Prairie | PC |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

**Personal Care Homes and Long-Term
Care—Steinbach**

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The city of Steinbach is one of the fastest growing communities in Manitoba and one of the largest cities in the province.

This growth has resulted in pressure on a number of important services, including personal care homes and long-term care space in the city.

Many long-time residents of the city of Steinbach have been forced to live out their final years outside of Steinbach because a shortage of personal care homes and long-term care facilities.

Individuals who have lived in, worked in and contributed to the city of Steinbach their entire lives should not be forced to spend their final years in a place far from friends and family.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health to ensure additional personal care homes and long-term care spaces are made available in the city of Steinbach on a priority basis.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by R. Fender, W. Schalla, M. Schalla and thousands of other Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to have been received by the House.

Bipole III Routing

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

Background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba Hydro has been directed by this provincial government to construct its next high-voltage direct transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Manitoba.

This decision will cost Manitoba taxpayers at least \$1 billion more than an east-side line, which is 500 kilometres shorter and more reliable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to build the Bipole III transmission line on the shorter, more reliable east side of Lake Winnipeg route in order to save Manitobans from a billion-dollar boondoggle.

And this petition is signed by B. Vandermeulen, M. Vandermeulen, M. Van Dasselaar and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have seated—where we have with us from Inkster School 52 grade 4 and 5 students under the direction of Ms. Karen Tayfel. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Mackintosh).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

And also in the public gallery we have seated the Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education. We have 100 grade 5 students under the direction of Emily Hector. They are the guests of the honourable Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Mr. Kostyshyn).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome all of you this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTIONS

**Addictions Foundation of Manitoba
Service Reductions**

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): You guys make it a lot tougher to ask hard questions. Mr. Speaker, I do want to just begin

by thanking members from all sides and staff and members of the media for all the very kind messages that I and my family have received over the past short period of time and just indicate that it's made a difficult situation considerably easier to get through. So I want to thank everybody for that. It is good to be back, and obviously now have to make the very awkward segue to question period, but I will do my best to go from gracious to critical in a moment's notice. So, thank you for that. Thank you.

Now, on that note, Mr. Speaker, we saw with the budget brought down a number of weeks ago a broken promise on taxes. We've seen the misuse of civil servants, and now we see cutbacks in services to people with addictions.

I wonder if the government can indicate how they can justify this reduction in service to people with addictions through the AFM at the same time as they're raising taxes on Manitobans.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I'd like to make sure that all people know that we haven't cut funding to the AFM this year. We will make sure that if the option of closing during the summer is done, it will be done on a rotating basis so that we will not affect services that—on addiction services that are required by people. We'll make sure that people have access to the services that we believe they need.

And I might remind all members that the funding for AFM in 1998-99 was \$9.6 million; now it's \$19.4 million. We'll consider—continue to fund addiction services. We'll continue to support the people that need it, and I'm pleased that we've done a good job of broadening the addiction services available for people in Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: The minister makes reference to broadening services, but the CEO of AFM is telling quite a different story. At the front line, they are saying that there will likely be impacts on wait-lists. Yvonne Block said, it's going to have some impact on clients and on wait-lists. They'll be looking at various strategies to reduce front-line services to people with addictions.

And the question, I think, that Manitobans are asking is that after promising to protect front-line services and to raise no taxes, the government has done the absolute opposite; they've raised taxes and they're cutting services. How can they tell Manitobans that this is the right way to go?

Mr. Rondeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, all members might not know that during the summer, demand for addiction services does go down. And one of the difficulty of maintaining the number of programs throughout the province is some of these facilities are smaller, and we think that by having the option of closing some facilities for maintenance, allowing the entire staff to go on holidays, is an option.

And I'd like to let all members know that the programs with the highest demand will not be cut. There will be services available for people. So there will be services there.

And I'd like to also mention that we're developing a centralized intake program, which will make sure that people have one in and so that they can be referred to the services they require. We'll continue to expand the IT system within the addictions facilities—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Mr. McFadyen: If you speak to people who have battled addictions or people who work in that world, they'll tell you those addictions don't take a summer holiday, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that many in the community were already referring to the fact that there were significant waits and significant challenges in terms of getting access to services even before this cutback to these services.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wonder how can the government justify their betrayal of Manitobans, who they promised as of September they would be there to protect the front-line services and no tax increases, and the government has now gone and done the exact opposite of what they said they were going to do.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): I thank the member for the question, and I'm sure that he knows that he and his family have been in our thoughts all over this House for the last while and we're pleased to see his face today.

I would say that addictions, very clearly, is a priority for this government. That's why we've seen since 1999 a more than doubling of the funding for addictions services. We've seen investments in increased beds for addictions services. We've seen investments in services for youth. We've seen investments in new facilities.

It's very clear when I read the communication from AFM that part of their planning is to ensure that

front-line services are protected. That's part of the—that's one of the goals that they are looking at for this summer. We know that during the summer it is common that maintenance is done on facilities. It's common that staff take vacations. This is being done to allow for that, but also to make sure that the services that people with addictions need are still available through the summer months. Thank you.

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba Service Reductions

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): That really is hollow rhetoric from this government. This government has had warnings over many years that with their uncontrolled spending eventually something's going to have to give, and the NDP have chosen to ignore those warnings.

Now we hear that the AFM has been told that they're going to need to find up to a million dollars in cost savings. To achieve this, the AFM doesn't know what else they can do but to close the men's beds for the month of July. So that's for four weeks they will be closing beds, even though men are already waiting two months to access care in this province.

* (13:40)

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Healthy Living: Why is his government cutting back on this desperately needed program? This program doesn't take summer holidays, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): Let's put some accurate information on the record, where what we've done is moved it from \$9.6 million back in 1998-99 to 19.5 for addiction centre—AFM alone.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, if you take all of the addiction services, whether it's the early intervention, the post-treatment facility, we've moved it beyond \$28 million. So we've expanded the services, we've expanded the support, and I might add that no one, no front-line services will be eliminated. We will make sure there's services out there for people. We'll ensure that these enhanced services continue, and I'm proud of our record on decreasing the wait-list and decreasing—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: The wait-list for access to care and addictions is not very good in this province. Men are waiting two months to access care and women are waiting three months to access service. The head of AFM, Yvonne Block, said that because of this

cutback, that wait times for addiction care in Manitoba will spike.

The Minister of Healthy Living said that this is not going to affect services, and I don't know how he can make such an incompetent statement and show such a lack of understanding about addiction care.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Healthy Living to explain why he is contradicting the expert opinion of the head of AFM.

Mr. Rondeau: I believe that what we want to do is make sure we have not just one service but we want to enhance all the services.

So let's look at pre-treatment, early intervention. Right now there is 31,500 people getting early intervention. Pre-treatment, we have expanded that where we actually have outpatient services. We have post-treatment services, and may I ask—add, Mr. Speaker, where you funded only a handful of services and agencies, we now have 13 jewels in our crown which we fund. And they do everything from pre-treatment to post-treatment to outpatient to residential treatment.

And might I add, the decrease of wait times for women have gone from about eight months down to a period of weeks, and I'm pleased that we're decreasing the wait-list for all areas, including methadone, including women's addiction, including residential treatment.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: The Minister of Healthy Living has no credibility with that answer, and I wish he would listen to the questions.

We're talking about a million-dollar cut to service, and before the election, the NDP promised no new taxes and no program cuts. Then, after the election, the people with addictions are facing a very big cut.

I will remind the Minister of Healthy Living that people with addictions in this province have died on waiting lists because they can't access care under this government.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Healthy Living to explain: Why did they say one thing before the election and they're doing something the total opposite after the election?

Mr. Rondeau: I might add that \$19.4 million is the same as nineteen four million dollars, which was in the previous budget. I also went on record to say that

we have a new centralized intake, which will make the program more efficient and link all the addiction services together. I might add we're also putting in new technology, which is above that, which is going to make the program, again, more efficient.

And, Mr. Speaker, I might add that we have a number of programs such as Magnus house, such as the addiction post-treatment follow-up, which are new, that are helping support the people who've gone through residential treatment, who live in this community, and I—that's been an expansion that we've done. We've also expand methadone treatment, both in the AFM and outside AFM, and I think our record—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Immigration Settlement Services Meetings on Federal Centralization

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Last night, I made a quick road trip 'brack' to Brandon for one of the meetings in the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism's fear and misinformation road show.

The minister has apparently been out on the road telling small groups how horrible he believes their lives will be with changes to settlement funding in Manitoba. This program is funded primarily by the federal government, and they have chosen to run it as they do in every other province. This program is about new Canadians, and Manitoba will still play its part.

Mr. Speaker, the minister needs to focus on what her department can do as opposed to running her campaign of fear. In fact, last night, the minister asked if there was any press in the room and looked very relieved when the answer was no. What is this Minister of Immigration hiding?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I learned at Maple Leaf that they went on a recruitment drive to Honduras. They had 1,000 applications for people who wanted to come here. Because of the minimum language requirements, when they went through the CVs it was brought down to 295. When they actually interviewed people they had a possible 97. That's 1,000 people who wanted to come here, but because of minimum language requirements it's gone down to a possible 97.

Why won't this member stand up for Maple Leaf? Why won't this member stand up for Brandon? Why won't this member stand up for Manitoba?

Mr. Helwer: [*inaudible*] this minister being around when Maple Leaf was here. In fact, I'm sure they probably voted against it.

But, in fact, Saskatchewan went to Northern Ireland just recently, Mr. Speaker. They had 300 jobs and they had 7,000 people show up at that job fair, and I know Maple Leaf is going to go there.

So last night the minister told the audience she was afraid to leave the country because she was concerned the federal government might not let her back in. What a horrible thing to say. What a horrible thing to say, Mr. Speaker, to frighten this audience. What kind of a country does she think Canada is? It's a country that many have died for to ensure our freedom, yet here is a government minister creating fear that Canadians might be denied entry to their country.

Mr. Speaker, does the Immigration Minister truly believe that the federal government is going to bar her from re-entering the country if she travels abroad?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, the context was in minimum language requirements. The federal government was wanting to bring in the minimum language requirement of CLB8, which is post-doctoral English. The joke that I made was, I better not go for a vacation, they won't let me in because I'm only at a master's level.

Mr. Speaker, the minimum language requirements are a concern to people across this country, and right in the area that he purports to represent, right in Maple Leaf, they are concerned. Why isn't he concerned about Maple Leaf? Why isn't he talking to his buddies in Ottawa about this how—about how this can negatively affect the people that he represents?

Again, Mr. Speaker, prime opportunity for the member of Brandon West to stand down for Manitoba.

Request for Apology from Member

Mr. Helwer: Well, I will stand up because that's what I'm supposed to do when speaking.

So, you know, when speaking to the budget in the House on May 1st, the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Pettersen) referred to 'federal' members of

Parliament as federal storm troopers. Mr. Speaker, to me this is an incredibly offensive statement. To those of us of a certain generation, storm troopers brings up images of Nazi storm troopers. I'd hope the member from Flin Flon would retract this statement. Obviously to a younger audience it evokes images from *Star Wars*, and it's still a very derogatory statement and goes to the fear that this government is trying to create in communities.

Mr. Speaker, in this first step to ending your campaign of fear, will the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism ask her colleague from Flin Flon to apologize to Manitoba's federal members of Parliament for referring to them as storm troopers?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, the apology needed in this House is every member of the opposition who took a standing vote against the retention of settlement services in the provincial government. They can still retract. They can still stand up for Manitoba. They can still come over and stand with Maple Leaf, with the newcomers, with the settlement services, with Brandon, with Winnipeg, with all of the people in southern Manitoba who have accepted newcomers, who are helping their communities just—not just survive, but thrive. They still have the opportunity. Stand up for Manitoba.

* (13:50)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

We have a lot of our fine young Manitobans with us here observing our question period this afternoon. I would ask for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please make sure that we leave a very positive and lasting impression with our young folks.

Highway 6 Upgrade Requirements

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Losing a loved one is hard on everyone involved.

Last night, Highway 6 Concerned Citizens Coalition, led by Lee Garfinkel, placed 21 crosses south of Warren. This represents lost lives on a busy stretch of highway which needs significant upgrades and repairs.

I know the minister is going to get up and say they spend millions of dollars on roads each and every year. However, for years, Highway 6 users have raised concerns about this highway, and the fatalities continue. The coalition is concerned that the proposed upgrades to Highway 6 south of Grosse

Isle do not go far enough. Mr. Speaker, this problem needs to be addressed before tenders go out.

Will the minister today agree to take another look at this project?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): One of the things we've done since we've been in government in 1999 is significantly reinvest in our highway system. We have systematically worked on highways ranging from the National Highway System—by the way, which has now been included; Highway 6 is now part of the National Highway System—and some of the small roads in our province.

And I do want to put on the record that we have significantly invested in Highway 6, \$85 million just in the last few years. In the upcoming five-year plan, we have a further \$78 million. We take very seriously that reinvestment. We have particularly worked on some of the curves in the southern end. We're reconstructing or constructing, in many cases, shoulders that didn't exist—paved shoulders.

We're making a significant difference, Mr. Speaker, and that's part of our overall highway investment plan. And it very much is about the kind of concerns that residents of—around Highway 6 have—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Eichler: Kim Tindall was also at the memorial site, honouring her son, Brant, who died in a collision on Highway 6 in December of 2005. Anyone who has faced the loss of a loved one wants to try and prevent another loss from occurring. This is precisely what this group is trying to do, save lives, Mr. Speaker. One life is too many to add to the list of lives already lost on this treacherous highway.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister responsible: Will this government commit to right this wrong before someone else's life is lost on this busy highway?

Mr. Ashton: Our commitment on Highway 6, as it is with our entire highway system, is to reinvest in our infrastructure.

And I think it's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that it's very much based on bringing our highways up to a safe standard. And I can—I know Highway 6 like the back of my hand, and I can tell you, when it comes to reconstructing shoulders, reconstructing portions that had not seen any investment for a considerable period of time, taking out the corners that were some of the biggest hazards, including the

one around Warren, which the member knows about, that is all about saving lives.

It's part of our overall commitment, and it's one of the reasons I always say to members opposite, I wish sometimes they would support our overall investment in our highways. We're investing now four times what we did in terms of capital in 1999. It's very much about safety.

Mr. Eichler: At last year's public meeting held in Grosse Isle that I attended along with MIT staff and some other MLAs, the message was very clear. We need to take this very seriously and upgrade Highway 6 for the current traffic conditions.

The RM of Rosser recognizes the problem with Highway 6 that was so serious last year they agreed to cost sharing the required upgrades with the Province.

This highway is built to the standards of 1960. It's time to get the updated standards of the 21st century. Mr. Speaker, the risk of people travelling on Highway 6 need to be reduced. Motorists need to know that no more lives will be lost as a result of outdated road conditions.

Will this government do the right thing and commit to those changes today?

Mr. Ashton: We are investing in our highway system, and I can tell you there were sections of Highway 6 that were an embarrassment when I became minister in 1999. They had been ignored for several decades. And we've invested in that, Mr. Speaker. And, in fact, not only we've invested, we've done a complete plan in terms of Highway 6, as we do with all our other highways across the province.

And I do want to stress that as we move forward, one of the things we are doing is bringing those highways up to the kind of standard we enjoy. And that's one of the reasons, by the way, we're investing \$2 for every \$1 we raise in gas tax, even after the most recent increase in the gas tax.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I make no apologies in this House, anywhere in Manitoba for the investment and the courageous decision this government has made, and I hope that the member, in addition to asking the question, will support that investment. I notice he didn't support the budget because, you know, it is about investing. We're raising the money and we're spending it on our highway system.

Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders Request for Meeting with Premier

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, the disaster continues to unfold for victims of the 2011 flood around Lake Manitoba. Homes and cottages remain damaged. The agricultural 'secting' is hurting and business continues to be disrupted. Organizations like the Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders have worked tirelessly for flood victims, but they, too, are getting frustrated with the inaction by this NDP government. Yesterday, the association wrote the Premier (Mr. Selinger) outlining their concerns and asking why, despite their repeated requests for a meeting, the Premier won't meet with them.

Mr. Speaker, it's been nearly a year since the disaster hit Lake Manitoba. Why does the Premier refuse to meet with the Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, we've had numerous meetings since the beginning of the flood, a flood that continues to this point, Mr. Speaker, and we have made significant progress. Are there still issues to be dealt with? Absolutely. But if you consider the fact that when we're dealing with 30,000 claims under various different programs—that's triple the number in 1997—many which are in and around Lake Manitoba, I think it's important to note we've already paid out \$650 million. Many of those programs are stand-alone provincial programs. We'd appreciate some assistance from the federal government in addition to the DFA cost sharing.

But we are committed and, as I speak, Mr. Speaker, there's a significant amount of work being done, either by the Province or by municipalities or by homeowners or producers around the lake. It's a historic flood, but we're there working with Manitobans to meet that challenge.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, in its letter to the Premier, the Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of response to their concerns. The letter stated, and I quote: "The people and property owners of Lake Manitoba were sacrificed their homes, security, legacies and in many cases, livelihoods due to your Government's decision to divert the water from Winnipeg which created this man-made disaster." End quote.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this government again: Will arrangements be made for a meeting between the Premier and the Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders to discuss their outstanding concerns related to the 2011 flood, or will their request be ignored for another year?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, there can be no doubt that last year was—and the flood that's continuing with this year—was historic, and it wasn't just Manitoba. It was Saskatchewan. And who can forget what happened in Minot, North Dakota, last year, our neighbours to the south: 3,100 homes devastated, thousands of people in that province impacted?

And what we did last year is when people in and around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin said, don't forget about us, when they said, we need relief on the lake level, we took—undertook historic project, Mr. Speaker, which was to build for the first time an outlet out of Lake St. Martin. We targeted November 1st. We built it on time and on budget. We listened to the people around Lake Manitoba.

And as we continue with the recovery, yes, Mr. Speaker, there are still issues to be dealt with and, yes, there are frustrations. We were there, though, in 2011; we're there in 2012. We will work with every flood-affected Manitoban until we get them back to normal.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, the 'assoshin' of—the Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders has pointed out the urgent need for the cleanup of trees and other 'depris'—debris which are posing a sizable fire hazard to homes and cottages. They also cite concerns over long-term environmental damage.

Flood-affected businesses have been told that there will be no assistance for 2012, even when the lake is still in flood stage. Ranchers and farmers are being told that they're on their own to find pasture and feed for 2012, even if their hay pastures are still a mess of grey silt and 'depris'—debris and their pasture fences have been destroyed by flood waters.

Mr. Speaker, can the government not get its act together and take action to help those people that they were so quick to sacrifice a year ago?

* (14:00)

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the member would not want to leave on the record the suggestion that cleanup is not taking place right now.

Many of the municipalities around the lake have made a significant effort to clean up. Many are now moving to that point. It's important to note we're now into spring, and there are—in fact, there are tenders going out for a number of the municipalities as we speak. There's been a significant effort. In some areas around Lake Manitoba there are still access issues. In some areas around Lake St. Martin there are still access issues because of saturated groundwater conditions. So we're not underestimating any of the challenges that any of the people around those lakes are faced with.

But it's very easy to get up and ask questions that make categorical statements which are really nothing more but rhetoric. What we're dealing with is dealing with the historic challenge. We have dealt with 30,000 claims right now, \$650 million. We're making significant progress, but we're not going to stop until we get everybody back to normal.

Flooding (Lake Manitoba) Multi-Year Compensation Program Availability

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, it's been nearly one year since people around Lake Manitoba were sacrificed for the greater good during the 2011 flood. They understood they were being flooded to save billions of dollars of damage in other areas of the province. They weren't happy, but they had no choice but to accept their fate. They accepted what happened because this NDP government repeatedly promised they would look after them and deal with the substantial damages they sustained.

Mr. Speaker, why is this government now breaking their repeated promises to the people around Lake Manitoba?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I want to stress once again that we met the challenge last year with people around Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin, with historic construction of an outlet.

This was something, by the way, that had been talked about since the 1960s. The Water Commission in 1978 rejected it. We built it. We took something that would have taken six to seven years; we did it in a matter of months.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, the former minister of Agriculture said there would be multi-year help for Lake Manitoba flood victims. Now the people are told there are no programs going forward. This NDP government tries to divert the attention away from the ongoing issues by talking about the number of

claims filed and the money spent, but they conveniently refuse to answer specific questions about program shortcomings and they break their promises to flood victims.

Mr. Speaker, do they not care about keeping their promises? Do they not care about the people who are hurt most with their intentional flood? Why did they promise multi-year compensation and now say there are no programs going forward?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, we care about flood victims. That's one of the reasons we moved with flood programs to protect Manitobans. It's one of the reasons we put in place six stand-alone provincial programs last year. Again, these are a hundred per cent funded by the people of Manitoba.

And it's not just this government, Mr. Speaker, and it's not just the municipalities in terms of that commitment. One thing I will say is part of the Manitoba spirit is I didn't hear very many people, if any, last year questioning, not only the flood fight but the unprecedented compensation assistance to flood victims.

Now, do we have challenges ahead? Absolutely. Have we made progress, though, Mr. Speaker? There's been \$650 million paid out, and we are working round the clock with our municipal partners, with homeowners, with farmers and with business people on those 30,000 claims. We're going to continue to work until we get people back to normal.

Mr. Briese: In a May 28th letter to the Premier (Mr. Selinger), the Association of Lake Manitoba Stakeholders stated, and I quote: The current program being used to help people and property owners affected by the flood of 2011 are inequitable, inadequate, and confusing for the people trying to access them; it has become evident that the people and communities affected by the flood event need to have policy changes in place in order to become whole again. End of quote, and I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, where is the integrity? When will the government admit that there are shortcomings in the programs, fix them so that Lake Manitoba flood victims can recover?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record that when it comes to the program that was put in place last year—six stand-alone provincial programs. We didn't sit back and say, well, we have a disaster financial assistance program, which is cost shared, by the way, up to a maximum of 90 per cent with the federal government. We didn't say under the

DFA program that cottage owners would not be eligible, and for the first time ever in Manitoba history, we stood up and we provided support to cottage owners—the first time, the member should really acknowledge that.

We identified some of the specific concerns involving our producers in and around the lake, Mr. Speaker. We identified some of the unique issues around the lake. And on top of that we built the emergency outlet on time, on budget, in a matter of months.

That is not only caring, Mr. Speaker, about the people around that lake; it's sending a message to all Manitobans. When it comes to floods, the bottom line is we in Manitoba, this government, all Manitobans—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Employment and Income Assistance Program Housing Allowance

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's well known as a party which doesn't believe in free markets and in market values, but rather acts in any way they can to distort markets because of their penchant for thinking that they know better than the market. An example is their approach to supporting housing for those on social assistance.

While the market value for rents has increased, the NDP's support for housing has changed little. At \$285 a month for a single individual on social assistance or \$471 a month for a family of four, the support for housing is today far below market value for renting.

I ask the government: When will they end their opposition to free-market rents and increase the housing shelter allowance for people on social assistance?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for that question. Certainly, over the time that we've been in government, we've seen historic investments in housing, both in terms of not-for-profit housing and social housing, working with diverse partners.

I know there's a very exciting project in my old hometown of Brandon, working with the Canadian Mental Health Association to build housing. We've seen, I think, some very exciting developments, looking at some of the downtown hotels that have been—become supportive housing for some of the

people who are the most challenging to house, folks who are homeless and deal with mental health issues.

So we are making progress on that issue, Mr. Speaker, and, of course, there's more to do in terms of ensuring that everybody has access to safe and affordable housing, and we'll continue to make progress.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, there is no progress on this issue as I table these reports.

We know that each month, because the NDP has no concern for market values and for normal economics, that tens of thousands of families and tens of thousands of children have no choice but to use their food money to pay their rent.

The gap between real rents and the paltry NDP support has grown enormously as a result of the information which I show. As a result, many people go hungry and we have increased poverty, increased learning problems for children in school and increased dropout rates.

I ask the government: When will they stop driving so many people to be hungry in Manitoba and having no choice but to use food banks?

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's opposite interest in this issue and passion for helping people escape poverty and go on to better lives. And one of the things we've seen in the time that we've been in office is a decrease in the number of families that are led by single parents, especially single women, a decrease in their poverty levels.

And some of that is because of very deliberate choices this government has made: choices to end the clawback of the National Child Benefit, which put millions of dollars back into the hands of those families; choices to invest in child care, to build thousands of spaces, to make sure that families can get decent child care so that they can go on to work; and choices to raise the minimum wage, Mr. Speaker, for the first time in many years to see the minimum wage go up every year that we've been in office. Those kinds of choices have helped families escape poverty and go on to live better lives.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the NDP have failed miserably. The number of children who are in families who are so poor that they have to use food banks has gone up dramatically, by 500 per cent under the watch of this NDP government.

The NDP's unconscionable neglect of those who are poor is having disastrous consequences in

Manitoba for how well children do in school, for increased crime because of poverty, and for various other problems, particularly in inner Winnipeg and elsewhere.

I ask the government to admit that providing a family of four with \$200 a month less than the actual costs for rents for available housing results in a major increase in poverty in Manitoba. Why is the government doing this?

* (14:10)

Ms. Howard: Well, certainly, we've put in place programs like RentAid and the Portable Housing Benefit that has put additional funding into the hands of people who are struggling to meet their housing costs. And I know from speaking with those people and folks that work with those people what a difference it's made in their lives.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know, I remember being an activist on this issue in the 1990s when the member opposite was in the federal government and some of the members opposite were in the provincial government. And at that time, the federal government ended all participation in the Canada Assistance Plan. That was a plan that was a partnership between the Province and the federal government to provide the very supports that the member is now asking about. Would—did he raise his voice, I wonder, Mr. Speaker, when he had the opportunity to stand up then for people who are living on social assistance.

Gordon Bell High School Green Space Project Status

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): As someone who actually lives in the inner city, it's nice to have a chance to actually talk about some of the success stories that we have there, and there are many, many of them in partnership with our government.

I was honoured today to attend a very, very special event at Gordon Bell High School.

I do have to wonder what the end of that story would have been, heaven forbid, members opposite and their cost-cutting ways had been in power, but that wasn't the case.

Instead, we had a very different turn of events, and I'm wondering if our hardworking Education Minister might care to inform the House about the marvellous celebration that we had earlier there.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): It certainly was a privilege and an honour to join the celebration today at Gordon Bell High School, to turn the sod on the brand new green space that they've been working so hard on for five years, Mr. Speaker. Our government was pleased to provide \$1.5 million to this new green space.

I want to congratulate the parent council, who's been working beside the students for five years to make their dreams become a reality, Mr. Speaker. This is a very exciting initiative for the whole West Broadway community, because this is a legacy. This is a parking lot that has been turned into an educational green space, an opportunity for recreation. And I'm very excited to tell you that it's not grass; it's turf, state of the art.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Flooding (Brandon) Optimist Soccer Park Damage Claim

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): The impact of the 2011 flood continues to be felt around Manitoba.

For example, in Brandon the effects are being felt at the Brandon Optimists soccer park, where the flooding rendered the soccer pitches unusable. Games are now being played at facilities scattered around the city instead of one central location.

This is taxing the limited resources the—of the Brandon Youth Soccer Association. The association has sought help through the province's excess moisture stimulus program and the disaster financial assistance program, but no help has been forthcoming. In fact, they are now on their fourth adjuster.

I know the minister will say there's 30,000 claims, but each and every one of those claims is important to that person.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister responsible: How long will it take to get the aid flowing to the Brandon Youth Soccer Association?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, you know, just for once, the member for Brandon West had the opportunity to get up and make some positive statement about something, about anything. And I thought, if he was talking about the flood of 2011, he would have talked about the tremendous effort of the City of Brandon, the people of Brandon, the province of Manitoba, supported by the federal government.

You know, there are 30,000 claims; each one of them will be adjudicated fairly.

But I can tell you, one thing again, and I think I've said this in the past, you know, a lot of us on this side, when it comes to Brandon, it's not just the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell); we believe in Brandon first. We were there last year in terms of the flood, Mr. Speaker. We'll be there for Brandon anytime, anywhere, and I hope for once the member for Brandon West will say something positive about Brandon.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Robyn Otto

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I rise today to honour Ms. Robyn Otto, a young Beausejour woman, who was our 2012 Woman of Distinction nominee and the recipient of a 2012 Prairie Award of Promise.

The Women of Distinction nominees and award recipients are young women who have enriched their community and inspired others through their creativity, leadership, compassion and dedication.

The Prairie Award of Promise category is reserved for those Women of Distinction nominees who are enrolled in a school outside of Winnipeg and who will graduate in 2012.

Ms. Otto was nominated by a local community leader from Beausejour, Ms. Tracey Drabek-Zirk, and she was honoured at the Women of Distinction Awards gala event on May 2nd here in Winnipeg. Along with her award, Ms. Otto has also received an academic scholarship to pursue educational opportunities at the post-secondary level.

Ms. Otto is known around the Edward Schreyer School in Beausejour as having a positive and uplifting attitude. She is the vice-president of the student council and co-chair of the grad committee. Ms. Otto is part of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's Intensive Training Program and she also volunteers as a teaching assistant and role model for young dancers in Beausejour. She is the only Royal Winnipeg Ballet student to ever have received both the RWB Award of Achievement and the RWB Teaching Assistant Award of Achievement.

In the Lac du Bonnet constituency, we have a long history of young women who have made outstanding contributions to our communities.

However, Ms. Otto demonstrates an incredible and prodigious internal motivation to everything she does, and we all admire her level of dedication and commitment.

Ms. Otto's family and friends are all very proud of her recent accolades, and on behalf of the constituency of Lac du Bonnet, the town of Beausejour and the RM of Brokenhead, we wish her the best of luck in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Awareness Concert in Honour of Missing
Aboriginal Men and Women**

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, Opaskwayak Cree Nation held a powerful event on May 26 to raise awareness and to honour missing Aboriginal men and women. I was honoured to be one of a number of guest speakers at the rally. We joined over 300 people in a march to the Gordon Lathlin Memorial Centre. We came together to shine a spotlight on an issue that is important not only in Manitoba but across Canada and North America.

After the march, we enjoyed a delicious barbecue. We then took time to hold a healing circle and a balloon release in honour of missing Aboriginal people. We showed that we remembered them and still hope for their safe return. Everyone present also wished to show their support for families of the missing for the pain they have endured and continue to endure.

More than a dozen musicians and bands played a free concert after the healing circle, which raised our spirits. The musicians travelled from all over Manitoba to be there. Some came from Mathias Colomb First Nation, and others drove in from Norway House to participate and entertain the crowd. Many people got up to dance. The bands played for hours, and people stayed to talk about everyday life and issues in the community.

I would like to thank the Opaskwayak Cree Nation Councillor Savannah Henderson, her brother Ken Henderson, both young people, all of—and all of the other volunteers who worked so hard to organize this meaningful event. I know that everyone who was there that day appreciated their efforts, and we were glad to have a way to acknowledge this deeply upsetting problem and to talk about how we can work together to solve it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Carolyn Froese

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, you would think that raising a large family and running a catering business, sitting on a school board and supporting a farming husband would provide Carolyn Froese with enough to fill her days. Recently, though, Carolyn was shocked to discover that her family nominated her for Show Your Ricki's Style contest, and it helped that her closet is full of clothing from Ricki's. The clothing company Ricki's was running an Internet contest to find models for a new advertising campaign.

Sixty contestants made it through to the first round of voting after surviving initial cuts from a panel of judges. For 10 days, dozens of family and friends voted through Facebook to help Carolyn win the contest. After advancing to the second round, 13 more days of voting went by, with Carolyn running neck and neck with a contestant from Ontario. As the clock struck midnight on the final day of voting, Carolyn found herself in the lead by 106 votes, with a whopping total of 1,290 votes. Supports came from far and wide across the local area, with generous showing of support.

Normally, big apples are reserved for homemade pies in Carolyn's house; however, she got to experience the real Big Apple, New York City, as a part of the grand prize experience for the contest. Along with meals, accommodations, tickets to a Broadway show, and spa treatments, Carolyn will take part in a photo shoot to be used for Ricki's online advertising campaign.

While she admits to being a little camera shy, the level of support she received from her family and friends are enough to carry her through the photo shoot. Her husband gives a large amount of credit to the community and was amazed when the people voted on Facebook, they would often leave a little comment for Carolyn, encouraging to keep it up and cheering her on to victory.

* (14:20)

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all my constituents to wish Carolyn luck in New York and to congratulate her for getting this far. Very shortly, all of Ricki's customers will be able to see why Carolyn is such an excellent choice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, Flin Flon celebrated Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee. Local schools took part in the celebration by decorating hats, making fascinators from recycling materials, writing letters to the Queen, holding classes on etiquette and having tea parties.

Our Premier (Mr. Selinger) attended the opening of our royal weekend, which was opened by the town crier and a motorcycle parade. After lunch at city hall, the Flin Flon Community Choir sang "O Canada" at the main stage while the flag was raised, followed by "God Save the Queen" sung by Katrina Windjack. We enjoyed a drumming ceremony, a smudging ceremony and an opening prayer. A caribou tufting by local artist Theresa Wride was presented to the Premier as a gift for Queen Elizabeth. The Flin Flon Community Choir closed with a piece written by Andrew Lloyd Webber for the Diamond Jubilee and performed for the first time in Flin Flon.

The Honourable Ed Schreyer and his wife, Lily, joined us for the performance by the Winnipeg–Royal Winnipeg Ballet. The house was packed with 500 people in attendance.

On Sunday afternoon we were treated to high tea at the community hall. The room was beautifully decorated and every table bore the actual china used the last time the royal family was in Winnipeg. Local cadets lined the doorways, ready to escort guests to their seats. The Rotarians served the tea, while the Knights of Columbus, in full regalia, escorted dignitaries to their tea stations. Former Governor General Schreyer entertained the crowd with personal stories about the Queen and her family.

I'd like to thank Crystal Kolt and her wonderful team for organizing all the events that were enjoyed by our community. Their hard work, creativity and sense of fun were an inspiration to everyone. Crystal and Bob Putko were presented with the Queen Diamond Jubilee Medal for their volunteerism and dedication to Flin Flon. The people of Flin Flon are blessed to have a community that is so enthusiastic about celebrating the arts and the art of having fun.

God save the Queen; she sure inspires a good party.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Laurie and Doug Murray

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour today Laurie and Doug Murray of Brandon, Manitoba, for their contribution to the Brandon Regional Health Authority's a 'hense'—A Sense of Home cancer treatment residence centre.

The new Brandon cancer treatment residence centre will be aptly named Murray House in honour of the generation–generous donation from the Murray family.

A Sense of Home campaign is a project that seeks to provide a residence for patients that are undergoing cancer treatment from communities outside of Brandon.

The intention is to provide cancer patients with a comfortable, convenient and welcoming place where the families of patients can visit freely and spend the night if they need to. In my opinion, it is a project that recognizes the fundamental difficulties many families face from rural areas who have loved ones undergoing cancer treatment and it provides a new and improved option for the treatment and recovery purposes.

The Murray family have long been good business people in western Manitoba and good community supporters. The Murrays' donation to the BRHA project was \$625,000. It was the largest single donation to the project so far and it accounts for one-quarter of the project's total needed resources. When Doug Murray was asked about his incredible contribution, he replied: We felt that this was a good cause. Cancer touches almost everybody.

Laurie has been a tremendous asset to the campaign as co-chair for Kerry Auriat. They have found great support in the community for such a worthy cause.

As people from rural communities come to Brandon for cancer treatment, the Murrays felt they deserved to know that they are supported in their time of need.

I am humbled today to rise today to tell the story of Murray House, the cancer treatment residence project of the BRHA. I thank the Murrays and all the other donors who have made this project possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY*(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****House Business**

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, would you move us into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker: We'll now resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)****HEALTH**

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Before we begin, I would like to remind the members to ensure their electronic devices are in silent mode and to also speak more closely into the microphones.

Now, this section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Health. Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes, Mr. Chair, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

Ms. Oswald: It is my privilege, once again, to make a few comments about health as we embark on Committee of Supply for this year. I would just beg, if I may, Mr. Chair, if I could ask my honourable critic a question, just to start off for procedurally. Am I allowed to do that?

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Oswald: In years gone by, it has been the practice of the member, for which I'm grateful, by the way, to—if possible, be able to signal to us when she may be wanting to ask some questions about Pharmacare and the drug program, so we can make staff available. We do indeed have staff present right now, but if she doesn't think that that's an area that

she might be moving to today, then I could dismiss them to go on to other duties. If the member could signal to us, that would be most appreciated.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I probably won't be getting to the area of Pharmacare for a number of hours, so I doubt it will be today or tomorrow. So, absolutely, rather than have the staff sitting here, I'm fine with working with the minister's department to find a good time for everybody.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I thank the member for that information, and I'm sure my staff has heard accordingly and will flee. And I'll just continue on with my statement then, Mr. Chair, as appropriate.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, thank you. Go ahead.

Ms. Oswald: It's my privilege to discuss the fact that over the last year, Manitoba Health has made some very significant improvements to health care and progress towards our longer term goals. We have been able to accomplish this despite some very serious challenges, among them, of course, an unprecedented flood that directly affected so many Manitobans, as well as an uncertain global economic climate.

The health-care system was well prepared to help families affected by flooding, and I would, in particular, like to recognize the diligent planning by our deputy minister and the Office of Disaster Management, which worked in close co-operation with the regional health authority to ensure continuity of care for patients and families during that very stressful time.

I'd also like to commend the STARS helicopter ambulance team, which transported over 50 patients during last year's flood. The medical professionals agree wholeheartedly that some of those patients would not be alive today without this service. Of course, we recently signed a long-term contract with STARS, permanently establishing this life-saving service in Manitoba with our own team of Manitoba paramedics and nurses. That complement of homegrown members of that team continues to grow.

But last year has also seen other improvements to health care, including new renal health centres opened in Berens River and near Peguis First Nation, providing life-saving dialysis to seriously ill Manitobans closer to home so they can get the treatment they need in familiar surroundings. These centres also provide education to help prevent diabetes and assist patients with diabetes to better

manage the disease so they won't need dialysis down the road.

We've continued to move forward with our plan to ensure all Manitobans have access to a family doctor by 2015. Our first QuickCare clinic opened in Winnipeg's North End, and, since then, two more clinics have opened in Steinbach and Selkirk. These clinics offer convenient services, including after hours and weekends, and have already seen thousands of patients.

Construction is now under way on a number of new and expanded health facilities, including the new Women's Hospital, a specialized diagnostic imaging centre at HSC, with a helipad to be placed on top, several clinics to help us meet our family doctor plan, expansions to the Steinbach and Ste. Anne hospitals, and planning and construction is under way on four personal care homes in Winnipeg, Lac du Bonnet, Morden-Winkler and Niverville.

We have embarked on a bold, aggressive, and first-in-Canada plan to provide faster cancer referrals, testing and treatment, called the cancer patient journey, and have started this transformation with the first rural cancer hub—CancerCare hub in Morden-Winkler. A new maternity ward opened at St. Boniface Hospital and the Birth Centre opened in south Winnipeg.

We've also taken several steps to improve organ donation and transplants in Manitoba including, most recently, launching signupforlife.ca, an online registry to help doctors honour individuals' wishes and give the gift of life to those in need. I would encourage everyone listening or reading to visit signupforlife.ca and register if they haven't already done so.

As we continue to work on making health care better, we know that we must find ways to get better value for the funding we invest, like every other province is doing. We're currently in the middle of our five-year economic plan to return to a balanced budget and keep our economy growing while protecting the front-line services that matter most to Manitoba families.

In Budget 2012, we announced a series of RHA mergers to reduce the number of RHAs from 11 to five, which is, of course, down from the original 13, where RHAs started in the 1990s. This plan will save at least \$10 million over the next three years, which will be reinvested into supporting front-line care.

Tackling health care administrative costs is important, and we've already made a lot of progress in this area. We used to have among the highest hospital administration costs in the country, but, today, we have among the lowest, according to independent data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. And we have legislated limits on corporate spending in RHAs. Corporate spending accounts for approximately 3.5% of total spending across all RHAs today. So, while it is important to continue to focus on streamlining administration, more must be done to transform the system and protect the front-line services families count on.

This is a challenge, as the demands for health care are increasing every day. We have a growing population that is living longer. The number of older Manitobans is expected to double in the next 25 years, and new medical advancements are offering new treatment but at higher costs.

At the same time demand is increasing, Manitoba and other provinces face global economic uncertainty, and changes to federal health funding will see the federal government contribute even less to our overall health-care system.

In the last few days, we released our plan to protect universal health care, a plan called Focused on What Matters Most, that will guide our investments and decision making to deliver better care closer to home for more families at a better value. Focused on What Matters Most has three key pillars to guide our system: healthier Manitobans, better health services and better value.

* (14:50)

We will support Manitobans to be healthier by focusing on tobacco reduction, injury prevention, increasing physical activity and healthy diets and improved access to screening. Healthier Manitobans means preventing chronic conditions and avoiding the need for more health services later on. Better health services with a particular focus on expanding home care and ensuring all Manitobans have access to a family doctor. These are examples of services that are both more convenient for the—for families and are less expensive than hospital-based alternatives.

Better value through a variety of initiatives including streamlining administration, more bulk purchasing, getting better prices for drugs, reducing workplace injuries, and training and hiring more nurse practitioners and physician assistants. Our plan

will see more seniors staying at home when they want to be there, for as long as possible; more family doctors offering same-day or next-day appointments; more QuickCare clinics while also getting a better value with fewer RHAs and executives, and other innovative changes.

We've already made a—made good progress in these areas. Manitoba was the first province with a Healthy Living ministry and a smoking ban after introducing programs to support Manitobans. More report being physically active and eating healthier foods, while fewer are smoking and more are getting screened for cancers and other conditions. And this is translating into improved outcomes, with fewer Manitobans having heart attacks and strokes and more winning the fight against cancer. We've improved care with more than 3,000 nurses and 500 more doctors, lowering wait times and better—providing better access to health services closer to home. We've achieved better value through administrative streamlining, bulk purchasing, better drug prices and innovative projects, including the use of lean management and process improvement.

In the face of uncertain economic times, governments have to make choices. They can cut them—cut services back, which is what we've seen happen here in the past and in other jurisdictions, or they can protect them. Our plan works very hard to protect them.

We're focused on getting the most out of the money Manitobans invest in health care, as well as ensuring that we protect universal health care exactly as Manitobans expect us to do. We've made great progress in this area over the last few years. Now we have a strong plan to ensure we continue to protect what matters most going forward: the front-line, universal health care that Manitoba families count on.

I know in the coming hours there will be a number of questions from the critic and her colleagues. I will listen attentively to those questions, I will endeavour to provide the best answers that I can, and, as always, I will endeavour to learn and listen to her advice so we can all work together to build an even better health-care system in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mrs. Driedger: And I do have a few short comments to make, and I'm going to start by telling you a little bit about my weekend, which was very special. I was a participant in a nursing reunion with my classmates from a number of years ago, and there was 60 of us that got together and it was a wonderful experience and it reminded me about why I really got into this business of politics. But it also reminded me of my passion for nursing and for health care, and I was so honoured to be a part of this four days where we got to reminisce about a lot of things. Some of them I'd forgotten, and some of them just showed me and reminded me about the special times that we all had in our nurse's training days and what we learned, and it made me also realize how much of what I do today comes from that passion that I started out with a number of years ago as a nurse.

It also, maybe, reinvigorated my commitment to continue to fight hard and fight harder if I can for our patients, for families and for front-line health-care workers. I have great faith in our front-line workers, I—our front-line professionals, whether they are in hospitals, personal care homes, home care, in the community and our various agencies and organizations out there; whether it's the paramedics and, also, very much so all of the people that work in the Department of Health.

I'm sure with the many challenges they face day in and day out, probably a lot of challenges I don't even know about, but I admire their efforts in what they're doing because I know that they are behind a lot of the really good things that do tend to happen in Manitoba. It is their ideas, their innovation, their persistence, their commitment, their passion, and I just want to say to them I admire what they do because health care is really about people. We were reminded about that this morning while we did a private member's resolution, as well, that you can put up all these shiny edifices, but if you don't have the people in which to staff them, you're missing the key element, and that is care. And you need people to provide care.

So I know there's a lot of great announcements about health-care facilities which we need, but if you don't have the people to staff them, then we really are losing out on providing the kind of care that people in this province deserve.

And I think we need to take better care of our patients, our families, and our front-line professionals. I think we need to give our front-line professionals a stronger voice, too, and I'm

concerned with some of the things I'm hearing currently out there, and I will be certainly asking more questions as we go through Estimates.

But to everybody involved in health care at every level, just, you know, I thank you from a former nurse who was reminded this past weekend of the incredible value of front-line health-care workers, and I just want to say that your work is very valued and it's very important, and even though you may get discouraged sometimes, I hope that many people will stick it out and you'll continue to provide the service that is needed by so many people.

So, with those few comments, I'll end my opening remarks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 21.1.(a) contained in the resolution 21.1. At this time we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my privilege to introduce Mr. Milton Sussman, Deputy Minister of Health, and Ms. Karen Herd, chief financial officer.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of the department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chair, I think we'll get through it a whole lot faster if we just leave it global.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. It is—

Ms. Oswald: Agreed.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, it's agreed. Thank you. It's agreed, then, that the questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner with all the resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chair, I'll start as I usually do with the organization chart from the Estimates book, and ask the minister to indicate who the new ADMs are.

*(15:00)

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Chair, as we can see by the organizational chart, Mr. Sussman, of course, is deputy minister at Administration and Finance; associate deputy minister and chief financial officer is Ms. Herd, seated with us today; Health Workforce, Assistant Deputy Minister Terry Goertzen; Regional Programs and Services, Assistant Deputy Minister Jean Cox; Public Health and primary care, Associate Deputy Minister Marie Perchotte; Office of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer—acting, that is—Dr. Margaret Fast; and Provincial Programs and services, Bernadette Preun.

And, if I could just clarify, there has been a change since this book was printed, so I would clarify for the member that, indeed, a Ms. Beth Beaupre is serving as ADM of Health Workforce and Terry Goertzen has moved to Public Health and primary care, as in the coming days, Ms. Perchotte is going to retire.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the Minister of Health tell us if Ms. Beaupre was hired through a competition or was it an appointment?

Ms. Oswald: It was an appointment and, indeed, it is a secondment. I know that's one of her favourite topics and it is a secondment.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister indicate, at a secondment from where and why the job wasn't posted?

Ms. Oswald: Ms. Beaupre was seconded from the University of Manitoba and the WRHA. She had part positions in both, and it was a direct appointment related to her skill set concerning workforce. There is a very significant effort that is going on within the department now, certainly in the context of looking at streamlining, making sure that we're getting the best possible value for our dollars and really wanting to co-ordinate wherever appropriate and possible our efforts on workforce through the RHAs and the department.

So her expertise and ability to negotiate and to liaise with these major players in our health-care system was viewed by the deputy, and I support him, as a very critical role at this moment in time for developing our capacity and our workforce and finding those integrations were appropriate.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what the title of Ms. Beaupre was in her previous job?

Ms. Oswald: Yes. Ms. Beaupre's former title was executive director, joint operating division, WRHA and University of Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: Would this be the same JOD that many of the doctors were very fearful about because of what it might do to their ability to do their jobs?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, there was some discussion last year about the joint operating division between the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and the University of Manitoba. There was an effort ongoing to build and create an academic health sciences network with an effort to keep Manitoba competitive with other jurisdictions to ensure that we were as strong as possible in recruiting and retaining doctors, but there were concerns being raised by doctors, as the member points out. Some of them were presented, I think, publicly in a way that may not have fully captured what the joint operating division was about. Others were quite accurate, in fact, and as we always said that the transition into the joint operating division, as it was contemplated at the time, could not and would not happen without an overwhelming majority of doctors supporting this particular kind of organization. I believe the threshold that was being set at the time for approval was very, very high. I may stand to be corrected, but I think it was something like 95 per cent needed to approve.

So this was part of the message, I think, that did not really come clear to the public at that time, but we always said that while in theory, the joint operating division could indeed achieve all of those goals, particularly concerning competitiveness, recruiting, retention, that it would never go through without this overwhelming majority of doctors supporting it. As discussions ensued, it became clear that as the joint operating division was being contemplated, it wasn't going to receive that kind of majority, and, as a result, it was dissolved—what's the date—apparently effective May 15th, so just a short couple of weeks ago. I may stand to be corrected on that date but I believe that was the intended date for it to be dissolved.

Now, the U of M and the WRHA are going to continue to work together on the large goals, that is, a health sciences network, strong recruitment and retention processes, but, again, the joint operating division as it was being contemplated is no longer going forward. And, yes, this was the entity that Ms. Beaupre was working with at the time, but she brings to our department now a wealth of experience and

expertise, and we're actually very, very happy to have her.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd just like to take a few moments and just ask a few questions in terms of the backgrounds of the various ADMs, and this, in no way, is meant to be a criticism. I'm just curious in terms of whether or not the various ADMs that have been given the jobs have any background in health care. So, with the minister's indulgence, I would just like to ask a few questions about some of the positions, and I guess the first one I'll start with is Ms. Thomson, and ask the minister how long Ms. Thomson has been an ADM and whether or not she has a health-care background.

* (15:10)

Ms. Oswald: Before I begin speaking a little bit about Marcia—I didn't come with their CVs in hand, so I'll do my best—in the spirit of full disclosure, I do not have a background in health care—just in case, you know, the member was going to fail to mention that—I'm a teacher, school administrator, and mom full-time.

I can say, about Ms. Thomson, that Mr. Sussman informs me that Ms. Thomson was serving in the role of ADM from the beginning of the time that he was working with government. Mr. Sussman left for some time and, mercifully, for me, came back—I mean, mercifully, for me; he didn't come back for me, technically, or did you? Never mind. So that's 11 years plus, in any event, for the member's information.

Prior to that, it's my belief—and again, I may stand to be corrected, I'm working a little bit on the fly here—that Ms. Thomson worked with Justice, also has a background in social work, which has served her in very good stead, particularly, in her current very important work with mental health. She was also executive director of Selkirk Mental Health Centre for a spell. And so, you know, possesses—I think, at least—a number of professional responsibilities that would have a direct relationship to the work that she has been doing and is doing now.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to thank the minister for that.

Certainly, I did know Ms. Thomson in my previous life when I was with Child Find and she was in Justice, and she was doing very good work at the time. And certainly, having a background in, you know, the whole area of mental health I'm sure serves the department very well.

Can the minister indicate in terms of Mr. Goertzen what his background is and how long he has been an ADM?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, just before I answer this question, I was thinking about the member just yesterday, and her very dedicated work with Child Find, and imagined where she must have been mentally, emotionally, spiritually over the last day or so with that remarkable recovery of the two children we've all been thinking about. And you probably had something to do with that at one moment in—or more than that at one moment in your career because of investments that you made. And I meant to say that to you earlier today, that you probably played a big role in that. Good for you.

Now, back to Mr. Goertzen. Mr. Goertzen worked prior—he was appointed in '08, as I understand, and worked prior to that in the WRHA. He was a liaison; did some government relations and some communications work with them. Came to the department, and worked in a variety of roles—executive director's role—and was very, very engaged, of course, as evidenced by the organizational chart, in Health labour relations. In fact, I know that he and his—under his leadership, he did a lot of work in establishing and working through the master agreement for physicians—over a couple of agreements, which is no small task, and he should be commended for that.

Prior to working at the WRHA, he did have a political role, I believe, in the Minister of Health's office, but, elsewhere, I believe, I just can't speak to that right now; I would have to do a little bit more research. But I do know that he did do some political work at one point in his career, prior to moving to the regional health authorities and prior to working in the department, most specifically on health labour relations.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us if he has a health background?

Ms. Oswald: I would have to double-check on the specifics of his resume. That's about as much information as I have with me today. I can commit to get back to the member—not that I am aware of, specifically. We know, of course, that leadership roles across government, you know, really have a multidisciplinary approach these days. And, you know, I don't discredit him for not having been a doctor or a paramedic or a nurse or a health-care aide or what have you, in terms of his ability to do his job proficiently. And I know that the member said at the

beginning that this line of questioning was, you know, not to discredit anybody personally. And I do appreciate her making those remarks. Certainly, we know that a line of questioning like this could make somebody have hurt feelings. She has declared that this is not her intent, and I take her at her word.

Mrs. Driedger: And I just want to indicate I appreciate that because—and the minister's comments on that—because this is not, in any way, a reflection on these individuals. I'm just curious about the, you know, the backgrounds of the people in these various roles and how they got to their jobs.

Can the minister just indicate whether or not Mr. Goertzen was a direct appointment or he did get the job through a competition?

Ms. Oswald: It was a competition.

Mrs. Driedger: And Ms. Cox, can she—can the minister give an indication as to how long she's been in the job and whether or not she has a health background, and if it was a direct appointment or a competition?

Ms. Oswald: I believe Ms. Cox has been in the role of ADM for about a year and a half. I could go back and check but, officially, she's been appointed into that role for about a year and a half. She has worked in a variety of roles in the department and has done a—an excellent job throughout a variety of those roles.

Ms. Cox's background is, you know, quite extensive, actually. She has an MBA in health administration from the University of Manitoba. She was an administrator of a personal care home in the province of Nova Scotia. She was executive director for Meals on Wheels and she's splendid. *[interjection]* Oh, and it was through a competition.

Mrs. Driedger: And now I understand that Ms. Perchotte is retiring, and I wish her well and thank her for her service. And so the next person I would ask about is Ms. Preun, and the same questions.

* (15:20)

Ms. Oswald: So, Ms. Preun was an ADM in the Regional Programs area, and that was back in '07, we believe, without looking at the details that we don't have in front of us. And she did transfer as an ADM of that area to her current role. So there wasn't a competition for that current role; she moved over. But when she was placed into the job with Regional Programs, she was awarded that job as a result of a competition.

Prior to that she served as executive director with responsibilities for emergency medical services, and, by profession, it's my understanding that Bernadette is an occupational therapist.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate how many ADMs are on secondment from the WRHA?

Ms. Oswald: The answer is two; Mr. Goertzen and Ms. Beaupre.

Mrs. Driedger: And is the deputy minister still on secondment from the WRHA as well?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, he is.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister provide, either verbally now or at some point in the next day or so, a list of all of the people that are seconded from the WRHA to Manitoba Health and vice versa?

Ms. Oswald: The following individuals are those that are seconded from regional health authorities to Manitoba Health: Jeanette Edwards, seconded from the WRHA. Prior to secondment her title was regional director, Primary Health Care, and she continues in that role. And she also functions as special advisor to the deputy minister regarding the PIN project, that's Physician Integrated Network.

Seconded from the WRHA, as stated earlier, Mr. Sussman. Seconded from the WRHA, Betsi Dolin, who was a midwife and serves as a consultant for Midwifery and Maternal Care.

Yes, just to interject, I am provided—I believe the member might have asked me about administrators, and I, you know, I have some information here that might include some front-line providers that have been seconded, so I might be going outside of the context of your questions, but I'll just give her.

Okay, from the WRHA, Ms. Barb Kraft, who served as a clerk, is serving as an administrative manager in Blood Programs. From the WRHA, Susan Turnbull, project co-ordinator, Provincial Blood Programs Office, functioning as project analyst, Blood Programs. And this will be done at the end of this month, but she is technically still there until the 31st.

From the WRHA, Dr. Lynne Warda, a physician, medical director, medical consultant serving as medical consultant to the medical officers of Health. WRHA, Terry Goertzen, Beth Beaupre, as indicated earlier. Seconded from the WRHA, Brian Bechtel, team lead in Housing and Community Development.

Continuing on, from the WRHA, Anita Moore, community area director from St. James functioning as executive director in public health. From the WRHA, Bridgit Tenszen, executive assistant from Seven Oaks Hospital functioning as appointment secretary in the deputy minister's office. WRHA, Manitoba eHealth, Tom Fogg, director of strategy functioning in quality and innovation consultant, primary care networks. WRHA, Louise Nicholas [*phonetic*], a home-care manager—this is a half-time secondment as rehab stroke co-ordinator. WRHA, Shauna Krawchuk, public health nurse, a half-time secondment as public health nurse, maternal and child health-care services; this is a position that will end as of June the 30th of this year, but it's ongoing now.

From the Interlake RHA, Christine Ewawka—forgive me, if I have mispronounced that name—a paramedic functioning as a paramedic in the south air ambulance pilot program. Also from the Interlake RHA, Joanna Sobiech, a paramedic functioning as paramedic in the south air ambulance pilot program. Central RHA, Mike Gingrich and Eric Glass, both paramedics functioning as paramedics in the south air ambulance pilot program. Parkland RHA, Ryan Schenk, a paramedic functioning as paramedic southern air ambulance pilot program. There are also individuals that have been seconded to the RHAs from Manitoba Health, and I can read those in should the member have an interest in that.

All right, she's indicating by nod of head that she would be interested in that and I shall carry on. WRHA, Manitoba eHealth, Wilma Arseneault, executive director of information systems, functioning in the RHA as director of strategic initiatives for eHealth. WRHA, Manitoba eHealth, Claudine Dumas, senior business analyst functioning as customer agreements manager for eHealth. WRHA, Manitoba eHealth, Barry Rousseau, senior project manager functioning as customer service manager eHealth. WRHA, Manitoba eHealth, Sheila Engel, senior technical architect, technical architect in eHealth. WRHA, Dr. Lisa Richards, medical officer of Health functioning as medical officer of Health for tuberculosis.

And I just need to backtrack, Mr. Chair, I had old information on this note. For those paramedics that I mentioned at the tag end of the list regarding the southern air ambulance program: It began as a pilot, but it is an ongoing program. So I would strike the word "pilot" from what I had read originally. That should cover it.

Mrs. Driedger: For those that are seconded at the administrative level, and that would be the deputy minister and the two ADMs, can the minister indicate how their salaries are paid?

* (15:30)

Ms. Oswald: The—those positions are paid through the region, and then the department reimburses the region.

Mrs. Driedger: And would their level of pay be the same as other deputy ministers and ADMs, or is there a top up given through this payment method?

Ms. Oswald: I would have to check on that information in terms of what other deputy ministers are paid and comparatively speaking. So I'll have to get back to the member on how that functions comparatively.

Mrs. Driedger: And back to the same question I probably have asked every year, and I would note that when the NDP formed government, they inherited three ADMs, and now we have six. I would note Saskatchewan only has two.

Can the minister tell us why she needs to have such a large staff? I know that, right now, Saskatchewan Health appears to be the health department to watch in terms of some of the great successes that are going on in health care in Canada, and they seem to be doing it with two ADMs, and I'm wondering why the minister feels she needs to spend all this money on six?

Ms. Oswald: Well, I know if you ask the Saskatchewan Department of Health, they will define themselves as the health department to watch, without a doubt, and they do do a lot of very interesting things. We've partnered with them in discussions, you know, in actual projects on a number of things. I think, without a doubt, they are better at throwing parades, and I have chastised my department. You know, I really think they could pick it up a notch in throwing parades for the incredible work that they are doing. And I would say, very sincerely, that humility abounds in the Department of Health in terms of the work that Mr. Sussman, Mr. Herd and others are doing that is influential across the nation. And they really do—you know, they really do stand to be commended for the work that they do, and at least the people that are sitting to my left right now would be arguably the last people in Canada that would ever brag about what they're doing, and it's kind of a shame. So I could spend an hour on that.

So, yes, Saskatchewan does have two deputy ministers. I think if we drilled down into another layer of their administration, you might find a larger number of executive directors than you would find in our department. I do think it does balance out. They've got 12 regional health authorities, 12 CEOs, so I do think that provincial structures and departments of health, you know, do take on their own shape and complexion. I mean, Alberta has seven ADMs and deputies; BC, I think, nine; Ontario, 15; Québec, seven. And so Manitoba has—sorry—landed at this particular staffing complement with—they also, I would note, in Saskatchewan, they also have a number of special advisors that, in number, that I don't think that Manitoba matches. I may stand to be corrected on that, but my recollection says that, structurally, I think, they're quite a bit different in that way.

But Manitoba has elected to have this structure focusing our efforts in areas where we know that we want to prioritize and we want to have leadership in those areas to be able to drive our agenda forward—that agenda, of course, being working very diligently on helping Manitobans be as healthy as they can be, providing even better service as close to home as possible, and, of course, working on getting even better value for the investments that we make—the triple-aim philosophy, of course, that many provinces are adopting.

So, again, I—you know, yes, she does ask me this question every year. I'd be disappointed if she didn't. It's one of—it has come to be one of life's rituals.

And, you know, I respectfully suggest that governments just have differences of opinion about how they might organize themselves structurally, and this is the structure that we have chosen. And we believe that there've been a number of good things that have been accomplished under this structure and we also believe that with the incredible work that we have ahead of us, that we are well positioned to do our best by Manitobans under this structure.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, we certainly know that the NDP like big government and, certainly, the minister has moved in the direction of creating a big department rather than something that—I see Saskatchewan seems to be more leaner and yet they're doing some really, you know, effective things, even though they are in that position, so, interesting to hear the rhetoric year after year.

I'd also note that—and I'll ask the minister to explain—on page 11 of the Estimates book, if we go

back to the Estimates of Expenditures for 2011-12, it is showing \$10,062,000, when, in fact, the budgeted amount for 2011-12 was 9.977. Has it been restated in here, because it makes it look like there wasn't a change in the Estimates of Expenditure, that it stayed the same over the 2011-12 and '12-13? Has it been restated, because the budgeted amount in 2011-12 was \$9.977 million?

Ms. Oswald: We're having a discussion about our answer here and we're just a bit at odds about what the member is asking.

Do you think that she could just either ask it again or ask it a different way so perhaps I might understand a little differently what she's asking?

Mrs. Driedger: If the minister would turn to page 11 of the Estimates book and at the very top, right-hand corner, Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12, under Administration and Finance, it's showing ten sixty-two, and, if I look at a previous Estimates book, that number would be 9.977.

So my question is, is that a restated number?

Ms. Oswald: I was just getting a quick lesson in accounting here. The—at the bottom of the page 11, that same page 11, there is a reconciliation of changes that were made, and so the chief financial officer says, yes, it's restated at the top, but there's an explanation at the bottom that accounts for moves that were made among departments and provides a bit more detail about what was in and what was out concerning the transfer of those funds. So the explanation for that should be existing on the bottom of that page.

* (15:40)

And if—I would just hasten to add, the member made a statement about the NDP liking big government, and I think it's a salient point that there are actually 167 fewer positions in Manitoba Health today than there were in 1999, and while we may have differences of opinion on the issue of how the department would be organized and how leadership would be organized and how it would function and flow, I think that—well, that's what makes life interesting, really, is different governments will have different points of view on that. But it is worthwhile to note that there are 167 fewer. According to the '98-99 Estimates, there were 1,416 full-time positions in the department, and this year we see twelve forty-nine. So, just as a point of interest and, you know, a point of keeping it real here, I think that

we would just make mention of the fact that, indeed, that is a reality.

I'd also like to note that, you know, again, when we're talking about who's lean and who isn't, and, you know, who's doing a better job than what, there are a lot of ways to measure that, of course. I think Saskatchewan has some interesting projects on the go, and we're, through the deputy level, working with them to learn from them and, where appropriate, we're going to try and do those projects, too. So I commend Saskatchewan.

They've also come to us with interesting projects that we're doing and have worked with our deputy to endeavour to duplicate there. So I think that because we have some things that are quite common in terms of populations and so forth, that there are lots of opportunities for sharing. But, in terms of who's lean, who isn't, CIHI shows us that our hospital admin costs are at 4.4 per cent, among the lowest in the nation. Saskatchewan sits at 4.8, so we're winning that race, I guess.

Mrs. Driedger: So, on page 11, can the minister confirm that for Administration and Finance, the amount budgeted for this year is \$10.062 million, which, according to that page, then, wouldn't be any different than the year prior.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, that's correct.

Mrs. Driedger: So did the minister not feel that there might have been an opportunity—I know they're looking for ways to find more money, and, you know, we heard today about potential cutbacks in AFM funding where they're being forced to find a million dollars in savings.

Did the minister not feel that maybe, under administration, she might have made more of an effort to try to find some savings rather than some of the, actually, cutbacks that we're seeing in some of the programs in Health, where some of the funding to programs has actually been less this year than last year, so why wouldn't she have tried to find something more in the administration line in terms of savings?

Ms. Oswald: Yes. Certainly, the Estimates book is—it's exactly that. These are estimates. This is what we have responsibly budgeted for. But the member is quite right that we are going to continue to be looking for opportunities where we can streamline opportunities, where we can find efficiencies, and it would indeed be our heartfelt desire to endeavour to come in under that number, without a doubt. We

have said clearly across government that we're working to balance the budget in the context of our five-year plan, but we are endeavouring to do that while protecting front-line services.

There were departments, and I know it was painful for them—there were departments that face zeros this year. Indeed, I believe that there were departments that got less than zero. I may stand to be corrected on that. I know that any of those ministers that have been in that position will be running to remind me about that when I say that Health was one of the departments that did see an overall increase of 3.5 per cent.

And so our goal is to protect front-line services. I know the member was asking some questions of my colleague today during question period concerning services for addictions. I know that my colleague was providing some information about the plans that are going on there. What I heard him saying is that every effort was being made to protect front-line care, and, certainly, within the Department of Health, that is absolutely our goal as we're going forward. We've made commitments to Manitobans concerning enhancing home care, concerning enhancing primary care and any other number of issues that I may have stated in my opening statement and beyond.

So, yes, this is an estimate for Administration and Finance. I know that the work that will be going on to find efficiencies will be very rigorous, and we're going to continue to make sure that we're directing every penny that we can to front-line care for the benefit of Manitobans.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether department salaries have been frozen, either this past year or in the upcoming budget?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, of course, these folks would fall under the auspices of the MGEU collective agreement, and, of course, there was a negotiated two-year pause or zeros in that context.

Mrs. Driedger: In the area of the Department of Health in Administration and Finance and, actually, throughout the Department of Health itself, were any of these salaries frozen either the past year or this year?

Ms. Oswald: The answer is, yes, there has been a freeze for the past year. And I would also add that, at the regional health authority level, CEOs, senior administration have actually been working under a salary freeze since, I believe, February of 2009. So

there's actually an extra year under which they've been operating in that way.

Mrs. Driedger: Are the—were any of the salaries for ADMs frozen over the—this year or last year?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, indeed, they all would've been frozen as part of the MGEU pause.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether or not the political staff in her office have also had their salaries frozen?

Ms. Oswald: Actually, I'd have to check. I think so, but I'm not certain about whether or not they've gone steps on scale or whatever, so I would have to go back and review that and get back to the member.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the Department of Health maintaining a vacancy rate of staffing throughout the department?

* (15:50)

Ms. Oswald: Yes, our vacancy rate is, roughly, 5 to 6 per cent every year and that would be consistent with this year. There are some areas where specialized staff, like at Cadham lab or Selkirk Mental Health Centre, the vacancy rate is much lower because we want these front-line positions filled as quickly as possible, and that's going to continue to be the case. That won't be a place where we're, you know, exercising vacancy management. So the average vacancy rate, excluding Cadham and Selkirk, I believe, is in the neighbourhood of about 5.6, actually.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister at some point in the near future provide a list of all vacant positions?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, we'll endeavour to get that together as swiftly as we can.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us how long she expects to maintain this vacancy rate?

I do note that I think it has been sort of in this area for a number of years. I know a number of years back, it used to be 4 per cent and then it's inched up a little bit. Does she intend to keep it at this rate for the near future?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, I think that the economic times and the province's economic prospects, you know, certainly do have an influence on how we maintain vacancy rates. I know that the Department of Health endeavours to try to keep the vacancy rate around that level. Certainly, our priorities are always working hard to fill those critically important front-

line positions, such as those that I mentioned at Cadham lab and at SMHC.

So I would not say that it's in my immediate plan to be transforming what has been a reasonably consistent righted boat for a while, but, again, as we evolve and are influenced, really, by a number of factors that are arguably outside of our control, you know, what is going to be happening to health financing from the perspective of the federal government, what kinds of initiatives may be asked of us by the Council of Federation. They have become actively engaged in discussions about health-care innovation and the like.

We would, you know, look very closely at what kinds of resources we will be needing in order to fulfill those obligations, and we'll keep a very steady eye in ensuring that everybody in the department, wherever possible, is working to their fullest potential and that has the support that they need. But right now, and for the past several years, that 5 to 6 per cent rate has been quite consistent.

Mrs. Driedger: Has any of the work within the department or any projects been delayed as a result of the vacancy rate?

Ms. Oswald: No.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister have, and I don't know if it's tracked, but I—you know, the turnover numbers in staff in the Department of Health, is there such a thing as a turnover rate that is monitored?

Ms. Oswald: We would have to work closely, it's my understanding, with the Civil Service Commission in order to really capture that information. Certainly, in response to the last couple of questions that have been posed, the deputy, quite rightly, informs me that some of that vacancy rate, of course, is part of a natural evolution of turnover and should be acknowledged as such. But I think in order to answer the question as framed by the member, we would have to do some work with that Civil Service Commission to provide a fulsome answer.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the department hire consultants or, you know, people from the outside, on a contractual basis, to do any projects?

Ms. Oswald: So the answer to that question is, yes, there are consultants that are hired. And I'm going to anticipate her next question about tendering and so forth and—was I right? *[interjection]* And, just wanted to inform the member that we do follow the Treasury Board guidelines concerning, you know,

how consultants are acquired and contracted and so forth.

Mrs. Driedger: What are those guidelines?

Ms. Oswald: So that process would involve the fact that any contracts that are over a certain threshold that aren't tendered need to go to Treasury Board for approval. And there's also regular reporting to Treasury Board concerning these contracts, you know, as would be the case, I believe, with any department.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us how many individuals have been hired on a contractual basis over the past year and in this next fiscal year?

Ms. Oswald: I'd have to do a little bit of homework to get that information to the member, but I will commit to do it and to get back to her.

Mrs. Driedger: And if the minister could also include in that, what contracts they've been hired for, that would be great.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I will endeavour to do that.

Mrs. Driedger: Just a few questions on flooding related to the Department of Health.

And I wonder if the department has tracked the number of hours of overtime worked by the department during last year's flood.

* (16:00)

Ms. Oswald: Yes, so specifically speaking, directing overtime that was paid out, I am informed that, indeed, a lot of that, if not all of it, was tracked. We'd have to work to do some kind of compilation of that issue. I think that, at my fingertips, there's an overall government number, but specific to the flood and specific to Health, I think we'd have to do some work to tease that out.

You know, we are of course—I believe the member well knows, we're talking about a component of our department in the Office of Disaster Management. You know, we're talking about—you know, we're talking about, you know, quite a few different sections of the system that could be applicable to this so, you know, we could endeavour to do this work. There has been, I think, an overall government accounting of this where it's been collected, so I just want to make sure that a number that I might endeavour to give you might not be competing with another number that has been compiled in aggregate for this, so I'll need to do a little bit more work on it.

I think, you know, the government number, you know, overall is—at December 31, was, you know, well over, you know, you know, about a million six, I think. So we can endeavour to do that work and make sure that we're giving numbers that are, you know, not being reported twice or something like that.

Mrs. Driedger: And just while the minister is collecting that, I would just add a couple more things to it, and I'll just list them. And that would be: the total number of hours of overtime worked by the staff of the Department of Health in relation to the 2011 flood, broken out by month, for the period ending March 31st, 2012, and the dollar value of that overtime; and also the number of temporary or contract staff hired by the department in relationship to the 2011 flood and how much has been spent on these staff and an indication of whether any of them are still employed by the department; and the dollar value of the bills submitted by the department for payment to the Department of Finance in relation to the 2011 flood, broken out by month, for the period ending of March 31st, 2012; and a list of any projects or initiatives the department had to defer as a result of the 2011 flood.

And if the minister's department could answer those questions related to the flood, that would be great.

Ms. Oswald: Okay, thank you for the list. On behalf of Karen Herd, I thank you for the list, and I know that there have been a number of questions across government and that there is an effort under way, I think, to, you know, try to make sure that we're using staff to the best of our ability to compile this, so we'll work as best we can to provide answers as best we can.

Mrs. Driedger: And I appreciate that commitment. I know that that will take some work, and I do appreciate the time that it will take to provide that.

While I'm still on the organizational chart, I wonder if the minister could explain why Dr. Kettner was fired.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, as the member is aware, the department ended the contract with Dr. Kettner, and we want to be clear about the fact that his contract was honoured in the ending of that contract. Certainly, this was a decision that was entered into by the deputy in terms of, you know, what would be best for the department going forward, and I support the deputy in his decision making about staffing, and

about planning, and about looking at the great breadth of work we all have ahead of us. Arguably, nothing is more important than public health, and it should be said that Dr. Kettner was the author of a very important report on the health of Manitobans. He dedicated a great deal of time to that, and he is, in my view, to be commended by our department. Certainly, he is by me, personally. And it was an arrangement, and an agreement that was arrived at by the deputy who, of course, is charged with running the department. And, you know, I support the deputy in making that decision with the best interest of the department and the best interests of Manitobans at heart.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister was somewhat evasive. Was there a particular reason that he was fired?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I can specify for the member that it was a termination without cause, and the elements of his contract were honoured. Within that context, you know, there are things that can be discussed publicly and things that cannot be discussed publicly and, perhaps, ought not.

I can say that it was a decision not taken lightly by the deputy, in terms of the best possible forward motion for the department, for public health. And these situations are not easy and I'm sure that the member can appreciate that and, you know, it certainly has nothing to do, you know, with any of my personal feelings about Dr. Kettner. I would say on the record, I have great personal affection for him but, certainly, I know that in planning and going forward in the best interests of Manitobans, and the best interests of the department, it was a decision taken by the deputy, not lightly, and I support him.

There are super fantastic days to be deputy minister of Health. I don't imagine that that was one of them, and so, again, I support him in the best interests of moving the department forward on very important initiatives.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate how much his severance package was?

Ms. Oswald: I don't know if I can tell you or not. I'd have to consult with the civil service officials about whether it's appropriate for—or allowed, for me to speak about it, but I will commit to the member that we will consult about that and let her know what it is that we are legally allowed to let her know.

Mrs. Driedger: Was Dr. Kettner—when he was released—was he made to sign a—an agreement where he would be silenced for a certain period of time

from speaking about issues of the department and health care?

Ms. Oswald: I'm not even 100 per cent sure I'm allowed to answer this question, but I'm taking a flyer here. I would have to double-check, but it is my understanding that, no, he did not. I may stand to be corrected, but I don't believe so.

* (16:10)

Mrs. Driedger: On page 13 of the Estimates book under Public Health and Primary Health Care it indicates an expenditure summary, and it is showing that public health and primary health care is funded as a percentage of the whole budget at .96 per cent. I would note that in 2010-11, from the Estimates book, it was at 2.1 per cent. It appears that this particular area's funding has been cut in half. Can the minister tell us why?

Ms. Oswald: There has been some reorganization within the context of the department. A unit designated for health innovation, for example, has moved from one budget area to another budget area. And while the CFO is going to work, perhaps, swiftly right now—but we may need to come back to you—with that answer, it may, really, just present that way as a result of a reorganization.

What I can say, in general, is that our investments in public health—certainly, on the heels of the five-year report on the health of Manitobans and what it is that we have to do within the context of public health—what we have to do in the context of public health—you know, everything from working on more immunization to working on prevention programs—all of those things are areas in which we're making more investment, certainly not less.

And I will, as I said to the member, endeavour to provide you with some more organizational detail about why it may appear that way.

Mr. Chairperson: Member for—

An Honourable Member: We're just—oh, sorry, sorry, I wasn't quite done.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, honourable Minister.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Sorry, I didn't give you the standard operating body language there.

I would say that just a quick note that I'm looking at might, in fact, have last year's book posting the item you're looking at, at .86—this year, it's .96—but we might be getting our wires crossed on

what we're looking at here. So, again, I will specifically endeavour to explain any reorg that happens there, but emphatically declare that work that we're doing in public health will be expanded not contracted.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to go now to page 15 and look at the positions within the minister's office, and ask the minister if she could provide us with the information about all the political staff in her office: how many they are, who they are, and how long they've been in the position; and indicate who has left and where they have ended up.

Ms. Oswald: Just to be clear here, I'll be speaking about those staff with whom I work directly. I know in the past I've answered this question and omitted staff that should have been in the deputy's office. But I think I've heard the member clearly ask me about my staff, so I'll speak about that.

Working in my office at present, Breigh Kusmack is in the position of project manager. She started in the office at—in 2007. She was there before I was, actually, the dear soul. She previously served as special assistant. There is a vacancy currently in my office for special assistant. Brad Hartle, a stand-up individual, works as project manager. He started in 2010. He previously worked in Executive Council. Cotelte Mackintosh is serving in the role of intake co-ordinator. She started in 2011. Prior to that she was an admin assistant. Tim Smith works as project manager in my office and he has been there since 2011, and he previously worked as a special assistant. Sandra Little is functioning as the acting EA in my office. She previously was working as my constituency assistant. My—the constituency assistant position in my office is currently vacant.

Staff who've—you've asked me staff who have left the office over the last year, if I remember correctly. Keir Johnson has left my office. He started in Health in September of '07 working on a number of files and in February of this year Keir transferred to the priorities and planning secretariat of Cabinet. Ben Wickstrom, who used to work in my office and apparently has a quite a fan club within your caucus—they all tell me they miss him—so do I—he was formerly project manager. He was replaced by Tim Smith and works in policy now.

And Katarina Cvitko who was intake co-ordinator, has—she began working as an administrative assistant, actually, in my office and has left to return to an admin position. So she's gone also.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what admin position she's got?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, she's working in the Department of Health with the maternal and child health secretariat as an admin assistant there.

Mrs. Driedger: So she's gone from being a political staff person to a civil servant, am I understanding that correctly?

Ms. Oswald: Well, she's gone from being a civil servant to a political staffer to a civil servant.

Mrs. Driedger: And does the minister know whether or not she got that job through a competition or was it an appointment?

Ms. Oswald: I think it was a competition, but I would have to go back and double-check. I know that there was an immediate need in that unit, but I would want to go back and double-check to see whether or not it was.

And I am informed that I just gave you the wrong dates for some of my staff, so I just need to go back. I beg your pardon.

Tim Smith and Cotelle actually started in 2012, not 2011. I beg your pardon.

Mrs. Driedger: And I might've missed it, can the minister indicate who replaced Keir Johnson in his position?

* (16:20)

Ms. Oswald: Nobody can replace Keir Johnson, but I would say that filling the roles of project manager in my office now would be Breigh Kusmack, Brad Hartle, and Tim Smith. Keir was formerly in the role of project manager. I had three before and I have three now.

Mrs. Driedger: So are we—we're still looking at six political staff, I guess, as there have been year after year. Is that correct?

Ms. Oswald: It is the same amount of staff as when I arrived in the office. That's correct. There, as I say, are a couple of vacancies in my universe right now. The special assistant position is vacant, as is the constituency position vacant.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us how long those positions have been vacant?

Ms. Oswald: I'd have to go back and look at the dates, actually. I can certainly tell the member that they would be months, not over a year. I would just

have to go back and check to see when the positions were vacant. Roughly six months, maybe. But I could check.

Mrs. Driedger: It seems to me if that—if the minister can manage without an SA for six months, does the minister really need to have six political staff appointed to her?

Ms. Oswald: Well, I'm sure that Breigh, who's carrying double duty right now, would enjoy being at the microphone right now to tell you no, she can't.

I—we've had this discussion in years past. There's no doubt about that, about how one might organize one's office, and we've had, not to any great surprise, disagreements about this in the past. I know that I've said to the member in the past, and will reiterate, that I have not changed the level of staffing since I came into the office five and a half years ago. And certainly we've changed, I think, roles and responsibilities, and consider the team to be a dynamic one in every sense of the word where we're always trying to amend roles to best serve the people of Manitoba.

Each of these individuals, who, I think, are deeply, deeply talented in a variety of ways and so committed to the work that they are doing that it inspires me every day. I say that very sincerely. But they're each always trying to find a way to do the work that they're doing better and to do it more efficiently. Indeed, within the context of these vacancies, their commitment to carrying the load has been admirable.

And our priority, of course, has always been trying to be as responsive as possible to Manitobans who write to us or who call us with concerns, with sometimes very personal matters that require sensitivity and care. Sometimes issues that they call us with are urgent, and we need to be as responsive as possible.

And so it has been my choice to construct the staff in the way that they are constructed now. I do think having this vacancy has created an intense amount of work, in particular for one member of my staff, and I'll be looking to alleviate that and striking that balance.

So, again, we—I haven't made a change despite the fact that we have seen challenges coming from a variety of fronts, and I'm really, really proud of these individuals and don't apologize for them. Didn't last year, won't this year.

Mrs. Driedger: On page 25 of the Estimates book, under Executive Support, I'm just wondering if the minister can confirm: I see 15 positions there—the managerial FTE is one; am I correct in assuming that that is the deputy minister and that that salary has gone from \$155,000 to \$162,000? Am I correct?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, that is correct.

Mrs. Driedger: And under which category—would her political staff fall into any of these categories: professional/technical or administrative support? Where do all her political staff fall?

Ms. Oswald: In fact, they could be in either of those two categories that the member mentioned, but I can say that the total of 15 individuals that she cites, as has been the case in the past, comprises the staff in my office and in the deputy's office. That's a total.

Mrs. Driedger: So, if we look at 2011-12 to 2012-13, it appears that there were no salary freezes, that, in fact, the salaries in the—in that area for all 15 staff appear to have gone up. And I'll wait, I guess, to see what the minister says in terms of political staff, to see whether or not they got raises or if the raises just went to the rest of the staff in her office.

Ms. Oswald: Again, as I committed previously, we will look to see where those monies are accounted for in terms of, you know, who received increases, steps on scale, as I said before, and who did not. I'd have to go back and look. I don't have that at my fingertips.

Mrs. Driedger: And I would note on that same page under other expenditures under transportation, communication, supplies and services, and other operating, there were no changes in expenses from last year. So it doesn't look like the minister has directed any savings within her own office. Is that an accurate assessment?

Ms. Oswald: Well, again, just as we were speaking of earlier, the—this is an estimate; we have, you know, responsibly budgeted based on what our figures were last year. But we are going to be working very hard, whether it's through issues of technology that we're using or communications—whatever, we're going to be working to try to be as efficient as is possible in virtually every area across the budget, and this will be no different.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to switch gears a little bit here. We were talking a little bit earlier about tendering and tendering processes, and I would—in

the—in Estimates last year, we talked a little bit about STARS and air ambulance service. So I'd like to spend a little bit of time just finding out a little bit more about how this government went about entering into that contract with STARS, and I note that the minister has mentioned it a number of times, and my question would be related to the statement on the government website where it states that the government, and I quote, is committed to open and fair tendering practices, end quote. And I wonder if the minister can tell us, you know, if they're truly committed to open and fair tendering practices, why didn't she go to tender on the STARS air ambulance contract?

* (16:30)

Ms. Oswald: We are absolutely committed to being fair and transparent, and continuing to take advice from our civil service, and to take advice from the office of the Auditor General, on the very best ways that we can move forward and, you know, be as modern and transparent as possible, in the finances of the Department of Health.

We have made many significant investments in improving our EMS system and we're going to continue to make those investments. But we do also acknowledge that, in some circumstances, albeit rare, when it is in the public interest, government may, indeed, enter into a contract without a tender. And I believe, if ever there was a case for making that decision, with the public interest at heart, this would be it. We know that we wanted to ensure uninterrupted life-saving helicopter ambulance service in Manitoba, and STARS was, indeed, the only provider that could offer the uninterrupted service.

We were able to experience their expertise in 2009 when they came to do their work during the flood. At that time, indeed, their expertise captured the imagination of all Manitobans, when we saw the very dramatic rescue of the young boy from the culvert. His life was saved, and it was saved because of STARS.

And I think the notion of air—or helicopter ambulance really started to penetrate the consciousness of Manitobans at that time. It had been contemplated in some circles, certainly, and discussed, but I think it was at that time that we all got a very real, a very tangible sense of what this helicopter could do. And, when they came back in 2011, and we were very enthusiastic about having them back to deal with very challenging

circumstances during that flood, we were presented with an opportunity to have them stay and have them be with us in an uninterrupted fashion.

And we know that, you know, there are those in Manitoba that believe that a made-in-Manitoba model would be a good thing for Manitoba, and I actually don't quibble with the idea that Manitoba has great professionals in it that could work to transform, and to build, and to educate a potential helicopter system, but it was estimated by my officials that it would take roughly 18 months, maybe longer. Some said it could be shorter, but the majority of those giving me advice said it would be 18 months, on the inside, that it would take to build and develop a made-in-Manitoba model.

And yet we had STARS right at our fingertips and so we made a decision, and it wasn't secret. I mean, we told Manitobans that we were going to pursue a contract and so we took the opportunity, again, not tendered, admittedly, but in the public interest, to make the decision to have that service available to Manitobans.

Now, we signalled, roughly eight months before the signing of the contract, that we would be moving forward with STARS. And I asked the department to do some arithmetic, and, in the time that we initially signalled that we would be working to build an agreement with STARS and the time that we signed the contract, STARS transported over 100 patients. And, if we had made the decision to say farewell to STARS and endeavour to go through a different process, the outcomes for those people, without a doubt, could have been profoundly different, including life and death, and so we made that decision. I think, to date, or at least as of the 24th of May, there've been 186 transports since our engagement with STARS.

So I know that there are folks in the Aviation Council that feel quite cross with me, personally, government, broadly, about this decision. I respect their right to have that view, but, certainly, when presented with the choice of transporting or not transporting via helicopter those people, it wasn't a difficult decision for me.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister explain, then, what made it so urgent in 2011? STARS was here, as she indicated, in 2009 during that flood. Why wasn't it urgent at that point, then, to get that uninterrupted service and sign the contract back then? What was so different about 2009 versus 2011?

Ms. Oswald: I think it was our experience with STARS. We had them come during the '09 flood. We—as I stated earlier, saw very compelling results, but we had a lot of work to do in terms of timing and their ability to integrate within our existing system. We had a lot to learn about STARS and, certainly, when they left in 2009 we publicly committed to begin our due diligence in looking at what would be an appropriate path for Manitoba concerning an air helicopter program, an emergency program.

And the department did analysis; I commend them for that. They suggested a variety of paths that we could take and, certainly, when they came back at 2011 and, indeed, STARS was, themselves, more ready to partner with other jurisdictions. The—I was just going to say the stars began to align, but that would be terrible. You know what I mean. The conditions under which this would be an appropriate partnership presented themselves in a much more clear way. As I said earlier today in the Chamber, STARS got to know more about our system and MTCC in Brandon and it was a very proud moment, I know, for the staff that were—that are working on the ground in Brandon and, broadly, the department, working with EMS to listen to the comments by the CEO of STARS, by his staff regarding how professional and comprehensive the information was coming out of MTCC. And they were all the more attracted to coming to Manitoba to be working with that kind of innovation and that kind of advanced technology that they said, you know, very humbly, I thought, we don't even have this in Alberta. You know, we're the hot shots on helicopter ambulance service and you have a lot of things here in Manitoba that we don't have functioning in Alberta.

So there was a coming together, I believe, of a relationship. And when we were offered the opportunity to be able to continue uninterrupted with that service after our research had been done and we felt more comfortable in terms of our due diligence, that we took that opportunity. So the difference for me, really, between '09 and 2011 was education and information on both sides, I would say.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has indicated that she saw very compelling results in 2011. Were those same results not evident in the 2009 flood?

* (16:40)

Ms. Oswald: I think what I said was, we saw very compelling results, without a doubt, in '09. You know, the example that I cited about the young boy that was wreck—rescued from, arguably, most certain

drowning, and was revived and has had a very good outcome. So, yes, there were compelling results in '09, which is why, at that time, as I said, we committed to do the work that needed to be done to prepare to have an air ambulance helicopter in Manitoba. So, yes, there were compelling results in '09. What was missing at that time was the homework that needed to be done about how a helicopter would effectively integrate; were we ready; were we going to be able to plan for the infrastructure—for the helipad; were we going to be able to function with a helicopter in the absence of a helipad; how would we do that. And the department did do considerable work, also contemplating what would we do if we were to start from scratch and build from the ground up, a made-in-Manitoba model.

And, indeed, it was out of that analysis and more beyond that, that some of the information came to the fore that it would take that amount of time, that, roughly, 18 months to start from scratch and go. And so, we were able to take that information and use it when we made the decision in '11, that we wanted to continue with uninterrupted service. And it was also at that time, I believe, that STARS itself was more ready and more equipped to be able to stay—come in 2011, deal with the flood, and stay. It may, indeed, not have been an opportunity in '09, as I recall, but it was an opportunity in 2011 and it's an opportunity that we took.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm sorry, I might have missed this in the minister's last answer: Can she explain how she knows that it would take 18 months for a made-in-Manitoba model to have kicked in?

Ms. Oswald: So, yes, I did say in my answer that—a number of, roughly, 18 months. Some folks suggested it would take longer; others suggested it might be shorter. But, on average, about 18 months was a time that we were being told that it would take when that intervening analysis was done between '09 and '11. So, you know, that was the number that we were working with at the time. There were some intervening circumstances, I guess, regarding different aviation providers that acquired different aircraft or connection to aircraft that may or may not have shortened that time. But, certainly, the number 18 months was what we were being given when we sent our officials away to do the due diligence once we committed to the public that we would be bringing a helicopter ambulance to Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister explain a little bit more when she sent the staff away to do due diligence? Where was the staff sent and what due diligence was done?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, just to be clear: We didn't send them anywhere; they were here. So, if I misspoke in using that expression, the work that they did was within the context of Manitoba, and that analysis would have incorporated a number of the things that I mentioned in my previous answer. You know, what kinds of existing infrastructure did we have? What kind of infrastructure would have to be acquired, at what cost? What potential operators, you know, within—how could we, within government, potentially build the system? How would homegrown in Manitoba, you know, from the ground up, helicopter ambulance program, integrate into the existing EMS? How would we train the staff? How would we build our workforce in a way that would be appropriate? Where would we get the pilots? Where would we get people with the kind of expertise that you need for this kind of, you know, trauma air rescue?

And I'm sure the list goes on much longer than that, but I think it gives the member a flavour for just the nuts and the bolts of how would we build this thing from the ground up in Manitoba. And, certainly, I ask the question, you know, could we do it better than STARS is doing it? And that would involve could we do it cheaper, could we, you know, is this something that you can place a value on?

You know, STARS is an organization with 25 years' experience and brings with that a breadth and depth of knowledge in trauma and emergency care that one could argue is second to none in the nation, and was there anything that we could do that would even compare to that?

So there would be a variety of those facts that would have been done in the analysis and so the efforts that the staff—our staff—went through were commendable. And we looked at the work that they did, and certainly it was our decision in the end that STARS would be the program that would best serve Manitoba. And so that's how we made the decision. And, of course, Saskatchewan made a similar choice.

Mrs. Driedger: Who were the Manitoba staff that were looking into this?

Ms. Oswald: These would be staff within our EMS branch.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister indicate how long it took them to look at this, and whether or not there was an extensive review process and similar process to what they did in Saskatchewan?

I know that there was quite a review process there, and they came out with quite a significant report. Is that how the staff here in her department addressed it as well? And is there a written report to refer to?

Ms. Oswald: I don't think we have a report similar to Saskatchewan's. Certainly, Saskatchewan did signal their intent to contract with STARS and then there was, as I recall, a pretty lengthy intervening gap before STARS actually started on the ground—well, in the air—on the ground there, and they took that opportunity to do more work on their analysis to come to, arguably, the same conclusion.

We had an opportunity after our department had done a lot of analysis to have STARS continue doing the work that they were doing, the excellent work that they were doing, in an uninterrupted way, and we certainly did seize that opportunity. So I believe we made an informed decision.

* (16:50)

We know very well that we did make this decision to go ahead with them without the tender which, at the time, we believed was in the public interest. So Manitobans were receiving emergency care from STARS long before, I believe, people in Saskatchewan were, despite the fact that Saskatchewan had signalled that they were going to contract with them before Manitoba did. So, in my humble opinion, I think Manitobans were better off.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister indicated that her department made an informed decision. Can she explain how they made it an informed decision when there was absolutely no consultation on this initiative with the industry in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, again, I'd reiterate to the member that there was a decision that we were faced with. We had the opportunity to continue with STARS in an uninterrupted way, and, certainly, looking at the analysis that the department had done—and bearing in mind, of course, that the department has ongoing relationships with a variety of providers and ongoing conversations, and they did some analysis and—good analysis. I think some providers ended up with some resources that came into play subsequent to the department's analysis, and I think that's part of what's making some people very cross. But at the time that

the analysis was done and was presented to me as minister, and we looked at the work that STARS was doing and the experience that they brought to the table and what it was that they could offer us, you know, I made the decision, in consultation with my colleagues, you know, in government, that we would choose to pursue an uninterrupted service.

And I believe that our analysis was correct in making that decision, and, you know, I know that members opposite made a commitment to expand the helicopter service if they were to be elected. And, you know, what I'm gleaning from the member is that this is something that you would have tendered. You would have made the decision to tender and go with interrupted service. Is that what I'm understanding, because it was certainly my decision and the decision of the government to continue on with uninterrupted service, you know, making the decision to go untendered because it was in the public interest. But I'm gleaning, although the member has not said this directly, I'm gleaning that it would have been her party's decision to tender. Am I right in making that assumption?

Mrs. Driedger: Did the election that year have anything to do with the uninterrupted service? I would note that the government used the STARS helicopter on their NDP website. It used—there was a picture of the helicopter there right through the election.

Can the minister indicate, because it didn't seem to be a big issue in the 2009 flood to have uninterrupted service, although as she said, STARS has been around for 25 years. If it was that important in 2011 in an election year, why wasn't it important in 2009 when they were still here and they could have gone ahead and had uninterrupted service? Is uninterrupted service really the issue here, or is the fact that the NDP wanted to take advantage of this beautiful red helicopter and use it in—on their political website? Is that really the reason why there was all this scramble and no consultation with the industry in Manitoba? Is that really what this is about?

Ms. Oswald: Actually, for me, the issue was people's lives being saved. And as I said to the member quite clearly, but I'll say it again, that in 2009, which was a much shorter duration of—in terms of the flood and the time that the STARS helicopter was here, we were absolutely thrilled with the work that the STARS organization did for us. And it was at that time, as a result of being so pleased with the

work that they did, that we committed publicly to all Manitobans—not an election in sight—that we would pursue an air—or a helicopter ambulance program.

And we committed to do that, and what one does when one makes that commitment is endeavour to do analysis about what will be best for Manitobans. And so, we set the department at work—we set the department to work. And they did a lot of work in terms of potential costs; they did a lot of work in terms of workforce; they did a lot of work in terms of the kinds of training that would have to occur; how a helicopter would integrate into the existing system. And they came back with an analysis that helped inform our decision as we went forward and faced a very challenging time in 2011 with a much more complex set of circumstances of the flood.

And it was with that analysis—and again, I would remind the member that our EMS branch has an ongoing relationship with a variety of providers, so to suggest that there no conversations going on I don't think is a fair representation—but, we made a decision to go with uninterrupted service because we believed that it was right thing to do in terms of life or death for individuals. And we made a decision that we would go with uninterrupted service based on information and analysis, and the reputation and 25 years of extraordinary service to Canadians by the STARS organization.

And I would hasten to add, not wanting to descend into abject cynicism at this late hour, that the Conservatives had a picture of a helicopter on the front of their election document. Now, would this be the helicopter that you, indeed, planned to seek a tender for? Was that that helicopter? Inquiring minds want to know.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what discussions or consultation did actually take place by her department in the—this in-depth analysis that she has indicated took place. Because I'm certainly told from the industry here that that did not occur, but the minister is indicating that there was an in-depth analysis. Can she indicate what types of meetings took place with the industry in Manitoba?

And then, you know, she has indicated that it would take 18 months. And some folks have suggested that it would take 18 months for a Manitoba, made-in-Manitoba, model to move forward. Who told her that? Like, where does that information come from, because that's not the information I'm getting from the industry here? So

who told the minister that it would take 18 months? She's indicating some folks.

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

EDUCATION

* (14:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Education.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a truly global manner, and the floor is wide open for questions.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): My question to the minister, still speaking about the new report cards and the new formats is this: Is the minister confident that the new report cards will be fully implemented in 2013-14?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): Yes.

Mr. Friesen: Can the minister please indicate why the decision was undertaken to delay the full implementation of the two thousand and—of the new report cards. It was originally indicated that they would be fully implemented in 2012 and '13 and then the minister moved away from that commitment.

On what basis did she decide to delay the implementation?

Ms. Allan: I think that I—I thought I already answered this, but we had a request from the Manitoba Teachers' Society to do a year of voluntary implementation around training, and also the other issue was technology. So there was a couple of issues. So we had a good discussion with them about that, and at the oversight committee, there was a long discussion about that. And we're confident—I think we also talked about the fact that we think there's probably going to be about a 70 per cent voluntary implementation and then the following year, it will be mandatory.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister please indicate if there have been cost estimates prepared that would indicate what monies would be needed to bring Manitoba teachers up to speed with the new formats?

Ms. Allan: Well, the—that would depend on teacher training. It would be for release time for teachers. So we believe that the costs around the new report card

are around professional development for teachers, and we don't have an exact cost on that at this time, but regardless of what that is, it's certainly a cost that is well worth it because we want to make sure that teachers have a comfort level with the new report card.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister please provide whatever information is currently available in terms of the cost estimate for bringing teachers up to speed with the new report card formats?

Ms. Allan: Certainly, when that's available, we'd be more than delighted to provide it.

Mr. Friesen: At the MTS convention this last weekend, there was discussion among teachers as to the release time that would be necessary to learn the new report formats, the new standards, and there was discussion at that time about what kinds of orientation and training procedures will be put in place to assist with that.

Will the costs of that teacher in-servicing be borne completely by the department, or will there be costs that will be incurred by school divisions for the purposes of training teachers in the new report card formats?

Ms. Allan: I think it'll probably end up being a little bit of both. I think that we've certainly made a commitment that we want to help with that, but some other training might be done, you know, informally during specific times within school divisions that aren't the more formal training that may happen in the workshop environment. So I think it'll be a little bit of both, and we'll share in that because we are good partners, and we share in new strategic initiatives around public education.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Just a quick question in regards to busing allocations funding and possible restrictions. There's been a situation that's come to light in the Sunrise School Division where there's families, split families, where they have their children split up within a couple weeks. So one week, they're at one parent's and the next week, they're at another's. By the sounds of it as far as seat allocations, it seems that one seat per one child for one bus per division.

I was just wondering if the minister has heard situations like this in other jurisdictions where, basically, they're rural families, split-up, they need to take, then, two separate buses: one from the one parent and another one from a different parent, to get to the same school. And the—by the sounds of it, the

school divisions are saying that they have to pick one bus or the other.

Ms. Allan: Those are decisions that are made at the local level, by individual school divisions. There is a policy in place in regards to busing; it's a distance, and I'm trying to recall off the top of my head what it is. It's 1.6 kilometres. So in those specific kinds of situations where there are, you know, difficulties, where there are situations where children are in different homes because of custody arrangements, those kinds of decisions are issues that are managed at the local level.

Mr. Ewasko: So is this the first time you've heard of a situation like this going on in a jurisdiction, and, if so, how has it been handled in others?

Ms. Allan: I have not had anyone speak to me at all in regards to that kind of a situation.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that answer.

Mr. Friesen: Still on the subject of the new report card formats, I want to turn my attention—the or the attention of this Estimates to the French report card, and just to ask a few questions in reference to the basic French report card template, which I'm looking at now.

The Manitoba basic French curriculum describes four language competencies: reading, writing, listening and speaking, that must be taught. The European common framework for languages, currently being adapted by Canada—by the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, lists five language competencies: oral interaction, oral production, listening, reading and writing. And the latter document is—I would suggest, is a more accurate representation of language acquisition and development. I'm not an expert in this area, but I do know individuals who are, and it's becoming the global standard for discussing levels of language fluency.

My question for the minister is, why is it that the new report cards for grades 4 through 6, basic French, list only oral communication, reading and writing, and oral communication is then used to lump together all three of the—of these: oral interaction, oral production and listening. Why has the decision been made to lump in three distinct areas of language competency into one, and would the minister suggest this is an accurate way of measuring student performance?

* (14:40)

Ms. Allan: Well, officials in my department are familiar with the document that the MLA is referencing. We also have—there has also been a broad conversation about that particular document at the CMEC level, which is the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, and they are now doing some analyzing of that document. It is a recent document, and we—they're looking at it from all—across all jurisdictions in Canada in regards to how it can inform us in regards to learning and outcomes for young people in our French education system. This document will inform us as we move forward.

We have a confidence level that the French language report card meets the needs of our students here in the province of Manitoba in the DSFM system, and—but as we further analyze the document, you know, we would have a better—we may have a better understanding of what, you know, the outcomes might be for young people in our system.

We also are going to have an—explanatory documents that will accompany the French report card that will go home—well, all report cards. I talked about the English language report card last week, and also there will be explanatory documents that will provide information to parents in regards to what the language—or what that means in the report card.

So we have a confidence level, and it was discussed at the oversight committee, but this is nothing new for the Department of Education and for education—the education community to have new research, new information that comes out, and it's always analyzed very carefully in regards to what's in the best interests of students.

Mr. Friesen: I can't say that I share the minister's confidence that the way that French second languages, then, being reported to parents, would meet the needs of students when we're taking three basic core components—oral interaction, oral production and listening—and then combining them in one space on the report card, synthesizing the results of three distinct areas of measurement and reporting them on one line. And I would suggest that it goes against best practices in education to have that kind of representation of blended outcomes on one space, rather than reported as clearly three separate skills.

So I'm, once again, making reference to the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers' five language competencies where oral interaction,

oral production and listening are all separately indicated as desirable or measurable outcomes for students. And I'm wondering whether, then, as the minister has indicated, the issue will be continued to be looked into, whether there will be a willingness and an openness to revisit these documents and perhaps make changes to them as we go along in the future.

Ms. Allan: I already answered that question.

Mr. Friesen: I'm looking for the minister to elaborate on the answer she gave. I'm not a hundred per cent sure what she's meaning by her commitment to continue to look into this matter. I think it's a subject that is worthy of our discussion here today.

If CASLT is saying that there are three distinct areas relative to oral communication, and there is one listed here on the Manitoba new report card template for basic French, I'm wondering if perhaps the three measurement areas could eventually be expanded into five. And the reason I believe it's a good question is when I compare that to other areas, like social studies and mathematics and science, there are only three indicators of success. So I'm wondering, is—are there only three measurements because it's been decided by her working committee that there will only be three, or would there be a willingness to expand that to five, even in the area of basic French? That's why I'm asking the question for clarification.

Ms. Allan: I'm more than delighted to tell the MLA for Carman—Winkler-Morden how pleased I am that he's interested in the report card.

You may—you—something you don't know because you're a newly 'ected'—elected MLA, that a couple of years ago, when your leader was consulting with education stakeholders across the province of Manitoba in regards to initiatives that your party might embark on, he was told by a retired superintendent that one of the initiatives that would probably be very exciting and well accepted and well received by the education community and by parents is a common report card. And the response from your Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) was that that was too controversial and that they weren't—and he wasn't prepared to look at that.

We have embarked on this initiative because we believe it is in the best interest of parents and educators and students to have a common language report card that meets the needs of students and parents and teachers so that they know how their students are doing.

If—this is an oversight committee that has all of our stakeholders on it. And this—and we would be more than happy to take your recommendations and your concerns that you have in regards to the report card and forward them to the committee so that, you know—yes, that they can be discussed. We'd be more than happy to do that and include you, your comments or recommendations. If you'd like to provide me with some information in writing we'd be more than happy to take it to the oversight committee and to have the expertise of all of the stakeholders have a discussion about it. The oversight committee was so enamored with the process in regards to developing the new report card that they asked if they could, you know, stay on and continue to do oversight work in regards to the new report card. So I'm quite sure that they would be happy to have a look at any suggestions you might have that you think would assist the report card.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

Could I ask the minister to indicate now, is this the final document and, if so, will the working committee continue to meet or has that committee now concluded its work on the rendering of the final documents, these final templates that were released some weeks ago?

Ms. Allan: These are the final documents. These templates are final.

What we did with the report cards is we piloted them, and when we piloted them in schools that's when staff, teachers, principals in schools—I believe it was 13 schools in 11 school divisions including French language schools—they took those report cards and they worked with those report cards with parents, with students, and they got feedback. And that feedback came back to officials in my department, and then, the feedback came back to the oversight committee so that they could make final recommendations in regards to what best met the needs of students and teachers and, well, all educators and parents. And so some changes were made, but the report card that you have before you is the final document.

And the—yes, the oversight committee is going to continue to meet and get feedback. They also are taking on the whole initiative around the class size K to 3. They're also helping us in regards to the documents that go out to parents and the explanatory documents that go with the report card. So we have every confidence that this isn't a process that's over

tomorrow. Hope—we believe this is a partnership and it's because of that partnership that this report card is a realization here in the province of Manitoba.

We are also well aware of the European framework. CMEC has been very cautious in using this document. Manitoba is using the European framework as a useful reference document, does not plan to directly implement it. The report card was designed to only include a few curriculum categories and that is information that I have received from Jean-Vianney, who is the assistant deputy minister responsible for French language for the bureau français—Bureau de l'éducation française in my department.

*(14:50)

Mr. Friesen: I'm just wondering how to reconcile the minister's two statements: the first one being that the report card formats are finalized, they've been standardized, they've been closed, they're fixed; and the minister's subsequent comment that she would welcome my comments or comments that might be emerging about the content and about frames of measurement, and be happy to pass along to her working committee any suggestions that might be made. I'm wondering what would be the purpose of passing along those suggestions if the documents are fixed.

Ms. Allan: Well, Education is a dynamic portfolio and always changing, and, as life rolls on and pedagogy changes and things change, I'm sure that at some point we may consider making some changes. And if the oversight committee is—if they're in favour of those changes, we'd be more than happy to make them. It's certainly up to the member if you'd like to provide us with some information that might—at the same time the oversight committee is looking at this document, they might—it's an opportunity for you to receive some feedback as well in regards to what you believe are some concerns.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for the invitation and the opportunity to submit ideas. And certainly, I will avail myself of that opportunity and put something in writing and send it in the direction of the working committee.

Closer to home, just looking at the actual Manitoba curriculum, one further question on this matter, and that is that the Manitoba curriculum indicates that in the area of basic French instruction that at the grade 4 to 6 level more emphasis is to be placed on listening and speaking than on reading and

writing; and that comes from the Manitoba curriculum. I guess, on the basis of that alone, without looking for—comparing the decisions made in this context with the European common framework for languages, even keeping it closer to home and looking only at the Manitoba curriculum, I still have to ask, then, why a decision was made.

If the Manitoba curriculum is saying emphasis on listening and speaking, why then emphasize reading and writing with a separate indicator—a separate category—but lump listening and speaking into one category and call it oral communication? I just wonder, in principle, if that is a way to make the reports more clear. If that, indeed, is to be the direction and the intent of the reports, does that, indeed, make learning more clear?

Ms. Allan: Well, we would certainly look forward to putting that in your brief that we would take forward to the oversight committee, and you can have a response on that from the oversight committee.

Mr. Friesen: Can the minister just indicate if the curriculum support people for basic French were consulted in the development of the document—in the development of the French template?

Ms. Allan: Jean-Vianney Auclair, our assistant deputy minister responsible for French language instruction in the province of Manitoba, was the co-chair of the committee, and as all other members on the oversight committee will go back and consult with our department. And I just wanted to remind you that he's highly regarded in the community and—close working relationship with the DSFM—I don't have a meeting with the DSFM without him—and has been in our department for a very long time.

Mr. Friesen: I don't dispute Mr. Auclair's credentials. I know he's highly regarded in his field. I was wondering, more particularly, is there a group with whom—with which he consults that includes support people for basic French, a liaison group between teachers and the department. And, if there is such a group, how many individuals would it comprise?

Ms. Allan: We'll get that information for you.

Mr. Friesen: I appreciate that. I'd like to turn our attention at this point to discuss some other issues pertaining to Education. And, in particular, I'd like to just draw our attention for a moment to the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program, the PCAP 2010 test scores, which were released in the fall of 2011, as the minister knows, and that those test scores reveal that

Manitoba ranked second last in Canada, and I'll just take a moment just to quickly recap some of those scores.

We found in the test results that Manitoba students ranked second last in math, science, and last in reading. Similarly, the OECD 2009 report for International Student Assessment scores—those scores reveal that Manitoba slips dramatically over the last 10 years, that Manitoba ranked fifth in Canada in 2003, but ranked ninth in Canada in 2009. That's for math. In reading in 2000 Manitoba ranked fifth among the provinces and in 2009 ranked ninth among the provinces. And in science in 2006 Manitoba ranked sixth, and in 2009 Manitoba ranked eighth. And what I believe that these assessment scores show is a pattern that Manitoba is slipping in relation to other jurisdictions when it comes to test performance.

Does the minister share the concern that Manitoba's relatively poor performance in these tests show us to be losing ground against our counterparts?

Ms. Allan: Well, there's absolutely no question that I have said publicly that we were concerned about some of the slippage that we have seen in some of these test results. We have to, you know, in regards to the PISA results, we have to put it into context. We have to remind ourselves as—about how well Canada does in regards to other OECD countries—there are 62 of them, I believe, that participate in these tests, and Canada still does fairly—quite well in regards to other jurisdictions in the world in regards to those OECD countries.

And, in regards to the PCAP results that were from the year 2010, this was the second time that PCAP results had ever been done. The first time was in 2007, and we had a particular concern with the math results because we saw our results go down in that particular area, and I—upon receiving the PCAP results, I called all of my education partners to a meeting in my office and we had a discussion about the fact that this was concerning and that we all needed to work together to improve our education quality in the province of Manitoba.

We have made significant investments in our public education system and we will continue to do that, and we will continue to work with all of our education stakeholders because we believe that we have an obligation to address these test scores, and our stakeholders have pledged to work with us in developing a long-term education quality plan. We

want to make sure that our young students in the province of Manitoba perform well on the world stage, so we need to work together.

We have made many announcements since I've become the Minister of Education in regards to quality education. One of the first changes that I made about a year into the job was we needed to have more rigorous standards in our schools. We needed to ensure that teachers who had been—who had—there was a policy initiative in the province of Manitoba; it was the former minister of Education, Linda McIntosh, and there was a policy that students couldn't be docked marks—could not be docked marks for late assignments, and that was something that certainly I felt was not appropriate. I believe that any student, unless of course there's an incredibly good reason for it, perhaps a death in the family or a situation where an assignment, you know, couldn't be handed in because of a personal situation at home that, you know, people—young people in our society have to be taught that deadlines matter, and I believe that that is the world that we live in.

* (15:00)

So we reversed that policy and put the responsibility for that back into the hands of teachers who can make those decisions. They're the individuals that know those students best, and they know what these personal circumstances are in regards to that child and what their educational—what they're facing in regards to their lives and what they're facing in regards to their studies. So that was the first change that I made as a minister about a year into the job.

The second thing that I wanted to make very clear with school divisions is the whole notion that Manitoba has a no-fail policy. And we put into legislation the fact that young people in our society who are in school, they need to meet grade level. They need to meet the outcomes of the curriculum, and if young people are struggling, we need to figure out exactly what supports they need, and we need to make sure that we have a plan so that we're not taking young people and students and moving them through the system and just making the matter worse.

So we have put—we put that in legislation, I believe, over a year ago, and it is without no question, a more rigorous standard in our school in regards to banning school division no-fail policies. The decision in regards to retention and moving a student—graduating a student, that decision is made with the student and with the teacher and with the

parent, and the principal is the individual that is charged with the final say in regards to the retention and promotion of that student.

I mean, I can also tell you that I've talked to—many times as well, about our early childhood learning and how that early—we know our early childhood learning initiatives are investments, are making a difference. We know that the Fraser Mustard report, Early Childhood Education Index, has shown that Manitoba is only one of three jurisdictions in Canada that is doing well in our early childhood education system. So we need to continue to work on that, but also what we need to do is also look at what else we're doing in regards to early learning and—early learning literacy and numeracy and, of course, the class size initiative.

And so we will continue to work with our education partners in making sure that we take these results seriously, and that we have an education agenda that will provide us with better results for our students.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

I'm glad that the minister has made clear that the government took action to correct the problem that had to do with late assignments and a policy that was brought into effect in Manitoba that would require teachers to not attach any kind of measurement or importance to lateness of assignments. And I concur with the minister that that was a damaging policy and it had no place in the school division. And I believe the—I'm not certain exactly where that policy came from, but I was alarmed, as a former teacher, to see it take root so quickly in Manitoba when it had not been proven elsewhere to be effective.

I believe it was implemented in one jurisdiction. And in a school division, especially, when school divisions are saying that they're preparing students for life, that they're preparing them for the challenges ahead, that they're trying to teach them about developing a good inventory of schools—there was no policy that I saw in education that was so damaging and that sent so clear a message to students that they didn't have to hand things in on time. And I was alarmed to have been a teacher in Manitoba and see this take root.

I can share with the minister that my colleagues across the province shared that dismay and that we were glad to see it repealed. We would have been more glad to have seen a screening in place by which

such a policy would have never have found root in the first place. And I believe, at this point, there are no other jurisdictions that are moving in the direction of trying to implement a policy that would prevent lateness from being addressed by teachers. It created abuses and it created the opportunity for students to take advantage of the situation. So I thank her for that.

Getting back to the measurement of success, though, comparative with Manitoba, I've heard the minister indicate this afternoon that she's concerned with this, and I'm glad to hear that she's not just saying that all of this data is a statistical anomaly. That is clearly not what she's saying. She's saying that the province of Manitoba, the department, our school divisions, we need to grapple with this problem and that it is considerable, and I would agree with her in that. That we understand that these things go right to the heart of the competitiveness of our province, and in a global economy it is more important than ever that we are preparing students, giving them the skills that they need, making sure that when they transition out of school into whatever challenges they choose, whether that be technical programs or university or the workplace, that they have the skills and the abilities in place to be able to meet the challenges.

And I would ask the minister, then, to indicate not just in general, but then what are some of those strategies to specifically attack our—where we are right now with respect to math and reading and science. I'm looking right now at the public schools funding grants and initiatives, a backgrounder that was attached to a media release that came out March the 12th, and I see here that there's \$1.8 million in new funding articulated for numeracy and early literacy intervention. And so that sounds good. That sounds like something that would be put in place to address some of our math and our reading scores that these two testing methods are showing to be lacking.

Could the minister indicate, of that \$1.2 million in new funding for numeracy and early literacy intervention, first, what amount of that 1.8 will go for literacy? What amount will go for numeracy? And second, what specifically will that funding set out to accomplish?

Ms. Allan: Well, thank you very much for the question.

We know how important and how successful reading recovery can be to our young people in our school, and we did have a reading recovery program

in the K-to-4 system—or, sorry, in the K-to-4 grades—and it was early literacy intervention. And so what we did in our 2012-2013 announcement was we expanded that early literacy intervention beyond the K-to-4 grades to grades 5 to 8. So we increased funding for, certainly for numeracy and literacy as well.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister provide information, then, to indicate with respect to the early literacy intervention funding, what does that funding go to? Is that funding going to a departmental personnel position who then goes into the school and directly works with school divisions? Does it go towards teacher training? Does the money go to school division in the form of grants that they can use to hire specialists or third-party providers to come in and assist in literacy initiatives? What specifically does that money then go towards, whether it is wages or programs or classroom resources or perhaps information technology resources?

* (15:10)

Ms. Allan: Well, because all of our school divisions—well, not all of our school divisions look alike. A lot of—as I said, a lot of the school divisions use the Reading Recovery program because it's so successful. But also, school divisions will work with our department in regards to programs that they feel might work well in their school divisions.

So not all school divisions are doing programs that look exactly the same in each school division. But it—this is definitely money that—it goes out to school divisions to help them provide supports. And they're supports to students that we know are vulnerable; they are at risk. They need more support, that they've been identified as struggling in our system and need to have more supports. And so school divisions, teachers, identify what kind of programming, what might work best for them. It could be a Reading Recovery program; it could be a mentorship program; those kinds of programs that help young people in regards to young people when they're struggling.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Chair, could the minister indicate whether the monies are then equally distributed to school divisions or distributed on the basis of perceived need?

Ms. Allan: In regards to early literacy intervention, \$7.3 million is available to support school divisions in their efforts to provide early literacy intervention

programs. And these programs are supplementary to the classroom instruction in order to increase reading and writing proficiency of low-achieving students. And early literacy intervention programs eligible for support are Reading Recovery; also, externally developed early literacy programs that have demonstrated success in increasing reading and writing proficiency, as shown in research and literature; and locally developed early literacy intervention programs that have demonstrated or have the potential to demonstrate success in increasing reading and writing proficiency as shown through the program planning evaluation reporting process.

The money also—and the money goes to all school divisions on a per pupil basis. And, in numeracy, funding is provided to assist school divisions with a design and implementation of kindergarten to grade 8 numeracy programming, focusing on low-achieving pupils in order to build strong foundational mathematic skills. Funding is calculated as \$15 per eligible pupil in kindergarten to grade 8, the—at—as of the enrollment of September 30th, 2011th.

Most of the funding that we provide to school divisions, that enrollment, September 30th, is a critical time for school divisions and for our department to figure out how funding is going to flow. And so, that is the two areas, numeracy and literacy, where we're providing funding around some of the concerns that we had about our scores.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response. The minister indicated \$7.3 million towards the literacy initiative. Could the minister just clarify whether that \$7.3 million also includes that portion of the \$1.8 million in new funding blended for both numeracy and early literacy? And then could the minister also indicate what sum is then dedicated towards numeracy? I believe she failed to provide a number with respect to the numeracy initiative.

Ms. Allan: We're not sure where you're getting your numbers from, so we're just kind of wondering.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Morden-Winkler, proceed.

Mr. Friesen: I wrote the number \$7.3 million down when the minister was responding just now in providing details about the numeracy—or the literacy program. I wrote that number down because she provided it. I was wondering, then, if she could also

provide the total funding that's right now going into numeracy intervention. We know from the backgrounder provided by the Department of Education that \$1.8 million of new funding is going for numeracy and early literacy intervention.

What I'm looking to know is: What portion of that 1.8 goes to numeracy and what is the total amount then flowing towards literacy intervention or literacy initiatives?

Ms. Allan: While we're waiting, I have some information that I would like to share from my assistant deputy minister in my department in regards to the question that the MLA asked in regards to the—his participation on the oversight committee and whether or not he consulted with any organizations or any groups. And I am informed by Jean-Vianney Auclair that, yes, he had many conversations with members of the French community as a second—and there is an actual committee, a consultative committee, and he had an opportunity to have discussions with them, French as a second language consultative committee. The Manitoba association teachers of French, they're called MATF, is one of the groups invited as well to attend meetings with Jean-Vianney, and he also has regular meetings with language co-ordinators from school divisions, So he had an opportunity, as well, to meet with them. And, also BEF has multiple forums this year to discuss the revitalization of French as a second language, including basic French.

So I just wanted to share the information with the member in regards to the consultation that was done by Jean-Vianney Auclair.

In regards to the early literacy intervention grant, the total amount for the early literacy intervention grant is \$7.3 million, and the increase in this 2012-13 year was \$1.0 million. So this is the new money that went into the early literacy intervention grant: total, 7.3; new money, \$1 million.

The early numeracy grant is now called the numeracy grant because it's not early anymore because it's—it used to be K to 4, now it's K to 8, and that is given to school divisions at \$15 per pupil. It used to be \$800,000; it is now doubled and is now \$1.6 million.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for providing that information.

While we were revisiting the issue of French second language instruction, I wonder if I could add the—or ask the additional question and just ask if the

minister could provide information to indicate how many members there are on the consultative committee to which she referred, and how long those members have served on that committee and whether they have experience both in early years, middle years and secondary French language instruction in the classroom.

* (15:20)

Ms. Allan: We'll get that information for the MLA.

Mr. Friesen: And, additionally, if the minister's providing that information, could she also provide information to indicate whether the members of the consultative committee are currently teachers or whether they have been seconded to that work, and if that is a paid position to be on the consultative committee? And, if it is a paid position, whether there was a competitive process to go on to that committee. I would appreciate receiving that information as well. Could the minister provide that?

Ms. Allan: Well, I'm not really sure where the MLA is coming from or what on earth he's trying to figure out or what—it—we consult with our education partners. We consult with people. There is a committee called the Manitoba association of teachers who are French, so I don't know if they're retired or if they're paid or if it matters.

I don't—I mean, it almost sounds like the member—I'm really not sure what the member's getting at and there—he—we consult with our education partners in regards to matters. If we consult with the DSFM who, I think, are pretty bright individuals, we—we'd—I'm not so sure that we are concerned about whether they're paid or not. What we—what we're concerned about is how well they understand pedagogical issues in our public education system. So I'm just curious what the member is concerned about.

Mr. Friesen: And I assure the minister that, because these are the departmental Estimates, that we need at all times to be concerned about expenditures. And, as the critic for Education, I will ask a lot of questions, and sometimes we'll ask those questions and have the information right on hand to provide, and other times I do appreciate the minister and the deputy minister agreeing to provide the information later on.

And I assure the minister that the questions that I ask are exactly for the purpose of establishing where we spend our money, establishing—are we spending money and getting the results that we want to? And I

assure her that it is exactly in my role as Education critic that I continue to ask these questions.

Until today, I was unaware that there was a consultative committee and I appreciate the minister providing that information. And so I think it's a reasonable second question to follow up and then say: Who's on the consultative committee? Are they seconded to the committee? Or are they actually teachers right now in the public school system, or perhaps in the independent school system? And if they are on that committee and they are seconded to it, is it in the capacity of being paid or do they volunteer their time? And how many members are there? I believe these are all reasonable questions.

And the question I have for the minister this afternoon is, quite simply this: Can she provide the information?

Ms. Allan: We'll get the information for the member and we'll put it with the rest of the information that the member wants.

Mr. Friesen: Getting back to numeracy and literacy intervention, I notice in the information that was released in the backgrounder that it's indicated that the project for numeracy programming will focus on low-achieving students in order to build strong foundational mathematics skills and the minister made some mention of that.

Now, in relation to numeracy—because we did talk about literacy—how exactly do we focus on low-achieving students? I think that we are agreed on the matter of the OECD test scores and the PCAP scores, indicating that we have a ways to go in the province of Manitoba to bring up the level of achievement in our students. And I'm wondering specifically, then, while this is somewhat encouraging to hear as a stakeholder that we are focused on low-achieving students in order to build strong foundational mathematics skills, what exactly are we doing? Is it something different? Is it a new strategy, or are we doing more of the same?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, what happens is teachers in the classroom all day with students and they identify young people who are having difficulties, and it's a—this is what's important.

We know that Finland is at the top of the PISA scores; they have been at top of the PISA scores for quite some time. Korea is giving them a run for their money, and we know that the No. 1 thing that you can do in regards to getting better results is focusing on vulnerable learners.

And that's why we believe that it has to—that the early literacy and numeracy initiative is important because we focus on learners in the early years. And we put our trust in teachers who are at the front line of our public education system, who are with those young people two hundred days of the year for most of the time. And that's why it's important to us that we put more funding and programming into the early years and put it in the hands of people that are on the front lines. So we know that our teachers are always doing new things with young people in our public education system so that, you know, they can provide supports to those young learners and help them achieve academically.

Mr. Friesen: As a former teacher myself, I know that it is always important to be engaged in measuring outcomes. It's always important to be asking ourselves whether what we're doing is accomplishing our—the desired effect.

And so I would ask the minister in regard to numeracy and literacy interventions and initiatives: What—on what basis will the minister determine if the \$1.8 million in new funding is having an effect and raising the ability of these low-achieving students? Will it be measured?

*(15:30)

Ms. Allan: We have—in the province of Manitoba, we have a grade 3 assessment that is a province-wide assessment for literacy and numeracy, and we know that learning is cumulative, so that provides us—that is teacher directed and we have—we get those results.

And the other thing that staff do in my department, officials in my department do, is they go out and they talk to school divisions. They meet with school divisions throughout the year, to talk to them about the funding that they are receiving, and they have an opportunity to talk to them about the programming that is being put in place with the funding. They talk to them about what changes they may need to make to their programming, and they get an opportunity to determine whether or not, you know, they think the programming and the money is making a difference in our public education system.

My deputy minister also has the opportunity to speak to superintendents, and he goes out and visits superintendents all across the province, and talk to them in regards to math education. And you're obviously familiar with what we're doing in regards our other initiatives, in regards to our math summit

and the conversation that we're having in regards to our math education as well.

Mr. Friesen: That provides an excellent segue for us to turn our attention to the discussion of math education in the province of Manitoba, and I know that the minister is aware that concerns have been raised by professional math educators in this province about the state of this province's math curriculum and the quality of math instruction in K-to-12 classrooms. And the Western Initiative for Strengthening Education in Math is the group that has, in particular, brought to light a lot of the—of this issue, and they've explored the extent to which skills have been de-emphasized in the math curriculum and, in fact, there is no mention of basic algorithms at this time in the Manitoba curriculum.

I think that has been one of the things that they have brought to light and it is certainly resonating with the public. And it's been interesting to see the resilience of this issue and its ability to stay in public discourse, even over a number of months now. It was featured on the front cover of *Macleans* magazine and there has been a website established, and I know a lot of parents communicating back and forth. And I know it's gotten the considerable attention as well, the minister and the deputy minister, and it's good to see us having this conversation about math education in Manitoba.

And, of course, from their perspective, these professional educators, they're seeing the evidence in university classrooms on the effect of a number of years now of math in the classroom. They're seeing the effect that where we no longer insist on a mastery of basic concepts like memorization of the times tables and vertical mathematics and long division that, underlying these changes, this group is bringing attention to the idea that there is this notion that—this notion perhaps emerging, or this notion perhaps that is driving these changes that would say that you can arrive at mastery of a subject area apart from developing a set of skills through repetition and practice.

They refer to the idea of automaticity and so, I guess, my question for the minister would be this: In light of what WISE Math has brought to light about the state of math education, the de-emphasizing of skills and repetition and practice as part of the approach to learning mathematics, is the minister prepared to emphasize skills in mathematics more in Education going forward in Manitoba?

Ms. Allan: Well, we've—I've said very clearly that this has been a very important dialogue about public education, and we've been pleased to work with our education partners, all of them, in regards to this particular issue.

We had a math summit and we—and, you know, we had a lot of our partners at that math summit, not just our—you know, our—the people that we've worked with, the math—university math professors, but we've also had: the Manitoba Association of Mathematics Teachers were there; we had school divisions there; the Manitoba School Boards Association; we had the western initiative for strengthening education in mathematics.

And, you know, we've had an opportunity to really have a very, very thoughtful dialogue about this whole issue. And my understanding is it's not just an issue here in Manitoba; it's also an issue in Saskatchewan and Alberta and—because they're part of the protocol. So, you know, we believe that it's a matter of balance, and, you know, we know it's a balance that is about skill development and conceptual understanding and, also, problem-solving abilities. And it's been an important discussion for us, and will inform us as we move forward.

Mr. Friesen: In particular, what I would ask the minister is with respect to the specific idea of the de-emphasizing of skills in the curriculum: Is that a discussion that the minister has had directly with the WISE maths—Math group? And if she's had a discussion, what does she think about that idea, and is it something that she's talking specifically with her departmental people about?

Ms. Allan: I have met with WISE Math; I met with them in a meeting with 13 of my other colleagues. And I also met—offered to meet with them—unfortunately, when I was deathly ill. We had a meeting that I unfortunately had to cancel, because I got the influenza virus and was away for several days, and then, of course, I had the opportunity to just see them briefly. My officials of my department have met with them eight times, and we're still in the process of having a discussion about this in regards to the balance and what it will look like as we move forward.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that response.

Just picking up on something that the minister said: The minister indicated that she had met with the WISE Math group along with 13 of her colleagues.

Am I, then, to understand that the minister has not had the opportunity to meet with the WISE Math group apart from a larger meeting? I imagine that might be a Cabinet meeting or a full caucus meeting of the NDP caucus. Am I to assume, then, there has not been a meeting with WISE Math being able to represent their concerns directly to the minister apart from a meeting with 14 individuals in the room?

Ms. Allan: Well, it was a meeting with my caucus colleagues, MLAs interested in the issue, and I was in the meeting with them for an hour and a half; they made an—a presentation to me. And the meeting that you're referring to, which was one-on-one in my office, had to be cancelled. We called them back, we tried to set up another meeting, and they said, at that particular time, they didn't want to set up a meeting, because they wanted to wait until we had had an—till that we had done the math summit. So then we did the math summit, and now we're setting up another meeting with them. And my understanding is that this really isn't an issue; they're perfectly comfortable coming to see me, and we're arranging that meeting, and, in the meantime, they have meetings with my officials all the time.

Mr. Friesen: The minister made mention of the idea that we need to strike a balance when it comes to skills and conceptual understanding and problem-solving capability. And I think, perhaps in many ways, balance is a good word to use.

*(15:40)

I believe what it is that is underlying the WISE Math group's concern is exactly the lack of balance that is currently in the curriculum and the full-scale move away from skills and the place of repetition and the place of making certain mathematical computations automatic to learners so they can attend to more complex math problems. And I think that the principle is quite universal. I know that, as a pianist and a piano teacher, always I would emphasize that students learn scales. If you want to learn Beethoven, you learn scales. My children now take piano lessons, and it's absolutely fundamental that they learn to play scales so that they can play it in context when they play a piece from the repertoire.

And in the same way, what troubles this group, and I think I share their concern in this regard, is that by de-emphasizing skills that students are then hamstrung and not able to go along and do the more complex calculations that are required in mathematics.

And I know that there's—we could have a long, long discussion on this—and for the purposes of our discussion this afternoon, we won't be able to have that long discussion—and there's philosophical assumptions that underline some of these decisions that are being made, but suffice it to say that there seems to be a movement away from encouraging skills development.

So then, if I use the minister's own terminology about balance, I'm going to come back again to those same standardized report cards, and if I look at the mathematics reports, I notice that the first area of measurement is knowledge and understanding. The second area is called mental math and estimation, which I think we would all agree is not the same as skills proficiency, and the third area is problem solving.

My question to the minister would be this: In lieu of the fact that she has used the term "balance" and said it is important to strike a balance between skills and conceptual understanding and problem-solving capability, to what extent does the new math standardized report card strike a balance?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I would appreciate if the MLA across the way would not use the word "standardized." I got a slap on the wrist for using that word by educators in the—and they do not like the word "standardized" because that is a word in the education profession that means that the report card looks exactly the same in every school division, which it does not. It's a 70 per cent common report card with a 30 per cent—there is flexibility. Thirty per cent of the report card is flexible so that it can reflect the different cultural and community aspect of where—whatever communities the report card is being used by teachers. So I certainly learned that lesson the hard way very, very early on when I used the word "standard," but, unfortunately, somehow it stuck, so it's like any public—it's like any marketing exercise; once you use a word and then you try to stuff it back in the bottle, it's very, very difficult.

In regards to the whole issue of balance, I find it interesting. I don't know if the MLA is familiar with the recent press release out of the province of Saskatchewan, and they have basically told WISE Math that they are not going to make any changes to their curriculum. And so we find that interesting as well in regards to the fact that we're here working and—away with our stakeholders in the WISE Math organization in regards to how to find that balance in

regards to the skill development, particularly at the early years.

And I think one of the reasons that this new curriculum came into place was we, you know, we recognized the—how important conceptual learning can be, and it all can't be kill and drill, and, you know, because in many ways I know what WISE Math is concerned about, is we need to put the joy of math back into learning.

And I think that's probably one of our biggest challenges in regards to looking at that—this issue is the whole issue around balance as well as the whole issue around how we really make sure that those fundamental skills in the early years, we have a confidence level that they're being taught as well as making sure that we don't go overboard to the point where the whole issue around problem solving and conceptual learning, you know, is—you know, we want to make sure that we encourage that. So those are some of the discussions that we're having right now.

In regards to the report card, the mental math that applies mental math strategies for adding and subtracting to 18 that are efficient, accurate, and flexible, and, of course, that's very much about skills. So we feel confident, and this was the advice, of course, that we took from our oversight committee in regards to the development of this that that meets the balance that we needed to meet in regards to the report card.

Mr. Friesen: I would like to further ask the minister. She used the term "kill and drill," and certainly I didn't refer to the idea of kill and drill, but I think the minister would agree that in math, skill is cumulative and students can ascend to the next problem or the next process once they've mastered one—a simpler one—and by that we continue to add competence and ability and even confidence.

And so the question I asked earlier I would probably just ask again in a different way. I'm looking at the—those three areas of measurement on the mathematics report card. I'm looking right now on the K to—or the 1 to 6 report card but I know it's the same in the 7 and 8, and, yes, it does indicate there a whole different area of measurement for mental math and estimation.

But, in the interest of providing balance and in the interest of restoring balance with respect to the place of skills and skill building of a student being able to add in columns or use long division, would it

not be more accurate on the report card in the place of mental math and estimation, which will only get you so far, to have a broader category and list there something to the effect of—and I jotted down on my paper, skill and accuracy, or skill, accuracy, and procedural fluency, or skill and fluency? Wouldn't that be a better indicator that a student would have in their arsenal an ability to actually perform those things, long division and multiplication, and wouldn't that be a more fulsome way of measuring a student's ability in math education at the 1 to 6 or 7 to 8 level?

Ms. Allan: Well, I would certainly—if you would like I could certainly—you could put that in your little document that you would like the oversight committee stakeholders to look at, and we could get some feedback from them.

There's also going to be—in anything that we do in regards to the report card, there will be a document that we're putting together in regards to the explanatory note about how the wording and the language is used in the report card, and that was the whole part of this exercise was to make sure that we had a plain-language report card that was common and portable and—*[interjection]*—but not standardized, yes, that's true, or you'll get a slap on the wrist from an educator in some school division somewhere in the province of Manitoba. I've already got mine. And so we'd be more than happy to provide that to get some feedback from the oversight committee on your suggestions.

* (15:50)

Mr. Friesen: I would welcome the opportunity, once again, to be able to submit ideas to the working committee. It's a bit disappointing that the—that there wasn't an invitation to do so sooner. And, while I assure the minister it's not as if I have the market cornered on good ideas, it's simply that I've been listening and reading and learning, and I'm just surprised at some things that, perhaps, aren't in place in the new documents that I would have expected to see. So I would welcome the opportunity to provide that information and to write a letter both on the issue of math education and, also, on the previous one we discussed. But, at the same time, we're faced with that difficult situation whereby these documents are standardized and I don't believe the committee will be revisiting them.

Nevertheless, as the minister has indicated, education is fluid, and so I hope that there will be a willingness to, perhaps, continue to look into this

complex and challenging issue that has a real effect on Manitoba students.

I want to, perhaps, provide one small illustration of the limitations of mental math and estimation for the purposes—or for the minister's consideration. I have a daughter who's in grade 5 and she's a hard worker, and she takes math. And so, as her dad and as a former educator, and as many parents do across this province, we're called from time to time to assist our sons and daughters with their math homework. And so I've obliged, and I've sat next to Gwendolyn as she's worked on her math homework and I've endeavoured to be of some assistance to her. And at some points I have been of assistance, I don't know. At some point she might claim I was more of a liability than an asset, but, in any case, I was asking her about—because I understand that procedures change in mathematics. So she does look at some of the things that I learned to do while I was in math—and she looks at me kind of funny and saying, we don't do it anymore. But I was surprised to see when I was asking her some questions that she said, oh, that's mental math, I can do that. So she said, do this with me daddy, and she says take your two hands and hold your 10 fingers up. She says, what's 9 times 7—or I asked her, what's 9 times 7? Push down your seventh finger, and she says, the answers right there, it's 63. She says, ask me another one. I said, what's 9 times 8? Push down the eighth finger and you get 72. And, you know, by extension—what's 9 times 9; push down the ninth finger, you get 81. I said, what's 8 times 6? She says, we haven't got a trick for that one. And those were exactly her words: we haven't got a trick for that one, and I thought that was a perfect illustration of the difference of the limitation of mental math.

Because I think it's exactly this issue that in the interest of supplying students with many different approaches, any one of them they can adopt if they think they will be successful in it. I believe there is the danger of confusing students and there's also the related danger that there will be an end to which the mental math can help them. And I believe that the better approach, the more comprehensive approach to challenges like this is to actually insist on skill building and, yes, part of that, Madam Minister, is drill. I know that there's a real derogatory, you know, sense of that term that's been tossed around. But, really, it comes down to this: skill and accuracy, and it means emphasizing the right answer. The right answer is important. And, I think, that's what the evidence of these tests are coming back to show us,

is that perhaps we haven't put enough emphasis on the right answer.

So my question to the minister, then, just to wrap up, and I don't want to belabour the point, it would just be this: Would she acknowledge that mental math only gets you so far and that skill building, or skill and accuracy would be a more fulsome, a more comprehensive term to perhaps apply to the math report card that will be common to the whole province of Manitoba?

Ms. Allan: Well, I said very clearly in my press release on the 16th of May, that skill development in regards to math is very, very important. So we know that that is important, and we will have explanatory notes for educators that will—we will work on with our oversight committee in regards to the report card. And we have every confidence that this is another tool that will improve the quality of education for us in the province of Manitoba.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Thank you. Let me start out with a question from page 93 of the Estimates. This deals with the Aboriginal Education Directorate, and I see that there's been a fairly drastic cut in the supplies and services budget. And maybe the minister could provide an explanation.

Ms. Allan: The decrease is because there was a federally funded project out of the millennium project called Making Education Work. It was a five-year project and it just came to an end—to a conclusion. And it will—there will be—we will be preparing a report on that, and it will help inform some of the work that we do in regards to Aboriginal education. *[interjection]* Oh. A report has been prepared—*[interjection]* So we have the report and we will analyze it and study it, and it will assist us in regards to furthering Aboriginal education in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Perhaps the minister could provide a little bit more details of this project. And I would ask the minister if she'd make that report available so that, you know, I could have a look at it and others could have a look at it.

Ms. Allan: Thank you very much. This was, as I said, a five-year, \$3-million pilot research project that—and it was to assist Aboriginal high school students. And it was to assist them in completing high school and pursuing post-secondary education.

The research component of the project was intended to assess the overall effectiveness of fostering active parent, guardian and community

involvement, providing academic supports and post-secondary planning and promoting high school completion with the larger goal of increasing post-secondary education participation rates for Aboriginal students.

Some of the communities that participated in it was Thompson, Selkirk, Swan Valley and Cross Lake, Norway House and Peguis. It involved 256 grade 10 Aboriginal high school students, and we have just finished off having a look at the report. I haven't even seen it yet, but I am quite sure that we will have an—I will have an opportunity to have a look at that report shortly, and we will certainly take your request to have a look at that report seriously.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I thank the minister and I'm just curious as to whether the report showed that the effort that was undertaken to increase high school graduation rates was—whether it was successful or not.

* (16:00)

Ms. Allan: In consultations that—and the individual information that we're getting from not just the report but from the school divisions, is that there is no question that this kind of work with school divisions is making a difference. We have—we know that some of the work that was focused on in this initiative was specifically around tutoring and mentoring.

Also, of course, we all know that parental involvement is critical to a young person's academic success, and that was part of one of the core components of this program. So we—the—initially, the officials in my department feel that this is absolutely no question, this report synopsis says that it was successful in increasing graduation rates.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, if it was so successful, I'm curious as to why it's discontinued.

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I just want to caution the member in regards to the language that he used, that it's so successful.

We are—first of all, we are still in the process of analyzing that report, and it's important to us to look at the different components of this pilot research project, and that is exactly what it was. It was a pilot research project that was funded by the—in partnership with the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, and it was done to inform us in regards to best practices. So, of course, we will take that information very seriously.

It was one of—I'm being informed by my deputy minister that it was one of five or six or seven projects. He's not—he can't quite recall—that was—that were projects across Canada, and we were very pleased, obviously, to be a part of—or be chosen as one—a jurisdiction to participate in that kind of a research project. We will take, you know, the information. We're still analyzing it on—and we will take that information seriously.

We also, two years ago, started a student success initiative pilot project here on our own in Manitoba. It was part of the funding announcement. It's \$600,000 to three school divisions here in the province of Manitoba, and it is a similar kind of a pilot project, and it's money that is provided to school divisions.

And what happens—and it's a similar kind of project in regards to—it's a teacher mentorship program and students are identified that we believe are at risk of dropping out of school, and we know how important mentorship can be.

We know how important young people are at risk around the age of 15 of dropping out of school and, for many of them, it's a personal connection with that teacher that keeps them involved in their academic work. And, of course, we know how important it is to have a young person graduate from high school because that diploma opens up all kinds of worlds for them.

So this is just one of the things that we're doing here in the province of Manitoba in regards to how to provide supports to young people at risk and, particularly, our Aboriginal students in our public education system.

Mr. Gerrard: Did—what was the name of the program or project that was funded under this and where the funding—the five-year program that was funded under the millennium—Canadian millennium foundation?

Ms. Allan: Making Education Work.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. You know, one of the issues, as we know—and the minister referred to the problem of the need to put the joy of math back into learning and, you know, we also want—not only the joy there, but we want, of course, excellence and skill development in math area. And I'm just curious as to, you know, why, after, you know, 12.5 years of the minister's government, that we have a situation where the joy has been taken out of math and where kids are not learning the skills?

Ms. Allan: Well, actually, what happened was there was a new math curriculum that was developed. It's a western protocol math curriculum that was developed by three jurisdictions, signed off on by three jurisdictions: Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. And in regards to the WISE Math professors, this is the curriculum that they have some concerns about, and this is the curriculum that we are reviewing at this moment in discussion and dialogue with all of our stakeholders. We take the issue very seriously and we have just completed the math summit that we had about 10 days ago. And we're going to continue to work with our education partners in regards to striking the appropriate balance, as I said earlier, in regards to a math curriculum and math education.

Mr. Gerrard: My understanding is that the program basically gets rid of things like vertical addition and long division. And so, that, you know, for—in many circumstances, it's replaced these with applications which are not workable, particularly for longer numbers. And so, I'm just trying to understand, with the—you know, the minister and her government being responsible, you know, how could these changes have been introduced in a way that has resulted in, as we talked about, the problems that you've just describing and are trying to deal with?

Ms. Allan: Well, in the new curriculum, the—it's algorithms. It's the four algorithms, and it moved math education to a more conceptual way of thinking, of doing math—sorry—a more conceptual way of doing math. A lot of value was placed in doing math horizontally in regards to place value, so that's what we have been having this discussion about over the last six months, actually, in officials meetings with education partners and with the WISE Math organization and the presentations that they've been making.

*(16:10)

I don't know if you've had an opportunity to have a meeting with the WISE Math professors, but I know they had a meeting with the Tory caucus. But these are all very important discussions and meetings that we are having in regards to this because, at the end of the day, this is about balance. And it's about balance between skill development and conceptual understanding and problem solving, and we want to, you know, address this and have an opportunity as we move forward to make sure that the math curriculum is meeting the needs of our students.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I thank the minister.

Yes, we had an open public meeting in River Heights with Anna Stokke who has raised many of these concerns and been at the forefront of raising the concerns. As the minister knows, she's a professor at the University of Winnipeg and is very concerned about the learning of kids in math and that the kids have the joy as well as the skills.

So thank you. I will turn it back to my colleague as my time is up. Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: Just a couple questions on the report cards, Minister.

Just with respect to the wording on the report cards, I see that the grades—we've got the wording: grades 1 to 6, 7 and 8, and then senior high, 9 to 12. Just wondering: What was the rationale in grouping them in those groups as opposed to the early years versus middle years versus senior years?

Ms. Allan: Well, I think I've gone over this in detail. I think what—and I'm not sure I am clear in regards to what your question is, so if I'm not, I'm sure we'll sort this out.

But—and we talked—last week, when we were talking about the report card, we knew that it was the grade scale and that was important in the early years, and that hasn't changed. And then we went to the percentage change—the percentage scale and the language that goes with that, and then the report card for grades 7 and 8 were transition.

And, as I said, in Estimates, I believe, last Friday, the whole issue of language in the report card, there was lots and lots and lots and lots of discussion at the oversight committee in regards to what the appropriate language would be in the report card that would be clearer for people that were using that report card and would make sense. And this, at the end of the day, was the language that everyone had a comfort level with.

Mr. Ewasko: It's just interesting that for years we've gone back and forth on over the early years, middle years and senior years wording and classifications of K to 4, and then 5 to 8 for middle years, and then 9 to 12 for seniors, and how now, when it comes to not standardized report cards—from what I understand, it's more so 70 per cent common report cards—that we're now doing away with those names.

So a quick question: Why is the K-to-6 report card set up so that the behaviour is not grouped with the subject area, as the 7 and 8 and the senior ones are?

Ms. Allan: Real simple answer: you don't—when you get to the senior years, you don't always have a homeroom teacher. You don't always have one teacher at the front of the room as you do in the early years.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that so-called easy answer. But, you know, this would make sense in tracking student performance over time if you did have the behaviour—the learning behaviours under each classroom, because in a lot of situations, the same teacher is not in front of the classroom, actually, all the time in the K-to-6 years, 7 and 8, and as they are different in the senior years, so I don't think it's that easy of an answer. This also, as I said, this report card assumes that one teacher then is teaching all the areas, which are, again, not very often the case, and behaviour may change according to teacher or academic demand of the area.

Ms. Allan: Well, the issue with a common report card is that you cannot create a report card that meets absolutely every particular case in the school, and this was one of the things that we heard clearly from the Manitoba Teachers' Society is that some schools had 16-page report cards and it was a workload issue. So that was one of the issues that the oversight committee had to be cognizant about, if that we were going to have a common report card, we better make sure that at the end of the day we have a report card that meets the majority of the situations in our public classrooms in the province of Manitoba.

So, certainly, you know, in the early years, I'm not saying every classroom in the province of Manitoba has one teacher, but we believe most of them do, and so that was kind of the thinking at the oversight committee. Then, of course, as you move into grade 7 and 8 in the transition year report card, you have a situation where you have students that are starting to branch off and go off into other classes and, you know, and take different courses and that—and, you know, that's the situation. And certainly once you get to high school, right, it's—it looks even more different.

So that's kind of how the report cards are set up, and we believe that it meets the majority of cases in all of the grade levels as outlined in the report card. Obviously, it can't meet all of them, because, you know, at the end of the day we wanted to make sure that it, you know, we weren't going back to a common report card that was now 16 pages long, so we were trying to find a balance.

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate the fact that the minister corrected herself on the fact that she does acknowledge that there are some schools, and in my experience in that, more so lean towards the fact that there's not many schools that have only one teacher for absolutely every single subject that the students would be being taught from K to 6. But then, that being said, I appreciate the answer.

I look at the 7 and 8 report card and I don't see adding the learning behaviours to the K-to-6 report card for each subject would bump it up from a six-page report card—or a five-page report card to a 16-page report card, I believe the minister said. So I would just—is that where the 30 per cent of the 70 per cent common report card would then come into play?

* (16:20)

Ms. Allan: Some of the other areas where there—some of the other areas—if you turn to page 5 of the report card, you'll see learning behaviours, and you'll see some of the learning behaviours on the report card in regards to personal management skills, active participation and learning and social responsibility.

And then you'll see that local option there. And those were boxes, local option boxes, for teachers to have a look at in regards to what they may want to put in there that may pertain to their local community, their local programming, kind of their local cultural circumstances, and also the comment box, as well, which provides the teacher to put in some comments that are obviously totally personal in regards to that student that they're responsible for in the public education system.

So that's, you know, we—the oversight committee—this is another example of where they tried to have a report card that could—that wasn't a cookie-cutter approach in regards to reporting.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Madam Minister, for that answer.

Yes, my point is, is the fact that students learn and behave differently on—not necessarily all the same, under the—under different teachers, and then you just repeated the fact that page 5, one teacher fills this out and they can—the one teacher can make their comments and that.

All I'm basically asking is if this page can be part of that 30 per cent of the culturally and community-based portion of the report card of this—

to add on to the 70 per cent commonality of the report card for the rest of the province?

Ms. Allan: Well, you know, I find it quite interesting that you—the two—you want—everybody wants to rewrite the report card in this committee. I find it really quite fascinating, especially considering the fact that, you know, the—

An Honourable Member: We're here to help.

Ms. Allan: Yes, well, the official opposition didn't have any interest in developing a report card when a retired superintendent made that suggestion to your leader.

So I just want to let you know that the advisory committee, the stakeholders that I work with, are working together for the first time in the history of this province, and they're all working together in the best interests of students in our public education system. And they have done a lot of work on this report card, and I have a lot of confidence in this report card, and I can tell you that teachers, when I was going door to door in my riding, and I went door to door in a lot of other ridings, and I heard a lot of really positive comments about the report card.

And I will make the same offer to the MLA, that if you would like to put all of your comments down in regards to all the changes you would like to see to this report card, we would be more than happy to forward them to the oversight committee. If you feel that you have some ideas that are better or more responsive to the needs of Manitoba students, I'd be more than delighted to take your comments to the oversight committee, and we can get you some feedback in regards to why these decisions were made.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm not going to apologize for asking these type of questions this late in the day, Madam Minister, because I believe that the Estimates process is to ask questions, and if you feel that you've answered the questions already, or however you're feeling right now, I'm going to move on to another line of questioning, but it's interesting that you find that comical.

Ms. Allan: Well, I don't think anyone's laughing. I don't know why you would say I find it comical. And I have—I'm not sitting here laughing; I'm telling you that I'm—find it fascinating. Now, funny and fascinating I think are two completely and totally different words.

But I have made a sincere offer that we will make this—you know, I've made this offer to both you—the MLAs that we will take your suggestions. I think you would find the feedback that you would get from the report card committee interesting. And we will definitely do that for you. And I don't think you have to apologize for asking questions; that's why we're here today.

Mr. Ewasko: Well then, and I guess we'll be moving on to another question.

Number 4 on the middle years is equivalent, according to the key, to an 80 per cent, 100 per cent range. And I know that the minister had—the—my colleague from Morden-Winkler had asked a similar question, but I was just wondering why the 80 to 100 per cent range when we're dealing with students at the grade 7 and 8 level, when—and again, not to upset the minister, but just asking the question—if I attend work 100 per cent of the time, and get recognized equally for someone who attends 80 per cent of the time, I personally would not consider it fair that we would both receive a four for that. And I was just wondering the rationale between the 20 per cent difference there and the 10 per cent differences before that.

Ms. Allan: Well, I already have answered this question, so I will be more than pleased to answer it again.

The—this grade scale matches the grade scale in Ontario. Ontario has already been through the exercise of putting together common frameworks for their report card. A lot of the—when the oversight committee first met, they looked at what other jurisdictions had done. And they—you know, they used that as part as their research to inform the oversight committee in regards to what had been done. And this grade scale complements what's been done in Ontario.

And, obviously, that's important to us, because one of the beauties of this report card is the fact that it's portable. It's portable just not here in Manitoba from school division to school division, from school to school, 'depenzent' on how transient populations are, but it's also portable across jurisdictions. And it's portable from Manitoba to Ontario now when it's fully implemented, because you—we will have a similar academic achievement grade scale for schools—for students.

And that's particularly important when students are applying for post-secondary education. So this

will provide—this report card will provide for more portability across two jurisdictions when they're applying for post-secondary education.

Mr. Ewasko: The question was why the 20 per cent difference, but I'll take the minister's answer that because Ontario did it.

Another quick question, and my last one for today: Is there—Madam Minister, is there a separate, individual education plan report card in addition to these three?

Ms. Allan: No. The IEPs, you can see them—you can see the IEPs were incorporated into this report card. We did extensive consultation with that. I also met with a committee that is called MAS—sorry, other way around, SAM, and—different acronym. And we had a good discussion with them, and I know that this was the whole issue, in regards to how to grade students with exceptionalities, was important to them. So they also has—had provided the oversight committee with some—*[interjection]* And there will also be information in regards to students with exceptionalities and students with IEPs; there will be additional information that can be provided to parents so they understand how their students are doing.

* (16:30)

Mr. Ewasko: I have to correct the record. I do have one more question.

Since the minister mentioned that the IEPs are incorporated into these report cards, I do understand that there is additional resource-supplied material, but what I'm seeing on these report cards is a check-off box saying that—let's just use on page 4 for the 1 to 6 report card, we've got French. The check-off box, I guess, would be IEP, and then the parent would then, what? So I'm wondering where the minister feels that it's incorporated in these report cards.

Ms. Allan: As soon as you check that I—that box off that says IEP, that's what links the report card to the additional information.

Mr. Friesen: Briefly returning to math education, I just wanted to make the minister aware. I'm holding a news release of May the 11th. The minister had earlier made the claim that Saskatchewan had decided not to proceed on the basis of any of WISE Math's concerns, and I'm seeing here: Ministry of Education taking action based on results of math consultations; first paragraph outlines that they're

going to strengthen supports for renewed math; second paragraph indicates they're addressing concerns coming from parents and stakeholder groups; and the third paragraph starting to list immediately focus its attention on. It would indicate to me that the province of Saskatchewan actually does take seriously those concerns that have been articulated, not just by WISE Math, but many different groups about the quality of math education not only in Manitoba, but in Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions in Canada. I just wanted to make the minister aware of that.

And still on this subject of mathematics and in Manitoba, I wonder if the minister could comment on this just because we had an exchange in question period about a week and a half ago or so, and I want to clear up something that's not clear at this point. And that is that there was a headline in the *Winnipeg Free Press* that indicated minister expels the math exam. And it had indicated that the minister was saying that there would be no math exam for this coming year for provincial math tests for 2012-13. At the same time, the deputy minister, in a radio interview indicated that there would be a provincial mathematics exam—or, pardon me, I misspeak. The deputy minister stated there would be a math exam. The minister corrected the record and said there would be one. But I have also a letter from—it looks to be originally from the assistant deputy minister, and that letter indicates, as of March—in March in 2012, it says, please note that while the piloting process will continue there will be no provincial math tests in 2012-13.

The question for the minister: Will there be a math provincial test for 2012-13?

Ms. Allan: Well, the unfortunate part about what—that is causing the confusion is it says there will not be a provincial math test, provincial standards test. It's common when you're implementing new curriculum—we're implementing new curriculum in the province of Manitoba. It is common when that curriculum is in the process of being implemented, as I said in the House, that, you know, you make a decision to pause on that standards test that students are marked on. It counts for 30 per cent of their mark.

And so what it will be replaced with and what we've said is that there will be a test, not a standards test, because, obviously, we need to continue to get some data, but the test would definitely not count for 30 per cent. These kinds of things are done when

you—you're in the process of piloting new curriculum.

Mr. Friesen: I want to assure the minister that the context of this letter clearly states—it clearly sets out that the author is talking about standards tests. As a matter of fact, in just the paragraph previous, the author states, standards tests will be administered system-wide in the following areas. He lists three areas and directly beneath in a bullet, he says, please note that while the piloting process will continue, there will be no provincial math test.

So I accept her explanation, and I thank her for the answer, but I do want to assure her that the writer quite clearly is referring to standards tests, and he's not trying to expand the definition of what type of test may be administered. I'm happy to accept her explanation that there will be a test in place for next year.

My subsequent question for the minister is this: Will there be a provincial standards test in place in the subsequent year 2013-2014?

Ms. Allan: Well, I'm informed by my officials where we're trying to make it even clearer, he wants me to add an adjective—regular standards tests.

So there is—the tests are administered in January 2013 and July 2013, and there will be a test in January and in June 2013.

So, just to correct the record. The regular standards test will be in—there will be a test in January 2013, and we will be looking—but the regular standards test, as related to the new curriculum, will be back in 2014. *[interjection]*

Sorry. The reason we're having a problem is, is we're trying to determine which is the school year and which is the calendar year, and so I'm just actually just confusing my deputy minister even more so and my apologies.

Mr. Friesen: And to further clarify then, so the absence of a regular standards test in the next year does not indicate in any way a movement away from mathematics achievement tests.

Ms. Allan: Correct.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister indicate whether the Department of Education has posted provincial averages for the grade 12 math standards exams for the previous year?

Ms. Allan: We're going to—we'll look into that and let you know.

Mr. Friesen: I went on a search and I seem to have discovered that it doesn't seem to be the case that applied math, pre-calculus, and consumer math or math essentials are all posted.

I wonder if the minister can indicate at what point in the school year do the previous year's results normally get posted.

Ms. Allan: We'll get that information for you.

Mr. Friesen: And in my searching out this information, it seems that it's the case that—and I could be mistaken; I could be looking in the wrong place—but it would seem to me that I can access the applied math and the pre-calculus tests, but not the consumer math 40S test.

* (16:40)

I wonder if the minister could indicate: Why would that be the case? Why would some of the exams be posted online and not other ones?

Ms. Allan: We'll let you know.

Mr. Friesen: Would the minister be able to indicate at what point in time she could provide this information?

Ms. Allan: As soon as officials in my department have had an opportunity to gather the information.

Mr. Friesen: I appreciate the minister's compliance and her willingness to supply that information at her earliest opportunity.

Also, on the same subject of math education and math standards, just want to ask the minister her response to the idea of strengthening math education at the high school level by putting in place a requirement for an academic math, and whether she feels that that would be a reasonable means to raise the bar, so to speak, for math students in high school.

Ms. Allan: Well, I said very clearly in my press release the day that we had our math summit that what we would like to do is ensure that our high school math courses have the learning expectations and outcomes that are necessary to prepare students for success in our post-secondary education system and to prepare them for the world of work. So that—those kinds of issues, right now, are discussions that we're having and issues that we're looking at, in regards to what that might look like.

Mr. Friesen: With respect to Aboriginal Education Directorate, the mandate of the directorate is to provide leadership and co-ordination for

departmental initiatives on Aboriginal education and training. This department, according to the Estimates book, has a staff of 10 and a budget of \$1.3 million and with a focus on a lot of solid initiatives.

I'm not seeing in there a very strong focus on addressing Aboriginal graduation rates. A couple of years ago, the department indicated to our party that they don't track graduation rates among Aboriginal students.

You've made mention of the fact, Madam Minister, numerous times this afternoon that I'm new to my critic role, and that is indeed the case, so being new to this role, I'd ask you: Is it, in fact, the case that the department doesn't track graduation rates for Aboriginal students, and if not, why not?

Ms. Allan: Well, actually one of the things that we are very excited about in the department is the fact that we have made progress on this file.

One of the issues, of course, was the whole issue of Aboriginal students and self-declaration and we have worked vigorously with school divisions in regards to encouraging Aboriginal students to declare, because, of course, that is how we can have good data in regards to how Aboriginal students are doing in our public education system.

So we actually have done a lot of work. Officials in my department—and I'd like to thank them for that, because we all know that Aboriginal students in our public education system may need more support, and this is one of the ways that we can provide that support to them.

And it's also good data for us to have, in regards to the programs and the services and the funding that we are giving through the Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant, whether or not that funding is making a difference. We have some preliminary results in regards to numbers and what they look like, and this will always be a file that officials in my department will be very interested in.

Mr. Friesen: The minister has made reference to the fact that they are making progress. Can the minister indicate what the graduation rate is for Aboriginal students in the province of Manitoba?

Ms. Allan: Well, I can inform the MLA that since 2001 our graduation rates have increased by 17 per cent. Our new grad rate is 83.5 per cent. We do not have a breakdown in regards to—[interjection] Because this is a new initiative in our department in regards to self-declaration we want to—because we

want to make sure that we have good data so we believe that we will be able to provide that information in the near future.

Mr. Friesen: I am surprised to hear the minister say that there isn't specific data to indicate a breakdown for Aboriginal student graduation rates. I know we've spoken to the Treaty Commissioner Jamie Wilson, who has said that without data we can't see an improvement.

Would the minister comment and indicate whether she thinks it would be a reasonable goal of the Aboriginal Education Directorate to track Aboriginal graduation rates, and shouldn't this be part of the directorate's mandate?

Ms. Allan: Yes, that's why we're working on it.

Mr. Friesen: Can the minister indicate at what point in time we might have data on Aboriginal student education rates? Basically, I'm asking how much of a priority is this for the directorate, and have they indicated a completion date for this initiative?

Ms. Allan: Well, this is about an initiative that is happening all across our province with school divisions, and it's about—it's an exercise in data gathering and analyzing that data. We want to be very, very careful that we have this process right and that we're getting good data. We certainly don't want to just collect data for the sake of collecting data. So we are—officials in my department are working very hard on this and we—this is an important file for us, and we definitely want to make sure that we have it right. But we will continue to work on it.

Mr. Friesen: With respect to Bill 13, preparing schools for—students for success act, the changed compulsory age from 16 to 18, can the minister indicate whether she has contacted Manitoba school divisions to find out how many more students are staying in school as a result of this bill?

Ms. Allan: Well, this is a piece of legislation that was passed less than a year ago. It was the first time the age—the compulsory age to attend school was changed. It was changed by Premier Duff Roblin in—from 15 to 16, I think, in 1962–65, and so this is a very exciting initiative for us here in the province of Manitoba. We actually are—this is going to be a huge culture shift for us here in the province of Manitoba, and I've always said that we're going to do it together. We had school divisions apply for funding to—through an RFP process and we took—and we put money into school divisions for their specific projects in regards to the kinds of programs and

initiatives that they wanted to have happen in their school divisions so that they could enhance what's happening in regards to encouraging young people to stay in school.

* (16:50)

We know that many young people don't necessarily succeed in high school if it's a big school and they walk in the door and they move from classroom to classroom to classroom, and they sometimes don't feel that connection with the teacher. We know how important that connection is with the teacher in regards to achieving in our public education system. And this legislation is going to provide us with an opportunity to, you know, see that—you know, to have more young people getting their public education system so that they can participate in our economy.

This is something that is going to be an ongoing initiative and we will get data from our school divisions and we will probably continue to see that—our grad rate increase even more. As I said earlier, it has increased 17 per cent. We are pleased at the grad rate and how it's gained momentum over the last 10 years, and we know that a lot of that work is because—a lot of that success is because of the work that teachers and administrators and communities are doing in our public education system, and providing opportunities for young people who don't traditionally succeed in big settings.

So we will continue to work with school divisions and continue to provide funding to school divisions so, you know, we can see more young people succeeding.

Mr. Friesen: There was a resolution brought to the floor of the MTS annual general meeting this last weekend, and the resolution basically states that parents would not be allowed to have their children opt out of any portions of the Manitoba curriculum—education curriculum.

Is the minister aware of this resolution and can I ask her to briefly comment on it?

Ms. Allan: I will be—I was at the Manitoba Teachers' Society convention on Friday night at the bank—what—Thursday morning, I was there to bring greetings, and then I was there Thursday night, at the banquet. And what usually happens is, is the Manitoba Teachers' Society—we get an opportunity to meet every couple of years, and that would certainly be a discussion that I would have with them if they so choose.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions for this section of the Committee of Supply.

Resolution 16.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$27,158,000 for Education, School Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,748,000 for Education, Bureau de l'éducation française, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$298,819,000 for Education, Education and School Tax Credits, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,244,869,000 for Education, Support to Schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$49,994,000 for Education, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$166,000 for Education, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Now, in keeping with standard practice, we will now resume consideration of the last item in the Estimates of this department. It is item 16.1.(a) the minister's salary, which is contained in resolution 16.1.

Floor is open for questions, if any. Seeing none—

Resolution 16.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,935,000 for Education, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the consideration of Estimates for the Department of Education.

Next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

What is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise?

An Honourable Member: Can we call it 5 o'clock?

Mr. Chairperson: Committee's will to call it 5 o'clock?

An Honourable Member: Sure.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. *[interjection]* Or a recess as well? *[interjection]*

So you're okay with just going into it? Okay.

CULTURE, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): So we now welcome the honourable Minister for the Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism for joining us here at the head table.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Yes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Ms. Marcelino: It is my pleasure to present to the Committee of Supply the 2012-2013 Expenditure Estimates for the Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

This year our department's budget has been held to the same level as the previous year to help contribute to our government's goal of reaching balance by 2014. As we move through the—this fiscal year, we will also carefully review our in-year expenditures to ensure the best possible outcomes from the funds we commit.

Our department is proud to work with and support the vibrant arts, culture, heritage and tourism sectors in our province. Manitoba is known far and wide for our rich cultural heritage and outstanding tourism attractions, and it is indeed an honour to work with the many organizations that help us to retain this positive reputation.

An important part of this work is the support we provide to arts-based community organizations. This past year we expanded the Urban Art Centres program's operational funding and now support 11 organizations.

In addition, the Manitoba Artists in the Schools program, which is administered by the Manitoba Arts Council, will benefit by an increase of \$200,000. The program provides arts learning experiences that enhance curriculum and develop future artists and arts audience members. It also provides employment to 65 professional Manitoba artists, and last year over 30,000 students were able to benefit from the program.

Arts activities, arts education and festivals are an important part of Manitoba communities. Last year our department's investments in community arts resulted in over 1,600 performances and visual arts exhibitions provided by more than 60 community arts organizations. They also provide countless hours of instruction—

Mr. Chairperson: With all due apologies, the hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

*(14:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I'm pleased to present to this committee for its consideration the 2012-2013 Expenditure Estimates of the Department of Housing and Community Development. I look forward to engaging in a constructive discussion regarding the direction our government has set out for the department in these Estimates.

On April 17, 2012, our government outlined its funding commitments for this fiscal year in the provincial budget. Budget 2012 presents solutions that focus on priorities of families. This year's budget provides \$80,445,000 for the Department of Housing and Community Development. Despite the—there is in this budget, there is what people would perceive a 2.5 per cent less than in 2011-2012, but I'd like to say

in these opening remarks, that this reduction is because of a reallocation from the Building Manitoba Fund of \$3.4 million, as well as urban and rural economic development initiatives in order to support our community development work. We will maintain our commitment to providing access to quality, affordable, and suitable housing, neighbourhoods that are socially and economically inclusive, and to creating healthy communities where Manitobans live, work, and play.

We will invest in a number of key areas during the 2012-2013 fiscal year. The department remains well positioned to deliver on its existing 1,500-unit commitment to deliver affordable housing over five years under the HOMEWorks! strategy. As of March 31, 2012, we have committed to develop 991 new, affordable housing units and 933 households with rent geared to income assistance. In 2012-13, the fourth year of the commitment, we will deliver a further 300 new, affordable units and provide 300 more households with rent geared to income assistance. Projects added to the 1,500 commitment will include a number of family rental and seniors rental housing projects.

We will continue to enhance housing quality and accessibility by renovating and repairing existing social housing in over a hundred Manitoba Housing smaller projects. We will also continue the modernization and improvements of some of Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation's major housing complexes, including 185 Smith Street, Carriage Road, Furby-Spence, Park Manor in Carman, Armstrong Manager—Manor in Beausejour, Hilltop Manor in Stony Mountain, as well as renovations and expansions in McCreary and Riverton.

Through the Investment in Affordable Housing agreement, we will work with our federal partners to reduce the number of Manitobans in housing need by providing new investment in affordable housing programs such as new supply, home ownership, and renovation and repair.

We will continue to provide vital programming under Neighbourhoods Alive!, Cooperative Development Services, and Community Places programs to support our communities in their sustainable neighbourhood revitalization efforts, cooperative development, recreation, and social development opportunities.

We will move forward in our commitment to building healthy communities and improving the

social and economic well-being of Manitobans by continuing to support volunteer, non-profit organizations in their activities.

I'd like to express my appreciation of Housing, Community Development staff for their ongoing work and dedication to continuous improvement and commitment to the provision of high quality service to Manitobans. I look forward to this committee's review of the Department of Housing, Community Development's expenditures and welcome the comments from committee members.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank the honourable minister for those remarks.

Does the critic for the official opposition, the member for Riding Mountain, have any opening remarks?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I would say that I don't have any opening remarks other than I look forward to the dialogue with the minister and to learn more about the Department of Housing. I know there are a number of challenges and some initiatives that I would like to know more about so I'm just going to leave it at that because I believe we have a very short period of time to go through questions and answers.

Mr. Chairperson: Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 1.(a) and proceed with the consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 30.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff and staff from the official opposition to join us in the Chamber. Once they are seated, we ask that the staff in attendance be introduced.

Madam Minister, to introduce her staff.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, I'd like to introduce Joy Cramer, the deputy minister; Darrell Jones, CEO of MHRC; Craig Marchinko, assistant deputy minister for Community Development and Strategic Initiatives; and Brian Brown, the director of Financial Services.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mrs. Rowat: I'd like to have our discussion in a global manner.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, we'll proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Rowat: To get started, I would just like to ask the minister if she could give me her vision for Housing and, given the financial challenges being faced by her government, how she expects to get the best bang for her buck, or the Province's buck, in making sure that programs continue to provide the services that they're supposed to?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, that's a question I welcome the opportunity to answer. It's a very broad question, so I'll try and narrow it down for you—and if you have any further questions, don't hesitate to ask me.

Well, right now, we have our HOMEWorks! strategy which is directing the work that we do in the department, which is a combination of building more affordable housing across the province, as well as designating more affordable units as rent geared to income.

We need to work and address the issues where there are individuals that are chronically under-housed and need additional support. And the first group that comes to my mind are people with mental illness or mental health issues in making sure that we're able to provide them with a shelter, as well as that continuum of service that they need.

* (14:40)

There's some really innovative projects that have recently opened to address homelessness within that population. One of the projects is the Bell Hotel, which is 42 units, with 24-7 supervision and services being provided to the individual. The individuals that are calling the Bell Hotel home, many of them have not lived in a residence for decades, and are doing well. It's not without challenge, and we have some great staff that are providing that challenge.

Also, under HOMEWorks! another priority area is housing for Aboriginal people as well as for seniors and for families. Most recently, we had a RFP for seniors housing where five projects were awarded and we, right now, are working on a finalizing a expression of interest. For that expression of interest, we received well over 50 applicants from across the province interested in building family housing in their communities, and we will be working with many of those individuals as we proceed.

And also, another piece—the part that I enjoy with working with this portfolio is bringing together

the co-operative development and the community development together with the housing component and providing opportunities to support individuals in employment and training programs.

We have a very close relationship with our construction, whether—a good example is in Lord Selkirk Park and Gilbert Park, where we hired community forces, and those community forces are individuals that have lived within Manitoba Housing. And the community pride that we—that was a outcome of that exercise is even seen ‘til today.

We had a celebration with the Right to Housing Coalition, where they acknowledged the work that has happened by Manitoba Housing and the community in Lord Selkirk Park and celebrated our success.

We have a lot of success that we can point to, but I also acknowledge that we have a lot of work to do. So, while we're making investments on new builds, we're also investing within our portfolio and doing the deep refreshes and refreshes across the province.

Mrs. Rowat: Just a couple of questions with regard to statements you've made and what you consider your vision for housing in Manitoba.

You talked about the home work initiative. And affordable housing, obviously, is a major challenge in this province. Every community is facing affordable housing needs, and I'm just wanting to know if the minister can tell me how the criteria is struck for projects within the home work initiative.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's a—when we are making our decisions about the new builds that will happen across the province, we're looking about need and demand. We have the staff at Manitoba Housing will work with community groups and, also, you know, using statistical information about what's happening in the community demographics to decide how we're going to proceed with builds. But, as I stated earlier, the focus with the HOMEWorks! is Aboriginal people, seniors, people with mental illness and people with disabilities, so those are our three areas.

The way that we have started to develop our process over the last year was through RFP, request for proposals, where individuals can come together. And, in our request for proposals, there'll be different criteria. The one in—that we did—the first one was specific to seniors, but we also looked for private sector involvement. And we were able to leverage many more units than if we would have been able to

do it independently. I think that housing's an issue that we hear about no matter where we travel in the province. And we all have to work together to address the need of providing good, safe, affordable housing for Manitobans.

So, when private sector can step forward, when the business sector can step forward, we can see some important results happening. And then I also had spoken about the expression of interest which closed in November. And we're right now in the process of evaluating that. And as we evaluate it, as I said again, is looking at the proposal, if it meets our requirements that we outlined, whether we have a group that is prepared to sponsor and has the capacity to manage it. And the geographical, we're making sure that we're balancing. We're looking that we're building across the province, whether it's the south to the north, the west to the east, and making sure that there is accessible housing for everyone.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me, with regard to the HOMEWorks! program, can you give me a breakdown of funding, the total amount of that program. And I guess it's probably in the book but I was trying to find it earlier. Also if you could give me a breakdown of north, rural and Winnipeg dollars allocated.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, I'll start in the north. In the northern region, which approved funding is \$15 million, six—oh, I'll say almost \$16 million; RGI units, 33; affordable units, 71. The southwest region is approved funding of close to \$12 million; 157 RGI units and 106 affordable units. Approved funding in the Selkirk-southeast region is \$41 million; RGI units, 238; affordable units, 360.

In Winnipeg—we have Winnipeg divided into four different regions. We have the Lord Selkirk region is where we totally refurbished all of the townhouses as well as the two—or the apartment block there and built a daycare and a family resource centre.

That investment that we made in that region was \$48 million; RGI units, 230 and affordable units, 212. There'd be other projects in that besides. I think the whole—the total cost of the Lord Selkirk Park was—we'll get you that number because we have it somewhere.

Gilbert Park, the investment was \$2 million; RGI units, 13 and affordable units, 56. And, in Central Park region, the approved funding was \$8 million; RGI units, 134 and affordable units, 95.

Winnipeg South region, the approved funding was \$20 million—RGI units, 34, and affordable units, 65.

* (14:50)

And there's specific projects in each of those regions, a combination of new-builds as well as redevelopment of some of our existing social housing.

Mrs. Rowat: I was wondering if the minister would be able to share those projects with me. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Housing and Community Development.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: My apologies. We can certainly provide a list. We'll just take it under consideration for now. We'll make sure we'll make a note of that.

Mrs. Rowat: Just clarification on the Selkirk-Interlake region—\$41 million allocated. Were—was some of those dollars allocated for flood victims?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No.

Mrs. Rowat: Maybe the minister can help refresh my memory. I remember seeing a news story that would probably be about three to four months old where you were filmed in one of the homes in the Interlake area. I think it was the Interlake area or the—Lake Winnipeg. Okay. If the minister can just give me the Coles notes on that, please.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I think what you're referring to is when we did a walk through at the McDiarmid Lumber, and it was for a show home for a Lake St. Martin residence. I think that's what you're referring to, and that was—that happened about four months ago.

Mrs. Rowat: I just wanted to know if any provincial dollars went towards that initiative for housing for Lake St. Martin.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The expenditures that we have made so far have been specific to the evacuation site and the redevelopment of the Gypsumville radar base. What we've—we know that how—there's a certain percentage that is DFA recoverable. So there are costs that are recoverable from the DFA: principal and interest, the cost of development of the site as well as the homes themselves.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister, then, indicate to me what was the purpose of the news story, then, if there was no dollars attached provincially? Were there

dollars being allocated federally to the residents in that area of the province?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: This—that news conference—first of all, I'd like to back up. There was a lot of provincial money that went in as far as civil servants and staff and deputy ministers working on a plan to ensure that the people of Lake St. Martin had affordable places to live, and they could get out of the hotels. There was a huge interest for a number of reasons, as you can understand as a family member yourself, about after being in a hotel for a year with children; it's very stressful. And we felt and in partnership with the First Nation, that it was important that we developed an interim site as they worked towards the allocation of their federal land—lands with the federal government.

So that purpose of that news conference was to make sure that members of the Lake St. Martin band that were evacuated from the flood site knew that there were these homes that were available to them. We had an open house at McDiarmid Lumber location in Headingley as well as on-site at the radar base. They were very well attended and, because of that, we had many more people register and, I must add, voluntarily, to relocate from the city or wherever they were living—some of them were not—all evacuees were not living in the city, but gave them an opportunity to live in a more stable environment and rebuild the community for themselves and their families.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister provide me a tally or a total of the number of people that actually took up or moved forward on that initiative and actually took advantage of relocating?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, there is no, necessarily, timeline to this initiative, so it's a moving target.

We have been working with a number of families that have moved in. We currently have 16 families that are residing. We have 15 offers that are in process right now.

There are some families that are interested in moving, but because their children are in school, they're waiting till after school is out at the end of June and then will be relocating.

We have staff that work very closely with the families to identify the best opportunity to move, what type of home do they want to move into.

So we have another five units that are available and ready to be moved in as of today on-site.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what the costs of these houses for the 16 families has tallied at and is it the Province that's paying for them or is it the federal government?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the average cost of a home that we purchased was \$160,000—160—one six zero, but you need to know that there's some—they're not all one bedroom. There's one bedrooms, there's two bedrooms, three bedrooms, four and there's actually—and five bedroom homes as well. And there are some duplexes or fourplexes that we have also purchased.

What we are doing is we're using Loan Act authority which will be recoverable from DFA and we are charging back principal and interest to the DFA as well.

Mrs. Rowat: If the minister can indicate to me what budget is being targeted for the Loan Act authority in that specific project?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It would be the Loan Act authority for Housing and Community Development which we're accessing.

Mrs. Rowat: Does—can the minister indicate to me exactly how much she's identified as a budget for that initiative?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The budget that we have—that we're working within is \$40 million, and we haven't expended all of that yet, and we're not even—we're not sure if we will. It was that—that budget was provided to us at the time when we were working towards the development of the interim village and not even sure where that interim village was going to be established. And because we have established it at the radar base, where already some infrastructure existed, we were able to cut some costs.

* (15:00)

I'd like to put on the record that the number of people that are now living on-site—I know when you hear the number 16 households, it doesn't seem like very many people, but it represents 46 less people that are living in hotels, and I think that's a pretty important number for us to focus on.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister has indicated 46 individuals have now been housed in an interim site. Can the minister indicate to me if she's got that stat can she also provide for me the statistic on the number of people that are actually in hotels that are outside of the community out of Lake St. Martin? Does she have the number? There has to be a number

because they're receiving assistance as flood victims, so there has to be some type of a stat.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm unable to comment on that. That is not in our jurisdiction so I'm not able to—it's EMO would be able to provide you with those numbers.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister has indicated that there's five more dwellings going out to the interim site and that there's 15 offers. Is that the five included out of the 15 so that would then leave 10? I wasn't clear on what you were—

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are 90 applicants that we are now working with and it was 16 that we had—that had accepted those offers and were waiting—there's another 15 that were in process.

Mrs. Rowat: With regard to the RFP through the development of affordable senior housing the minister touched on that a bit and I'm assuming that that is where she indicated there's five projects that they're looking at funding just to clarify, and I just wanted to know what is the budget allocation for that initiative?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It was 10 million, and with that 10 million proponents brought also their own funds to the table and we were able to—we project—I'll get back—we have a certain number of units and I don't want to put on the record the wrong number, but we'll get it to you. Okay, I know the number now, 160 units \$10 million will create.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me where these 160 units will be located throughout the province, the breakdown of the locations?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We're still working with proponents to finalize the agreements and we haven't announced them publicly yet. But what I can tell you it's a really good range of rural, urban and northern communities that are represented in those five projects.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me the criteria for this initiative if she has it in writing or if she can share it verbally? What was the criteria used in determining a successful funding allocation?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There was—that was an RFP process in which we released—I want to say August it was released—last summer it was released, and for that initiative we received over 20 applicants. And, as I said before in previous remarks, a number of community groups and private sector people worked with us to develop strong proposals. We were very excited that \$10 million was able to multiply into

160 units. What we can provide the member with is a copy of the RFP that was sent out so then you can have the specifics. But it was really—the ones that I recall off the top of my head was that it was specific for seniors housing and that it was we were looking for partners that would be able to come to the table and share the cost and contribute.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me who was on the selection committee of this RFP process?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So I—I'm not sure if the member's asking for the names of the people, but I can tell you that it was individuals that work in the housing delivery area of Manitoba Housing. And what they were able—they would—it was a committee that sat together and reviewed the applicants and they rated them. They had a ranking system. And they came up with their—the top five that they felt that we could fund and afford because it was a balancing act within our budget of \$10 million that impacted what projects we were going to fund.

And then it went through the formal process of executive management committee, which includes the deputy minister, the CEO, assistant deputy minister, CFO and HR.

Mrs. Rowat: I wouldn't mind having a list of the people that were part of the selection committee process that were staff with the new department. They were all staff? There were no board appointments or there were nobody brought in as a consultant to be part of that process?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: They were all staff.

Mrs. Rowat: Today, on the news, they were talking about Stats Canada report that 19 per cent of Manitoba's population is under 15 years of age. And I'm just wanting to know if the department is tracking the numbers, and, if they are, you know, are they looking at programs or policy that are going to be able to address the significant number of young people in our province? Is there anything within your department that you're doing to work proactively in ensuring programs are in place to assist families when there's going to be almost 10,000 more children in our province?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, within the—in this portfolio we're very, very fortunate when the Premier (Mr. Selinger), you know, appointed a minister for Housing and Community Development because it really brought the housing, the construction, as well as the healthy communities together. And we've seen really positive results based on that.

The thing that we're able to do, and will continue to do, is to work to improve our existing housing stock as well as development of more affordable housing, as I had stated in previous answers. The expression of interest for family housing is a good example of that. And there's mini-grants that we provide to non-profit organizations that provide direct services to families as well as Community Places grants, which I know the member is familiar with, where we are able to support recreation, schools, child-care facilities.

We work very closely with other departments. For example, the ability to provide child care on-site at Lord Selkirk Park is a really good example. As well, I can tell you, in the—in our existing portfolio of direct managed, that there are 75 units that are used throughout the province to provide support services to families. Some of them are family resource centres. Some of them are youth programs.

* (15:10)

Mr. Dave Gaudreau, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Another good example of our commitment to youth is our ongoing relationship with RaY, resources assistance—Resource Assistance for Youth, and the work that we're able to do with them. Right now, they have two units where they're able to provide—four—they have four units where they're able to provide temporary housing for youth that are homeless and help them transition into permanent housing. That's just one example. There's many examples of community centres being opened after hours to provide recreation, arts programming for individuals, and that's through Neighbourhoods Alive! grants.

We also have a bursary program that we provide for tenants of Manitoba Housing where they, if they're seeking post-secondary education, they're awarded \$1,000, and it can go towards purchasing books, whatever they need at that time. As well as, we have been working on playground renewals across the province. We also have skate parks that are on some of our properties.

One of the other pieces that we've done to better support families, and people might not even realize this is, what—when we have developed our security services. And the security services, which is led by Mr. Kevin Gamble—I think he has approximately 35 security guards that are working with him. And what we've been able to do is to take a different lens and,

in that lens, look at social development and crime prevention. And I—that really supports families. We're able to provide consistency in our larger complexes with having the same security guards on-site that are developing relationships.

So it really is a multi-pronged approach. We were looking at building and securing safe, affordable, accessible housing, and then, around that housing making sure that we're providing some ingredients to support healthy communities, whether it's through recreation, arts, employment opportunities.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what the status is of the ALL Aboard strategy? I know that there was a report that was supposed to be released several months ago, and it may have already been released, but I don't believe so. Can the minister provide me with some insight into her strategy and how she's going to prepare to handle, in her portfolio of Housing, the increase of children that will be needing housing supports?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So I really see that you have—you've asked me two different questions, so I'm going to focus on ALL Aboard and provide you the answers, and then we can speak about what kinds of housing opportunities that we're providing.

So the paper was released. It was released on budget day, where we talked about the ALL Aboard strategy and highlighted our 21 indicators that have been approved. We are working very closely, interdepartmentally, and working—it took us a while to come up with our 21 indicators that—and that was after lengthy consultation with community groups and advocates. And, as that was approved, it was released with our budget documents. We right now are implementing one part of the act, which talks about the inclusion of community members as part of our larger committee, which is really exciting.

I don't think on any other Cabinet committee do we have individuals—lay people—persons of interest on a committee, and so we're really looking forward to the synergies that are going to happen with the individuals that are representing their own life stories, their constituents as they move forward.

We have developed seven priority areas for 2012, 2016. I'd like to put them on the record: Building Blocks for Employment, and that's working with Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, as well as with Housing and Community Development and looking at how do we support people in

employment? How do we support people in training and apprenticeship programs? Targeted supports for those most in need. Looking at food security, opportunities, housing, closing the gap for Aboriginal Manitobans, creating opportunities for youth, as well as investments for early childhood development and parenting supports.

So we're focusing on, over the next four years, and what we've decided to do as a committee, we've decided to break it down a little bit further and take on, you know, once we—when we have our large committee meeting, which is scheduled to be in early June, talk to our full committee about picking two items that we want to move forward on for this fiscal year.

And I—the addressing poverty is an overwhelming issue that many of—that our whole province feels the impact of. It's not just one government's responsibility and that's why I'm really excited about the ALL Aboard strategy. It speaks about all of our responsibility, collectively, of improving the quality of life for all Manitobans. We need to work with business to identify employment opportunities. We need to work with education to look at training and apprenticeship programs. We need to continue to address the barriers that keep people in poverty.

And, I think, one of those barriers, in the past, has been housing. Housing was a barrier for individuals—I'll let you know where I'm going Brian, you looked shocked—housing's a—was a barrier—the rent was a barrier, because individuals would go and find employment, and as they found employment their rent would be increased, and that would create more hardships for them and more difficulties of them finding their way beyond that poverty wall. So what we've been—or the welfare wall. What we've been able to do is cap rents, so we've done that to support families as well.

So we are committed to our ALL Aboard strategy. We have done some specific things over the last year which has supported helping to improve people living in poverty. One of it is ensuring that Manitoba continues to be an affordable place to live. Also, we have been looking at strategies around Rewarding Work, RentAid, as well as our HOMEWorks! strategy that has been very beneficial.

We'll continue to work to—through our education pillar, to the best way out of poverty is education and in employment. So we have a strong focus on our graduation rates in making sure that we're able to

provide people with the education they need to go forward.

You also asked the question about what are we doing to provide affordable housing for children that are living in poverty. And that, again, goes back to the investments that we've made around our social-housing stock across the province. It also speaks to our expression of interest for our family housing. That's only one piece of the puzzle, as you've heard me speak. It's about a whole combination about providing housing. Housing is the No. 1, and that's why we at Manitoba Housing believe in housing first. We provide the housing and, then, through that housing, provide the necessary supports for the families. And by supporting and strengthening families, it makes the lives of the children that much easier and more rewarding.

So we'll continue to work on addressing the issues of poverty and affordable housing as we move forward. It is—there's a lot of work that has to happen. There are still children living in poverty in Manitoba and we cannot deny that, and we'll continue to work towards improving the quality of life as we move forward for all Manitobans.

*(15:20)

Mrs. Rowat: Manitoba's vacancy rate is probably one of the lowest in Canada. So, obviously, there's still a need for us to be developing affordable housing in Manitoba. Can the minister indicate to me, how—or if they are collecting data on some of the points that you were listing earlier, like poverty? Have you been—have you—do you collect data on the number of families in Manitoba who are at a poverty level, the number of families that are using food banks, the number of individuals who are homeless in this province? Do you collect that data, and are you able to share that with me?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, we do. We collect data ourselves but it's not just this particular department that collects the data. There's departments, you know, we access research and information, statistical information from ETT, from Health, from Family Services and Labour. As well as third party, we rely on reports from other individuals. We have a really robust group of men and women who are working on the ALL Aboard strategy who are constantly providing us with the best information that we have available to make sure that we're able to make informed decisions.

And as I spoke about the suite of 21 indicators, each of those indicators will be monitored and we have a responsibility in the legislation to report back about how we're doing on those indicators and we will do that.

We also have information that we access from Healthy Child Manitoba, Children and Youth Opportunities as well as the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CHM–CMHC provides us with information too.

We have a really exciting initiative that started, I want to say well, maybe eight months ago, where we brought together individuals that were concerned about the low vacancy rate and we call that the rental round table. And around the rental round table sits anywhere between 15 to 20-plus people who—it was a very exciting initiative when we brought together the social housing advocates and the private sector as well as individuals who are researchers who work in specific areas of housing need and started the conversation about what do we need to do to make things better for Manitobans.

So we access—we gather our own information, we access third party information and one of the things that we have been praised about is our ability to go out and do consultation, whether it's non-profit groups, whether it's the private sector group.

And the second round table that I refer to is the seniors round table. And that is specifically looking at what are the needs of seniors across the province and how can we best address those needs to serve the population.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister provide a list of the individuals who have been invited and who have attended the rental housing committee, and the seniors round table committee and actually, the objectives laid out for this committee and any notes or any meeting notes that could be shared from these two committees. It would be useful as a new critic for Housing to be able to access some of that information.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We'll get a package of information for you that includes the list of who the participants are and the terms of reference which we had developed. And there will just—*[interjection]*—sorry, Mr. Chairperson—Acting Chairperson, and there will be a document that will be produced and released and—for both round tables within the next few months.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm hoping to get the information on the previous promised—information prior to the two months, okay? Thank you.

Can the minister indicate to me what type of data is being collected on homelessness in Manitoba?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's a new program that's been implemented in the province called HIFIS, and it's being accessed by—the shelters are using it. It's a new IT system called HIFIS where it's measuring individuals and characteristics about who is coming in to receive the services of the shelter, but we're also using it in another capacity around the Bell Hotel, and we're hoping that we can get all non-profit organizations to start using that information so we can really better understand what the issues are of homelessness. We have a sense, I think, but we're learning every day, especially around when we're following the Housing First model and providing housing opportunities in the Bell Hotel, about what kinds of support services that they want and that they need, and how we're going to proceed.

So I would suggest that HIFIS is the best way that we're going to do that, as well as we do program evaluations around specific initiatives. There's program evaluations that we're completing on the Portable Housing Benefit, as well as one on the Bell Hotel, and there will be a larger report on the Mental Health Commission work, Chez Soi, that will—I'm not sure when that will be released, but they also are accessing the HIFIS system and next year it will be released for our information.

We're really considered leaders in some aspects when it comes to working on this issue with the Bell Hotel and the Mental Health Commission in providing housing. They were really innovative. And the private sector—we must applaud how they embraced this initiative and have provided housing to individuals that weren't accessing a roof at all, and we were able to wrap around those important services so that they could have successful tenancies.

And so we're really looking forward to see the results, and we know that with those results we'll be able to build a better and stronger system. The system, when you think about housing and homelessness, and we are really excited that homelessness is now part of Housing and Community Development because we feel we have the full continuum now, so we'll be working with the shelters; but, as we work with the shelters, we will be working on—the goal will be to provide permanent, affordable safe housing for individuals. And that

does not come without a lot of work and coordination and support, but we know, through just stories that I've heard, as people have moved into the Bell Hotel, about the pride that they have, how they've never had—you know, how, for the last number of decades, that they've always had to share a bathroom. They had no place to call home to invite people back and to share a meal with them.

So I'm—we're working on homelessness, and we'll continue to work to develop other initiatives to address the issue as we move forward.

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): I would just like to draw the attention of the Chamber that Rosann Wowchuk, the former member for Swan River, is joining us today in the gallery.

* * *

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister—I'm going to ask again: Can the minister provide me with data on that—her department or what the government collects on homelessness? If all these other—if all these initiatives are taking place, I would really like to know what the benchmark is, you know, how many people are homeless in Manitoba, and then we can then evaluate, you know, the programs going forward. So I'm wanting to know if she has a number.

*(15:30)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What we are able to provide the member would be the specific information on the number of people that are accessing shelters within Manitoba. I think that's a benchmark that we can use. We know that there is also a group of homeless people that aren't represented and aren't counted, but that's what we're using as our benchmark.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister give me that number?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We can't provide you with that number, but we'll add that to your information.

Mrs. Rowat: I can wait for that number. I'm really curious. I'd like to know if you could provide that for me today.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We can certainly provide it for you, but we can give it to you, also—if you want to. I'm sure you have more questions you'd like to ask so—we may not—we don't have the staff at this table that have that information at their hands. They will try and access it for you.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you. It would be great if I could have that before five o'clock today.

It's just really curious, based on some of the other things that are going on in the media with regard to homelessness and poverty.

Can the minister indicate to me what type of funding she would receive from Immigration and Multiculturalism? I'm looking at page 8 of the Estimates book, and it looks like there's a \$145,000 transfer functions from Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Do you know what that—could you share what that would be? Page 8 of the Estimates book.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That would be the transfer of agencies, boards and commissions to—from that department to the Department of Housing and Community Development. It would be two positions.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister provide me with which ones those would be? You said they're two departments?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There was—ABCs was formerly in the Department of Labour and Immigration. And when we had the most recent Cabinet shuffle, ABCs was transferred from that Labour and Immigration to Housing and Community Development. And that was the transfer of the dollars, and that transfer of dollars includes the two FTEs.

Mrs. Rowat: I have a question with regard to an explanation on page 33 of the Estimates book. It—point No. 4, Increase to recoveries is mainly due to the increased draw from reserves.

Can the minister explain to me what those reserves are, where they're located, and what is the dollar amount in those reserves?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The reserves are reserves that are held by MHRC, the Crown corporation, not the department. But I can give you what they are. So the total was \$12.4 million. Affordable Housing Initiative, \$7.8 million; insurance proceeds, \$1.8 million; and cash reserves from previous gain on sales, \$2.9 million.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister spoke about strategies that would be working towards improving the quality of life for people that are homeless and families that are living in poverty.

But I noticed in the Estimates book that, actually, homeless strategy has not seen an increase in funding at all this budget year. Can she explain to me why that would be?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, we have approximately \$1.1 million that's specific to providing support services for our homeless strategy, and that's going to ensure that we're able to provide housing for people. We know that people that are homeless, the primary condition or—that they have will be addictions or a mental health issue. So because of that, we know that there's a number of support services that need to be wrapped around them.

So I can list how the \$1.1 million is going to be spent. It's going to be spent: permanent housing with supports, and that will include housing supports for 50 units with an integrated community support team, that adds up to \$122,000; Community Wellness Initiative, which is \$60,000 for programming; three tenant service co-ordinators at \$188,000.

We have the housing outreach team which is seven mentors that are in Winnipeg, Brandon, The Pas, and Thompson, and they—and one mentor at West Central Women's Centre. And they really are working specifically within their community identifying who are homeless and trying to find them adequate housing and then supporting them to maintain that tenancy.

A Project Breakaway, which is a community initiative in which we're seeing some great results with a partnership with the Main Street Project as well as with Winnipeg Police Services, and that is for a co-ordinator and two housing outreach workers, and then housing supports for up to 40 homeless individuals, and that would be for the Bell Hotel.

These are just—and there are many more dollars that go into supporting homeless people across the—across government. There's money through Justice, there's money through Health, there's money through Family Services and Labour that goes into support. This is one snapshot, and we're really happy that we're able to continue to provide those necessary services for homeless individuals. And we've also—are targeting new builds to look at providing housing first options for the homeless population across the province. So there'll also be capital funding that will be allocated to this homeless strategy as well.

Mrs. Rowat: I also noticed a huge reduction in housing development—in the housing development subappropriation. It went from \$8 million down to 6.6. Can the minister indicate what programs are going to be removed from that initiative?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There'll be no reductions to services.

Mrs. Rowat: There's going to be a reduction of \$2 million somewhere. Can the minister indicate to me what that reduction will be?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That budget line represents—and I'll do my best to explain it. What you see in that reduction is a cash flow. So it's how—depending on any given year, we're working on multiple projects, and sometimes those project are delayed and the money does not flow to them in the budget year that we assume it will. So we have to have some flexibility. So that line represents money that we are spending, providing to proponents, with specific buildings. Any given year, you'll see that there are buildings happening within Winnipeg, within Brandon, within Sprague, and the timelines in which we think that the money has to be paid out is sometimes different than what the construction is. So it's just—what you see is just cash flow. And then it also depends on whether we're accessing Loan Act authority or operating dollars to fund the different projects. So there will be no reduction in services.

* (15:40)

Mrs. Rowat: Could the minister give me a written breakdown of the \$6.6 million of identified projects for that expenditure, or appropriation?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We can certainly provide you with a list of the programs and projects that this \$6 million will be supporting.

A good example of one of them would be infill housing. There's where that money comes from, and there'd be also supports through that budget line, I'm thinking, for Neighbourhoods Alive! and some of the housing work that we do with them. *[interjection]* Yes, the Neighbourhood Housing Assistance program.

Mrs. Rowat: Recently, I believe it would have been at a—some—a committee, we talked about the huge deficit in housing repair that the Province faces in public housing, and I know that there's been a few different initiatives, including selling off stock. You know, mind you, some of the stock is in really bad shape. Can the—I noticed that that's one way of dealing with, you know, stock that is less than favourable for the Province to maintain or repair.

But I did notice in the subappropriation, repair and renovation program, there's only \$7.2 million, and that number hasn't changed from the year

previous. And I do know that housing stock is continuing to need attention, and I think there's more and more need out there in all the communities that I represent and communities that I've visited in northern Manitoba, as well, and in some of the units that I've visited in the city.

So I just want to know if the minister can indicate to me if there's going to be—if this is going to be a flat-line transfer this year and for years to come. I don't think it's going to be able to address the challenges that have—that Manitoba's facing.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The budget line that the member is pointing to, the 7.2, that is for our renovation programs, like our rental RRAP programs, our Emergency Repair Program. And that's not the money that we access—*[interjection]* Yes, that money goes to private sector housing; that's not money that we access in order to renovate our property.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me, then, the amount of money that is allocated from her budget to go towards maintenance and repair of public managed—either direct-managed or sponsor-managed—breakdown of both?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So we have allocated \$109 million to support our housing stock. Repair and maintenance is \$27 million for our direct-managed portfolio, as well as \$82 million for capital projects in Winnipeg and across the province.

I'd like to put on the record, though, and this is a—we are—just the facts about what's happening within Manitoba Housing and what we've been able to accomplish over the past few years. You have to realize that for decades there was no money coming into Housing for any repairs or maintenance, and so we had a huge deficit when we became government to start working on, and we've been slowly able to address that. We do own a portfolio as 17,900 units across the province and we directly manage 13,500 of those. So we're—have a lot of—we're a very large landlord in our community.

What housing is doing is we have—housing is renovating the interiors of 1,800 homes along with common areas and exteriors of over a hundred properties. We cannot underestimate the importance of that. Yes, that is a drop in the bucket when it comes to the number of units we have, but we are making a difference. We're also, in many of our properties, upgrading windows, roof, heating, ventilation, safety systems and will benefit 8,000 tenants.

And what we've been able to do because of our relationship with social enterprises in Winnipeg and in Brandon, so that would be BUILD and BEEP, Inner City Renovations, North End renewal corporation, we've been able to maximize our investment. We're getting our work done within our complexes but we're also hiring local, providing employment and training to individuals, and those individuals are living in their community, and they are, too, reinvesting in their community economically with buying their groceries and providing a very stable and vibrant community. So there's a lot of work to do and I won't deny that.

But what I'm very proud of is the work that we have accomplished and the work that we will continue to commit to through this budget of 2012 and '13. We are moving forward and that is—in these economic times that's something to be very proud of, that we are going forward, that we are making those improvements and adjustments. Our housing stock is—I won't say old, it's mature and it's decades old, but we know the cost if we had to replace it, we—it would be overwhelming for all of our partners. So investing in these properties, redeveloping them and when we redevelop them it's from the bottom up looking at energy efficiency, looking at making sure that they're going to provide housing for individuals for a very long time.

So we'll continue to work away at our many capital projects that we have to improve the quality of life of citizens of Manitoba and making sure that they have affordable housing to access.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister provide for me the actual deficit that's outstanding on repairs required on public housing in Manitoba? You must have a sense of what that deficit would be.

* (15:50)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So we believe that we need to invest \$100 million a year in order to continue to see the improvements that we have, and we've been able to do that for the last three years. So we've invested \$300 million around repair and maintenance, and we'll—and capital projects that we're doing, and we—that's we're projecting that we're going to need to do that for over the next seven years as we proceed.

One of the things that there's been a building boom that's been happening in this province recently, and so it's about managing these projects. So there's a lot of work that has to happen, and we have great department staff everywhere from the design to the

procurement that are working full out to make sure that we can spend that money and provide those necessary upgrades.

So we're working to capacity. We're working with our community partners. We're seeing every year great improvement, and we're committed to see that improvement for the years to come.

Mrs. Rowat: How does your government decide what the housing need is? What indicators do you use?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, we rely on a national standard called the core housing need which talks about affordability, suitability and adequacy. And we also talk about—we also use—look at household incomes of Manitobans and look at a measure if they're spending more than 30 per cent of their total income on housing need, then that identifies that there may be some resources that are necessary to support them.

So we also have a group of individuals that work within policy who are monitoring core housing need across the province and also monitoring what's happening nationally and internationally to ensure that we're able to develop strong policies and programs that do improve housing for all Manitobans.

Mrs. Rowat: There's one question I forgot to ask with regard to housing development. You mentioned the RRAP program.

Can you indicate to me how many units are waiting for RRAP assistance at this point?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So I can—for the RRAP, the repair and renovation assistance program—currently in Manitoba, there are 27 disability RRAP assistance applications pending, with 12 in Winnipeg, 14 throughout the central and southern regions and one in the north.

Under homeowner RRAP, there are 123 applications pending, with 56 in Winnipeg, 56 in central and southern regions and 11 in the north.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what is the current wait time—lapse time between an application being submitted, an application being approved and actually then moving forward?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We want to make sure that we provide accurate information to the member, so we've asked that a—the other—the folks in the department to give us the actual time.

It's hard to predict, I have to say, because applicants come in in varying forms. There's some applicants that we have to spend a fair amount of time with, making sure that it meets all of our requirements. But we'll get that information for the member.

Mrs. Rowat: An average would be sufficient as well. And beyond the average, probably the longest that one has taken in the last year and, you know, that would be helpful.

Looking at the Estimates book again, noticing that there's been an increase in salaries in the Executive Support and Support Services within Administration, can the minister indicate to me what those increases would've been? Under page 21, executive support increased by \$31,000; support services, \$40,000, and I believe there's others, but just wanting to know if the minister can indicate to me why we've been seeing an increase in salaries in her department.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the increase was \$71,000 that the member is referring to, and that was related to one existing position requiring full-time salary with a regular-regular merit increments for the 20 positions in the main appropriation, for pension liability expense and employee benefits.

Mrs. Rowat: To clarify, was that a part-time employee that moved into a full-time position?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So this was an FTE that was transferred when the department was developed two years ago, and there was no allocation of money that came with that position. We got the FTE but not the funds to support it. So this is just formalizing that, putting the funds in our budget.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me the name of the individual and the position title of this individual?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

* (16:00)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The employee is Tim Kashin [*phonetic*], who is a policy analyst.

Mrs. Rowat: Where did this individual come from? Which department did he transfer from?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We believe it's from Family Services.

Mrs. Rowat: I want to bring up an issue that is a concern, I believe, with several residences that are

managed-direct-managed, or contract-managed by Manitoba Housing, and the issue is elevator certification in Manitoba. I believe that when the former critic asked the minister for information on that issue he was provided written documentation that indicated Winnipeg had 41 elevators that had expired permits. And in rural Manitoba there were 15 elevators with expired permits.

And 'expecially' with the situation that happened in Brandon this year where residents were literally stuck in their units because the elevator was not working, can the minister indicate to me the numbers that are currently-in Winnipeg that have elevator certificates that are expired permits and also in rural area. Give me the numbers for both. And then, also indicate to me, was the Brandon unit, was its elevator permit expired when it failed?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As we have the department looking for the information about the elevators, I'd just like to put on the record about that issue in Brandon when the elevators broke down and the stress that was put on the families and not only the tenants that live in that facility.

We were very quick to respond and provide alternative housing units if individuals chose to do that. Not all individuals did. And we were able to put in a temporary lift. What happened was, the part that we needed took way longer than what anybody had ever wanted to be. And so, yes, it created a hardship but we made sure that the tenants there were well-cared for and that there was exit strategies if need be. And, as I said earlier, that we did provide them with choices if they wanted to relocate. And I understand that that would not be a desirable thing to do at all, but safety was our No. 1 priority for the seniors that were living in that block.

Mr. Chairperson, just for the record, as well, that this was not a direct-managed building, that this was a sponsored-managed building, and a non-profit organization was responsible for it. But I was extremely proud of the work that the staff at Manitoba Housing did to support the non-profit with the redevelopment, as well as coming up with alternative plans for the tenants.

Mrs. Rowat: I look forward to receiving the numbers with regard to the direct-managed properties in Winnipeg and rural Manitoba that have expired permits. I'm also wanting to know if the minister can provide stats on sponsored-managed properties in Winnipeg, and in rural Manitoba, if that is possible as well.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's specific to the elevators. Yes, we can—that might take us a while. We're working on it.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what the status is of boiler inspections in Manitoba Housing direct managed properties in Winnipeg and in rural Manitoba that have expired permits?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Were you referring to boiler inspections?

Mrs. Rowat: Boilers that are needing to be inspected and are, right now, working with an expired permit. So there—they need to be, I guess, checked and recertified. If there are any boilers that have expired permits that haven't been inspected?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's not information that we have at our fingertips right now, so we will take that under notice and provide that as soon as possible.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me, on page 37 of the Estimates book, there's a section under: Less: Recoverable from Urban and Rural Economic Development Initiatives, and that number is \$1.5 million. Can the minister indicate to me or give me a breakdown of what those recoverables were?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So that recoverable was for the Community Places Program that I referred to earlier in my opening remarks. And so that money has gone across the province to provide recreation funding. So, in total, we allocated a little over \$3 million to all portions of the—all areas of the province, and was everything from playground, to the arts programing, to ensuring that community clubs can keep their lights on. So that's—I—you know, the—though—the—where the money went for Community Places is online. The member's welcome to access them there. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Riding Mountain. Sorry.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you.

From Rural Economic Development Initiatives, and Urban. My understanding would be that would be dollars that would be allocated to your department from, I'm thinking, Rural Economic Development Initiatives, that would come from agriculture and rural development.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: UDI is used for some of the projects that are in the city of Winnipeg or urban development, and REDI, yes, is from MAFRI and it

is used for some of the rural projects that we recover from. So we're able to provide Community Places grants and then we can recover the money from MAFRI or from Local Government and UDI.

* (16:10)

I have the breakdown for the \$6.6 million for housing development: Neighbourhood Housing Assistance program, Winnipeg, small grants, \$360,000; NHA Winnipeg homeowner, \$100,000; NHA rural, \$500,000; community homeownership, infill, \$2 million; and investment to affordable housing 3.6.

Mrs. Rowat: On page 35 of the Estimates book, under details of appropriation for Housing and Community Development, I noticed there's a reduction in three community development from 14 million to 10.9.

Can the minister indicate to me where the difference is? What—was there a reduction in community development initiatives or was it allocated elsewhere?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, so you are asking about Appropriation 30.3, is that right? All right, so that's the community development, community assistance area where, for this year, we have a \$9.9 million expenditure that we're able to do. However, there is recoveries from other areas so that's why you see the difference.

Where we have recoveries from other areas of the government where 500,000 last year, and for this year '12-13 there are \$3.9 million. And that again, is primarily because of the Community Places Program and the recovery that we're getting from the building Manitoba from REDI and UDI.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister explain to me what she means by recoverables from Community Places et cetera. Is that money that wasn't allocated, wasn't spent or is it—?

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister of Housing and Community Development.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: When I used the word recoverable, I'm saying that we have a commitment that we are going to spend this amount of money in community places and in order to spend that money we are going to recover it from Local Government for the UDI portion, from MAFRI for the REDI portion, and again, from Local Government for the—or is it Building Manitoba Fund is MIT? Local Government? So it's—we are going to continue to

make the commitments for Community Places to support development of recreation facilities, child care facilities, improvements to playgrounds. And that money is going to flow and we made the announcement about a month ago now and the projects are going to start happening across the province.

It was like 273 projects that we were able to fund this year and those monies will be recovered and transferred from Local Government and MAFRI to Housing and Community Development.

Mrs. Rowat: Community Places has now gone under Housing—or is now, I guess under your department, Community Places grants, and I know that AMM has indicated publicly, and through resolution, that those types of grants are just not meeting the needs of the community infrastructure deficits that are—they're facing.

Can the minister indicate to me if—what her current budget is this year for Community Places, and is there going to be an increase in that program?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The budget for Community Places is 3.915. That is money that is being well spent across the province to ensure that programming, whether it's recreation, arts, social programming, is happening, whether it's for infants to seniors. It's happening across the province.

I am very familiar with the resolutions that have been at AMM and have had the conversations with them. One of the parts that the member forgets to mention is how grateful they are for the investments that we have made. And we need other partners to come together. We need the other levels of government to work with us to improve their infrastructure. And we also—we know that the private sector also comes and helps to support us.

What we have done, because of the infrastructure deficit in the north—and I know the member has travelled extensively in the north and is very familiar with that—is that we have, in the last election, made a commitment to increase the grants for the north to \$75,000.

So we'll continue to—we have exceptional staff in the Community Places Program that work year round with proponents about developing programs that address the needs of their community. And we'll continue to work with all of the groups to try and improve the infrastructure across the province.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, I'm just wanting to, I guess, to be clear on how to interpret the allocations, or their appropriations and the expenditures from last year to this year under Community Development, as well as I see a huge reduction in Community Assistance.

So I guess—can you, can the minister indicate to me quite clearly why there is that reduction, and if she can explain in the reason why, also indicate what projects have been moved over to another area?

Like—the way I read this is Community Development had an expenditure last year of \$14.2 million, this year only 10.9, and Community Assistance, we see last year's expenditure at \$9.3 million, now only 5.9. And I guess the reason I'm really wanting her to explain to me the differences and the reductions and where that—where those allocations are. If she's saying that are recoverables under different departments, then I want to know where they've gone, because this is concerning, especially when I hear from communities who are facing infrastructure challenges. And we see a reduction in delivery of programs and supports within communities. I think that, you know, Manitobans deserve to know exactly how these reductions have taken place and where those dollars have gone.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I want to make it very clear to the member that there has been no reduction of gross expenditures in this department, that we will continue to provide the quality and quantity of service that we have in the past fiscal year. What you see happening is that there's a transfer. There's a transfer from Local Government and from MAFRI that is coming to Housing and Community Development. And that is recognizing that the projects that are being funded through Community Places are infrastructure programs that fall into those categories of those—of that transfer, of that budget line.

So it is—there is no reduction, that it is business as usual, that we will continue to do the good work that we have, that we will continue to work with proponents across Manitoba to improve their infrastructure, whether it—whether we're talking about churches, recreation centres, playgrounds, skating rinks, curling rinks, swimming pools. We're there and we're open for business.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chair, can the minister indicate to me where the \$4 million would have went from

Community Development? Where—who is now going to be administering that?

* (16:20)

Obviously, you're seeing less dollars in your budget. So I want to know where that reduction of \$4 million out of Community Development—it's program delivery. And we really need to know. It's not a shell game for these communities. These communities really want to know where their infrastructure dollars are.

At Community Assistance, that's Community Places, grants—we've—in rural and northern communities, we've already seen a Community Works Loan Program taken away from those communities, and we don't know where those dollars have been allocated. So, if that's part of where the Community Works Loan Programs have gone to is, you know, out the window, then, I think, you know, I—Manitobans deserve to know what the answer is to this, and not saying that it's been transferred from one department to another. We need clearer direction on it.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's no reduction; there's a transfer of funds. We're the—we are the—Housing and Community Development is delivering the program. The funds are being transferred. We are providing the same quality and quantity of service as we did in previous fiscal years and we will continue to do that; 273 projects were funded this year, and we will be working with proponents for the next intake of applications, which will happen in December.

Mrs. Rowat: So can the minister, then, indicate to me—if there's been no change in program delivery, no change in the dollar allocation, no cuts in any types of programming, can the minister, then, indicate to me where that other \$4 million will be coming from in Community Development?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'd like to refer the member back to page 37, where it's written out, where it says, less: recoverable from Urban and Rural Economic Development Initiatives \$1.5 million and recoverable from Building Manitoba Fund \$2.4 million, which adds up to a \$3.915 million, which is allocated to community places this year.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the member indicate to me or give me a breakdown of the Community Development programs that are going to be provided to communities in the next fiscal year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the money will be spent for—with the Community Places capital grant, the 3.915; Neighbourhoods Alive!, \$6.1 million; Cooperative Development, \$280,000.

And then we have grant assistance to the volunteer sector, which includes grants to United Way of Winnipeg and non-profit—and Manitoba Services Community Council, who deliver programs across the province in infrastructure as well—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable—go ahead.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Oh, sorry—\$5.5 million.

Mrs. Rowat: I have one question with regard to a community in my constituency, and it's actually a concern that is not isolated only to the village of Binscarth. There are other communities that have identified the same issue. They have two senior lodges in their community that are owned by Manitoba Housing, and the units are approximately 30 years old. And I believe that what the issue is of those communities—that community is that the one—the bachelor suites are actually something that are not of interest to seniors that are looking for a place to live. You know, our desires, you know, of what we would like to have over the last 30 years has changed.

They approached the then-minister of Family Services and Housing in March of '09 and asked him for somebody to come out and help develop some other options or look at, you know, doing some conversions of the living space. And at that time they had come out, I believe, to—or had written a letter to the minister saying, you know, would somebody come out, and the minister then provided a letter back saying someone would be in contact with them. To this point, I don't believe anybody has provided possibilities for converting the housing units.

Is there somebody within the department that would be able to work with somebody that—the community that would be looking at that as an option?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, of course. We get approached by many community groups that are talking about the needs and redevelopment of that space because, yes, there is no desire for bachelor suites in—right now, for the most part, and what we have undertaken is, in other communities, to redevelop the units and put a couple of bachelor suites together and make one-bedroom units, and we've done that in the city in Winnipeg around some of our projects in Central

Park, we've been able to do that. Riverton is another example where we did some of those renovations.

So, yes. If you can provide us with the information of who the contact person is we will certainly follow-up as soon as possible. But I must say that as we follow-up with these community groups we're balancing our budget and the needs of all Manitobans and looking geographically about what we are able to do and what is the core housing need; what are the numbers of seniors that are living in the community as well. So it's—we'll go out, we'll meet with the community, we'll have the conversation, we can look at options, and we welcome them.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what that budget—was that under Housing Development? Is that where you would have a budget for conversion costs associated with units like that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It would fall under the Capital Budget line, the budget that I referred to that was \$82 million.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me if—how that \$8.2 million is allocated through the province? Is it broken up into—based on population or different regions of the province? How do those dollars allocate?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's really based—it's \$82 million and it's based on the need of the community as well as our overall quality of our social housing that we have available. You have to understand that in some of our complexes there are emergency repairs that have to happen, and so that would come out of those \$82 million, too, if it was a capital repair that was unexpected. The department has been working very strategically of—making sure that they're addressing the housing needs across the province, whether it's within housing delivery or redevelopment.

* (16:30)

Mrs. Rowat: This is a community that is very close to the Saskatchewan border. There are a lot of people that are looking for housing in that community and I know there are seniors who would be interested in that unit if there was at least a one-bedroom or something different. So I will definitely make sure that the minister gets some information on that, because it looks like it has stalled. In 2009 they had written to the department and hadn't received a return email back, so I will be sharing that with the minister.

I'm going to now turn over Estimates questions to my colleague, but before I do I just want to just ensure that the minister understands that there is a lack of housing, in general, and affordable housing in a lot of communities, and it's a major concern. And so we're really wanting to make sure that this minister does understand the needs for public housing, and how these needs are being met, to make sure that there are benchmarks in place, and that data that is being collected and enumerated is actually assisting those communities that have affordable housing concerns.

I know a lot of communities that I've been speaking to have just not been able to access existing provincial affordable housing programs, and haven't had much 'success' with the issue of being successful and receiving grants. And I know that the success of small local businesses in communities often rely on housing. I know this one plant that hire—has 75 staff. It's Glanbia, and recently was destroyed in a fire. But part of their challenge is—was—is finding housing for their employees. So I think that, when the minister is looking at programs and ways of meeting the needs of rural communities and northern communities, that she does take into consideration that there are needs throughout the province and the needs aren't any less in one region to another.

So I just want to thank her for that and I look forward to continue our dialogue over the next couple of years.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, thank you very much. I thank the member for her question and her insight into housing. We have been able to provide housing opportunities across the province, and I have a list here that I could put on the record but, you know, there are projects that are in Brandon, in Springfield, Riverton. There's projects within Gimli, Winkler, The Pas. So we are addressing the needs across the province—Lynn Lake, Brandon. We also have a—we have the commitment of 1,500 units, new-builds, as well as 1,500 affordable units, and we also, because of our community development principles and philosophies, we believe in not only hiring local but supporting—purchasing local too, so we've been able to accommodate that in many of our RFPs as we go out.

Housing is a solution that all levels of government need to work on as well as the private sector and the community themselves. In the last election, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) made a commitment of 2,000–2,100 more private sector

housing units in downtown, using our TIF grants, as well as 2,500 more private sector rental units. There will be 500 new rental units with a \$25-million grant made available to private developers, as well as 1,000 new rental units using our tax incentive financing in both Winnipeg and Brandon, and 1,000 new units of family–multi-family and seniors rental housing.

That's just an example of our most recent commitments, and our commitments to provide housing within The Pas, Thompson, Winkler, Sprague. We continue to listen to our proponents. We have phenomenal staff that continue to work with individuals as they prepare their proposals. We also have the Proposal Development Fund, which many community groups access and use that funding, the \$60,000, to finalize their proposal before they can submit it.

So I thank the member for her question. I look forward to working with her over the next year as we move forward and address the issues of housing across the province.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Let me start with a question about the shelter allowance for those on social assistance, which is currently at \$285 a month. I wonder whether the minister has any input at all into, you know, what that number is or whether it's completely in the purview of one of her colleagues.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We in Manitoba Housing, we've been working very diligently with nonprofit groups and community members to develop affordable housing across the province. We have specific new initiatives called the Portable Housing Benefit, where we'll top up an individual's rent by \$200 and provide some services so they can maintain their tenancy. We'll continue to support that program. We have a program that is called RentAid, and we also have a commitment of providing 1,500 more units that are rent geared to income. And we have over 900 of those units already developed, and we have 600 left to do within the next two years. We're committed to be—to provide safe, affordable housing for Manitobans across the province.

Mr. Gerrard: I take it that the fact that the minister is, you know, has these extra \$200 grants for certain individuals or families, can the minister tell us what the criteria are for getting these extra grants and why this is not a benefit which is available across the board?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The Portable Housing Benefit is a pilot program that was initiated by this government, I think approximately two years ago, and we have a certain amount of portable housing benefits that are available. And I don't—it's—we, right now, as it's a pilot project, we have 600 benefits that are being provided to individuals and families, and the criteria right now as we move forward is people that have a mental health issue. That's how they are identified and they also are provided with supports to help maintain their tenancy. Our preliminary findings are very positive. We're excited about the number of individuals that have had successful tenancy, as well as the reduction in outside services that they're accessing, primarily justice and health care and getting those services at home.

This is another example of our government being adaptable to the needs of individuals seeking housing and the importance of them maintaining, which falls into our responsibility, in principle, I should say, of Housing First but also identifying it has to be broader than the bricks and mortar and a key. It has to for some individuals—has to have the necessary supports to ensure that they are successful.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister and her department clearly have a lot of experience and a knowledge in terms of the actual cost for building and maintaining units, affordable housing units. Can the minister indicate whether a \$285 a month is sufficient to cover the costs of a unit, a rental unit, or any unit that is constructed under her mandate or the existing units?

* (16:40)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, as I had stated before to the member, that we continue to have a commitment to build 1,500 more units of affordable housing but—and go—and to take it beyond that and provide 1,500 more housing units rent-geared-to-income, which allow it to be more accessible to people in—within low incomes. I'm sure the member knows that within our housing stock that our rates are set at the rates by EIA and people that have the privilege to live in Manitoba Housing have a safe and affordable place to live.

Mr. Gerrard: The question that I was trying to ask was this: That you're providing housing for which individuals may be paying or contributing \$285 a month through the rent—through the shelter allowance but your actual cost I suspect of either construction or operation of that unit is actually larger than that, so, you know, on average what

would be the subsidy that would be provided in addition to the 285 a month in order to make this feasible?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, I can assure the member that this government believes that we have a responsibility to provide social housing to low-income individuals, and that's what we're able to do with the supports that we're able to provide to our direct-managed portfolio and for the supports that we're able to provide to the nonprofit organizations that are providing housing.

Mr. Gerrard: I see from the data or information on page 33 that of those units that are directly managed the rental revenue that is brought in, which in those who are on social assistance would presumably be the 285 that rental revenue makes up less than half of the operational costs, and that would suggest to me that if Manitoba Housing gets 285 through the social assistance program that there would be then probably an additional 350 on average that Manitoba Housing would have to subsidize in order to make that a viable covering the cost of the unit. Is that approximately correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, you the member you cannot conclude about the difference. What you need to know is that the seniors' housing portion which is included in the direct-managed is not EIA, and as well only 60 per cent of the family housing is on EIA. There's another 40 per cent that aren't.

Mr. Gerrard: Of that direct-managed the—what proportion would the seniors' housing make up?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's approximately 41 per cent.

Mr. Gerrard: So that the—those on social assistance would be approximately 60 per cent of the 59 per cent, which is approximately 36 per cent of the total. Is that correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, if we followed your math correctly.

Mr. Gerrard: So, for those on social assistance, is it possible to break this down in terms of what the rental contribution is from social assistance and what the additional subsidy is?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That would be very difficult to come up with that information as there's so many differences within family sizes, bedroom sizes, children, the geography of where they're living.

Mr. Gerrard: All right. I thank the minister, and the next question deals with the percentage of the

housing. You've listed non-profits and co-operatives together. What proportion of that would be co-operatives as opposed to non-profits which are not co-operatives?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I know that the time is running short, so I'll provide the member with the co-op. There are 2,100 units for the co-op, and the non-profit, we'll just—we'll get that for you. We'll try and get it before the end of this.

Mr. Gerrard: Of the thirty-one million and three hundred and eighty-seven budgeted for this year, or 387,000, what proportion of that would be the cost or the expense of the amount that's going toward the 2,100 co-ops?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Four million dollars.

I must add, though, our co-op development branch, we have been very successful in the last two years of redeveloping it and in providing those necessary supports to the co-operative movement, whether it's around housing, business development or social programming. There's actually a curriculum now that we have gotten developed with MCA as well as initiatives around marketing and communication strategy. And also there's scholarships that are happening for people involved in co-op development too.

Mr. Gerrard: I have had some calls from people in Manitoba Housing, though, for problems with bedbugs. I'm sure the minister is familiar with this issue, and I wonder if the minister could indicate whether there are records in terms of, you know, whether the number of units which have bedbugs is increasing or decreasing.

* (16:50)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm sure the member is familiar that bedbugs are an issue across North America and in Europe, and that he's probably also familiar that the infestation are happening in private homes and hotels, commercial properties and they have no discrimination about where you live or what kind of property you own.

We have been very successful over the last three years in developing our in-house pest management team, the Integrated Pest Management Group, is what they are referred to, and they are—oversee the entire bedbug control process, including monthly inspections, treatment on a three-week rotation until the bugs are eradicated, preventative treatments in

common areas and information sessions for tenants and service providers.

As a result of the team's efforts, Manitoba Housing has seen a decline of more than 30 per cent over the past two years of the number of units with known bedbug activity. We still will not rest, though. We are known to have the best technology. As well, Dave Funk who is our—in charge of our bedbug unit, he's also in charge of the provincial bedbug strategy and has been sharing his information and knowledge across the province. So we continue to provide education seminars for our tenants as well as the necessary treatment. And I can tell you that per month, we treat between 500 and 800 units with activity plus another 2,500 units as precaution, and these would be units that would be surrounding the infested units.

So we're extremely active and committed to eradicating to the best of our ability.

Mr. Gerrard: Just where is the line item, on which page, that deals with the cost for looking after bedbugs?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's within the direct management portfolio, I think under the operating line.

I have the answer for the member around how many units are non-profit—14,600 units—and that's—accounts for \$27 million.

Mr. Gerrard: In—so the cost for looking after bedbugs would come out of the line on page 33, housing operations direct-managed costs? Is that it?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the minister have the estimate for the cost for looking after bedbugs, you know, this year and last year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: In '11-12, it was approximately \$2 million, and this year, for '12-13, we're projecting another approximately \$2 million. It's dependent on the amount of treatments that we have to do.

Mr. Gerrard: For a typical unit which is infested, if you look, how many times would such a unit have to be treated to ensure that, you know, until it is free of bedbugs?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's—the average is around three times, but I have to tell you that even after those treatments, they continue to monitor if there's any activity, and if there is activity resuming, then they would go back in and treat again. But it's around three times.

Mr. Gerrard: And so, you know, units which are much more than three times, you know, would suggest that there's a problem, a particular problem somewhere that's not getting attention to? Is that correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, one of the challenges is, around the bedbugs, is that there's different treatments, and some treatments treat the adult bedbugs, some only treat the eggs and you have to find that balance. And also it's about educating our tenants about what to bring in and what not to bring into their homes.

So it's certainly a nuisance and a frustration for our tenants, but I'm proud to say that we are not ignoring the issue, that we are addressing it with different treatments as well as prevention.

Mr. Gerrard: If the extended bedbug infestation has gone down 30 per cent, but the costs are staying the same, maybe the minister can explain that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We need to ensure that we are continuing to provide the services, the treatments, and the prevention. That won't stop because bedbugs are increasing throughout our country, North America and Europe. We cannot let—we cannot slow down at all. So we will continue to treat and to educate. We offer programs such as our mattress covers, which are helpful, so those are ongoing programs and ongoing costs that we'll continue.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister and I'm going to turn it back over to the member for Riding Mountain.

Mrs. Rowat: I think we're ready to—

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 30.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,641,000 for Housing and Community Development, Housing, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 30.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,969,000 for Housing and Community Development, Community Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 30.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$153,000 for Housing and Community Development, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the minister's salary, contained in resolution 30.1. At this point, we request that the minister's staff and the staff from the official opposition leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Resolution 30.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,682,000 for Housing and Community Development, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department. The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are the Estimates of Innovation, Energy and Mines.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

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