

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

Vol. LXVII No. 45 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 10, 2015

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
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LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
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WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 10, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 25—The Children's Advocate Act

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), that Bill 25, The Children's Advocate Act; Loi sur le protecteur des enfants, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, in response to recommendations made by Commissioner Ted Hughes, this bill introduces independent stand-alone legislation for the Manitoba Children's Advocate. The bill retains the powers and duties of the Children's Advocate that were previously embedded in The Child and Family Services Act. However, a number of provisions have been amended and the new ones created in order to strengthen the independence of the Children's Advocate and enhance public reporting abilities on the important work carried out by the Children's Advocate. With this bill, we set the stage for upcoming legislative amendments that include an expansion of the Children's Advocate mandate beyond the child-welfare system.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

**Provincial Trunk Highway 206 and
Cedar Avenue in Oakbank—Pedestrian Safety**

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH 206 at the intersection with Cedar Avenue.

(2) There have been many dangerous incidents where drivers use the right shoulder to pass vehicles that have stopped at the traffic light waiting to turn left at this intersection.

(3) Law enforcement officials have identified this intersection as a hot spot of concern for the safety of schoolchildren, drivers and emergency responders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To encourage that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by D. Wachniak, D. Wachniak, D. Pageot and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

**Province-Wide Long-Term Care—
Review Need and Increase Spaces**

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) There are currently 125 licensed personal-care homes, PCHs, across Manitoba, consisting of less than 10,000 beds.

(2) All trends point to an increasingly aging population who will require additional personal-care-home facilities.

(3) By some estimates, Manitoba will require an increase of more than 5,100 personal-care-home beds by 2036.

(4) The number of Manitobans with Alzheimer's disease or any other dementia-related illnesses who will require personal-care-home services are steadily increasing and are threatening to double within the current generation.

(5) The last personal-care-home review in many areas, including the Swan River Valley area currently under the administration of Prairie Mountain regional health authority, was conducted in 2008.

(6) Average occupancy rates for personal-care homes across the province are exceeding 97 per cent, with some regions, such as the Swan River Valley, witnessing 100 per cent occupancy rates.

(7) These high occupancy rates are creating the conditions where many individuals requiring long-term care are being displaced far away from their families and their home communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider immediately enacting a province-wide review of the long-term-care needs of residents of Manitoba.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to recognize the stresses placed upon the health-care system by the current and continuous aging population and consider increasing the availability of long-term-care spaces, PCH beds, in communities across the province.

And this petition is signed by M. Frayer, V. Botwright and B. Kopulos and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Proposed Lac du Bonnet Marina— Request for Research into Benefits and Costs

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Lac du Bonnet is a recreational area with great natural beauty.

(2) The Winnipeg River is one of the greatest distinguishing cultural and recreational resources in that area.

(3) Manitoba marinas increase recreational access and increase the desirability of properties in their host communities.

(4) The people of Lac du Bonnet overwhelmingly support a public harbourfront marina in Lac du Bonnet.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider collaborating with other levels of government to research the economic benefits and construction costs of a marina in Lac du Bonnet.

This petition is signed by A. Meade, S. Meade, W. Franz and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Bipole III Land Expropriation— Collective Bargaining Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

On November 19th, 2014, the Premier authorized an order-in-council enabling Manitoba Hydro to take valuable and productive farmland for its controversial Bipole III transmission line project without due process of law.

On November 24th, 2014, the minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act signed a confirming order for the province of Manitoba declaring that no notice to landowners is required for the seizure of property.

This waiver of notice represents an attack on rural families and their property rights in a modern democratic society. There was not even an opportunity provided for debate in the Manitoba Legislature. In many cases, the private property seized has been part of a family farm for generations.

Manitoba Hydro has claimed that it has only ever expropriated one landowner in its entire history of operation. The provincial government has now gone ahead and instituted expropriation procedures against more than 200 landowners impacted by Bipole III.

* (13:40)

Since November 2013, the Manitoba Bipole III Landowner Committee, MBLC, in association with the Canadian Association of Energy and Pipeline Landowner Associations, CAEPLA, have been trying to engage Manitoba Hydro to negotiate a fair business agreement.

For over 14 months, the provincial government and Manitoba Hydro have acted in bad faith in their dealings with Manitoba landowners or their duly authorized agents. These actions have denied farmers their right to bargain collectively to protect their property and their businesses from Bipole III.

MBLC, CAEPLA has not formed an association to stop the Bipole III project and they are not antidevelopment. MBLC, CAEPLA has simply come together, as a group of people, as Manitobans, to stand up for the—for property rights and the right to collectively bargain for a fair business agreement that protects the future well-being of their businesses.

MBLC, CAEPLA are duly authorized agents for Manitoba landowners who wish to exercise their freedom to associate and negotiate in good faith.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government immediately direct Manitoba Hydro to engage with MBLC, CAEPLA in order to negotiate a fair business agreement that addresses the many legitimate concerns of farm families affected by the Bipole III transmission line.

And this petition is signed by B. Wiens, P. Rempel, D. Scott and many more fine Manitobans.

Rights of Manitoba Children

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government should uphold the rights of children set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by Canada over 20 years ago, to better protect and promote children and their rights and to ensure the voices of children are heard.

Instead, many children in Manitoba, especially those in the child-welfare system, reveal they

sometimes feel they have no say in what happens to them.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba's children and youth are falling behind in several indicators of well-being and in areas that would prepare them for better outcomes in life.

This year, the provincial government's education system was ranked last of all Canadian provinces in science, reading and math.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba also has the second highest percentage of children using food banks of all Canadian provinces and the highest child poverty rate.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to ensure that the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and that the opinions of children are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to correct the tragic systemic flaws that have failed Manitoba children in the recent past.

This petition is signed by A. Koch, S. Fisher, K. Wiens and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have guests to introduce. This afternoon we have, in the public gallery, we have Ms. Devin Morrow, who is the guest of the honourable Minister of Health (Ms. Blady).

And also seated in the public gallery this afternoon we have, from Springs Christian Academy, we have eight grade 11 students under the direction of Mr. Brad Dowler, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Economy Government Record

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the government released a report late last year that was in respect of judicial compensation, and it reported—and this is according to government experts, Mr. Speaker—that economic growth in Manitoba is meagre—meagre. That's a tough way to describe what the Premier's celebrating in taxpayer-paid advertisements, I think.

Now, these senior finance officials commented that we are falling behind Saskatchewan remarkably. In fact, they said we shouldn't even try to compare ourselves to Saskatchewan; we should compare ourselves to New Brunswick instead. These are government experts that the Premier isn't apparently aware of or listening to.

Now, Moody's report said that the government has an incredibly bad spending problem which is threatening our credit rating, and other experts at Hydro have reported that the government's mistaken strategies are going to lead to a loss in our credit rating and billions of dollars of losses.

Now, with all these experts united in commenting in a negative way on the government's lack of economic management, who is wrong? Are they all wrong or is the Premier wrong?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We've taken our economic forecast from a range of private and public sector forecasters, the standard ones used by most provinces across the country; they don't reach into special committees to get economic forecasts.

The Royal Bank of Canada says that our future outlook remains bright for Manitoba, third best in 2015 at 2.6 per cent. The Conference Board of Canada has us at 2.8 per cent in '15 and '16. The recent job numbers on actual hours worked that we just saw from the head of statistics Manitoba, the Manitoba bureau, has said that when it comes to actual hours worked, Manitoba's outpacing all but one other province. Mr. Speaker, that's a macro indicator that shows more people are working, they're more—working longer hours, they're earning better wages.

So we do know that overall forecasts for the first quarter in the country showed a dramatic slowdown, both in the United States and in Canada, their economies, and that has affected all of us. But in the

midst of all of that, Manitoba still is ranked as one of the better performers for the economy in the coming year.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier is sadly confused. He's confusing forecasts with actual results. His actual results are ninth over the last six years, closer to 10th than to eighth, but forecasts are an interesting thing. Last year the government projected that it would grow the economy twice as fast as it actually did. So I'd encourage the Premier to study his history and learn from it.

Now, the fact of the matter is that the reason that these experts are saying we have bright future is because of one thing: the drop, unprecedented drop, in the price of crude oil. The Conference Board, in fact, commented and said, no, there's nothing that they're doing right in Manitoba; it's just that the price of oil is dropping and it will benefit Manitoba more than all other provinces.

So the Premier has the power to make certain things happen. He can bungle a stadium project. He could stage an internal rebellion, cause it to happen. He could make secret payments to friends. He could even raise the PST, and all of these things would be his responsibility.

But would he admit today that he had no responsibility whatsoever for the price of crude oil dropping by 50 per cent?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, just—the member doesn't like forecasts; he likes hard data. The full-time employment, April 2015, per cent change upward positively, 3.4 per cent, No. 1 in the country: hard facts.

I know the member doesn't like facts when they contradict his preconceived notions, but let me give him another one: total employment, up to April '15, 2.3 per cent, No. 1 in the country, Mr. Speaker, No. 1 in the country. Private employment, up to April 2015, 2 per cent; Canadian performance, 0.6 per cent. Where are we ranked? No. 1 in the country.

Those are the facts. Will the Leader of the Opposition acknowledge those facts are accurate?

Mr. Pallister: So for six consecutive years, under this Premier, this province's economy lagged the rest of the nation and now he's surprised that we have a higher percentage growth. Even if we grow at twice the rate of Saskatchewan for the next six years, we won't make up the ground we've lost under this

government and this Premier, Mr. Speaker. Now, that's the problem he doesn't seem to want to face up to.

Bear Bryant was a notable football coach, Mr. Speaker. He used to say, if things go really well, it's your fault; if things go bad, it's my fault. But the Premier's got it backwards. He wants credit for things that he had nothing to do with and places blame, blame on the global economy, blame on the federal government, blame on Mother Nature, blame on the previous premier, blaming all the time. That's why half his caucus doesn't support him, because he'll blame anyone. He'll blame the civil servant and put one under the bus when things go south every single time.

* (13:50)

Now, why, when he's ninth–ninth–over the last six years, why would he blame someone else? Maybe today we'll see a new revelation in behaviour from this Premier and he'll admit that that's not somebody else's fault, that's his fault.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the non-blaming approach of the Leader of the Opposition, and I say that with an enormous amount of irony and a tongue firmly planted in my cheek.

Housing starts in all areas: for the first quarter of 2015, per cent change for Canada, 3.7 per cent; per cent change for Manitoba, 43 per cent; ranking in the country, No. 2. New facts for the members opposite.

Urban housing starts: up 'til April 2015, 0.8 of 1 per cent for the country; for Manitoba, 26.2 per cent; rank in the country, No. 2.

The real economy at base prices: for '14, per cent change for Manitoba, 2.3 per cent, No. 2 in the country.

I'd be happy to put more performance-based facts on the record for the Leader of the Opposition if he is so kind as to ask me another question, Mr. Speaker.

Social Impact Bonds Social Service Program

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, I'd be happy to. Fun with facts here, Mr. Speaker, let's play with the facts, the Premier says.

Okay, when you hit one home run in a whole season, hitting two is 100 per cent gain.

Congratulations. Okay, lagging the country for six years and now using fun facts to try to make a case that doesn't–isn't supportable by those facts is pretty pathetic.

But let's put this on the record. Here's a quote: Our province should be judged by how it treats the most vulnerable. We agree—we agree—and that's why yesterday we advanced some pretty significant and innovative ideas.

We'll launch a social impact bond pilot program. What it'll do is allow community groups to bid to make the greatest impact upon providing—fighting against poverty and the causes of poverty and to feel part of the sustainability and making sustainable our new approach to social programs that work to improve people's lives.

These are the words of the NDP leader of New Brunswick.

Does the Premier agree with the NDP leader of New Brunswick?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The member asks a question about what he calls social impact bonds. We believe that if you're going to invest in communities that the resources should stay in the community, Mr. Speaker, and that we think that—we're very supportive of social economy, social enterprise activity where the investments go into the community, the benefits stay in the community, the salaries increase.

The member opposite is proposing an approach where you don't put the money where it's needed, you put it where it's going to give their greatest return for the private investor, and if something goes wrong the investor gets paid out, not the people that need the service.

He's even proposing doing that for people in the child-welfare system. All the money in the child-welfare system should stay with the children and the families.

This is another attempt by the Leader of the Opposition. Last year—last week he announced he's privatizing the daycare system. This week he's privatizing the social assistance system and social support system. That's unacceptable.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Speaker, it's not unacceptable to socialist governments in Scandinavia who use the exact concept. It's not unacceptable to people in Australia who are helping address, together in partnership, social problems in their country, or in

England or throughout the United States or, in fact, not unacceptable to the leader of the NDP in New Brunswick. It's only unacceptable to backward-looking, closed-minded members opposite.

It wasn't unacceptable just three months ago when the government released its Manitoba Social Enterprise Strategy, and on page 21—which I encourage the Premier to read, and endorsed by the member sitting next to him—page 21, recommendation 29, recommended and supported: publicly financed social impact bonds.

Who is talking to who over there? This report is signed by not one but two ministers on the other side. Don't they talk to each other?

Now, how can social impact bonds be such a scary idea today when they were such a good idea to his friends just three months ago?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite, because it allows us to make this very important clarification.

His approach is to bleed money out of the daycare system, to bleed money out of the social services program just like he bled money out of the province of Manitoba when he privatized the telephone system, just like he attempted to do when he tried to privatize the home-care system.

The approach taken in the Social Enterprise Strategy, in the social economy strategy, is to make sure the money stays in the hands of the community. He wants to put holes in the community and bleed money out. We want money to go into the community and stay in the community for the benefit of the community.

That is the difference: more wealth for the people of the inner city, not more wealth for his rich investor friends.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we announced support for an idea, which the government supported three months ago, which now they don't. The minister of Child and Family Services, the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Mr. Chief) signed off on this report, and they signed off on the same ideas that we support, Mr. Speaker. The Premier, in castigating those who come forward with ideas, fails to recognize that the problems, our social problems, have worsened under his watch, and he fails to be open-minded to looking for solutions.

Now, obviously, there was a rebellion over there because members asserted that the Premier stopped

listening. I sense another rebellion in the offing if he doesn't begin to listen.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. We have a number of guests with us in the gallery this afternoon, and we're thankful that they're here watching our Legislature in action, but I'm getting the sense here that members are getting to be a little bit boisterous. I'm not sure what was on the menu for lunch, but I'm asking honourable members, please keep the level down a little bit to allow our guests to hear both the questions and the answers.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, to continue.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me just say that we believe that the societal challenges that we must face in this province must be faced in partnership and they must be faced creatively and with innovative thinking, and I was impressed by some of the work, actually, that was contained in the report that the ministers co-signed on, and I believe there were good ideas in it, and we chose to endorse and support one of those ideas put forward by those two ministers, and the Premier today chooses to criticize those ideas.

Now, I would suggest, respectfully, that some of the ideas that we discuss here should be discussed in solidarity and with a mutual sense of purpose, and I would just simply ask the Premier to endorse this concept and to at least commit to researching it and looking at it with an open mind because it's working to help people around the world and we need to help some people here in Manitoba—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition's time on this question has elapsed.

Mr. Selinger: Certainly, we will do that.

That report was prepared in a consultation between members of the government and members of the community, Mr. Speaker, and they took a look at all these different dimensions of it. It was a collaborative approach. It was a partnership approach. The member opposite talks about partnership, Mr. Speaker, and I'll give an example in a minute of what he did when he was in government when it came to partnership.

All of those ideas have to be informed by the core values. Who are we trying to benefit? We're

trying to make sure that the folks with the least amount of resources have a chance for jobs, have a chance for training, have a chance to have quality services, have a chance to get housing, have a chance to live in safe neighbourhoods. That's the purpose, not to reward investors outside of the community by bleeding resources out of it.

We see lots of good investments from many well-spirited Manitobans all the time, and we have one of the best charitable giving rates in Manitoba, for which it makes a huge difference in the investments made. And we've supported many community foundations in Manitoba which have a very direct impact on the quality of life in their communities.

But let me just speak to the partnership of the Leader of the Opposition when he was in government. He cut money for the abilities network; he cut money for the Association for Community Living; he cut money for the Brandon Friendship Centre; he cut money for the Dauphin Friendship Centre; he cut money—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The honourable First Minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Children in Care Graduation Rates

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I rise today to thank the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, I guess, for waking up this government, exposing many of the truths that Manitobans have already known, with the report Manitoba Can Do Better for Kids in Care.

The report states, and I quote: Manitoba has one of the highest rates in the world of children placed in care. End quote. In the world, Mr. Speaker. We have over 11,000 kids in care, two thirds of whom do not graduate from high school. This is obviously not new information.

Will the minister admit that this government has failed Manitoba's most vulnerable children and continues to get worse?

*(14:00)

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I certainly thank the member for the question. It is an important part of public policy and needs to be discussed in this Chamber.

I also want to thank the centre for the research work that they did. After all, we commissioned that

report, and we commissioned that report because on this side of the House we believe in evidence-based analysis of circumstances so that we can get a handle on the full nature of the circumstances facing our kids in care, especially as it relates in education.

That's why we've taken the next step to establish a task force in consultation with members of the educational community and the social services agencies so that together we can create a bright future for every student in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, two thirds of the children in care do not graduate from high school. Less than half are even ready for school.

This damning report shouldn't be a surprise to this government. It didn't just appear out of thin air, much like the magic wand from the Health Minister.

Has the government been hiding this information or did the ministers not know what was going on in their own departments?

Mr. Allum: Well, we commissioned the report because we want to make sure we have the best evidence-based analysis of the circumstances facing kids in care, especially as they relate to educational outcomes.

That's why we established a task force yesterday. It will be co-chaired by Tammy Christensen, who is the executive director of Ndinawe, and as well as the good Kevin Lamoureux, who's an instructor and educator and an outstanding public servant in our community. And this task force will focus on actions that will increase communication between education and the child-welfare system. It will develop programming to address the particular education needs of children in care and identify best practices, resources and strategies that can be used for teachers and social workers in the field.

Mr. Speaker, we're—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, the facts are we have a damning report which magnifies how this NDP government can do better for children in care, as if they didn't know this information already.

Eleven thousand kids in care and growing each and every day, two thirds of them do not graduate from high school, and what do they do? They launch a task force. Really?

Will this minister admit 16 years of failed NDP policies and do they—and that they do not have a plan moving forward?

Mr. Allum: Well, I've been in Education for some time now and not once has the member opposite ever raised this question, because they don't care about these particular issues.

We commissioned the report and established the task force with two outstanding members of our community, by the way, so I would ask him to show a little respect on that—in that regard, and to make sure that we have the best outcomes for student success in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, on the opposite side of the House they have one agenda, and that's to cut services, cut budget. I don't know for a—if I think about it, I can't for imagine understand how that will be of any benefit, not only to kids in care but to any Manitoban. They're—the biggest threat is the Leader of the Opposition and his caucus.

Children in Care Graduation Rates

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): What is wrong with our child and family services system when only 47 per cent of the kids in care are ready to attend school? Seventy-six per cent of children who have had no contact with Child and Family Services are ready to attend school. That's a huge difference.

These children are starting their education and their lives with a huge disadvantage.

How can this be acceptable to this government?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Well, Mr. Speaker, this is an important question. I'm glad the members opposite have raised it.

We do need to work collaboratively and collectively to ensure the best possible outcomes for kids in care with respect to their education system.

Mr. Speaker, whatever other challenges those children might have in their lives, and they are significant, whatever other challenges they have, we want to be sure that the education system is there for them every single day, responds to their needs, so that they can have opportunities in the future to go on with their post-secondary education if it comes to that, go on and get a good job and have a good life right here in Manitoba.

Mr. Wishart: After 16 years, they just noticed they had a problem.

During Estimates I asked the minister responsible for Child and Family Services questions regarding the department's practice of tracking data. The minister revealed that Child and Family Services does not track school attendance for the children that they are responsible for.

The report indicates that these children already receive a poor start in school. The department has indicated that they don't care if the children even attend school. It appears that this government has set these children up for failure.

Why does this government not care enough about the children in its care to even keep track of the information?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we commissioned this report, what we wanted to do is make sure that we had the best evidence-based analysis from top experts in Manitoba to ensure that we properly understood the various challenges facing those children and to make sure that we embraced whatever possible avenues to improve their educational outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, on our side of the House we have invested in education every single year that we have been in government, and every single year when we invest in education the members opposite vote against those particular investments. We're trying to improve the education system for every child in Manitoba; they appear to not be on the side of any child in Manitoba.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, it would appear the minister thinks the best way to make the right choice is not keep track of the information.

With the high school graduation rate of only 33 per cent, kids in the care of CFS are given anything but the good start in life they deserve. Kids who have had no contact with CFS have a graduation rate of 89 per cent. This is a huge difference.

How can this government claim they are doing a good job with kids in care with only a 33 per cent graduation rate?

Mr. Allum: I'm glad to hear that the member finally acknowledged that our graduation rates have gone from 71 per cent to upwards of 87 per cent in Manitoba.

We make every effort on this side of the House to ensure a quality education for every child in Manitoba. When the—when it became clear that we needed proper, evidence-based analysis, we asked the centre to do the necessary research and then we would move on to an important task force that brings educators and social service workers together along with other stakeholders—and the community, by the way—in order to ensure that we get the best collective result for those children.

On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to stand behind those children, work with community and ensure good outcomes for every kid in Manitoba.

Healthy Baby Initiative Program Funding

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, Healthy Baby is a program for young mothers and their newborn babies that has been delivered by Healthy Child for many years.

In fact, the concept was originated by the MLA for River East. I'm sure all members of this House will miss her when she retires this year.

Now, this service is being threatened by this minister's relentless cuts to front-line service. Facilitators are being cut by two thirds and real people who have held those positions for 10 years are being forced to compete for the few remaining jobs.

Mr. Speaker, why is this minister cutting front-line services to those young mothers and their babies?

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to this program. It's one of the best programs we have going in Manitoba. *[interjection]* Thank you. I have no problem acknowledging the member opposite for coming up with it; it's an excellent idea.

Healthy Baby program offers health and wellness information, support and 'research', group sessions to pregnant women and their families, new parents. It's one of our signature programs, and we're very, very proud that we have continued it and it has touched many, many thousands of people over the years. So we're very grateful. We can't stress enough what an excellent program it is.

The Manitoba Prenatal Benefit is part of Healthy Baby, which provides a financial benefit—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, there's no question it's a good program, but facilitators in the Healthy Baby program will now have to travel over 100 kilometres just to deliver what remains of the program. They will do three times the work delivered by one third of the staff and spend hours on the road to do so.

* (14:10)

This is a program that helps to keep families united and together and out of the CFS system. These front-line service workers are not feeling the Health Minister's happy thoughts. They and the young mothers and their babies are victims of the minister's relentless mean-spirited cuts to front-line services.

Why does this minister continue to cut front-line services?

Ms. Wight: Mr. Speaker, we have not cut this program, so I don't actually know what the member opposite is speaking of.

But in 2013-2014, for example, Mr. Speaker, over 3,688 women received the Manitoba Prenatal Benefit from—and recently, in fact, we just did an expansion also of Families First, which is another program that works with families early on, which we believe is the answer to really reach families at the beginning, in fact, prenatally is our goal. And that's what we're doing with all of our programming. And we just increased Families First, for example, are working in one of the communities in order to bring that program closer to home for folks.

So I'm happy to keep having a chance to talk about these—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Mr. Helwer: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the minister is confused about what programs and what's going on out there. These cuts are not a—the fictitious rewrite of history spewed out by this minister's propaganda machine. They are real cuts happening to real people in real time, now. That time is now, not some alternate universe 20 years ago in the minister's—Health Minister's happy mind.

Mr. Speaker, will this minister stop her attacks and cuts to Manitoba's front-line services and help those young mothers and their newborn babies?

Ms. Wight: Well, I'm mystified by what the—what he's talking about.

But I'm not mystified, Mr. Speaker, by what would happen if members opposite were to come into power. We know what happened under their watch: \$48 million was cut back in child tax benefits from these same people. And quite honestly, I find it disturbing that they have even the gall to be speaking about things when they're talking about bringing half a billion dollars in cuts. That is not going to be helping our babies. It's not going to be helping our families.

And we need to be continuing to do the very things that we're doing here that make our families happier and healthier families.

Hydro Projections Rate Increases

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, let's talk about profit and loss at Manitoba Hydro for a moment.

In 2019, Hydro's projected a loss of \$75 million; 2020, a loss of \$102 million; 2021, a loss of \$164 million; 2022, projecting a loss of \$192 million. All these losses are projected on top of a 4 per cent compound rate increase each and every year. That's more than half a billion dollars in losses in just four years.

Will the minister stop this billion-dollar boondoggle? It's a prime example of spending more and putting more debt on hard-working Manitobans.

Hon. James Allum (Acting Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Mr. Speaker, of course, when the member asks a question about Hydro, the first thing he needs to acknowledge that—is that Manitoba Hydro has among the lowest rates in Canada. And then he needs to acknowledge that when you put that together with home heating and car insurance and hydro, you have the lowest bundle of utility rates in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we invest in hydro because we want to make sure that there is a clean, reliable source of energy for Manitobans for generations to come. The member opposite clearly prefers to keep Manitobans in the dark.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, they're spending more on making the hydro rates higher each and every month, that side of the House.

Losses continue: In 2023, projected loss, \$174 million; '24, losses of \$109 million; 2025, \$38 million; 2026, \$9 million. All those losses despite 4 per cent compound rate increases each and every year. That's another \$330 million losses in just four years. That brings the total to nearly \$1 billion in eight years.

Will the minister commit to stop the boondoggle on Manitoba hard-working families?

Mr. Allum: Well, the only boondoggle in this House is the agenda of the Leader of the Opposition and all of his members in caucus, who have one agenda when it comes to Hydro, and that's to privatize one of our most valuable Crown corporations.

Let's remember the history of that side of the House. When it came to the phone company, they said they weren't going to do anything with it, then they privatized it. They tried to privatize home care; we wouldn't let them do that. Last week they said they're going to privatize child care, and then there's—going to privatize social investments into our community.

The only boondoggle, the only lack of candour on—when it comes to Hydro in this House is on that side of the House that won't share their hidden agenda with the rest of Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, let me tell the minister opposite what the Hydro employees have brought to my attention, and I'll say what he told me.

What the NDP have done to Hydro is nothing short of criminal. A rainy day fund in hundreds of million dollars that were raided. Not satisfied with that, they beefed up water rental fees; each gallon that flows through is taxed six times. The NDP made decisions based on fairy tales that go against the advice of any engineer, a person that has a brain in their head. The NDP really have misled people of Manitoba on a monumental scale.

I'd like to ask the minister: What does he say to hard-working Manitobans and one of his own Hydro employees?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, what I'll say to those folks is that they have the—among the lowest rates in Canada. We're protecting their jobs and we're providing a secure source of clean, reliable energy for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite want to privatize Manitoba Hydro. Why don't they just say it? Because the reality is they don't want to invest in

hydro; they don't want to export to the States; they don't want to work with First Nations; they don't want development in the North. The only thing they want is to turn off the lights in Manitoba and leave Manitobans in the dark, and on this side of the House we're never going to let that happen.

Information Technology Systems Auditor General's Recommendations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, as episodes around the world have emphasized, ensuring security of information technology systems must be at the very top of a government's agenda.

In Manitoba, today's government is responsible for many systems with highly sensitive information, including child abuse records, witness protection records, Cabinet minutes, pretrial prosecution files, as examples.

The Auditor General, in his recent report, emphasizes that far too many of his recommendations have not been completed, that the government is moving far too slow and is not taking this issue seriously.

Why has the government failed to pay adequate attention to the security of provincial information technology systems?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for River Heights.

The Auditor General has given us the report on how to improve information protection. The response from the government has been—is that they take that seriously.

They are making very significant investments in information protection as well as new technologies for the transfer and protection of information in Manitoba. Many of these projects are long-term projects that have long-term investment horizons, but we clearly have taken the recommendations seriously and have our own program to protect information.

Every single day governments around the world, including this one, have hackers trying to break into the system. We're aware of that, which is why we are one of the first jurisdictions to set up an Information Protection Centre with some of the best expertise anywhere in North America. They work every day to put systems in place to stop hackers accessing our information. Technology evolves every single day. Software evolves every single day. It's a constant battle out there to protect that information.

Our folks are fully seized of the challenge of doing that and we are making significant investments to support them in doing that, and we'll continue to do so in the future.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report was more than two years ago.

Last week the Auditor General reported on what had been actually implemented, and he found that far too little had actually been implemented. The recommendations which the government has failed to complete include that the Information Protection Centre, which the Premier talks about, should actually establish standard IT security requirements and that the government's BTT should develop and implement minimum physical security requirements for data centres.

* (14:20)

You know, why aren't these in place? Common sense, sensible measures. Why aren't they in place years ago and why are they still not in place two years after the Auditor General said they needed to be in place quickly?

Mr. Selinger: Forty-seven recommendations were made by the Office of the Auditor General; 11 have been implemented, 35 are a work in process, and one is they have not agreed with it and prepared to have more dialogue on it.

The Information Protection Centre has very highly qualified and skilled people that spend all of their time making sure the information in this government is protected from hackers, from people that want to use it for purposes against the public interest and against the private interests of the individuals whose information we are protecting, and we will continue to do that.

We've seen many threats over the years, thousands of threats on an annual basis, and that is going on all around the world. There's a whole cyber world out there of attempts to bust into systems to compromise information. Our folks have done a very good job in that. They know they can make further improvements. Every single day there are new techniques being advanced by doing that.

We just funded a cyber-security academy at Sisler High School and that academy is producing some of the best cyber-security young people anywhere in North America. That academy is open to anybody in Winnipeg or, indeed, Manitoba that wants to attend it. That is a state-of-the-art academy

in a high school with support from the University of Winnipeg and Red River community college. Very few—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable First Minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, two years and only 11 of 47 recommendations implemented; that's only about 25 per cent. Twenty-five is way below 50 per cent; that's a failure rate by any standard.

Efficient, effective and secure IT systems are really critical to good government, but this government has had problems from the beginning with broadband access, with co-ordinated and effective health information systems, with emergency medical information systems, with information systems for CFS and many more. Today's NDP needs to act and not just to prevaricate.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier complete all 47 recommendations, or even if he doesn't complete one, all 46 of what they say they want to complete? When—when—when?

Mr. Selinger: As I've said, we've—we take the recommendations seriously. Our technical people that look after information protection are acting on those recommendations. They've completed 11; 35 are in process; one they wish to discuss further with the Auditor General.

The member's completely—and we will be happy to discuss this at the Public Accounts Committee and we can go into detail on that if he wishes. He needs to know that we have a very skilled workforce working on this in Manitoba. We've made very significant investments in IT protection and information protection in Manitoba.

We are modernizing legislation to do that, including for the new archives which will protect the information for residential schools in Manitoba. And we have a bill in front of the Legislature. We'd like to see that bill passed right now so we can have that information protected and properly supported in Manitoba.

All the members of the opposition have to do, Mr. Speaker, is they can support the budget. They could support the bill. If they support the budget, more investments will be made in IT protection, more investments will be made in high schools in places like the cyber-security academy and we'll be ready to move on the bill immediately.

Workers' Compensation PTSD Legislation

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, our government believes in supporting working Manitobans in all occupations.

On Monday, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and Minister of Labour and Immigration announced groundbreaking workers' compensation legislation that seeks to help any worker who faces traumatic incidents in the workplace that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Can the minister tell us more about this first-in-Canada legislation?

Hon. Erna Braun (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Monday, indeed, was a great day. The Premier and I were joined by members of MGEU, the Paramedic Association of Manitoba, UFFW and the Manitoba Nurses Union to announce new presumption legislation for workers who suffer traumatic events at the workplace that result in PTSD.

This first-in-Canada legislation will recognize PTSD as a work-related occupational disease and the Workers Compensation Board will presume their condition was caused by the job, making it much easier to access supports, treatment and compensation.

Psychological injuries can happen absolutely—to absolutely anyone regardless of what they do for a living, and our government believes all workers deserve timely access to compensation and support services. Our goal is to ensure that workers with PTSD receive the treatment they need—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It is now time for members' statements.

Alison Desjardins

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask yourself and the rest of my colleagues in this Chamber to take a moment to join me in congratulating Alison Desjardins from Birtle. She received the Manitoba Society of Pharmacists Award of Merit on April 18th.

The award of merit is presented to a member of the Manitoba Society of Pharmacists that actively participates and promotes contributions that benefit the society and the profession of pharmacy. Alison has served in many roles including second vice-president, sitting on the board of directors and chairing numerous committees since she graduated from pharmacy at the University of Manitoba in 1995.

Alison describes the pharmacy in a rural community as being one of the only real constants in health care while many doctors come and go. Along with her husband Steve, Alison has spent the last 15 years as the owner and manager of the Birtle Pharmacy. On June 19th, the business is having an official grand opening of their new location. It was clear to the couple that they had outgrown their old location, and in order to provide more professional pharmacy services, they built a new one. Taking the plunge and building a new pharmacy in what Alison calls, and the community agrees, is an investment in the Birtle and surrounding area.

In addition to running the pharmacy and raising three active boys, Alison and Steve invest countless volunteer hours into the community. Alison is a board member and volunteer for the local palliative care committee, sits on the donor choice committee and has served on various other health committees as they come up. Meanwhile, Steve runs a local motel called the Desjard-Inn and has been president of the rink board and minor hockey, on the executive of minor ball and the fitness centre and is a Lions Club member.

I would like to thank Alison and Steve for all their hard work in the—within the community of Birtle and say congratulations again on her well-deserved award of merit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Fort Garry Community Network

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): In south Winnipeg, we are very fortunate to be home to the Fort Garry Community Network. The network was established in 1999 to identify the needs of community and develop ways to address these needs by creating a stronger and healthier community for everyone. In particular, the Fort Garry Community Network promotes the healthy development of children, youth, seniors and families.

The network is made up of service providers and residents within the WRHA Fort Garry catchment

area, which includes Fort Garry, Fort Richmond, St. Norbert, Whyte Ridge, Linden Woods and Waverley West. Members meet regularly to share community news, identify local issues and share resources. The network schedules guest speakers to provide members with the opportunity to continue learning about resources that are available to them and the residents of their neighbourhoods.

The network's newcomer advisory committee supports programs for new immigrants, identifies gaps in services and provides support to the neighbourhood settlement worker. This committee plays a valuable role as the neighbourhood settlement worker welcomes newcomers to our community and assists them in accessing resources.

Through the years, the network has supported programs for seniors, after-school programs for children with disabilities, neighbourhood family centres for preschool children and their families and youth recreation programs. Since it began in 1999, the Fort Garry Community Network has proven to be an invaluable resource to south Winnipeg. It continues to bring organizations, service providers and interested residents together, working towards a common goal of creating a vibrant and healthy community.

55 Plus Games

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, every year, hundreds of Manitobans aged 55 and over gather in one of our communities to participate and compete in a wide range of events to promote and encourage healthy and active living among our seniors. I am proud to say that this year, the community of Beausejour will be hosting the 33rd annual Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries 55 Plus Games on June 16th to 18th. The Manitoba Society of Seniors hosted the first 55 Plus Games in 1983 and, after many successful years, in 2011 handed the reins over to Active Living Coalition for Older Adults in Manitoba who continue the success.

The 55 Plus Games provide activities that encourage not only physical and recreational participation but also promote entertainment events including a variety concert and an athletes' banquet where seniors can socialize among their peers. The theme of this year's 55 Plus Games is Never Too Old To Play. It is an appropriate theme as there are female and male participants who are over 90 years of age.

* (14:30)

A number of seniors enjoy the experience of the 55 Plus Games so that—so much that they travel to wherever the games are being held to participate. It is expected that more than 1,000 athletes will be competing in over 25 events that range from snooker to slo-pitch.

The community of Beausejour is not new to hosting international or provincial events and the success of these events are largely due to the dedication, experience and commitment of our volunteers. Our community volunteers offer and provide a level of excellence that is comparable to events held in large urban centres, and I can promise that the 33rd Manitoba 55 Plus Games will be another success to add to the list.

I would like to thank the Beausejour host committee and the long list of volunteers, community accommodation hosts, the Town of Beausejour, RM of Brokenhead and all the local businesses who continue to support and welcome special events like the Manitoba 55 Plus Games.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the House to enter the organizing committee's names and their positions for this year's event.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to include the names that the honourable member referenced in his members' statements in today's Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Chair, Bruce Schade; Co-Chair/Treasurer, Bunn Baxter; Headquarters Chair, Karen Berry; Banquet Chair, Louise Keefe; Sport Chair, Stan Pleskach; Awards Chair, Russell Wychreschuk; Equipment Chair, Charlie Relf; Medical Chair, Donna Ray-Litke; Sponsorship/Advertising Chair, Rick Steffanson; Transportation Chair, Al Hunnie; Secretary, Donna Demarco.

Flintabbatey Flonatin

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): I have been looking forward to giving this member's statement all session. Back in March, Travel Manitoba put on the Roadside Madness competition, pitting prairie giants from all over Manitoba against each other to find out which one of these iconic statues is most popular.

You may already have guessed who won the competition since I'm giving this statement, and you would be right. The grand champion at the end of the day was none other than Flin Flon's fabulous famous figure, Flintabbatey Flonatin.

The competition was held in a single elimination format, and people from across the province were able to cast their votes for their favourite roadside attraction. In each consecutive round, the attraction that received the most votes moved on to the next round. It seems that Flinty was a crowd favourite right from the start.

In the first round of the competition he sped past McCreary's Alpine Archie with ease. In the next round, Flinty was matched up against Dauphin's Beaver, who tried to take a bite out of him but couldn't hack it. In the quarter-final round, Gimli Viking gave him a good fight but Flinty ended up giving him the axe. The semifinals saw Flinty matched up against Erickson's Viking Ship, which he scuttled with ease.

It was the final round that was truly a matchup of titans: Flintabbatey Flonatin versus Glenboro's Sara the Camel. In the end just over 7,000 Manitobans cast their vote and helped Flinty leave Sarah standing in the dust hogtied.

I know that all 32 communities in Manitoba who are home to roadside attractions are very proud of their giants. From Churchill's polar bear to Steinbach's Rolls Royce, these statues are full of charm and they often tell a story of their town.

But Flintabbatey Flonatin wasn't worried about their charm. He tamed the polar bear and crushed the Rolls. Flinty really doesn't like to gloat; he's far too modest for that, so I have to do the gloating for him. There can no longer be any doubt as to which town has the greatest attraction, and I think Flinty wears that honour well.

Thank you.

Today's NDP

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is receiving a lot of global attention in the last week, and not all of it is complimentary.

It's nice that we have the FIFA World Cup happening here and the Canadian museum of human rights is popular, but when the Minister for Infrastructure pipes up and says that under today's NDP we have one of the most dysfunctional legislatures in the world and one of our noted scientists, Dr. Marni Brownell, says Manitoba has one of the highest rates of children in care in the world, we had better pay attention. The comments of the Minister for Infrastructure and of Dr. Brownell are likely related.

With government dysfunction contributing to poor outcomes for children, the report of Dr. Brownell points out that the children in the care of today's NDP government, for whom the government is the guardian, are not faring well. They are getting a poor start in life. By the time they enter school, a large proportion, 53 per cent, are not ready for school; they are already behind. During school, on many measures, they remain behind.

Children in care scored lower on math and reading assessments in grades 3, 7 and 8 and on achievement tests taken in grade 12. Less than one third graduated from high school.

Today's NDP are all talk and no action. The government talks about helping families but at the same time makes a large effort to apprehend many more children from their families and put more of them into care. The government talks about being better organized but one of their own ministers stands up to say that this is one of the most disorganized governments—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, the member for River Heights, and I hesitate to interrupt him, but he's referred three times to a matter that you've taken under advisement and I'd ask that he be cautioned, please.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for—the Official Opposition House Leader, I was going to allow the member for River Heights to conclude his remarks before I caution the House, because I clearly heard at the beginning of the member's statement where the honourable member for River Heights said he had referenced the matter I have taken under advisement and have not yet provided a ruling to the House. So I'm going to caution the honourable member for River Heights to not make reference while this matter is under consideration by the Speaker.

And I thank the honourable member—Official Opposition House Leader for his point of order.

So I'm going to caution the honourable member for River Heights to quickly conclude your member

statement, please, and to not reference the matter under consideration.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, as I noted in question period, we have a government which has not been able to implement important recommendations from the Auditor General to address the information technology needs of our province which are central to improve organization and function. In this and many other matters we need improvement. It's time to change the government. It's time for a Liberal government.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Could we resolve the House into Committee of Supply in three sections of the Legislature: the Legislative Chamber, 254 and 255.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker, will you please take the Chair, and the various committee Chairs to the committee rooms.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

* (14:50)

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 ever-exciting Department of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

And I understand the minister has some answers to put on the record that the critic had asked for previously, so, with the committee's permission, we'll start there.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I begin by tabling the document that was requested regarding

the staff for my office and that of the deputy minister's office.

Mr. Chairperson: Do you have three copies?

Ms. Blady: Oh, yes. Three copies. Here we go.

And I was just also wanting to know, again—and this is about furthering the ability to communicate between our two offices—I know that my staff often interacts with the member's staff and to resolve constituency concerns, and just wanted to confirm if she'd be able to provide the names of her staff to us as well so that we can make sure that we are in communication with the right folks.

And the second part of it, there was a question regarding the square footage for the new Grace emergency department compared to the current. The current size of the Grace emergency department is approximately 10,000 square feet, not including the ambulance carport. The new emergency department will be approximately 38,000 square feet, which includes a 2,700-square-foot ambulance garage and 3,000 square feet of circulation space, which is the public corridor which is access—to the ACCESS centre, the MRI and main hospital lobby. So the increase is one of approximately 28,000 square feet.

And I know that community members from all over west Winnipeg are really excited about these new developments at the Grace, and, again, it was in talking to folks at the gala that I could—saw how they were really looking forward to the improvements there and the—seeing those kinds of expansions happening at the Grace.

So I think that was everything in follow-up.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Recognizing which—I've got two hands—honourable member for River East.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I just have a couple of short questions for information from the minister.

I wonder if she could indicate to me when the prenatal program was cut from the River East ACCESS Centre. I'm understanding that there no longer are prenatal classes running at that facility.

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question. This—looking back at my notes, there was a similar question last week regarding a discussion of cuts to services at the Birth Centre, and I was able to get information there that, in fact, none of the programs that had been alleged to be cut were, in

fact, cut at all—just having staff connect with the ACCESS centre and RHA to see if there have been any programming changes related to that program.

I can say that it was actually very nice to be out at an ACCESS centre today, because one of—the ACCESS centres are now being connected into part of our cancer hub, so it's—that's one of the things that I have to say that I really like about the ACCESS centre is the breadth of programming that's available there from the primary health-care perspective and whether that's things like the prenatal classes and where that links in to the kinds of supports that we do provide for mothers in terms of maternal care, but now also to be able to offer that immediate access at first sign of suspicion in terms of cancer treatment.

So, again, in terms of the things that have been happening in maternal health care, I know that our dedicated 24-7 Health Link to maternity units and neonatal intensive cares, you know, expanded to all of Manitoba's birthing hospitals—it goes to the larger investments in—made in maternal care, including the new Women's Hospital, HSC, and \$2 million to further expand the maternity ward at St. Boniface as well as the opening of the midwife-led Birth Centre in south Winnipeg and expanding midwifery training into southern Manitoba and, as well, for those where there are challenges with conception, introducing a new fertility tax credit, being the second province to do so.

So I will endeavour to get the specifics. I—that is, staff are currently trying to connect to see if there have been any programming changes but, as I said, with the previous question along a similar line, we were able to determine that, in fact, no changes had occurred. So.

Mrs. Mitchelson: If I could just follow up, then, because I'm hearing from some fairly reliable sources that work right within the ACCESS centre that the prenatal program has been cut, and so I'm not questioning their comments or their questions—been a significant concern in the northeast quadrant of the city of Winnipeg for families that need that kind of support. So I would ask the minister if she could endeavour to find that out and put it on the record for me.

And I just want her to confirm—she may have had a question around the same kind of issue from elsewhere—that: Has there been any directive from her department in any way that would see prenatal classes throughout the city of Winnipeg or throughout the province being reduced in any way?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question, I can tell you, as someone that has benefited greatly by the kinds of prenatal classes that are available in our health-care system, especially the prenatal classes that I was fortunate enough to have with a midwife for the—my second child in 2003 and knowing the value of prenatal classes to, again, some in this very room and what it's meant for their families, that I would not give that kind of directive at all. So I can assure her that there has been no directive from my department in that regard.

Investment in prenatal care is very important, and it is one of those things that, again—it sets the foundation—that a healthy pregnancy leads to a healthy child, and a healthy child can go on and flourish.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): When I, on Monday, was asking questions of the minister, one of the questions asked was about the collaborative emergency centre pilot project that was supposed to be started in Vita at the beginning of 2013, and I wasn't very satisfied with the minister's answer so I got a little passionate about it, but I'll give the minister the opportunity to answer that question again for me.

*(15:00)

Ms. Blady: I do thank the member for the question, and it was unfortunate, in terms of the timing, how we got to the end of the day before I was able to give an answer that I can say that I was also satisfied with because in terms of the work that's going on at Vita, I think it's very important in terms of what it means for that community. And I do appreciate the member's passion and, again, the fact that this has been, as he's mentioned, that I'm now the third minister that you've had to talk to about this, so I want to make sure that we are doing the right thing there and that, in terms of that—the development of that project—I know that we're working actively with the RHA and the community in that regard because of how important it is.

And, again, as you've—again, you are probably more aware than most people that we have, again, made it very clear that we want to be able to test that collaborative emergency care centre model in Vita and that, again, discussions are still under way on how to best staff and formalize the model, and appreciating that our goal would—for it be—for it to be the first site. And the one thing that I do want to say is that we want to make sure that, in coming up with this model, that we ensure that as part of that

package that position remuneration funding remains in place, so the commitment is to, again, ensure that that position is maintained and filled as well as, again, building the collaborative care model.

Mr. Smook: I appreciate the minister's answer, but in the last 18 months we have heard nothing about this. It was supposed to be a pilot project, so I imagine the pilot project is the way the minister gets answers to whether or not it will work. So by saying that we're trying to make it the right way, well, I think that's the reason of having a pilot project.

In the last 18 months I've heard nothing, and yet from the RHA we hear rumblings about, well, they're having a hard time, they're struggling just to get enough doctors to keep the clinic open, so they are not really looking at, right now, opening the emergency, the ER. So this—according to the previous two ministers, this collaborative emergency centre is very important to that southeast, and they stated that it was ready to go within 30 days back in 2013. It was a matter of 30 or 60 days before they could launch that. All it needed was Treasury Board's approval, from what my understanding is.

Is this still the case, or what is happening, because I feel the residents of southeastern Manitoba are getting shafted right now? We have inferior health care for the people out there. It's not right.

Ms. Blady: Well, I just want to, again, thank the member for both the question and, again, the appreciation for the frustration that he and the community must be feeling because, again, in knowing the history of this particular development I know that part of the issue that we have within the department right now is that there has been a change in staffing as to who is the lead on this particular file and some conversations and some direction that were given. And so we have a new person that is on top of this new file and is looking at, again, the kinds of partnership that exists, what's there, and, again, looking at the quality of the proposal and making sure that it does meet the needs, so that is the one thing that I can assure the member is that, again, it's about the work that is being done.

So, in terms of comments relative to Treasury Board, I can tell the member that those things are taken very seriously and that it's always making sure that any proposals that are brought forth are strong. So, if there was more work that needs to be done to tighten up the proposal, I will ensure that direction is given to the department and to the RHA to make sure that we do have the right things in place to make sure

that we can, again, pilot this here in Vita, because I do believe that the need for front-line services is something that, again, your concern for is valid and that we can move forward on. I would like to see it done, you know, in a timely manner as well. I don't want any Manitobans at risk for lack of front-line services.

Mr. Smook: Would the minister be able to provide me or show me where in the budget there is money set aside for this project?

Ms. Blady: I just wanted to thank the member again for the question, and as I—I think what I'd said earlier, just to clarify, was that the financial resources for the physician remuneration funding are allotted for. And, again, wanting to make sure that those remain in place as this moves forward, and, again, that this project, like any other capital investment project, would, as indicated, go to TB and seek—would be approved there.

Mr. Smook: Yes, Ms. Minister, I can see where you've kept money aside for the doctor, that's what they're saying, but where does it show in there that there's actually money for this test project?

I mean, this goes to show the inability—I mean, three years, and nothing has been done. The leadership—would the minister be able to provide me with any documentation to show that there has been work done on this file in the last three years or two and a half years, whatever it might be?

Because, I mean, the people of southeastern Manitoba are very frustrated. They feel that they deserve more than they're getting. And two ministers have come out and made promises, first of all, that the closure would be no more than 30 days, now it's led up to almost three years. They promised a collaborative emergency centre. That is not happening. I mean, where's the management?

Just because a leader has left from someplace in the department, there was no files to provide to the next person that could read up on it and bring it back? I mean, provide me some documentation to prove that this is the fact, that it's not just an answer that I can't do anything about.

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question. Again, and I want to thank him for his passion and the concern. And, in terms of his concern regarding the one individual or the change in leadership, yes, there are, in fact, files that do get passed on.

In terms of the kind of documentation that he is requesting, I will just remind him that we do have confidentiality issues around Treasury Board submissions, but I will endeavour to get an update from the department with whichever documents are available to support to let him know where the project is at, at this point, and how it's moving forward. Because, again, as the local MLA, I want to make sure that you are as much in the loop as to how this is going forward and to be able to clarify so that when you get information from other sources, that you know that you've got a solid line of information.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Ms. Minister. I appreciate the answer, and it sounds like you are committing to having this as a test—like, a pilot project in the—at the Vita hospital, which is great.

Would the minister be able to give me some timelines? Which, obviously, the minister controls a lot of things, like, I know we're short of advanced-care paramedics in rural Manitoba, but there's enough of them in Winnipeg that they could probably steal a few of them or whatever from the next graduating class and make sure that they go directly to a pilot project at the Vita hospital. So I'd like the minister to put on record some timelines and for sure that this will happen.

* (15:10)

Ms. Blady: Okay, well, I'd like to thank the member again for the question. In terms of the timeline information, I can assure the member that the information that we will be getting for him will include such information and that, again, one of the issues with a project like this is, in fact, the staffing issue. So that, again, you know, it's about people applying for the jobs that are posted. So, again, we'll get the timelines out but with the understanding, knowing that there's always some flexibility in RFP's hirings, et cetera. So we will get you information that has as accurate a timeline or projected timeline as possible.

Mr. Smook: I would like to thank the minister for the information, but I'd also like to see if the minister could facilitate, because I know it's always between the minister's office, the RHA and the community. I was wondering if the minister would be interested in facilitating a meeting between the RHA, Kathy McPhail, the minister, myself and possibly one or two representatives from the community, and I think when you have three people in the room, everybody who's in charge, we can make decisions that we don't

pass the buck from one to another. And I would ask the minister if she'd be interested in facilitating that.

Ms. Blady: I think that works for me. Let's get our calendars together. I'll talk to the CEO, and let's see what we can put together because, again, if we can get together and we can meet—like I said, I've really enjoyed meeting with folks from your area in terms of the AMM, and I know that I've had opportunity to meet with, actually, with some of the members opposite that are here today. And I think that a lot of times we've made a lot of really good progress in terms of having that connection on a—on the ground, for those folks that are on the ground and have the best sense of what's going on in their neighbourhood. So I will get my staff within the department to find a time that we can put that together. And that might be opportunity to pass on the information that you've requested, or if we can get it to you sooner, we will, that you'd have it in preparation for the meeting.

Mr. Smook: I just would like to thank the minister. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good.

Moving down the table, honourable member for Riding Mountain.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I have a couple questions with regard to personal-care-home issues within my area, and it would be Prairie Mountain Health. And I appreciated the minister's comments with regard to being kept in the loop and clarifying any issues that are being raised because that's exactly where I'm going, and I look forward to getting some clarification.

With regard to No. 1, the—with regard to number of care hours per patient per day, can the minister indicate to me how those numbers are developed? What type of formula is used? For example, several personal-care homes within the Prairie Mountain region have staff-care levels that are around 3.6 hours per patient, and according to one staff person within one of my RHAs who was very concerned because indicated that wasn't even close to accurate; in fact, she indicated that an estimate time for a patient classified as a level 3, 4—or to a 4—is actually getting only 95 minutes of care per day on her—in her ratio. And I think that's alarming.

So I'm wanting to know if the minister can comment on what was shared with me in a recent meeting and also clarify what the formula is use—what formula they use.

Ms. Blady: Well, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

And I guess I would first like to begin by asking that if there is a particular case that has come up where someone has not lived up to the standards—we have a standard that is required of 3.6 hours per resident day. That's the—and if that is not happening, then that's something that needs to be investigated. So I would ask if she could pass on all information that she has that she thinks would be useful to my office so that we can pursue this. Because, again, the kind of care that we want for our friends and families in PCHs, sounds like that is not living up to the standard that I would want and expect for folks.

Mrs. Rowat: Based on what I'm hearing from staff, that's not an isolated incident. There are issues like this happening on a continual basis, and these issues have been raised with management and don't appear to be listened to. And when I've been questioning management with regard to FIPPAs and requests, I'm actually receiving varied information and being told that—the responses I'm getting from management within the RHA is not accurate. So I'm asking now for the minister to intervene and do some asking on my behalf and, also, obviously, the resident's behalf, because the services aren't being provided.

The next question is with regard to standards review procedures being scheduled. There's been several concerns raised with regard to that process. I understand that standard reviews, when they are considered unannounced standard reviews, should be such. My understanding is that that is not the case in some of the personal-care homes that I represent within my riding, that actually the standards reviews are being shared—the unannounced ones are being shared and prep work is being done ahead of time.

So is this common practice, that unannounced standard reviews are actually being shared ahead of time?

*(15:20)

Ms. Blady: Like—again, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

That I can assure her that in terms of the standards review procedure and how scheduling works, that is part of a continuous quality-improvement aspect. There's a combination of both scheduled and unannounced visits. So they do a combination of both of them so that, again, I think it's probably the fairest way of being able to do it so that, again, things are—when a visit occurs, we're

seeing what's actually happening on the ground, especially in an unscheduled visit.

Now, regarding the sharing of findings, if there's a situation where there has been a visit to a PCH and where something can be—where the system can learn from the findings there, what happens is those findings are shared but they are shared within a manner where it becomes, I guess you say, generic. The information, the findings, are not shared in a way that would involve any kind of—the ability to identify anything that could lead to any sort of blaming or shaming, that kind of thing. It's the here's a learning moment. We're going to have it described in a manner that allows for it to be shared without breaching confidentiality but be something by where—by which the system can learn from it. So they don't want—we don't want to sit on any valuable information that could help other PCHs.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm familiar with the outcomes, but my concern that has been raised to me—or the concern that's been raised to me, which is very concerning to me, is the process and the—process of scheduling, the standards review procedures.

And, I guess, does the minister think that it's fair that the PCHs have time to prepare for an unannounced standards review when a lot of the staff are saying, we're supposed to be already meeting those at all times, so why are we being told an unannounced standards review process—or procedure is going to be taking place on such and such a day so we need to get ready for this because they will be coming in? And the nurses are saying, we have to meet these standards all the time. Why are we being put—all tasks are being put to the side until we can reach those requirements—point No. 1. Point No. 2 is why are we learning of an unannounced standards review process ahead of time.

You know, that is actually, you know, in contradiction of the title. So, you know, I'm wanting the minister to just be concerned as I am with regard to this breach of protocol with regard to this process.

Ms. Blady: Again, I'd like to thank the member for the question because, again, the unannounced reviews, when they are planned, they are planned in conjunction with the RHA program staff as they participate on the review team, but the facility is not aware or they should not be aware.

So, again, if you have examples of that, if there's any information, individuals you—that you feel we can contact to clarify that, because, again, I want the

unannounced ones to be exactly that for the very reasons that you mention, that these are the standards that are supposed to be in place. That is what people are supposed to be doing, and the whole point of an unannounced visit is, in fact, that it is unannounced.

Mrs. Rowat: I think I've got an example of why the unannounced might be preannounced.

Minnedosa had a leaking roof, which has been an ongoing issue for over five years. It has never been put on the priorities list by the Prairie Mountain Health, even though there have been a number of safety and security issues with regard to that happening.

When I asked the RHA with regard to where it is on the list for—of priorities, the list I received did not include the Minnedosa hospital. And, when you have a situation where there have been strategically placed buckets to keep water off the floor, you know the standards aren't being met. It's not safe for staff; it's not safe for residents. And, you know, a roof repair is required.

What happens is when the standard review occurs, they patch. My understanding, and this is what I've been told by staff, is that they patch the roof until the review is done and then off they go and then nothing gets done.

My concern is two parts: No. 1, when I asked the RHA and Brian Schoonbaert responded to me in a letter saying, this is the first I've heard of this incident, staff were outraged because that was an outright misrepresentation of what they raised with me, because it was wrong.

Number 2, it looks like they're trying to circumvent a standard review process, and I'm angry about this because the residents are suffering from this and the staff are have—being put in a very difficult situation. And when I get the RHA sending the MLA a letter which is absolutely false, I think the minister should be made aware of it and I'm sharing that with you. So here's the reason why I think that that has happened.

So now I'm going to go into another situation where there's been a resident's room with no heat through most of the winter. Again, I was told this is not happening. There was no critical incident report made or followed up on by the department. The family actually had to bring in a heater to keep the resident warm. I again was told that this was not correct, that this was not the truth, when I know from the family member that they did purchase a heater.

They did provide the heat within the room. This was confirmed by staff within the facility and, again, there didn't appear to be any record of incident reports and maintenance requests were not responded to.

So, again, I ask the minister, you know, will she confirm for me that she will follow up on my concerns that have been raised by the staff and the family members within that facility?

Ms. Blady: I do definitely want to thank the member for the question because, again, we will look into the Minnedosa concerns. And I just want to make sure that in light of the two concerns, is this the same facility that had the unannounced visit concerns?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Ms. Blady: Okay, any and all information that you can provide or that correspondence, et cetera, anything that you think will help in our—in terms of our investigation and follow-up, I would appreciate you passing on to staff, because I expect families and residents to receive the best care possible. And, if they're not and if there's something that can be investigated, then, yes, we will follow up with that.

Mrs. Rowat: This is not just one facility and, I guess, when I—raising this and I'm being specific to one facility with a couple of incidents, this is not the only facility in my constituency that is facing these types of issues.

I know for a fact Russell hospital—or Russell personal care has—facing the same types of issues. They're aged facilities. The staff are doing the best they can, and I am very concerned that if standard review procedures are not being followed properly, that unannounced reviews are being done and being done once—little patchwork, you know, things are being completed. Then you're not—they're not supporting anybody. They're not helping the residents. They're not supporting the staff and they're undermining the needs within the communities that deserve better.

And so I appreciate the minister's agreement to look into this and I'm looking forward to further dialogue with her.

Ms. Blady: Again, just want to thank her, and you mentioned now the Russell facility. Again, any information regardless of which facility it's at, again, please follow up, connect with my staff, and we'll pursue this.

* (15:30)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Just to follow up on some of those questions, when reviews are done or inspections are done, where are they reported? Is there an inventory, and can the minister tell me how many of the reviews that are done indicate that standards are being met? Or do we have some sort of reporting procedure and is that kind of report made public?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question. In regards to the reporting of, you know, what happens in an inspection and what findings are there, as mentioned before, again, if there is a learning opportunity that's there, that information is shared in a manner that, again, allows for system learning without violating any kind of confidentiality.

In terms of this—the information being collected and how it's being reported, I can assure the member that part of what happens with that information is it's used regarding any future licensing, so it's what makes a difference between whether a licence is renewed or not. And having brought in the PCH standards in 2005 and having put them into law, which was, again, a significant achievement according to the Auditor General at the time, that there—as discussed earlier, the visits are every two years to be inspected against standards including infection control, involving residents and family in terms of care, restraint use and ensuring a safe and secure resident environment as well as a safe and secure working environment for those providing care.

The unannounced visits—again, the unannounced inspections, again, began in 2004, and we've, again, increased the frequency of those. Now, should a facility not meet a standard, they are required to develop an action plan within 60 days and implement it within another 60 days. And at any point in this time, Manitoba Health may perform an unannounced visit to check up on the facility and ensure that the action plan is under way.

Now, the department is actively working on trying to find a way of, in publicly reporting, making reporting of findings as they relate to the long-term-care system, a way that strikes a balance. The concern is that in wanting to ensure that we view standards—we take it from the approach of, again, this continuous quality improvement approach, so the idea being we want to make sure that we're learning from previous experience but at the same time find this balance where we can learn from previous experience but not—and focus on safety for

patients and for those working there, but in terms of findings, not wanting findings in being recorded to look like there's a punitive, accusatory perspective. So it's about striking a balance around the respect for the individuals involved as well as the safety.

We'd like to create a situation where, again, if we're—what's being done right, what can we learn from what we're doing right, so that in those places where there is still room for growth and improvement we can take those learnings and, again, make the improvements.

So, but to let her know that there is, again, active work going on, on trying to find the best way of getting that information out there so that it both reflects what might need to change at certain places but, at the same time, does so in a way that's respectful of the hard work that folks do in our personal care homes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So that if facilities are inspected and they're not meeting the standards, they're asked to develop an action plan, they're given 60 days, and then another 60 days? And I think that was—are there facilities—personal-care-home facilities out there today that have provisional licences only because they haven't met the standards?

Ms. Blady: I just want to—it's not information that we have right at hand with all the different licences that are in place, but I will endeavour to get that information. The department will look for that and get that information to the member so that we can get—put accurate information on the record.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I appreciate that answer. I think it's really important to know, because I do know when—in—sort of in the child care field, in our child-care facilities, if there's not enough—if we don't have the requirement of the appropriate numbers of staff to meet the standards, provisional licences are given, and there are several in the child-care system that have provisional licences because they can't meet the standards, and I'm just asking for that kind of information for our personal care homes.

Now, we talked a little bit earlier about the standard for the number of hours of care for level 3 and level 4.

Can the minister indicate to me whether all personal care home facilities are funded to meet the staffing requirements? Are they provided with the appropriate funding to meet those staffing levels?

* (15:40)

Ms. Blady: Thank the member for the question. In terms of the funding model, you should recall that we fund the RHAs in a global manner. So the RHAs are funded in a global manner and we ask RHAs to ensure that, again, they maintain the practice and the appropriate funding in place for the 3.6 hours per resident day, per resident, regardless of level. So it's—the funding is not on a per level basis so that, again, it's up to the RHAs to ensure that they are providing funding to the PCHs within their region at an—in an appropriate fashion and so that is left at their discretion, but if there's a situation where she feels that there is underfunding or inadequate funding, again, I would appreciate any information she has. But, again, the RHA does the funding in a global manner, or they receive their funding in a global manner.

Mr. Matt Wiebe, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mrs. Mitchelson: Have the RHAs, then, received the appropriate increases in their budgets to accommodate the increased staffing costs or salaries that are provided to health-care workers that work within our personal-care-home system? Have the regional health authorities received the appropriate increase in funding to accommodate the staffing levels required by standard?

Ms. Blady: Actually, in follow up to a previous question regarding the PCHs and whether there were any PCHs in the province that have been—that have a conditional or a provisional licence, I can assure the member that there are in fact none in that regard, that is, all facilities are currently operating with a full licence.

And, to the other aspect of the question regarding staffing that—and funding budgets, I know—I'm just going to check on some exact numbers here, but I'll provide some answers while I wait for the subsequent information from the departmental staff.

Again, part of it is making sure that we have hired more nurses and health-care aides in the personal-care homes to ensure that each resident does get the dedicated staff time. And it's about adding things like, you know, 1,000 PCH and supportive-housing beds and having hundreds more in development right now. You know, it's one way of ensuring that our loved ones can age safely and closer to home.

And, again, every health region in Manitoba does have a variety of specialized units, for example, for those that require secure beds. And so, again, it's

even things like working with the Alzheimer Society to implement the P.I.E.C.E.S. dementia education program which again, provides Alzheimer and dementia training to the PCH staff in all our RHAs. And, again, that really empowers caregivers with tools and strategies to better identify and meet the complex care needs of the patients.

And what I'm really happy to see is that, in fact, within the RHA, there was an innovative variation done of the P.I.E.C.E.S. program, and it actually helped reduce the use of antipsychotic drugs among PCH patients. So it's those kinds of things that we've brought into place to ensure the safety, and it's those kinds of investments. And so I hope, again, hope the member appreciates what gets done in terms of the kinds of investments that are made.

And, again, just looking at exact budgeting numbers here, if you give me a moment, I'll provide the rest of the answer in a moment.

In response to the member's question regarding the impact on RHA budgets for this kind of—in this particular situation and have they received the necessary increases—how those increases in funding operate are related to the contracts that are negotiated in the collective agreements; for example, the most recent one with MNU is a good example. And what happens is that the—when the contract is negotiated and if there are any increases, the amount of that increase is then—again, as the RHAs require, indicating how many FTEs, those kinds of things, they come to us with, yes, we have X number of nurses, and so it's based on the funding that's provided to the RHAs for staffing. So that's how the baseline—that's how that funding is moved into the RHA budgets. It's as per what is negotiated within the collective agreement.

And I can say that, again, the most recent collective agreement is one that I know that Manitoba nurses are very happy with, because, again, it was one that was supported by 90 per cent of their members as a four-year agreement. And it did a variety of things, including improving scheduling practices to reduce overtime, for example, and creating a balance of full-time and part-time positions, as well as work-life balance in addition to the remuneration changes.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): I just want to ask the minister—I had a—just to let her know that I had a constituent of mine who came to my office, very concerned. Her husband had Alzheimer's. He was—they encouraged—she should panel him into a

personal-care home. So what—she was appreciative of that, but when she actually tried to apply for—to panel him into a nursing home—personal-care home, she was told that probably the first available one would be almost an hour and a half away from the town of Virden. It was actually going to be in Wawanesa or Glenboro in the same RHA, which is Prairie Mountain RHA.

So the thing was—but she also was a nurse herself, a retired nurse, and she knows many nurses in the Virden hospital and the personal-care home, and she was quite amazed that there was a big waiting list for panelled patients who need to go into personal-care homes, but there was also many beds in the personal-care home that were empty in the town of Virden because of not enough employees—not enough nurses. And the concern that we have in the town is that there's going to be—it's an aging population right now in the—in our constituency.

We have probably one of the highest aging populations in the province, and we also really require those beds to be opened. And the concern we have is that a lot of the nurses who get work are usually part-time. Some of them would like to have full-time. And this is what—just by talking to Penny Gilson, who was in Melita one—back in February, I believe, early February—she was saying that the concern was trying to find nurses. And most of the ones that were posted were part-time nurses.

So what's really the cause of all these personal-care homes being closed, and why can't we find full-time nurses?

* (15:50)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Blady: Well, first, I want to begin by thanking the member for the question, and I appreciate the personal interest that he does take in looking after his constituents.

And I guess I would begin by saying if there is an issue, and if you'd like to pass on the information of that particular constituent and work with my office to pass on anything about that situation, I would really appreciate that, because if there are issues, as you mention there, we can only investigate them if we have the information by which to begin the investigation: knowing where to start, knowing who to talk to. So if you could please connect with my staff on that specific aspect of it.

In terms of the larger question in terms of panelling, again, when the determination is made that a person needs a PCH placement, again, it's the health professionals that work with patients and their families to, you know, work—see that they get the best care that they can and their first choice of PCH placement as—if possible. We know that there are challenges, as you mentioned. We do have an aging population and that PCH residents do deserve to age with dignity, and that's why we are building more care—personal-care homes.

And it was, again, really wonderful to be out in Morden-Winkler and see the work that's going forward and the community involvement, for example, in Tabor Home, knowing that there's other ones under development in Lac du Bonnet and in Winnipeg. But, again, that doesn't meet your needs right now in what you're talking about.

So in terms of accommodations sometimes it means that if someone needs a personal-care home right away, we try to make sure that they might end up having—well, it's about getting them into the care that they need, and while it might not be in the location they want, it's about getting them the care first. But, again, once that person is there it's a matter of then getting them to the place that they want to be. But knowing that if they can get into care first, that's the most important thing.

So, again, there is very much an effort on the part of the health professionals to balance the need of accommodating personal-care-home preferences while, again, ensuring that we do work to make sure that, you know, the person is getting the care that they need as soon as they need it or as soon as we can. And, again, it's part of the reason why we're investing in the construction there.

In terms of the questions regarding the nurse positions, I mean, there are more nurses practising in Manitoba now than ever before and there are more nurse-training seats, and I've been happy to run across, you know, some of my former students and seeing the work that they do including some who do work in PCHs, and one of my best friends who's a geriatric nurse, and I really appreciate the work that she does in one of our PCHs here in town. So I know the importance of the work that they do. And, again, with the nearly 100 nursing positions that were added last year across the province, there's still much more that needs to be done in terms of recruitment and retaining nurses, especially in rural Manitoba,

and that's why, for example, like I said, the training seats were expanded.

One of the things that I'm happy to say is that we've been working with everything from internationally trained nurses, working with Red River and other educational institutions to ensure that we've got more nurses being trained. And in—but like any other professional, there is the idea that they apply for jobs and they choose to apply for jobs. So it's about also creating an environment where, how is it that we can better recruit and retain nurses, and doing the different kinds of work, whether it's investments in, again, those seats, whether it's things like, again, being able to, you know, ensure that they have places to go, wanting to get them out there.

And I know that a lot of communities have done a lot of work, and we continue to work with the RHAs in terms of trying to draw more nurses out into the rural areas. And I know that there are many of our internationally-educated nurses that are actually looking forward to, once they get their criteria met in terms of their colleges, being able to go out and work in the rural environments.

So again, if there's specific cases in terms of the PCH situation, again, I would ask that we work together and you contact my office and we'll move forward on that, but knowing that—the valuable role that nurses play in PCHs.

Mr. Piwniuk: How many beds would there be empty in the personal-care home in Virden? Or, I want to know that, but also I want to know how many beds in the personal-care homes in the Prairie Mountain Health, like, the RHA, and closed due to nursing shortages, and how many nurses would there be required to actually—to open those beds up for the panelled patients?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question. And because it's a very specific question regarding beds within Virden and within the Prairie Mountain in general, again, I would want to make sure that factual information is put on the record. So the department is going to be following up with the RHA to get specific information, and I will get that information back to the member within the course of Committee of Supply.

Mr. Piwniuk: I want to thank the minister for looking into that for us. That's very important, because it is a crisis right now in the rural areas. We have a lot of postings for nurses. We've 'meetten' with the CEO of the RHA. The concern was that there's a

lot of, you know, postings of required nurses, like, in-required, but there's no one applying for them.

And the big thing was I noticed that all the ones that she read off for the Melita area was all 0.6 to 0.7. But I know a lot of people in the constituency; I know a lot of young nurses who have graduated who want full-time. There's a disconnect between what the RHA is looking for and what there's actually wanting to do.

And I actually had a good friend who's in a business who's going to lose an employee to Morden-Winkler, because his wife had approached the RHA, the Prairie Mountain Health region, and to say that she's a nurse practitioner—there's not very many of them in Manitoba—but she could not find a job in the Prairie Mountain. She had to go to Morden-Winkler.

That's a very concern for us in the southwest, when there's such a big demand for these nurses and meanwhile they can't come up for employment in these RHAs. There's a really big disconnect—and a doctor shortage. And now, I think, we're—the—other factor that I think in Melita that the doctors have locating, is that they're not coming because they don't have the support. They don't have the nurses to support their practices.

*(16:00)

Ms. Blady: Again, I'd like to thank the member for the question. And in regards to the specific individual, again, there—that is not the kind of situation that I would want to see. And, so, again, if you've got specific information, or would like to put that individual in touch with my office so that we can endeavour to see what happens there. Because, again, in terms of positions and postings, we're actively working to ensure that we are getting the kind of folks out there.

And you're right: It is about team building, and nurse practitioners are a vital—they play a vital role, as do clinical assistants, physician's assistants, and it's really about building holistic teams. And that's where, for example, you know, in looking at the contract that was just signed with the nurses, it was about, again, committing to addressing those kinds of concerns regarding what front-line nurses want—so, about, again, the reduced use of overtime and agency nurses, a better balance of full-time and part-time positions and a focus on workplace health and safety. And, so, we need to make sure that there is the right kind of connection, where what's being posted does,

in fact, match the needs, and that it fits into, like I said, a larger aspect of team building.

I know, for example, that in terms of—I believe the member mentioned Melita, and I know that at the Melita medical centre that a new physician assistant is arriving there—Jacob John—and it was just—it was wonderful hearing that, sort of, made public and sharing that with folks through the Brandon Sun where he's going to be working under Dr. Doug Beauchamp and in the Deloraine medical clinic under Dr. Nolan Brackenreed. And so the idea there's another internationally trained individual coming to Prairie Mountain and, again, seeing that this is a gentleman that's, you know, having come from Bahrain and has then, you know, between training in the US, doing work there, achieving his master's degree, you know, choosing to come to Melita and then to take on work and in this—you know, in a specialty area, even after coming to Winnipeg—has chosen to move out to Melita, I think that's wonderful. And, you know, my understanding of the reports is that he's very much enjoying being out there. He's enjoying the community. And I know that his role in primary care in both Melita and Deloraine is really going to help in terms of assisting, providing service both in actually a personal-care home and in—and as well in the lodge in Deloraine. So it's about building a complement and a team; about having that kind of a connection.

So, again, in terms of this specific concern around the staffing, again, any connection you can make with my office to pursue that to ensure that we are ensuring that the RHAs are posting the kinds of jobs that are wanted and needed by folks that keep them in the community but are also providing the care that we want and need for our loved ones in the community.

Mr. Piwniuk: Another question I have for the minister was: With the personal-care-home beds empty because of nurse shortages, I'd like to know how many—also the question I—another question I have is: How many of these patients are now in the actual hospital waiting to be transferred into the personal-care homes when there is actually room for them, and how much it's costing Manitoba throughout the whole province—of how many people are in these hospitals, and especially in rural areas, who are waiting to go into the personal-care homes? And just to have a ratio of how much we're spending in the actual hospitals versus how much we can be getting from themselves being in personal-care homes.

Ms. Blady: I just wanted to clarify so that, again, in terms of getting the information for the member that we're getting the actual information that he wants.

When looking at the wait times—or folks waiting—in terms of waiting in hospital, folks that are awaiting a PCH placement, is he looking for wait times? Is he looking for the number of folks currently waiting in hospital for PCH, and is it just for his region and—or specific institutions, specific facilities?

Mr. Piwniuk: It's actually for—let's say—let's use an example. Let's just use Virden for instance. Let's say—how many beds are empty in the personal-care homes? How many patients are—could be in these personal-care-home beds but they're in the hospital, and how much cost is it to the Province compared to the personal-care homes when the individual family or the person actually pays for it themselves? How much are we as the—like, let's say the Province of Manitoba is actually funding those patients in these hospitals? And we'll use Virden for an example, make it easier.

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the clarification, and the situation in Virden being his concern and so I will endeavour to get that information to him. I mean, that's part of the reason why we are building the number of personal-care homes that we are and why the investments are being made in rural Manitoba, as I mentioned with Tabor Home specifically in Lac du Bonnet.

Again, in having added over a 1,000 PCH and supportive housing beds and expanded home-care needs to meet the growing number of seniors, it's part of those investments that make sure that we have our seniors, those that we love, cared for at a time where, again, the support that they've provided us over the years we return in kind the support that they now need. And with 125 licensed PCHs in Manitoba, I mean, that is six more than in 1999 and, again there are more to come so.

*(16:10)

When we look at the growth that's happened in there, you know, we've—again, even in terms of supportive housing units, it's been a tenfold increase in the past 16 years. So we're going to keep doing those things and, of course, we're going to keep building those things. I mean, again, with the five that are currently under development, bringing over 300 new beds online I think will make a difference but, again, we always have situations where folks

again—that's—I mean, that happens to so many different folks, where they maybe present at a hospital emergency room, they end up going into the hospital, and then, in leaving the hospital, their situation, their health situation has changed in such a way that they might require PCH panelling, and that's one of the things that, again, we're also working to ensure, that panelling can happen as soon as possible and that we're facilitating those moves, and I really appreciate the work that our—that is being done by front-line providers and in hospitals throughout the province to ensure that that kind of transition moves as quickly as possible and that folks are getting the care that they want and need as they transition into PCHs.

So, I thank the member, again, for the clarification and we'll endeavour to get information to him.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): One of things that happened when RHAs were amalgamated was that you have two RHAs, for example, in the southern RHA, which were combined which had different IT information systems—computer systems that were being used, and so that these were not talking with one another. And I'm just wondering what the minister's plans are to have IT systems around the province, which, in fact, are going to be able to talk with one another.

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

Technology is an interesting thing, isn't it, Mr. Chair, and to the member? And as you mentioned in your question, the—that with the amalgamation it meant that there were a variety of IT systems, and that is the amalgamation of IT systems is an interesting challenge, not just within our RHAs, but I think across the board. I mean, if we even think of our own individual uses of technology and how we often find ourselves with one piece of technology that now supersedes another and needs to be upgraded. So I can assure the member that, actually, in looking at the IT systems, whether it's the larger eHealth and the kind of planning that is being done in collaboration with the RHAs, the DSM, CancerCare, it is about taking a provincial focus and approach so that there can be consistency, so that there can be a universal system, that—but it's about how we manage with the systems that we have and how is it that we evolve those technologies.

I know that things like the RIS/PACS system, for example, with the radiography—radiology—sorry,

having a moment here—information systems is part of that. And I know that we have other systems in place that, again, in terms of some recent upgrades, have done exactly that where they have replaced long-standing systems of multiple different layers and multiple different vintages and have been able to synthesize them into one. And I look forward to being able to do those things with the understanding, as I'm sure the member is aware, that these things don't come easy.

And I know one of the issues—that I actually had a conversation with someone about—had to do—the fact due—was due to the fact that we live in a day and age where we all like to walk around with our iPhones and our iPads and other pieces of technology, and we sort of take that for granted and think it can happen everywhere, and that knowing that when we go to upgrade technologies within our medical architecture, that especially where we have those locations that are of an older age—and frankly, after having been to some construction sites and renovation sites at some of our hospitals, you realize just how well these buildings were built and that they're not exactly easy places to either run hard wiring through or to place Wi-Fi into.

So those are the kinds of challenges that we face as a system. But I can tell him that there's definitely a concerted effort of making sure that we have the best kind of systems that we can, and moving towards exactly what he's talking about, the idea of consistent province-wide systems and less of that patch work that was inherited from the pre-existing HRAs back when there were 13 of them.

Mr. Gerrard: I recognize the government has had problems in this area going back many years. And one of the things that one should consider is that although we may have many different technological pieces of equipment which use the Internet but it's one system, and that the critical thing is not that you necessarily have every bit of technology the same, but that they be able to talk with one another. And that, clearly, you know, needs to be a goal and needs to be, you know, emphasized more.

Now, there are a variety of different emergency rooms in Manitoba in different hospitals, and not all of them are using an Emergency Department Information System. For instance, my understanding from the FIPPAs that we got is that it's not being used in Thompson and that there are others in the Parkland area where their hospital's not using an Emergency Department Information System.

What is the minister's plan in terms of the Emergency Department Information System?

* (16:20)

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question. In terms of the EDIS system, again, it was first launched here in Winnipeg with a provincial rollout, and, again, starting with some of those major rural hospitals. It's a rollout that is still ongoing, so if there are particular facilities that he would like information about the current status, I can gladly get that for him. So which are the particular facilities that he would like an up—a status update on?

Mr. Gerrard: Well, I think it would be helpful to have an update on the systems in the Northern RHA, emergency rooms in Thompson and The Pas and Flin Flon, and it would be helpful to have an update on the use of EDIS in what was the Parkland area of the RHA and the Swan River and Dauphin and Brandon ERs. So why don't we start there, and if the minister can provide that, that would be helpful.

One of the changes that's been implemented, although more slowly here in Manitoba than in some other provinces, has been changes which would provide a larger role for pharmacists; not just filling prescriptions but being able to provide a much greater range of advice and so on. And one of the questions which has arisen in other jurisdictions and some have talked to me about here, is is there any plan to change the approach to compensation for pharmacists in—as a result of the changing role for pharmacists?

Ms. Blady: I want to thank the member for the question regarding the role of pharmacists. I know that I've had the opportunity to meet with a variety of pharmacists throughout the province, and the work that they do is phenomenal.

And in terms of the idea of the greater range of advice or the greater roles that they can play, I know one of the areas that I was quite excited about, the area that we've had them do exactly some of that kind of expansion of service, was this year with the administration of the flu vaccine. That was something that I know, like many other folks, I found to be very convenient, the ability to go to my local pharmacist, the person that looks after all of our prescription needs, that knows us.

In fact, it was quite interesting. I have a young boy, 11 years old, who has this morbid fear of needles, and when you've got an 11-year-old as you're heading to school saying, Mom, Mom, there's

the flu-shot sign up at the pharmacy, can we go today after school, that was quite surprising. And so we went after school and he was quite excited. It allowed us to run a couple other errands. He did have his little moment of panic around the—when he actually saw the needle, but it was something that was really nice because it allowed us the opportunity to, again, go straight after school and after work, run some errands, go to a place that was familiar and not have to set up an appointment. The follow-up with them in terms of that time to come in, fill out the paperwork that was needed to make sure that they had our health profile, knowing that they're already familiar with us as, you know, neighbours in the area and folks that go there on a regular basis, and then even the rest and follow-up time, it was just a really convenient thing. And I know that it made a lot—a difference to us as a family and that it made a difference, as well, to other folks that we know in the neighbourhood. And what was also wonderful about that was that not only was it more convenient, but it was—it is, you know, one of those things that's actually more cost-effective.

So it's about ensuring that we have appropriate compensation policies for any of those further developments. But if the flu vaccines are any kind of an indicator, I'm really looking forward to the kinds of future partnerships and future endeavours to undertake with pharmacists in the province, because it's, to me, is something that, like I said, it made such a difference. And if it means that we can get more folks vaccinated—and, again, from a public health perspective—if it can make folks, you know, go out there and get vaccines—we've got a higher rate of vaccination and we've got a lower cost overhead—that combination of efficiencies and improving, sort of, herd immunity for us as a Manitoba population, I think is something that we can go ahead with in other areas if opportunities present themselves. And like I said, we can make sure that they're compensated appropriately so that they can do the good work that they do.

Mr. Gerrard: The—I'm just wondering if, in terms of ambulance transports, we've got a system which has varied historically from place to place in Manitoba. Is there now a standardized approach so that certain transports are charged to the patient and certain transports are paid for by the RHAs? Or is there still variability in terms of who pays what depending on where you are in Manitoba?

Ms. Blady: I thank the member for the question, and as—very much recognizes the fact that there has in the

past been a patchwork there. And, I mean, I believe that all Manitoba families should be able to receive health-care services that are safe, high quality and accessible, and that includes transportation through those kinds of vehicles, ambulances, whether it's ground, air, fixed-wing, STARS.

Again, and I agree that the current ambulance fee structure in Manitoba does need to change. Ambulance transfers are not covered under the Canada Health Act, which means the entire cost of ambulance transfers falls to provincial governments. And so, in order for the Province to provide the high quality of prehospital care that families deserve, there is a need for the province—for provinces to share the cost of this service.

And so as a result of the EMS review, Manitoba Health, I can assure him is currently in the process of seeing how ambulance fees across Manitoba can be done in a better, more equitable way. And I've asked—the regional health authorities have been asked, as they are the ones that administer our ambulance programs, to limit the fee increases to the rate of inflation. And addition, we are providing operating grants for ambulance services to help keep the costs low.

And in Manitoba we do provide free-of-charge services in many areas not covered by the Canada Health Act, whether it's things like our universal Pharmacare program, for example, or the offering free cancer drugs to home cancer patients.

*(16:30)

So it's about those things and sometimes we do go above and beyond the Canada Health Act and, you know, again, I guess it's also important to note that there are different types of ambulance services in Manitoba, as I noted before, for which there's no cost to the patient.

So, for example, in Saskatchewan, residents are charged for the use of helicopter EMS transports. Helicopter ambulance transports for patients requiring critical and emergency care in Manitoba is done at no cost to the patient. The Lifeflight Air Ambulance program, for example, which provides specialized interfacility transport for critically ill or injured Manitoba residents further than 200 kilometres from Winnipeg, again, transfers Manitoba patients at no charge. And the Northern Patient Transportation Program helps to subsidize the medically necessary transportation for northern families who can't access services in their

communities. So—and then, of course, all ambulance transfers that take place between hospitals are done free of charge to any patient.

So I agree that there is more work that needs to be done and that's why, again, we've—we're asking folks to take a look how it can be done in a better way, and working with the regional health authorities, again, to ensure much like the technology question asked before, that we have a provincial system that's important to all Manitobans equitably.

Mr. Gerrard: Now it's my impression that when it comes to personal-care homes that there is many of the RHAs, or most of them appear to use an approach so that the personal-care-home resident who is transported by ambulance to an emergency department and returned within 24 hours, that the regional health authority covers the transportation cost. Is this also happening in all RHAs? Is it happening in the Northern RHA as well as other RHAs or is it different?

Yes, just in the interests of time, maybe the minister can get back to me on that one at a later point and we could move on.

Ms. Blady: I do have a response. I was looking for some specific information which we're just waiting to get by way of email here.

So I guess what my first thing that I wanted to clarify with the member was in terms of the—what our standard practice is, is there a specific community or specific situation where there's a concern regarding cost, because not all ambulances are run by the RHAs. And so that RHA model and how the costing is done there is different from those communities where the—it might be the municipality that is operating the ambulance services, and so that affects the fee. So that was the first point that I wanted to ask, if it was a specific situation, and anything where—in terms of a casework follow-up, that we can connect with my office.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I was just wondering in terms of communities in the northern RHAs for Thompson, Flin Flon, The Pas and elsewhere, I guess, Wabowden—whether there were differences with other parts of the province with respect to charges for ambulance transport to and from personal-care homes.

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the clarification, and we will endeavour to get the information to him. And just the reminder that—of course, that some of the information is tied to things

related to federal jurisdictions, so we will get what information that we can access.

Also, too, that in terms of PCHs, one of the things that—you know, is the EPIC program is something that, again, in terms of the role that they would play within PCHs is something that's being, you know, investigated. So that's something that, again, I'm really proud of the expanding role that we have with paramedics in the province and the kind of care that they can provide, because, especially in community-based paramedicine, they can do great work in ensuring that that kind of front-line care that they can provide means that people don't necessarily need to present to an emergency room and that they can work within PCHs and other locations to provide that care before moving folks.

* (16:40)

Mr. Gerrard: Speaking of paramedics, does the minister have a plan to address the very significant inequalities in terms of pay in different parts of the province?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question because paramedics are crucial to the delivery of emergency medical services, especially in rural communities. And I am very happy that we have over 1,500 fully-trained primary-care paramedics versus the 280 that were here in 1999 and having moved to over 180 trained advanced care paramedics compared to just seven in 1999. And I believe, actually, this past week we had 27 new graduates joining the paramedic workforce.

And so we've seen this workforce strengthen in the province, and it has shifted from being predominantly casual or volunteer—1999, for example, was 80 per cent of the paramedic workforce was casual or volunteer, whereas now it is 70 per cent of the paramedic workforce that is full time or professional, and those kinds of investments, you know, that we've been making included 25 additional rural paramedic positions, I announced the creation of a new 16-seat advanced care paramedic program at Red River College with a launch this year and, again, even more opportunities for rural paramedics to upgrade their skills.

And, you know, we have approximately 210 primary-care paramedics trained in Manitoba each year through Red River College and four other institutions. And so in terms of the pay issue that the member suggests, any one of the issues that we have is the fact that there are so many different employers

across the province whether—and that ranges, as well, between not just rural health authorities, but also municipalities and First Nations.

So we are committed to work with paramedics because we do know how important a role they play and, again, especially in the rural communities. So, again, it's one of those things. It's part of the reason why I'm very happy that we introduced the—legislation was brought in this week by the Minister of Labour regarding PTSD. Knowing a number of paramedics and firefighters who live with PTSD—in fact, one of them actually says that he prefers the term PTSI, the idea that it's post-traumatic stress, it's an injury, it's a work injury—and that's how he frames it. And so it's those kinds of supports and that kind of legislation that build a larger, comprehensive package of how is it that we best look after our paramedics.

But, again, one of the challenges in working out the pay equity issue is, again, the variety of employers involved. But I know I'm very committed to working with all of our front-line providers and, again, to work out those inequities, but I know that a great progress has been made just by the fact that we've gone from a shift of an 80 per cent casual or volunteer workforce to 70 per cent now being full time and professional.

And so, again, with that, again, in terms of the kinds of work that's being done by paramedics I know that it's really important. One of the things that, again, that I'm—I've been happy to see, as mentioned to the member before, has been the idea of the, again, the EPIC program and the work that it's been doing and especially in terms of places like the Salvation Army and other places, Main Street Project, where, again, in terms of the Main Street Project, we saw that paramedics were able to see within first—the first five months over 8,000 patients, out of which only 161 were sent to an emergency room.

So that's, again, a big drop from the four to five hundred patients that would have been seen in an emergency room. So, again, the role of paramedics, whether they're here in the city or out in the rural area, is one that's very valuable, and, again, I look forward to continuing to work with them.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the very significant recommendations of the EMS, the Emergency Medical Services report, was that the minister act swiftly to put out a request for proposals with regard to the basic air ambulance service which is provided

by about six different carriers at the moment. What's the status of that request for proposal?

Ms. Blady: Again, the—when the EMS review came back in 2013, you know, those 54 recommendations on building a more integrated and responsive system over the course of 10 years, I take very seriously. I mean, when we think about it, again, the EMS system is critically important for Manitoba families and the care provided by our dedicated first responders does save lives daily.

And, as mentioned before, we've been talking about sort of the history. I mean, prior to 1997, it wasn't—you know, EMS supports were a municipal responsibility and the staff were largely, as I said before, part-time volunteers with limited training and there was little to no provincial co-ordination of services. And I'm happy to say that, again, our EMS system does look very different today, having the Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre co-ordinating fast and efficient dispatch, having a provincial ambulance fleet and a—and highly-trained, professional workforce integrated into the health-care system is a big change.

And, again, we called for that review to build on the very positive transformation over the past 15 years and find ways to make it better. As I've said before, you know, we are moving forward with the recommendations in the report as part of a 10-year plan to create a new era in EMS services, and, to date, we're making progress on the review recommendations. There were 54 recommendations made in—made, and 19 are now considered complete and the rest are either in planning or well under way. Those included things like the rural paramedic positions, and now more than 20 positions have been posted and more will be posted soon.

And, you know, so these are the kinds of things that are under way. We also—you know, I can assure the member that, you know, our task force, the EMS review task force, has been meeting regularly since May of 2013, and 19, and as I said, of the recommendations are complete.

Particular headway has been made on the dispatch and the Office of the Medical Director; review recommendations with the OMD now in place and centralized medical oversight—responsibilities for the entire province.

One thing that I can say is that, in terms of the interfacility transports, an RFP is, in fact, in progress as one of those recommendations, so I can tell the

member that, in fact, we are moving forward with exactly that, and, again, look forward to having that come about where we can have, again, one more step towards a more unified emergency medical system for Manitobans.

* (16:50)

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, a number of the recommendations from the Brian Sinclair report dealt with things that would need attention, both from the health system and from the Public Trustee. I wonder if the minister has had any conversations with the minister responsible for the Public Trustee to see about getting those recommendations implemented.

Ms. Blady: I just want to double-check with the member. In terms of the report and recommendations he's talking about, is it the EMS review task force? Or the question sounds much—sounds like it's related to the Sinclair recommendations, so I just wanted to check.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I had referred to the Brian Sinclair inquest report. Yes.

Ms. Blady: I have to apologize. My eyes are showing their age, and I'm trying to read some stuff in tiny print, and I'm getting my documents confused as a result. I will remember to bring my reading glasses next week—or next time.

Well, again, I'd like to thank the member for the question. In terms of the Sinclair inquest report and the implementation timelines, I have to say that, you know, the situation with Mr. Sinclair was, again, a tragedy, and I—and it was preventable and it cannot happen again. I am very much committed to seeing that the recommendations are implemented, and I do believe that they, you know, they require changes not just in Winnipeg, but in emergency rooms and health-care centres across the province.

As the member knows, I had, you know, tasked a province-wide team with developing a plan that ensures the orderly implementation of the Sinclair inquest recommendations across the province, and I'm—I, again, presume that the member's just talking specifically about recommendation No. 6, the recommendation that the RHAs and the Office of the Public Trustee continue to review the feasibility of compatible electronic charting of all relevant medical information for clients in the Public Trustee.

And the approach that we're taking to this one is a provincial approach, and that the actions that are under way at this point are engagement with the

Office of the Public Trustee, and that engagement is ongoing and has determined that the recommendation will be addressed within the RHAs and PHSOs provincially in consultation with the Office of the Public Trustee as required.

A feasibility assessment work plan is currently being developed and opportunities to integrate the requirements set out in the recommendation with existing or planned ICT systems to maximize the resource efficiency is again—is going to be assessed.

So it is something that is being moved on, and it's one of those things that, in terms of the timeline, one of the things that happened was the implementation report categorized each recommendation as either a short-term recommendation, meaning it needed to be addressed within nine months; medium term, being within 10 to 24 months; and then a longer term, meaning something that might take longer than 24 months. And this is a medium-term approach for the timeline for this one. The feasibility assessment work plan will be completed within five months and the feasibility assessment identification of opportunities for integration and recommendations for further actions need to be provided within 24 months' time.

And so it is one of these things where, again, it goes back to—actually, to your first question regarding the timelines and working with ITC, and this is one of those things that's being factored into the larger ITC require—ICT, sorry—ICT requirements in terms of making sure that all of these things fit together in one package and that the larger work that's being done accommodates this and makes sure that this is part of what we do when we move forward in terms of information technology.

Mr. Gerrard: I—if one looks at the recommendation No. 35, that is a seven-day work week for the home-care co-ordinator, when would the minister expect that to be implemented?

Ms. Blady: In terms of recommendation No. 35, that the—again, the RHAs review, the feasibility of a seven-day work week for the office of the home-care co-ordinator—this is one that the approach is one of—again, of a provincial nature. The current actions that are under way is that the Manitoba continuing care council will develop a feasibility assessment work plan to undertake the assessment and make recommendations on future actions.

This one, too, fits into the medium-term timeline with work plans to be complete within six months

and with recommendations for future action to be provided within 24 months.

Again, in terms of the home-care co-ordinator and their ability to do this kind of work, we all know that the kind of care that folks need and the ability to meet those needs and the vital role that the home-care co-ordinator plays, that people's needs, you know, are 24-7 and that situations can emerge, you know, at different times of the day and different times of the week. It's not always Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, and so this is a recommendation that I know will have great value unto a lot of—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse the interruption, but the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Jim Maloway): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

The—this section of the committee will—of supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. As previously agreed, questioning in this department will proceed on a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the minister relates to the five-year core infrastructure plan. As the minister is well aware, for the 2013-2014 year, there was \$75 million which was not spent, which was said to be carried over and spent in future years. In the 2014-2015 forecast, which was presented in the budget document, the government again underspent, this time by \$4 million, so that the total amount that has been underspent from the amount brought in by the PST now amounts to \$79 million over two years.

I—just wondering whether the minister plans to keep on underspending relative to what was—they have said that they were going to spend.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, we're in a unique position in this department, and a clear directive, as part of our five-year, \$5.5-billion infrastructure plan, of which this department delivers a significant part of it, is to go out, go forth boldly and not spend; invest. And as I indicated at the start of my—Estimates, I appreciate the member may not have heard that, but we are anticipating actually being

even above our target in terms of the last year. We're getting the final numbers in on the construction season. It's up dramatically year over year, as was planned. And we're looking at probably a 45 per cent—or more—increase year over year on the highway construction side.

So, bottom line is we are following through on our commitments and we'll actually be above and beyond our commitments in the five-year plan for this year. And I point out, too, that clearly we identified that it's a five-year plan. It includes a carry-over; this is something the industry's talked about, other stakeholders are—talk about. And if there are any years, for any given reason—flood, weather, any circumstance—where we don't meet what's targeted, it's carried forward into a future year. So, at the end of the five-year period, we will meet our targets, and we're not only well on track this year, we're ahead of where we anticipated to be in terms of investments.

But I can assure the member that was last year's construction season; we're very much focused on this year. We're getting some very good results in terms of rollout. The construction industry has really stepped up to the plate; so have consulting engineers. So if it was a record last year, stay tuned this year. I think we're going to see even more significant results.

Mr. Gerrard: As I have pointed out to the minister, last year, which was 2014-2015, they were still—the government was still behind. I would ask the minister, who said that the money is there to be rolled over, but I didn't find, except in their projections, where they actually have budgeted that money that had been raised the last two years, you know, in the budget documents. The budget documents, in fact, show that that money had been brought in by the PST was actually spent on other items. It wasn't held over in a separate fund so that it could be used for this year and subsequent years.

So I would just, you know, make that comment and ask the minister himself to comment.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, again, there—the rollover is evident in the subsequent years. When I say rollover, we've increased it; that was part of the plan. We ratcheted up the construction. That was part of the plan as well. It's a significant achievement to increase to the degree which we have. And, when I say achievement, not just, you know, the broader government aspect of it, but our department, the

construction industry, consulting engineers, you name it, people stepped up and delivered.

So bottom line is the numbers speak for themselves. This is a record year. I have put on the record earlier, the second best year in terms of asphalt in history. We've had a significant construction season in many other ways. I mean, what we're dealing with now with in terms of bridges is historic. You know, we're, in addition to this direct department, we're building the east-side road. We're into Bloodvein. So you've got some very significant improvements and we're continuing to work with communities on the east side, so huge investments.

And I want to assure the member—I know this was raised, you know, by another member earlier in committee—that it is focused on core infrastructure: roads, bridges, flood mitigation and, of course, there is a municipal component, not in this department, but under the minister of local government. But we are on track to deliver; in fact, we're likely to be even above the target for the past fiscal year. And that's the track we anticipate for this year as well. It's—quite frankly, this year, initially, we've been getting some good co-operation from weather. I'll point out, by the way, that it's a significant achievement last year given some of the problems we had in the early part of the season, May and June. So we're on track to deliver what we promised, a historic investment in core infrastructure.

Mr. Gerrard: In the budget documents on page 12, where there's a five-year core infrastructure plan, the 2014-2015 forecast investment was 1 billion, 35 million, but, of course, 34 of that was federal government money cost shared, so that the investment last year was 1 billion and 1 million.

I would ask the minister: How much of that expenditure was used—done with borrowed money, which has been amortized and the government is paying interest on?

Mr. Ashton: Well, of course, we have standard accounting, you know, across all structure in government; we have had for a number of years now. It's been a positive development for the department and certainly for government. So we follow that accounting process. There's a separation—some expenditures are—such as operating expenditures, I'll point out that when we first came into government, there was a real weakness in the accounting practices. We only had operating, even though it was called capital; in effect, for accounting purposes, it

was operating. So there's a combination of expenditures that are in place.

What is clear is the significant increase over where we were before the 1 cent on the dollar, a significant increase year over year. And I point out too that 2014-15, the numbers that are in the budget documents are forecasts. That's why I referenced—we're now obviously finished that fiscal year. We're completing the numbers probably in the next week or two. But every indication is that we will exceed the 693, you know, that's there. So that's very significant, the 693. And if you look at the trend line, the base on roads, highways and bridges, 478. We're looking at, probably, very much exceeding 700 million this year and there's a consistent level the next period of time. The projections: 747, 2015-16; 755, 2016-17; 762, 2017-18; and 771, 2018-19.

So what we did over this past year is when we said we were going to ratchet up, we meant it. And to have a year-over-year increase of—in a range of 45 per cent or more is unheard of.

So, yes, member's right, there are, you know, there are some operating elements as well. But, again, it's a—the highway system we're referring to. So it's a real number. It's a real increase. And, yes, it does have some operating and some capital dimensions.

Mr. Gerrard: The core infrastructures funding includes funding on flood protection. I wonder if the minister could list the specific flood protection expenditures planned for this year.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we do have, obviously, a global listing in the five-year infrastructure plan in terms of water control cap on [inaudible] preservation that is listed. And what I think is important to point out, quite frankly, is the degree to which we're also anticipating that will increase over time. And, you know, it does vary from year to year, when you get some significant, you know, work related to infrastructure, but I point out, at the end of the five-year plan we will be at a figure that is considerably higher than what is forecast this year.

The logic of that, of course, is very clear. If we're going to complete, as is our plan, a emergency outlet—well, the emergency outlet that'll become a permanent outlet for Lake St. Martin, the Lake Manitoba outlet—we're anticipating the total costs and that in the \$500-million range, which is very significant.

Again, we're in the stage now of detail design. I'm anticipating that we'll be deciding the choice of the outlet in Lake Manitoba fairly soon. And we're already engaged in discussions about some of the other components that are related. We need road access into Lake St. Martin, which you don't currently have. So we will be spending more over time on major projects of that nature.

I point out, too, the Assiniboine watershed, Souris, many of the other areas that we looked at, you know, Parklands, came up with a series of recommendations, you know, at the technical level. We've gone out and consulted. Clearly, we're going to be looking at some very significant work on the Assiniboine, both in and around Winnipeg, some significant work in and around Portage Diversion, but also elsewhere in the province.

We also have just announced—I'm sure the member's seen the press release—individual flood protection. That's very important for southwest Manitoba because it really, in many cases, is the only feasible way of making a difference when you don't have a, you know, sort of immediate option such as a, you know, a drain, a diversion or, you know, or a community diking system. And we have a combination of that, obviously, in what we've done in Melita which we started in 2009 during the major flooding there.

So those are the numbers currently, and they will increase over time as part of the five-year capital plan, which reflects, again, we're into another equivalent of what we did in our first 10 years of the mandate where we invested \$1 billion in flood protection, mostly on the floodway but also completion of ring dikes, et cetera, in the Red River Valley and work that was done elsewhere, as well north of Winnipeg, in Red River Valley.

So we are committed, and again, the 1 cent on the dollar makes a big difference in our ability to be able to finance it.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm—of the a little over \$48 million that is projected to be spent this year, from what I understood from the minister, that some of that is in design for the outlet for Lake Manitoba, that there may be some along the Assiniboine River.

Can—is the specific diking areas that along the Assiniboine River that would be addressed? And where do things stand in terms of—there was a very wide range of options presented at the consultation hearings, you know, particularly in Portage la

Prairie. When is there going to be a—decisions made on which ones will proceed and which ones won't, of all the many options?

* (15:00)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the member is correct. My reference to the Assiniboine dikes is really in the—some of the longer term fix as well, which, you know, will be in further—future years.

I'll maybe give the member just a quick synopsis of where we're at on major projects. Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin, the financial commitment's there; the clear commitment is there as well to move an additional 7,500 cfs, so the technical parameters are clear. We've gone through the broader conceptual design work; we're now into selection of which of the two routes we would follow in terms of the Lake Manitoba outlet. And I do want to commend the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Nevakshonoff), the MLA for the area. He's been very involved in these discussions as well, and I think it really realizes when you have two options, the No. 1 thing is to make sure they work. So there's been a lot of detailed work including on site. We're anticipating a decision; I think I'm getting a briefing on it over the next couple of weeks. Yes, so, you know, probably in—within next couple of months, we'll be able to finalize that decision.

Concurrent with that, it's certainly my hope that we can develop a significant partnership with affected communities in the area, particularly First Nations communities. It's important to note that there are four communities that have been on the receiving end of flooding either directly from Lake St. Martin or downstream in the case of Dauphin River. I know the member knows those communities quite well. And I can tell you the intent there is to work with them. Obviously, there's constitutionally required consultations, but not only do those communities benefit from the flood mitigation work, we think there's an opportunity to benefit as well by partnering and getting a direct involvement on the actual construction. And, to my mind, that's very critical. So we're proceeding with that.

In terms of the Assiniboine dikes, I can tell you we have been working on the detailed study. The Assiniboine basin study will be completed sometime this summer. And we're looking at the upgrading, potential to increase capacity. I can get into that in more detail if the member's interested. And, certainly, a preliminary design and geotechnical investment will be the first stage. We have been

doing some work on the existing dikes, but the reality is they're decades old. We do need to re-engineer and reconstruct and also take into account minimizing impacts on, you know, land-owners in the immediate area.

Portage Diversion, again, I mean, there's some issues related to that. I could provide a bit of an update. But what I would indicate with the Portage Diversion, probably most the significant thing is we've been conducting a review of the Portage Diversion, its operating rules, similar to what we do—have done in the past on the floodway. So for the first time, actually, since its inception, we're in that position. And that is proceeding as we speak, and we will certainly look at that.

I can indicate that the Shellmouth, we—I did indicate in previous discussions in committee we are looking at doing a similar review of the operating rules of the Shellmouth. You know, there's a fair degree of disagreement; not surprising because of the numerous stakeholders, some of which are upstream, some of which are downstream, some of which are recreational, some of which are agricultural. So I'm not suggesting for a moment that we would necessarily be able to reach, you know, 100 per cent consensus, but we are looking at that.

And I mentioned southwest; we've just announced the Individual Flood Protection Initiative. That, by the way, is something we've moved very significantly on in and around Lake Manitoba. There's been a significant improvement around the lake in terms of individual flood protection including for cottages. You know, I think it's the first time there's ever been the inclusion of cottages in any similar type of program. So we're working on that level.

I wouldn't underestimate the challenge. We are looking at probably a second billion dollars of investment. I mentioned the \$500 million on the two outlets. You're probably in the range of a half billion again on the remaining components including some of the things we are looking at potentially in the Parklands. But I think, you know, the Manitoba model is pretty clear. You learn from each flood, and the one lesson we don't have to learn, though, is the importance of flood mitigation. So it's going to be a significant component over the next number of years all throughout the flood-impacted areas.

Actually, one other quick thing I should add is the significant movement we've made in The Pas and the RM of Kelsey, which now has permanent diking

which—you know, we took temporary dikes and converted them to permanent dikes. We've done that in several other areas in and around Winnipeg, north of Winnipeg, for example. So we are in a position—we've made significant progress, but much accomplished, more to do.

Mr. Gerrard: There were quite a number of roads and bridges which were very severely damaged in the 2014–2013–2014 flood, and what's the status of the repair and rebuilding of those bridges?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, 2011, we had 80 bridges impacted; 2014, 80 as well. We've seen some significant progress in some areas already which is encouraging. We've been able to rebuild a number of major structures. Others, we've done some, you know, significant work in terms of getting them back into service or a limited service.

I can provide probably—the best would be, you know, an updated list, because they're—with 80 bridges, they're in various different states of response.

One thing I would stress: in the southwest, we particularly went out of our way to consult with the municipalities and communities in the area to get their priorities to reflect the local reality. So significant work has been done; a lot more will be done. And I've got to tell—we've been getting very good response from the communities affected. I just met recently with Two Borders, the new municipality in the southwest, and they were particularly complimentary to their working relationship with the department and the degree to which the department has talked to them.

Just to give you some sense, in 2014, in terms of impacts, \$70 million, really, over a three-year period is our cost figure and, you know, in terms of reinvesting and in terms of the impacts going back to 2014. Seventy million just in the southwest alone, which, I think, shows the degree of the impact, but also the degree to which we are responding accordingly at the provincial level.

But not all of that, by the way, is DFA recoverable. If you got significant enhancements to bridges, that's a provincial investment. But if you look at Coulter bridge or other bridges in the area, we're often building—we're building 60, 70 years out, not just to replace the existing structure, which does mean, in a lot of cases, some very significant changes in design, not the least of which we're

aiming to make sure that you minimize potential future flood impacts.

But it's also to recognize the reality of what's happening in southwest Manitoba. It has gone through a real renaissance politically and economically. You know, we've got amalgamated municipalities. We've got the oil industry. The ag sector, I think, has gone through a bit of a—you know, quite a bit of a rebound, notwithstanding the challenges of the floods.

So three years, \$70-million reinvestment in southwest Manitoba, I think is very significant, and that's over and above, by the way, a lot of the other things we're looking at, you know, the upgrading of general infrastructure. Highway 10, for example, we've significantly upgraded it from the border to Boissevain. We're upgrading south of Brandon as well, so gives you some sense of the scale of the challenge and the scale of the provincial response.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm going to pass this on to one of my colleagues. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I'm just asking today if the minister had a chance to get an update on a couple of questions I had the other day.

Mr. Ashton: The questions were asked on the PR 501 and five—and PTH 12 in terms of accidents: five reported in the latest 10-year history. Resurfacing is planned in 2017. And we, obviously, are on an ongoing basis as we do throughout the province. We'll review traffic counts to determine whether additional changes are needed to the infrastructure.

* (15:10)

Powerview-Pine Falls—so slope stabilization of the arch box culvert this winter—*[interjection]*—started this—yes. A new culvert next winter, so that's the construction plan. Road reconstruction scheduled for next year, 2016.

Costs of upgrading the Pinawa bridge on PR 211-12: \$1 million.

I've got a couple of others which I'll update on. By the way, the PTH 75 study, asked by another member, final report expected to be completed August 31st.

The Bachman Drain, first of all, in the east Bachman there's slope stability issues, design is under way. We may need a small amount of land acquisition which does complicate it somewhat. On

the west Bachman there is a minor rehab of the through dike. Culverts and other work have been considered either for later this year or into next year. So there is—both the east Bachman and west Bachman drain have been identified for work.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank the minister and the department for some of those answers.

Now a question for the Bachman Drain: Has there been correspondence back to the municipality in regards to the position or the—does the—I'm trying to think of the word—no—how fast they're—you're proceeding along?

Mr. Ashton: On Bachman, yes, I think I've identified some of the work we're doing right now. You know, we're talking about this year or next year, and if it's a matter of four municipalities, certainly the member should feel free to do so, but we can do the same as well.

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, that's what I was—that's where I was getting at, whether the minister's department had informed the municipality of the status of, you know, sort of what the next steps are and the timelines and all of that type of that thing.

Do you have an estimated cost to what that might be enduring?

Mr. Ashton: Not yet. And, of course, we are cognizant to, you know, we have the old council and the new council. So, you know, certainly, that does—often, I mean, we, you know, with new councillors, new leadership we do have to make sure that we're working with the new council. So we don't have a figure yet, but, you know, I think the concerns the member's identified are, I'm sure it's—we share them. And there will be some action. I do want to stress again, if there's land acquisition involved, that does complicate things somewhat in terms of timetable, but there'll be work potentially this year and certainly next year.

Mr. Ewasko: Up in the Sagkeeng area on Fort Alexander, there—a few years ago there was some work being done in regards to shoreline restabilization happening. And I'm just wondering if all the funds that were supposed to be shared or part of the project had been actually reimbursed to the First Nations community.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it is an ongoing problem. It's not strictly an MIT issue, obviously. AANDC is involved, the First Nation's involved. We were involved to the degree to which we saw the need

to protect infrastructure, and we've met those commitments. We continue to be willing to be involved to protect the infrastructure as well.

But, again, the fundamental challenge is there's very significant erosion there. It's impacting on homes on the reserve and it is certainly a priority for the community and for, quite frankly, for AANDC. So we are part of it, but we're really more supportive on the strict MIT side of it. And, well, we've done a significant amount work and we'll continue to be engaged with the solution. I mean, or maybe I should say mitigation. Because as is the case throughout the province with shoreline erosion, it is a process you often can't reverse. What it comes down to is mitigating the impacts and coming up with alternate, you know, transportation systems, you know, dealing with—the homeowner's, obviously, or the AANDC and the First Nation where the homes is, you know, in terms of potential relocation. So there are a lot of complications. It's definitely a problem, and we're not the major player in this, but we are, you know, we're at the table doing what we can.

Mr. Ewasko: I know that the minister's department is not the only one involved, but, from what I understand, this had something to do with the buildup of the area around Highway No. 11 that runs through the community of Sagkeeng right to the shoreline, and from what I understand, that there was a substantial amount of work done by the First Nations community and that they were waiting—and, by the sounds of it, a few years now—for reimbursement from, actually, the MIT from your department, Minister.

Mr. Ashton: Well, what happened there, actually, we had agreed to do 20 per cent of the work, and for some reason the request actually never came through in an accounting sense, so we did an equivalent amount of additional work afterwards. So it was—and it's somewhat complicated because, you know, it's AANDC and the First Nation. It's not something that we're directly involved with. So we did an equivalent amount of work and, you know, we continue to be willing to be part of the solution, particularly when it comes to protecting provincial infrastructure.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, I'm sure that the First Nations community will be interested in hearing some of these answers. That's good, thank you, Minister.

In regards to provincial drains, when it comes time for installing new culverts, is that up to the municipality or is that up to the local infrastructure

department to say whether there needs to be a new culvert along a certain drain or not?

Mr. Ashton: So I'm assuming you're talking to a culvert accessing onto a provincial drain, but a culvert through a municipal road, or?

Mr. Ewasko: I'll clarify for the minister. It's actually a homeowner's entry into their property, and it comes off of a municipal road, and the culvert should be actually in the provincial drain and then there should be a driveway into the business owner's property. And I'm just wondering how—what would be the process if the provincial drain has miles and miles of brand new culverts and for some reason this business has been overlooked in regards to a new culvert that enters his place of employment?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it depends if it's access on the provincial waterway. That is our jurisdiction. If it's municipal, it's different. So what I was going to suggest, rather than give a broad, general answer that isn't much help to the specific case, I have my staff here. So we will undertake to get the details and follow up and get an exact answer.

Mr. Ewasko: I will make sure that your department gets the specific location of the business that I'm talking about, so thanks for that.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Just a couple of local questions I have for you.

The Highway 13 rebuild between Carman and Elm Creek to just north of Carman, there was some property issues, drainage issues on the curve and rebuilding on the curve just north of Carman last year that did not occur. Can—does the minister have an update as to what's happening with the rebuilding of the curve? There's some structural changes to the curve north of Carman, and then the paving that is proposed to take place through Carman, give us an update on that project.

Mr. Ashton: It's—yes, still on the plan, and I get a more detailed response for the member.

Mr. Pedersen: Appreciate that. And Highway 34, which comes from the United States border, Crystal City, Pilot Mound, Holland, Austin and ends at Gladstone—unfortunately, Highway 34 seems to have been into no man's land. It's divided somewhere in responsibility between the Carman office and the Brandon office, and neither office really wants to take responsibility for it. I was just wondering if there is any plan to be rebuilding this highway in the

future and where it is in terms of planning for any rebuild.

* (15:20)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I draw the attention of the member to our capital plan, and there is a planned upgrade on Highway 34, between 1 and 16, fairly significant project for 2017-2018, \$20 million, and for bituminous pavement. So it's in the plan and will be under construction in 2017.

Mr. Pedersen: I will—I should be able to find that in the capital plan, then, somewhere here? Okay. If you could get that to me, that would be much easier for me, though there is a bridge, a very significant bridge, over on No. 34 Highway over the Assiniboine River, between Holland and Austin. Has there been—I know the minister talks about 80 bridges or 160 bridges, depending on how many floods you want to take into account.

Has there been structural inspections on that bridge or a report available on that bridge that would be available to myself?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'll undertake to get the member either a briefing or a, you know, a detailed background document on it.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Morris—the honourable minister.

Mr. Ashton: It is in the capital plan, as well, but I think the member's asking more for a detailed update, so we'll make sure we get it to him.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Just a couple additional follow-up questions from some areas of concern within the Morris constituency, Mr. Minister. So, specifically, the bridge on Highway 247 over the La Salle River in Sanford, Manitoba, I know recently within the last number of weeks, there was some repair done on that bridge in the form of replacing approximately 12 or 13 boards on the bridge. To my knowledge, that's the extent of the work done. I know I forwarded some pictures to the minister's office of some cracking along the concrete along the side and some damage to the bridge that was brought to my attention. So I'm just wondering what the status is of the bridge in terms of required future repairs and schedule of said repairs.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we did upgrade the bridge on Highway 2, I'm advised, and the other bridge is being left in place for local access.

Mr. Martin: The question isn't whether or not the bridge, is it going to be left local access. The issue is

the bridge over the La Salle River on 247 in La Salle; I'm wondering if there are any additional plans for repairs, if required. I mean, for all I know, the MIT has done an evaluation of the bridge and it meets all structural integrity requirements and that, but it's a concern that's been brought forward meeting some residents in Sanford about the integrity of the bridge.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it is restricted in terms of loads and it's certainly the intention of the department to be able to maintain its ability to still, even on a restricted basis, be open. And some of what we do throughout the province, obviously we do inspect bridges. We have a regular inspection program; we significantly enhanced that a few years back, recognizing some of the pressures on the bridge system. And we will obviously with this bridge and other bridges keep an eye on in terms of, you know, if there are any additional things that need to be done.

I was just going to maybe provide a bit of an update. Southwest Perimeter, the interchange timing, which was a question that was raised the other day, we've proceeded to hire a consultant to assist in developing a master plan for recommended construction staging plans. As the member identified, there are staging issues, quite apart from the broader picture; work will commence within our five-year plan. The Roblin interchange work will begin this year; that is, you know, an issue we have to deal with fairly soon, so this year you'll see work on the Roblin side and fixing the bridge and modifying interchange is partly in terms of meeting the future Perimeter cross-section. So we are working on the staging issues. I wouldn't underestimate the significance of the work taking place on the southwest Perimeter, and we're going to get the best possible professional advice on how to manage not only the construction but the management of the system in the interim, because it's hugely important to people in the area, hugely important in terms of trade. And, while we, obviously, are upgrading it long term, we're going to make sure we minimize any negative impacts of construction over the next few years. But we have to move—I think the member knows this directly—there is significant traffic flows in that area and they're only going to increase with the advent of—the real growth in CentrePort. So the southwest Perimeter is a major strategic priority for us; that's why we've put significant allocation and focus in our five-year plan. But our plan will include managing the staging of the construction and the management of traffic flows during the construction period.

Mr. Martin: I appreciate the minister's clarification on the other day's queries, whatever, but specifically to 247, Mr. Minister, and the bridge. When was the last time the bridge was inspected? And I appreciate the original query about this bridge actually may have been sent to the minister's—or to the previous minister of MIT.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can get him a specific answer. You know, the minimum that we do an inspection on a four-year cycle, but, you know, depending on local circumstances, well, we'll do more periodic. So I'll get an exact answer.

Mr. Martin: And are there any plans currently within MIT's five-year plan or—to pave the 247, the bridge in Sanford over La Salle ridge—La Salle River. It's currently just a wood board bridge with a speed limit of 30 kilometres an hour.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the answer is no, and we did provide new access to the highway when we upgraded the Highway 2 bridge. So that was the strategic move in that area.

Mr. Martin: The minister previously talked about the strategic importance of infrastructure to the southern portion of—the southwest portion of the Perimeter. I'm just wondering, I know the minister over a year ago announced the bypass extension related that would go through—in the Headingly bypass extension of CentrePort Canada Way that will also make—find its way out by St. François Xavier. I'm just wondering, I know, again, over a year ago the minister talked about this is a top priority. I think the minister said that this isn't—this is a—this is not a study, it's a plan, was the minister's exact phrase, and that land acquisition and engineering was commencing.

Can the minister provide me an update?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, what we said last year is, in fact, proceeding this year. We have done the engineering work. A number of options have been identified. We will be going to—this summer we're going to be having public input, open houses. So we've done the preliminary engineering work. We've also engaged on one of the key challenges. There's a current National Defence shooting range which would require some reconfiguration in that area. We have very good co-operation with DND. I've—so I know, too, that the MP for the area; I've had discussions with him as well and, certainly, he's engaged on this. It's the one factor we don't control. So having that co-operative relationship is absolutely critical. The

preliminary engineering, we've been able to come up with designs that will accommodate their needs and at the same time accommodate the needs of the highways. So we're going to continue to pursue that. We're cognizant in the area too. There's a tall grass prairie area in around that area. The preliminary design does not impact on that. So, again, we're always cognizant of, you know, minimizing environmental issues.

* (15:30)

So this summer you will see the options that have been presented and we will engage with the public in terms of that. So engineering work, yes. The specifics on the design will impact on land acquisition and, again, as we proceed to narrow down the options, that will determine what land acquisition we do need. And we're engaged with the federal government already, and I'll just stress again, they've been very co-operative thus far and that's critical to what we have been talking about, which is moving to construction within our five-year plan, and we're on track to do that.

Mr. Martin: So the purpose for the open houses, then, is to present the public with how many options?

Mr. Ashton: Three options.

Mr. Martin: Would there be—would I be able to schedule a briefing with the minister to review those options, or do I have to wait 'til they're presented at the public open house?

Mr. Ashton: I can arrange a separate briefing. We are, you know, we're finalizing our presentation and documents now. I've just had a sort of a, you know, [*inaudible*] final briefing, because it is a priority. I certainly wanted to get it, but I have no problem at all providing the member with a separate briefing. Quite frankly, I think it would be useful.

It's pretty straightforward in terms of what the needs are, but there are always local impacts, and we'll be doing much the same with the municipalities in the area as well, so not only will we make sure the public's involved, we'll make sure the member gets a direct briefing as well, and he's welcome to bring staff, et cetera. We'll try and arrange that in around the time of the, you know, going to the public so that the member has some sense of what's happening, you know, as it goes out for public consultation.

Mr. Martin: The minister will be able to share in general terms the—obviously, the three options will have different budgetary requirements. Is there a range in terms of the cost of the project?

Mr. Ashton: The options, similar cost frames, and we're still, you know, finalizing what we anticipate. And recognize, again, this is pre-tender, pre-construction, but we're still very much on target with the original amount we had released, about \$150 million.

Mr. Martin: And, in terms of time frame, the minister indicated there'll be open houses ongoing, will occur this summer in the affected communities, the—assume the RMs of Headingley and St. François Xavier. And then upon conclusion, does the minister have a time frame as to when they hope to finalize the option, like the preferred option?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'm reluctant to give sort of a specific time frame, other than that it will be sooner rather than later. The—I'm going to say sooner rather than later. You know, if there's significant concerns that are raised about, you know, options that might otherwise be a reasonable solution, we, you know—from experience, I can say we do find that it's useful to get that done at the early stage, not to delay dealing with that.

Some parts of it I think are fairly standard. If you look at the alignment, there's a pretty clear alignment there. It's just a question of how we intersect with Highway 1 and, you know, that's obviously where the devil will be in the detail. But the options, I think, will be fairly clear, so we're—you know, we will take that into account, probably later this year.

I just want to stress again that the big factor here in terms of the timing on construction is not so much this; we do have some control over that. It really is going to be the DND portion, but we've had a very good initial contact with them and we've come up with a solution, our technical staff, that actually, we think, provides them with a good—it's a win-win. It's good on the highway, good for them as well in terms of their needs.

So, when I say that, I'm not being critical. I'm actually quite optimistic, and if we get an agreement and can make sure we get all the approvals from the feds, the goal, again, is to get this under construction within the five-year time frame, so—I say the five-year time frame, the five-year initial plan. So we still have significant prospects of starting in, you know, probably 2017, and, again, asterisk right by that, DND being the one major complication.

And, you know, if there are significant design issues or land acquisition issues, again, we will take that into account. I mean, it is a—it's a big priority for

us, would not have happened without the significant bump in funding for infrastructure.

This is a project that was probably 20 years out until we were able to get this. It does reflect real progress on CentrePort. You know, we completed CentrePort Canada Way in a very expedited time fashion. CentrePort Canada, now there's significant progress on the—on site infrastructure. I'm not directly involved with that portion; we are involved with the highway side.

So it's not just that we have the funds, it's also we have the strategic need for it. So it's a major project and, as I indicated last year, we've been doing the key work this year. So I would say, if anything we're right on track with where we thought we would be last year.

Mr. Martin: I'm almost concluded on this one, Minister.

I would assume with the three options that the department's looking at, there is some overlap in terms of design and routing.

Mr. Ashton: You essentially have—the options that are there will be basically by and large pretty straightforward until you get close to Highway 1. You know, it's the same general—the issue—I mean you—I'm sure the member knows that area very well. It comes down to how you access into Highway 1, because this is a bypass from Highway 1, and there are complications as well with other highway access in that area. So that's really where the three options will diverge. You'll see a very similar alignment until you get close and there are three fairly different ways of connecting with Highway 1. That's why we want to hear from landowners in the area, we want to hear from the general public, we want to hear from the municipalities and certainly welcome the input from the member.

Mr. Martin: And I've been hearing some concern in the local community about the timing of land acquisitions. Have any acquisitions occurred yet if there is that overlap amongst the three designs, or are all acquisitions—land acquisitions on hold until after the summer's open houses and then until after the department makes a determination of the final design?

Mr. Ashton: No land acquisition.

Mr. Martin: So, again, with the plan, then, that all acquisitions will occur then once the final design is chosen and then with acquisitions would be slated to occur this—later this fall, this winter, spring of '16.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it would, once the conceptual design is approved then we're getting a detailed design, then we get into the exact requirements in terms of land. Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Martin: I just appreciate the minister's time. Thank you.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Just to ask a few questions regarding water control structures and, in particular, I know a review has been done and then public consultations have been done around the operating guidelines for the Portage Diversion or Assiniboine floodway, depending on whose version you use, and the Red River Floodway. I wonder if that report has been delivered to the minister.

Mr. Ashton: The answer is no.

And I was going to update a question that the member had raised. The bridge that was referred to, upgrades will be done in conjunction with changes to increase the Portage Diversion capacity, you know, the flow capacity. There's likely a need to raise the Portage Diversion bridge. This does impact on the existing interchange profile. Farmers surely can use the existing service roads and access roads. We're still dealing, of course, with the 2014 structures, you know, and from last year's flood as well in terms of the work we have to do. So that's the update on that, and again on the operating rule reviews the report has not been submitted yet.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for those answers.

When does he expect the review to be delivered? It was fairly specific if I remember correctly.

Mr. Ashton: Seems it's going to be a pretty busy summer because this is another report that's coming in later this summer. Although I must say it's nice in our department where we're actually dealing with, you know, long-term planning for flood mitigation, and—let's see—2009, 2011 and 2014 where we were dealing with actual flooding. So, if it looks like there's a fairly ambitious summer ahead in terms of a lot of these processes, it really is a fact that we—we're still about flood impacts from previous years, but we're able now to really focus in on long term. So, yes, the report will be sometime this summer.

* (15:40)

Mr. Wishart: So, if summer of 2015 is when the report will be delivered, will it be made public immediately?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it'll also be made public. I usually get a, you know, a briefing even before it's, you know, finalized. Our—this was a public process and we certainly would like to move to that. I point out, really, it's the first full review—first review period—of the Portage Diversion. It's something I've heard from lots of people, and not all the same view. It's certainly considering the member's constituents. Aren't many people around the area. And we've engaged pretty extensively. I'm not anticipating it'll necessarily result in a consensus that everyone will live with.

I've said before that issues certainly related to Lake Manitoba—regulation have been fairly controversial. Same thing with the Portage Diversion, but what it does is it gives some equivalency to what the floodway has had and people in around the floodway and stakeholders concerned about the floodway because we've had reviews of the operating rules for the floodway. They have adapted over time. We've moved, for example, from ad hoc use of the floodway for summer related flooding to now where we have specific rules on the floodway.

So what I am looking forward to is not only releasing the report, that actually being able to look at many of the bigger picture issues and also some of the sort of more immediate issues related to the operating rules. So absolutely, it will be released and I'm sure there'll be a healthy dialogue from the many people that participated in the initial discussions.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think I may be more aware than many that they'll be very unlikely that to reach a full consensus in that situation.

Just carrying on with that, is there any plans in the immediate term or in a five-year plan to begin work on the dikes on the lower Assiniboine?

Mr. Ashton: There's some, you know, ongoing work. I'm assuming the member is talking about the bigger picture outlined in the strategic document that we did have significant public input from. I believe the meetings would have been in December in the member's constituency, and that is something, again, with the next level is really take the conceptual work that's been done and move it to a more detailed design. So timing will be very much dependent on that.

I'll be very clear about the document itself and the conceptual work, you know, and the engineering

vision. It's very clear, I think, to everyone, the degree to which the existing dike structure is not an engineered dike structure. There've been significant impacts over time of silting. There are a lot of complexities in dealing with the diking. The report did point to the potential to get significant increase in the flow. If you look in the flood, it was actually quite a heroic effort to get 18,000 cfs through the diking structures. The report indicated that there is necessity even to maintain that on ongoing basis to improve the dikes and an ability to improve the flow through the dikes. One of the big complications is in—actually in terms of local drainage issues, drainage in the, you know, the area between the dikes, because essentially it's—the member knows this very well. These are—these dikes essentially raised up above ground level. They're really—I mean, if, you know, you look at the river itself, it's quite remarkable when it's carrying anywhere near that. The fact that we're able in 2011, 2014 to have those kind of flows—if you consider it's essentially it's a raised up channel rather than a river at that point in time, it's quite remarkable.

So timing, we're really dependent on the next step which is the decision and the sense of what we need to do to ensure that we meet the primary goal on the broader flood side which is increase the capacity, maintaining and increase it—in flood situations, but also recognize, you know, some of the local impacts.

And there's a significant amount of agricultural production that is very much impacted by flows on the Assiniboine and the capacity of the dikes, and any increased flow particularly because of seepage.

I was struck in 2014 how—I think about three quarters of supply of broccoli for Canada is actually right in that immediate area. There are significant vegetable producers in that area that are particularly vulnerable with high flows, to seepage and other impacts, you know, from the flows. And, of course, that's preferable to being flooded out which would have happened historically. But I wouldn't underestimate the degree to which that is an important consideration for us and will continue to be an important consideration both in terms of our operating. And if the member recalls from, you know, from 2014 some of the staging that took place in terms of the operating was very much predicated on not having an unnecessary impact, negative impact on the producers in the area. But down the line, in terms of design we want to make sure we're not creating additional challenges, and maybe there

are things that can be done as we do, you know, look at the dikes in terms of some of the seepage and other issues.

Bottom line, though, is we cannot rely on the existing dikes long term, even with all the work we've put in and the heroic efforts in two major floods. So the bottom line for me is, as minister and for the department, is clearly we've got to engineer them and upgrade them. As for the timeframe, that will really depend on the details.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for that.

I'm certainly aware of the nature of the lower Assiniboine and the fact that it is a perched river system by definition, well above the prairie in many places.

But I did want to touch further, and I know that the long-term plans depend on the recommendations that have come forward, and I would certainly like to know where we are at in terms of moving those recommendations forward.

But there are still a number of structures, borrow pits, work that was done in an emergency basis in 2011 and again in 2014 that have not been repaired. And many constituents are curious as to whether the department intends to, in fact, make good on their promise to repair those and when that might occur.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I think a significant amount of work's been done both in compensation and in cleanup. I know there is some litigation, you know, so I won't comment on that specific dimension. But, again, we've made a significant effort not just in the, you know, the area the member's talking about, but elsewhere as well. And, you know, we've made significant progress because a lot of this goes back even to 2011 as well, I mean, not just 2014. And, you know, it's been a challenge, I think, across the board. I mean, we're dealing with all sorts of elements, but there's been a significant amount of work done in the area. And I do appreciate there's still some, you know, some disputes out there about what is, you know, an appropriate reclamation, but we're, you know, our effort is to try and get things back to normal as much as possible.

It was a very difficult circumstance for people in there. I don't think people realize—the member does, but maybe others don't—the degree to which there are impacts. Even when a dike holds there are impacts on people in the immediate area. A borrow pit's a good example, but seepage is a big factor there. So, even if your primary dike holds, you still

have people that are negatively impacted. So we, you know, we've got DFA and the various other elements we've put in place in terms of reclamation.

And, if there are any specific issues, I'd be more than happy to undertake to follow up, you know, in terms of—because, I mean, there's been a lot of progress, but if there's any ongoing issues, you know, I can't resolve legal disputes obviously, but if there's anything that needs further attention I'd be more than pleased to look at.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the minister's comments, and if he would like a list of properties that have borrow pits that have not been repaired I can provide him with a fairly lengthy list. Hopefully, he can provide me with a timeline that they might be done.

And I recognize that part of the problem here is that you don't actually own the properties. Is there any plan to do anything in terms of property purchase in this area either for repairs as they exist or for ongoing plans of improvements?

* (15:50)

Mr. Ashton: You know, I think it's a useful—I'll take it as a question, but I think it's a useful suggestion, because it's—clearly, as we proceed, we can recognize from some of the experiences over the last number of years, but also historically, the difficulty that we're in here, which is even though it's a provincial waterway, so we have a—we do have legal right to access. If it's privately owned land, you also have the private landowner's interests, as well. And the obvious solution, and this will be something that we'll be looking at in terms of the design issues, is for the Province to have the ownership of the actual footprint of the dike and required areas.

I wouldn't underestimate the complication and the cost of that, because, again, you are talking about some cases, you know, it's private land, and—but, you know, the—it's obviously frustrating for some of the landowners—not all, you know, but for some. And it really is a bit of an anomaly that reflects the fact that, you know, this is historic. I mean, if you go back to the original construction of the dikes and—you know, and perhaps in that time period it wasn't seen as something that was necessarily appropriate, and it was significantly developed. I mean, as is the case elsewhere in the province, a lot of development, you know, really was the development—agricultural development took place in and around the—you know, the rivers and directly adjacent to—you know, to the Assiniboine River.

So, yes, the member, I think, has identified the logical go-forward which provides clear situation with the Province and a much clearer situation for the landowners. I do recognize some of the frustration does come from the conflicting uses. So, yes, we're definitely going to build that into the design in the go-forward.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm certainly well aware of the complications involved, as that whole area is covered either by river lots or parish lots, and it has been estimated that the area in question has at least 2,500 different properties that have to be dealt with that touch upon the river. And it is, in fact, a child of the development of western Canada because, at that point in time, river lots were the common form of development. Thankfully we didn't continue down that road.

But I wanted to ask a couple of questions regarding the seepage impact on the Portage Diversion. Because of the increased capacity on the Portage Diversion, now, after a couple of different emergency redevelopments, it's now carrying more than 32,000 cubic feet per second during its peak flows for extended periods beyond its original design parameters. There has been significant seepage on the private properties in association with the Portage Diversion.

Does the minister have any intention to try and deal with those property owners as to their problem with seepage?

Mr. Ashton: No, and the member—you know, the reality is 2011 and 2014 were exceptional years. The member's quite correct some of the issues in and around the area and some of the very localized issues, and I can tell you that we have recognized the issues and are having a number of meetings, you know, with specific landowners. We're expecting that this will be a part of what will come out of the report, as well, because clearly this is—you know, it's related. And it is clearly something we will be looking at in terms of long-term design issues.

The member's aware, I'm sure, as well, with, you know, the issues relating to the fail-safe, which, you know, related, as well, recognizing the degree to which—you know, when you've had the experience we've had the last couple years, is it really reasonable to assume that these are, you know, exceptional situations when we've run into them several times? And no one can predict future weather and flooding, but clearly you have to build that into the—you know, to the experience.

So, in terms of seepage issues, issues ranging all the way up to the fail-safe, that's clearly been identified and is an issue that we are looking at addressing as part of the—you know, the—well, not want to say long-term solution—in terms of the solution for a lot of the issues in the area.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Minister. So the report in terms of the management will contain recommendations on the mitigation of the seepage issue as well?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I mean, I would fully anticipate it would be coming up just because it's come up in the general public's submission, but, you know, whether it's in the report or not, this is something that we've identified for the broader design in terms of the overall study, and similar to the Assiniboine dikes, not just the macro capacity of the Portage Diversion to carry a certain flow, but impacts in and around the immediate area.

And I've mentioned, obviously, the fail-safe, and the member's correct in terms of seepage and also some of the infrastructure issues that were referenced before. So it has clearly been identified as something that has to be part of the long-term flood mitigation, you know, which is some of the local issues, you know, that we've mentioned them. But this is, again, one of the frustrations I find for people in the area. Not only has there not been a review of the operating rules, but for many years there was just the assumption that the Portage Diversion was there; we used it. And—true—I mean, it's been used fairly regularly in the last few years. I mean, it, you know, reflects the value of it not just to the management of the Assiniboine River, but also for the flood system generally here, you know, in the city of Winnipeg under some circumstances.

So, you know, one of our goals, certainly my goal as minister has been to get, I think, what's an historic review of not just our overall flood-mitigation systems, but some of the real legitimate concerns in that area. It's one of the reasons we engaged former MLA for the area, David Faurshou, who used to ask very similar questions to this in Estimates. So I trust in his sense of the area and I think it was appropriate, you know, to sort of reach beyond partisan differences in the past to get some real sense. But one of the reasons, quite frankly, David Faurshou's there is we want to make sure that people in that area generally—and he knows a lot of them; the member does as well—felt that they had full access and were able to have full input and

have a broad range of issues raised. And this is clearly—it's clearly on the agenda and it's clearly a priority for us.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the minister's response to that. While we're talking about water control structures, the management of the Fairford water control structure was not part of the review. Is there any plans to review the management of that for future considerations?

Mr. Ashton: I'm just going to go back to PR 247 for a moment, if we could. Bridge inspection: visual inspection September of last year; detailed inspection July of 2011; monitoring survey commenced November 2013; and interim inspections twice per year. So, again, that was a question that was asked earlier.

And in terms of the operating rules in terms of the Fairford, a lot of that's really tied in to the current design that's going to take place in terms of the two emergency outlets. Obviously, it does change the situation fairly significantly, the increased flows that we're planning. And we would certainly consider it as part of that as well. I mean, the Fairford operating rules are pretty straightforward. It really is very much, you know, there's a physical capacity which is mostly determined by the height of the lake minus any throttling back to protect against frazil ice which can have a very significant negative impact on Lake St. Martin. Again, so the member knows, that's one of the reasons why the emergency outlet was so important because the emergency outlet allows us to operate the full physical capacity of the Fairford.

And they will be commenting on that, I'm advised, in terms of the Fairford, the operating review panel and—along with the emergency channel. So it, you know, to my mind, in looking at the Portage Diversion, which is the inlet, obviously, there will be, you know, some commentary on the outlet, although I do want to add a qualification, again, that the situation will have changed for the two outlets with the Fairford potentially. So any review currently will change over time.

* (16:00)

Mr. Wishart: The minister made comment on the inlet side of Fairford. Are there any plans to do any work on the inlet side? There's been some significant silt buildup there.

Mr. Ashton: We did look at that. There was some discussion on the Fairford, I think, back around 2006 when, believe it or not—and I know the member

knows this, but people may forget that we actually had low levels, very significantly, you know, reduced from what we've seen. And there was some potential to look at that, but we don't have low levels now.

One—you know, we certainly have reviewed that and we reviewed that on the Assiniboine as well. That was one of the first recommendations people said in the Assiniboine. It's actually very difficult to achieve any significant benefits—often very expensive if you can do it all, because, again, you've got very significant flows. You have to have a ability to deal with it. But, you know, again, as is the case elsewhere, if it is feasible, we would certainly look at it. Certainly, initial indications indicate that it's difficult to do, but as we finalize the work, we still have the—you know, the two design options from Lake Manitoba and the final work on the other side. It's not something that's been totally ruled out. But, generally speaking, up until now, it's not a—it's not seen as a particularly feasible approach. You really have to get a broader construction—in this case, a second outlet from Lake Manitoba—to get any significant reduced—additional reduced flows.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

The emergency channel from Lake St. Martin: What is its current status?

Mr. Ashton: It's currently operating on—I did indicate earlier that the current flow is 3,300 cfs, and I did—I don't know if it's necessary to repeat it—I put on the record the current situation in terms of the operating approval from the feds and the degree to which we've also asked them for the standing ability to operate it when it's—when Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin are above flood level.

Currently—and I want to stress again, they've been co-operative, but currently we are required to basically seek operating approval when we hit flood level, not in anticipation of a flood, and we're attempting to get a standing ability to do that.

Of course, with a permanent outlet that changes, you can have operating rules that will allow operation in anticipation of a flood both in terms of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, which is one of the key elements for us in terms of the design.

Mr. Wishart: So could the minister also bring us up to date on where the planning process is for the permanent outlet on Lake Manitoba and what consultations are planned in the near future?

Mr. Ashton: The—there are two outlets—two options have been looked at for Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin—you know, the Lake Manitoba portion. The—we're anticipating that we should be able to reach a decision pretty soon on that. Within the next month or two, I think, probably is our time frame. I'm going to get a full briefing on this in—within the next couple of weeks, I think. So at that point we'll be in a position of going to the public.

There's been a fair amount of feedback already on the first feed—you know, the first consultations we did. The key issues are obviously minimizing any negative impacts on landowners or surrounding communities and make sure we get the hydraulic flow. And certainly from first examination, they're both similar in terms of hydraulic flow, but we've been doing a significant amount of surveying. So you've got to work looking at other potential impacts on, you know, groundwater, drainage, land issues in the area, so I'm anticipating a decision fairly shortly.

It's important because we want to stay on track in terms of going to the next step which is obviously—as we proceed with all the environmental approvals. And we've been in contact with the federal government in terms of the requisite federal approvals. We also need to do the detailed design work, so that'll be the next step, moving to actual detailed design on the selected outlet. But we should have decision on the outlet very shortly.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): So, looking into the Estimates book here for 2015-16, if I go to page 122, we have some emergency expenditures appropriations here. And the \$28 million, I think, is the minister said in past years that's kind of the plug number that we put in there for chances we're going to have some emergency, whether it be flood or fire.

Can the minister, though, expand on the area B there, 2011 spring flood, and the—last year had a \$12-million estimate and this year a \$10,500,000 estimate, and what would that entail?

Mr. Ashton: I was going to update the member on some questions he asked, and I'll start with the burrowing owls issue. I'm going to try and restrain myself from what I wanted to say here. I get a hoot out of the issue—no, wait a sec.

Actually, the member's quite correct. This is starting to be seen as a potential issue in southwest Manitoba. We're also seeing barn swallows becoming an issue with our bridges. So, two different impacts. So there can be and have been

some construction delays as we have to wait until the end of the nesting season, which is the beginning of August. It is a big issue for other provinces apparently, and we are looking at ways of minimizing impacts to our operations. So, burrowing owls, the member was quite correct, and I'll add to it barn swallows.

The member also asked about the Brandon 18th Street bridge lighting, and if this is the enhanced lighting provided by the City of Brandon, we provide the main lighting, so that's a distinction between the two. There were damages from the 2011 flood, and the City is planning a repair as—you know, as part of the dike restoration project.

And on the 2011 question, there are ongoing costs related to the 2011 flood. This is an accounting process, I'm assuming, from DFA—other claims and other stuff from the—mostly DFA? *[interjection]* Mostly recoverable DFA. It's important to note that you had areas where the flooding took place in 2011, recovery really was delayed in 2011—or, pardon me, to 2012, '13, '14, so even now we have ongoing impacts, and they can—is really a—cash flow related to mostly DFA claims.

Mr. Helwer: So, continuing on with that, can the minister provide us with an update and what are the outstanding claims still from 2011? There's been different numbers in different years, and obviously some of them have been settled, some of them may have gone away, but is there a number that we can talk about currently?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can get an update. It's important to note that you will often have situations where, you know, recovery is delayed, so you don't have, you know, the ability to get in and reconstruct a road or a bridge or et cetera. A lot of our claims are infrastructure; could be provincial, could be municipal.

You also have scenarios where more documentation is needed. You know, we are very cognizant of the fact that with DFA we have to make sure we have absolute accountability on the accounting side, because if it's not there when it goes to the federal government for recovery, they will insist that it be there, and we can and we will lose our ability to claim the provincial share.

In terms of claims, they have 14 private claims that are still open at various stages of appeal and 67 public sector claims, and I want to stress again that's often because the work is not complete. And I

think it's—I should add in some cases you've got areas where—of the province where, you know, there's not just the recovery aspect, but contract available, so that's the current summary. The vast majority of claims, though, happen fully resolved and fully paid out.

* (16:10)

Mr. Helwer: So that's the 2011 flood, and then moving forward to the next flood, I imagine there are a similar number—well, perhaps not a similar number, but they could—the minister could provide us with the number of outstanding claims from the last flood?

Mr. Ashton: I will certainly do that, and perhaps in the interest of time as we progress, as I get the exact number I will put it on the record.

Mr. Helwer: So then continuing on down page 122, we were in appropriation 27(3) Manitoba floodway expansion and East Side Road Authority estimates of expenditure there.

Can the minister inform us on responsibilities for both the floodway and the East Side Road Authority? I understand they are going to be transferred out of MIT into an authority—the East Side Road Authority in total, or can he perhaps expand on that?

Mr. Ashton: Couple key dimensions to the East Side Road Authority. One is it's always been under the responsibility of the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson). So we've not been directly responsible in terms of the day-to-day operations, and that makes sense. The minister is—obviously, the Minister for Northern Affairs, also is MLA for virtually all of the East Side Road Authority area. I'm actually MLA for one of the communities, Oxford House, Bunibonibee Cree Nation.

And what is happening is there's a couple different dimensions. We are in the process of transferring the construction of winter roads basically over to East Side Road Authority in that area. The logic there is a lot of these winter roads are going to be transitioned into the all-weather roads, and obviously they've developed in terms of that.

And I think the member's talking about operating—the operating costs for East Side Road Authority, yes, which again, we are transferring. So we were not responsible directly for the administration. But that's what's happening in terms of the current budget instead.

Mr. Helwer: So the minister is ahead of me in my questions here, obviously, but so we—the MIT is currently responsible for construction of east-side road and maintenance, but that is being moved to East Side Road Authority, is that correct and when will that happen?

Mr. Ashton: I'm just getting an update on the claims. We have 765 open private claims. That can be at various stages of, you know, perhaps partial payments, receipts coming in. I mean, it's—I want to stress these aren't 765 claims that haven't been paid at all. On the public sector side, similar situation, 83 open public sector claims. Again, that's for 2014.

And yes, again, we have no responsibility for the East Side Road Authority. That's entirely Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Mr. Helwer: Yes, the question had to do with the minister's continuation of the winter roads, and you mentioned you are responsible for construction and maintenance of winter roads, but that's being transferred. And when will that occur?

Mr. Ashton: We're in the process of transferring for the East Side Road Authority area. Elsewhere will still be under MIT. So York Landing, War Lake, Thicket Portage, Pikwitonei, Pukatawagan, let's see, where else would be—Brochet, lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake, they would all be under our jurisdiction, as well would be the ice crossing at Norway House as well. So everywhere else—and Shamattawa, of course, mustn't forget they're not in the east-side area. So any community that's not east-side road area we'll continue to provide winter road service. Everywhere else will be transitioned to the East Side Road Authority.

Mr. Helwer: So the crossing over Lake Winnipeg will be east-side road, or that stays with MIT?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we—it's already been transferred.

Mr. Helwer: Going back—I know we're jumping back and forth here, but the 2014 claims, there's the private and then the public sector, I guess, was the other level. Can the minister provide us with a guideline of what would be the largest outstanding claims in either of those two areas?

Mr. Ashton: It'd be difficult to do that without really getting into details of, you know, particular cases. You know, I mean, generally speaking, infrastructure issues, you know, the public sector would be—some cases would appear to be fairly large, but, again, it

may not be due to a dispute. It may be related to issues of contract availability.

I do want to indicate that we've gone out of our way, especially in the southwest, given, you know, the degree to which they've been hit time and time again, to really try and work with the municipalities and local residents on ensuring that we recognize some of the challenges they face just in terms of, you know, the myriad of issues, financial issues and others. I do want to stress that we do make provision for the ability for municipalities, for example, to engage people to actually do, you know, work on files, et cetera.

So we put in extraordinary measures, I believe, and I mentioned this meeting very recently with Two Borders. It was a positive meeting. There were some very significant compliments for the working relationship with the department I want to put on the record, and I echo that with our working relationship with the municipality. But one of the key things we have really been putting forward is the degree to which we, through the DFA process, can provide resources to assist them, and we've taken into account some of the other concerns they've raised.

So, yes, as I said, it's hard to provide, you know, specifics on each case, but we've got a significant amount out already, but our goal is to work with the municipalities and, you know, the individuals who get it to get the claims closed as soon as possible and make sure people get the assistance they need.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): I would like to—I guess I was talking to the minister before. I've—you've mentioned here that you—the southwest, you're working with the southwest, and, again, we do have a lot of issues that we came up with in the last—since I, you know, was one of the—become the MLA back in January, and we've been hit with the hardest flood situation ever.

And I think the biggest one, too, was we have some farmers who are in the area. They need some crop spraying, but the fact is the infrastructure—they would love to build a runway that's paved for their jet to—they're huge farmers, they farm both in the US and in Canada, and they want to build this runway, but it's been so wet in the last four years that they—impossible to do it.

But they've had permits in the past to use the highway that's just north of the crossing—customs crossing at Antler, and it's a very quiet stretch of highway, that they've always used proper flagging,

the proper people to—in place to make sure that it is—they land safely; they don't jeopardize the public. They've done this a couple of years because of this situation, and for this time, this year, they—we—they were unable to get their permit.

And they're also have been hit really hard again this year. They had much rain in the southwest corner. They've been hit again, almost on a weekly basis, about four to five inches of rain. This past Saturday, Sunday, they had two inches, so when you get that much rain on top of each—it doesn't take—it takes only an inch of rain to have that problem continuous. But when they get six inches at a time, they're really trying to make ends meet here, to get sure that this crop—and, again, these farmers are going to survive this whole ordeal that they've been faced in the last four years.

Why is it this department refused to give them a licence to do this after they've had it for a number—three or four years? Again, if it becomes dry again, they'll be able to build their runway.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I do appreciate the member raising this with me before, and I did ask for a complete update, and I can give the member a complete update right now.

First of all, it's important to note that aircraft are prohibited from using highways except under exceptional circumstances, and the No. 1 element is if there's no viable alternative. Department did, when there were clearly no viable alternatives, allow it.

* (16:20)

I want to stress that the viable alternative in this case is a municipal road. This—the road that is the potential alternative was inspected by MIT today and is in good shape, apparently, has been recently dragged by the RM. So, again, under the statute, what the department is doing is just following what the law says, which is when a viable alternative is available, it needs to be used. And I certainly appreciate there may not have been a viable alternative in the flood issues that we were dealing with last year in the area. Department did accommodate it then. But they really do have a legal responsibility here to only permit if there's no viable alternative, and it's certainly an indication as of today that there is a viable alternative with a municipal road.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mister—the minister doesn't understand that the—that they have the same

conditions that they've had in the last four years. They're just as wet as they were last year at this time.

Mr. Ashton: I'm just advising the member what the current inspection by the department is which is that there is a viable alternative, a municipal road. Work was just recently done on it, and the inspection is current as of today. So I do rely on the department to provide that technical analysis. That's what the law states. So I certainly appreciate the member asking the question, but given the law and given the fact that a viable alternative is available, inspected as of today, I think the only logical resolution to this is to, again, have the operation, the landing, on the municipal road which has been used in the past. So, again, this is based on current information as of today.

Mr. Piwniuk: Okay. I'll move on to the infrastructure, I guess. You know, over the number of years—I moved out to Virden 20 years ago and, you know, I remember talking to somebody with—from MIT, saying that those bridges that were washed out this past flood conditions of 2014 basically had a 50-year life expansion. And many of those, the life expansions of those bridges, were more than 60 years old which should have been probably replaced in the last 15 years. And now that we actually have many bridges have to be repaired—I believe right now there's, like, three of them that were on 83 Highway that are being repaired right now as we speak, one being on Pipestone that was just completed in the winter, just at the end of the winter here, and we have number—a number of them that are 1 and Highway 2.

The biggest concern I have is how much of the cost would it have been if we would have replaced these bridges, been proactive in replacing those bridges, and say, once every two years we—the government would have replaced them once every two years instead of having to replace them all at one time? I would believe there's supply and demand; the cost of contractors, it will be higher now because there's such a demand to replace them. But there's only so much contractors out there to actually do the bridges. How much more are these bridges going to cost us because of the lack—the inactiveness or the reactiveness of this government?

Mr. Ashton: Well, them's fighting words, Mr. Chairperson, because we've taken the capital program from about \$90 million in 1999 to the point where it's been spending more than \$700 million on roads and bridges. And I think the member

misunderstands one key element here. When you have a—something that's designed for a period of time, you don't tear it down after 50 years if it's still in good shape, and you don't keep a structure in place if it was designed for 50 years and after 20 or 30 years it is showing signs of needing refurbishment or replacement. I can tell you we've got wooden bridges in the system that probably date back to the 1920s that are in better shape than some of the bridges that were built in the 1960s and '70s. We've had significant challenges, not just, you know, with bridges over waterways but with overpasses built probably in the early—well, early '70s which have shown significant stresses.

So what we do is we assess the state of existing bridges. A number of years ago, we brought in a very significant enhanced bridge inspection program. We've identified—and former ministers and the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) as minister—identified the need to significantly invest both in terms of inspection and in terms of replacement. And I can tell you, we—you know, if I just look at what we've been doing in the southwest, I put on the record about \$70 million just in the last three—you know, just in a three-year period, in terms of dealing with some of the impacts from flooding, et cetera. So, as needed, absolutely we respond.

It's important to note, by the way, in the flood, that there's no real direct correlation between the bridges that were washed out in terms of age or condition. A lot of it is more to do with the geotechnical—the hydraulic flows. So again, you can't take, you know, a specific element.

But we are—we're increasingly investing the infrastructure system and bridges are becoming a significant part of that, year over year, a significant increased part. There's no different the challenges that a lot of our municipalities are faced with.

So the simple answer really on this one is, the long-term solution as having an investment in core infrastructure, that's what we're doing. Bridges will be a significant part of that and when we redo the bridges—the Coulter bridge is a good example—we build it not only to pre-existing standards, but we build it for 40, 50, 60 years out. And I do want to stress again, a lot of our bridges last much longer than the, you know, the amortized period or the design life. No different than the hydro dams. We have hydro dams on the Winnipeg River system that are 100 years old. Now, I'm not sure what the counting on hydro dams is, it's probably 40 to

50 years design life. You know, if you take care of an asset—no different than a house. I mean there are houses in the member's constituency that are more than a century old. They're probably in better shape than some of the houses built 50 years ago. So that's the key principle; to invest in, you know, the infrastructure, to maintain it, to refurbish it, to inspect it.

So I would actually argue one of the major success stories in the last period of time has been the degree to which we have been out ahead of the curve. When other jurisdictions have faced catastrophic collapses of bridges and overpasses—Minneapolis, Montreal—you know what? We have been out ahead of the curve and it's because we've been—I give the credit—full credit to our staff, our engineers and our other technical experts. They identified a long time ago that you have to have regular inspections, you have to reinvest.

So, you know, I appreciate where the members coming from in terms of that, but I do believe that that's exactly what we're doing. Not an arbitrary replacement of bridges, but we are significantly investing in bridges and we'll continue to do that.

Mr. Piwniuk: You've mentioned the Waskada bridge, and there's also the Hardy bridge. Those two bridges were built, you know, these last—they were just been opened—the Hardy bridge is been open this spring. And my question was, for both bridges, what was the actual tendered cost of those bridges and what was the actual cost to the contractor on those two bridges?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can get the costs for—I mean, the Coulter bridge, of course, the other is, you know, under completion right now.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I know the government typically has road plans in place five years in advance, so they can have enough time to prepare for any road repairs and new construction that they want to do.

I was wondering if the minister could inform me if there is any plans for work on PTH 15 between Dugald and Anola.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we are doing some work on the road that's adjacent to it this year, microsurfacing. And we're just pulling up the capital program. In 2016, a very significant investment—from Dugald to the Brokenhead River—a significant investment in paving—\$21 million.

* (16:30)

Mr. Smook: Could you repeat that, because I wasn't able to hear that?

Mr. Ashton: Twenty-one million. Thank you.

Mr. Helwer: As we've been traveling around the province listening to people we've heard a lot of questions about infrastructure, obviously, and the few times we've been in The Pas there I've heard from several people that they've been promised time and time again that PR 283 is going to be improved to the Saskatchewan border, but they have yet to see the final sections being done.

Can the minister inform us if there is any plans in the next five-year plan to include that section of road?

Mr. Ashton: Well, certainly we've been doing a significant amount of work in The Pas area. We've had major upgrades on Highway 10, which is very significant, going back a few years ago to the significant work that was done in OCN itself and in and around The Pas area especially south. We did a total upgrade to the junction with Highway 60, and we have indicated in terms of this specific initiative, the importance of it—actually went to the Hudson Bay Route Association last year largely because there's been a real effort to improve east-west connections.

We're significantly ahead of Saskatchewan in terms of that. They—the condition of their infrastructure is far more problematic and I do want to stress that is important for a number of reasons, but not the least of which is the degree to which we see some real potential for the catchment area in terms of grain to connect it into The Pas. Le Pas has lost its—terminal but there's I think every opportunity to look at additional storage over the next period of time. We are looking at a—overlay planned in 2017, again, that's been programmed from the west half to Saskatchewan, which is the key priority.

We did the eastern portion a while ago and we did raise the loading to A-1 last October. So I'm not sure when the member's last discussion was with the people in The Pas, but we've raised the loading. We've done half of it, and by 2017 we'll have the other half done and we'll be banging on the door with the government of Saskatchewan to see if we can actually influence them to see if they can re-connect from their side because we think it's a win-win for Saskatchewan producers. And it's certainly a win-win for people in Carrot River Valley to rely on

the highway and also for The Pas which is an absolute logical connection for grain through the Port of Churchill. So, yes, we're making significant progress on that.

Mr. Helwer: And, yes, indeed is the second part of the road to Saskatchewan that the questions have been about and obviously the minister has set a date there for when the plans are to resurface it, I guess, is the work that will be done.

So moving into—back into the flood area, can the minister provide us with a status update on upgrading of the province's flood forecasting equipment, and where would I look for the type of expenditure in the expenditure Estimates book?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can get a summary of that. We've done quite a bit over the last number of years in terms of monitoring stations, you know, the equipment side, that's important. I won't underestimate, too, some of the related elements have improved, the ability to forecast which is on the LiDAR surveying side. But I can get a full list of the enhancements over the last number of years.

Mr. Helwer: Obviously, we're still looking down the flood area here and we still have a number of outstanding flood evacuees from the 2011 flood who have not yet been able to return home. I know that number is a bit of a moving target. Can the minister update us with the current number of flood evacuees that are still not home from 2011?

Mr. Ashton: I'd have to track that down. We don't actually make the decision to evacuate. That's done by the First Nations themselves, you know, in terms of the First Nations evacuees. And I can indicate there's been significant progress in working with the First Nations and AANDC on the goal of what we're really looking at here, which is the ability of people to go back to flood-protected homes that aren't mould contaminated from chronic issues related to flooding in the past and, in some cases, the high water table, you know, not directly flooding.

And there's been significant land acquisition. Funding has been put in place in terms of homes. The minister responsible for this is Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson), and he's played a key lead role, and we're expecting very significant progress over the next few months, which will get people into essentially relocated areas which will be, of course, part of their reserve and will be in housing that is new and also is not subject to chronic

flooding. And, of course, that's the one side of the equation.

The other is the work we're doing on the emergency outlet from Lake St. Martin, which, to my mind, is job No. 1 in the province. The most chronically flood-impacted communities are in the Lake St. Martin area, the four communities. And our goal is to make sure that our work with the First Nations and the federal government, that we have a dramatically improved situation in the future.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you to the minister, and I understand, then, he'll be getting us those numbers, and while he's looking for those, we can look for the cost to the taxpayers of those evacuees not being able to return home. And, of course, we have some other evacuees from the 2014 flood, so interested in the same types of numbers: how many are still not in their homes and the cost to taxpayers of those evacuees.

Mr. Ashton: First of all, evacuation costs are all under the federal government because of, you know, we're dealing with First Nations. I can indicate a while back, don't have the current number, but total cost was hitting around \$90 million. And we've put forward our willingness, even though it doesn't impact on, you know, our budget, but, you know, because it is entirely a fiduciary responsibility of the federal government, to be part of the solution, we're talking about Manitobans and we're talking about, on the flood-mitigation side, so that's why we're proceeding with the two outlets. We don't have a full commitment yet from the federal government. We're going to continue to work to get that.

I point out, by the way, that there's significant work that could be done in communities such as Peguis. There's still some remaining work in Fisher River. There's significant work where, you know, we do require federal commitments, you know, Ebb and Flow, Sandy Bay. There are a number of communities that continue to have significant flooding, around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin; we continue to encourage the federal government come to the table. We're there; the Province is playing a key role in flood mitigation and, you know, in terms of cost [*inaudible*] I'll be the first, and I've said it publicly, it would've made a lot more sense to put \$90 million into flood mitigation years ago than, you know, paying it out in terms of costs for evacuees.

And, you know, I don't want to be overly critical; that's not my point. I think the lesson for the

federal government is very similar to the lesson that Manitobans learned, really, for a couple of generations, which is that it makes a lot more sense to invest in flood mitigation than dealing with the, you know, the avoidable costs that you face after a major flood. When I say avoidable, there's always going to be a major flood that has huge impacts, but we've saved, I think, the current account on the floodway is it's now saved \$38 billion in terms of, you know, flood costs, along with the trauma cost to people. It's probably an investment, well, maybe \$1 billion. So that model is still out there, still available for the federal government as well. And we are part of the solution.

Mr. Helwer: There's been plenty of issues around the Shellmouth Dam, and whether it's artificial or intentional flooding is open for great debate amongst the residents there. Some difficulties again this year where there was lots of advice given to MIT that they should drain down the reservoir, and MIT was apparently adamant that, no, thinks that we're going to have a drought, so that wasn't necessary, and then the dam filled up within a week, and we had to increase flows out of there.

* (16:40)

Can the minister inform us what the issue was there in terms of our flood forecasting? We seem to have been having a lot of difficulty over the last couple years, and I know the minister was perhaps not present in his portfolio at the time, the spring where we were having some issues, but how are we going to fix this, and it seems to be an ongoing problem that plagues that area of the province.

Mr. Ashton: There were some unique circumstances at Shellmouth which I've outlined are to do with flows in Saskatchewan. There were clearly, you know, gaps there in terms of what was transpiring. We've got some ongoing issues that, you know, there have been in terms of flows but also the impact of illegal drainage or unregulated drainage in Saskatchewan. That's a huge priority for us. It's a huge issue for people, particularly in the southwest, because of potential—not so much in a major flood, but in flood situations that might normally have a limited impact, that you have high impacts.

I would argue, actually, we've had a very good track record; our forecasting staff has had a very good track record over the last number of years. Recognizing that we're dealing with unprecedented flooding, and usually with forecasting you need a—you know, a range of experience to deal with it.

We've significantly enhanced our forecasting capacities. We have a very good team that's put in place, you know, so I think in the overall forecasting—we never claim to be perfect, but we have taken some—you know, some of our expertise and we've built it up. But there were some issues on the forecast.

Again—and the member's quite right. He's identified, I think, with the Shellmouth—the key issue in the Shellmouth is twofold. One is, obviously, if you have flooding, there's flooding; what are the impacts? But the second is how much of that flooding is artificial and how much of it has an impact on producers in the downstream area. And we have got statutory compensation.

I want to stress, in many cases, if there are, you know, limited payouts, it's because there either wasn't artificial flooding or artificial flooding didn't have significant impacts or the flooding impacts were dealt with through a other program, agricultural program. You know, we're not going to provide duplicate coverage, but, you know, I appreciate there's—there're always people that will argue it's artificial when the scientific analysis says it's natural flooding. And I point out 2011, 2014, we've had significant flooding that was natural, impacting all sorts of people throughout the watershed. And the degree to which the decision that is made on the operating side, yes, we do take into account the forecast.

We also have to be concerned about the downstream users, as well, maintaining a water supply. The amount of value added that comes from our ability to provide a guaranteed water supply in dry years is immense to anybody downstream. That includes in the immediate vicinity of the Shellmouth, but it particularly impacts around Portage la Prairie. A lot of the potato development and a lot of the vegetable development is absolutely predicated on having a reliable supply.

So I mentioned this earlier in the question, but operating rules for the Shellmouth—there are many people that rely on the Shellmouth, one way or the other are impacted. I do believe it's reasonable to ask for review, and I've put that on the record that we're seriously looking at that. But we—you know, we're working on the forecasting side. There were some challenges this year. But, you know, they—operating decisions were done in good faith, and, again, there is provisions; if there's artificial flooding that creates damage, it—you know, it will be covered.

Mr. Helwer: So how will the decision be made whether there will be a review or not?

Mr. Ashton: Essentially what happens is we look at any of the flood events, and the—we've got a bit of a template now, technically, from the experience going back to 2011. You've got to remember, the statutory coverage is new. It didn't exist until we brought it in. Prior to that, there was coverage on an ad hoc basis, and so we've got that template. Basically, then, we look at whether there were impacts and whether the impacts were from natural flooding or artificial flooding.

Mr. Helwer: So moving to the Red River, have there been any payments for damage under The Red River Floodway Act for artificial flooding? When would that have occurred and what would have been covered?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can get that information. We have had artificial flooding in the past in the immediate area, just—you know, the market gardens, basically, they're in that area, and there has been compensation in a number of years, again, based on actual losses from what is clearly, scientifically artificial flood.

Mr. Helwer: So, when the minister's looking for that information, it'd be interesting to know what would've been covered by that compensation in terms of damages and how they are inspected or adjusted.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the model for the Shellmouth is the same that we have for the floodway, the same methodology, same inspection process, same assurance that we don't provide duplicate coverage, but it's absolutely identical to the floodway. But I'll get the exact information, probably in writing, to the member.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Brandon West? Are there any more questions?

Seeing no further questions, I will now deal with the resolutions. This concludes the Estimates for this—[interjection] No? Yes, I'll deal with the resolutions. Okay.

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$43,527,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Highways and Transportation Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$180,389,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Infrastructure Works, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,139,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Emergency Measures and Protective Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$366,415,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$646,520,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 15.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 15.1.

At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Helwer: Well, we're waiting until they leave, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: I don't see them anymore.

* (16:50)

Mr. Helwer: I move that line 15.1.(a), the minister's salary, be reduced to \$1, and seconded by the MLA for Portage la Prairie.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Mr. Helwer: Now, I understand that this could have some difficulties for the minister, seeing as I understand he has an outstanding debt that he needs to deal with, but that's not the responsibility of the

taxpayers of Manitoba to pay for that debt, and if he'd been able to gather some more fundraising from his supporters, I'm sure he would have been able to retire that, and—[interjection] Well, it's nice to hear that there's an offer on the table already.

So it is—when I look at the Department for Infrastructure and Transportation over the last several years, while I do agree there has been some road work done, it's—the planning has been problematic, and when we look at the budgets of Infrastructure and Transportation, and we see that over the past five years, there has been almost \$2.3 billion underspent by this department, one really does have to wonder how much further we could be ahead in Manitoba, avoiding the potholes and replacing the bridges that would have been done had the government, indeed, just followed its budget.

And that's all we've really been asking over the past several years, that the budget's set there, we'd like to see it followed in—not only in this department, but in all departments. And obviously, other departments have a problem with overages. This one, in particular, has a problem with under-spending. And we've seen the detrimental impact that has had on Manitoba's infrastructure.

And I believe we will be paying for that for years to come, as we see the roads damaged, the bridges damaged, the impact that it has on commerce in Manitoba, the impact that it has on individual citizens trying to get access to various areas of Manitoba and programs and even access to emergency services. So it's indeed a concern for Manitobans that this department has had so many struggles with its spending.

And while I don't often advocate for government spending, in this case I would have been quite pleased to see the government expend its budget on those projects that it had anticipated. And I do understand that there are instances where there are problems with weather and other areas; however, this is over five years, so it's not something that just happened overnight.

The government has moved on several good bases. I do—I am quite pleased that the government did issue tenders early last year in the fall and that enabled contractors in Manitoba to develop their plans and source not only equipment but staff in anticipation of the projects that we—they might bid on and make sure that they had adequate resources in place for those projects. So there's certainly good

movement by the department; I don't want to say that there's been nothing good happen.

And we've seen—have seen, obviously, developments around the province with infrastructure that we do like to see but, certainly, when we look at the underspending and the hole that that has put Manitoba in, it's quite concerning, when infrastructure seemed to be the buzzword of the day just about every year, and then when we look at recent events and recent—some sort of nomination race or something of that nature that I didn't even hear the word infrastructure mentioned once by any candidate.

So quite distressing to see that this was the be-all-end-all for Manitoba, and I do agree, it's very important that infrastructure—the importance that infrastructure has in Manitoba, but then not one single candidate for the NDP leadership found it worthy of any mention whatsoever, seems to have fallen off the radar. And I know the government has lots of challenges and lots of difficulties, but in this regard, you know, Manitobans, they interact with their infrastructure every day. And we've heard from all over North America, certainly from CAA on terms of the dire circumstances of our roads. It's quite saddening to see the contest every year that CAA runs on the worst road in Manitoba. And while there is only one winner, or loser if you want to look at it that way, there are many, many, many contenders for those roads.

And, when I look at infrastructure throughout the rest—and not just Canada but the rest of North America and how infrastructure is handled, we do see that there are lots of things that the Province could learn from other jurisdictions on how to do things better. And, yes, I agree, a better government, a new government would be one of the things that could happen.

But nonetheless, we are working with the current government here, and they had an opportunity, but there were failures over the last five years by the minister to fully expend his budget, and it was certainly necessary throughout Manitoba to see those types of expenditures made.

So that's one of the real criteria for this particular motion. And I know it will put some duress on the minister repaying his debt, but I hear offers across the table already, so I'm sure he's writing names down so he could collect some more income from there. There you go.

So thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I actually thought the motion might be to—for \$110, you know, \$1 for each one of the kilometres that the member will be able to drive home to Brandon on. I could have been 45 per cent increase to actually reflect the fact, year over year, we've increased the capital budget by 45 per cent. I wouldn't go as far as to say that it should be a 700 per cent increase, because that's actually how much we've increased the expenditure on highways since we came into government, from \$90 million to over \$700 million.

But, you know, my sense is it doesn't really matter, because I know the member's acting like he's an advocate for investment in transportation infrastructure, but they've actually—not only didn't they do it when they were in government, they've actually—they've voted against everything we've done.

I noticed he referenced the '90s as being an alternate universe earlier. You know, I guess the Conservatives of those days were the evil twins. I wanted to let him know, it was not a Star Trek episode, it was reality for Manitobans. They underestimated—underinvested in infrastructure.

But you know what? We could continue to debate this. I'm quite pleased to deal with this. As minister, regardless of what happens on this, I consider it a real honour. And you know what? We are committed to core infrastructure, period.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: The question before the committee is as follows: that line 15.1.(a), the minister's salary, be reduced to \$1.

Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,692,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Administration, Finance and Government Services Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

For the record, the next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for Jobs and the Economy.

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson (Jennifer Howard): Order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now continue consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council.

Would the minister's staff and opposition staff please enter the Chamber.

As previously agreed, questioning will proceed in a global manner, and the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): When we were last in Executive Council, I was posing questions to the First Minister with respect to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council, and I'd like to ask a few more questions on that.

I believe at the end of our discussions last time, I had asked the First Minister to comment on the fact that this particular advisory council of the Premier has spent \$306,000 in the fiscal year 2013-14, but the amount of money as recorded in the Estimates for Finance indicates that that expenditure amount in that subappropriation is now \$418,000. And the Premier had indicated he thought it was good value for money, but I wonder if he could please account for the more than 25 per cent increase to the expenditure in this particular area. And I notice that under Salaries and Employee Benefits, there really are only two positions accounted for in this area, so could he comment on the 25–more than 25 per cent increase in the subappropriation and indicate if he

still thinks it's good value for the three meetings a year that occur there.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): This is an appropriation out of the Department of Finance. I just want to clarify, has the member discussed this item with—in the Estimates of the Finance Minister?

Mr. Friesen: Well, Madam Chair, I'm confused at this. I spent considerable time in the Finance Estimates, posing questions to the Finance Minister on this area in priorities and planning on page 81 of the departmental Estimates. I asked the Finance Minister, day after day, to provide information on the Premier's Economic Advisory Council, and every time I asked the Finance Minister, he indicated, and the record will show this, and I would encourage the First Minister to go back and to reread Hansard as it pertains to the Finance Estimates. Every time I asked a question, the Finance Minister deferred and said that the only place I would be able to get the answers pertaining to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council would be in Executive Council.

And so now we find ourselves in Executive Council and the Premier's response is that I have to go to Finance Estimates. Now this might be strategic on their part because now we have concluded the Finance Estimates, so, in which case I would be caught in an endless loop, but I'm just going to pose this to the Premier one more time and see if, based on the deliberations, that he may have had now with the Finance Minister, whether we could entertain these questions in this particular context.

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the member's frustration. He feels he's being bounced around a little bit. I would love nothing better to do than to refer him back to Finance, but I know those Estimates have been concluded, so I won't do that to them.

My understanding is that the budget amount hasn't changed. The expenditure amount has changed in terms of the actual, and I think he's seen an increase in the actuals, but I understand that the overall appropriation has been about the same on an annual basis. So I just, as a point of clarification, I'll just ensure that we're on the same page on that, then I'll see what else I can find out for him. Is that—

Madam Chairperson: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler.

Mr. Friesen: Well, I hope that the Premier can have his assistants do that in the context of this meeting. I can assure him that looking at that subappropriation 7.4.(b), these are estimates of expenditure, and, of

course, that these numbers are always compare the previous year to the current—or to the 2015-16 year.

The numbers in the column for '14-15 show 431, but the numbers—the Estimates here show 418 here. Now, what we indicate is that just from two years ago, though, two years ago that number was 306,000. So, it has sharply increased from just two years ago, and I'm asking for the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to comment on that. But perhaps while—if he can't comment specifically on that at this point, he could comment specifically on the other operating amount. Now, for this particular subappropriation, that other operating accounts for almost one-third or more than one third of the whole budget because there isn't further explanation given in this particular page.

Could he indicate, when it comes to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council, what would \$145,000 account for under Other Operating?

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to get the information for the member on that. My staff are seeking it now. We'll see what we can come up with for the member.

Mr. Friesen: Well, I appreciate the Premier looking into that matter.

Still on the subject of the Economic Advisory Council, the last time we discussed this matter a few days ago, the Premier had indicated that this committee still represents good value for money, and I see many of the names on this committee, and, you know, certainly these are serious people who represent important areas of the province: the private sector, the public sector, non-profits, various boards and committees. I'm certainly not meaning to impugn the reputations of anyone who comprises this council, and I know that there are members of this committee who are well known both to members on the government side as well as members on the opposition side. But I am looking at the—I'm trying to understand better what the apparatus is by which the information that is then collected on the advice and recommendations of this committee are relayed to government for consideration.

Now, the minister has indicated there's no formal minutes kept of the meetings when this group meets. And I believe at the end of the proceedings last time in Estimates, I had asked the minister then, how is there—what is the measurement? How does he gauge the effectiveness, and he had indicated at that time that the members of the committee prepare reports. I believe my last question before the gavel fell last time was when it comes to these reports, are those

reports that are generated in subcommittees of the Premier's Economic Advisory Council or would those have all been done in committee of the whole?

Mr. Selinger: My understanding—and subject to verification—is a subcommittee will be set up to study and look into a certain subject area, for example, how to increase the number of skilled tradespeople in Manitoba. And they will come back with a review of that area and recommendations on how to strengthen, for example, the number of skilled tradespeople. And that will be discussed, I believe, by the entire council, and then the recommendations will be offered to myself and senior staff and then we take them into account in our deliberations, for example, in budgeting and program decisions.

So we've made, for example, substantial improvements in the credits available to employers for hiring apprentices. I believe we have specific incentives available to hire first-year apprentices. We have incentives to retain apprentices all the way through to journeyman status and incentives for employers to hire more apprentices as well as legislation to ensure that apprentice opportunities are available when employers are bidding on public-sector contracts.

So those are the types of recommendations that would be received from the committee, and I believe the committee would discuss them among themselves as a group in its entirety and have a thrash at them and look at them and, you know, modify them as required as a result of that discussion and then forward them on to myself and senior officials for consideration.

Mr. Friesen: I just took note on page 79 of the Estimates from Finance that when there's an overview given of the work of the Premier's Economic Advisory Council, it indicates in that book that it is a broad-based organization of 36 volunteers. I just compare that to a freedom of information request that we received back that indicates there's 31 members. And so I understand there must be some fluctuation. It seems that the more recent numbers would have been the ones represented in the Estimates of Finance because I believe that the date of the request we have was earlier than that. Can the minister—or can the First Minister indicate, who are the new members that have been recently added to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council?

Mr. Selinger: I will endeavour to get the list that was provided for him in the Finance Estimates, compare it to the list that we currently have, see what

the difference is, and try to indicate to him any new members that may have been added.

But there—you know, members are added on a periodic basis. Some people for a variety of reasons are unable to continue, are—and then we look around for other good people that are interested. We try to draw on people from a—as the member has indicated, from a wide cross-section of sectors in the community, and when we—for example, new media; we try to get somebody involved from that, or new economy stuff; in the biosciences, for example, we have representation, manufacturing, media. We have people from a wide cross-section of the community that we endeavour to draw on their skills and their interests to give us an indication of what their experiences are in the community and in the economy and how those experiences can translate into government policies and initiatives that further strengthen our capacity to grow our economy and provide good employment opportunities in Manitoba. So I'll endeavour to try and get that information for the member.

* (15:00)

But I know there are changes as we go along, and we're fortunate in Manitoba. We have a lot of excellent people that are willing to go beyond their regular jobs and serve on committees like this and offer their experiences and their knowledge and their wisdom, quite frankly, on how to do get things done properly to improve services to Manitobans and to make our economy stronger.

And I just, I want to go on the record right now, while we have this opportunity, in thanking those people for doing that. I don't know that I've ever taken that opportunity in the Legislature. I've certainly done it when I've been face to face with them. I met with them about a week ago, actually—and maybe just over a week ago, probably about 10 days ago—and we had a conversation, and I gave them an update on what we were up to and I actually looked over some of the things that we had implemented in our budget and was able to identify that many of those good ideas had come out of some of their recommendations and some of the deliberations and advice they had offered government.

So they do play an important role. I appreciate the member for acknowledging that they are good people. They don't get remunerated for doing this. They do this as volunteers without remuneration. Probably some of the expenses that we talked about

earlier are for things like, you know, rooms where they meet or perhaps a supper or a breakfast, depending on the meeting, those kinds of things.

Mr. Friesen: And the Premier (Mr. Selinger) indicated that he met with the Economic Advisory Council just days ago and sat with them face to face. The information that we received back from the FIPPA request indicated that the group had only met three times in the period of one year, and that was for—in the context of a breakfast meeting, so I wonder if the Premier could just clarify: Was this at one of the breakfast meetings that he just met the advisory council, and did he meet with the committee of the whole—would that have been all 36 volunteers at that meeting?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, it was the larger group. I'm not sure if all 36 were there. I wasn't counting. But there was a large group. We met. It was around, I believe, it was around 6 p.m. in the evening, after the House had closed for the day.

Mr. Friesen: Also, according to the FIPPA response, it was indicated, because we asked the question, that the Premier had attended only one of the three meetings held over a one-year period, and that one-year period had ended in October 29th, 2014. So the Premier says he puts a lot of stock in this particular group, but when he's only been to one of three meetings over the course of one year, that seems to imply something else.

I'm wondering, first of all, I guess, I'm just asking for the Premier's response on that, that if this group is—has tremendous merit and importance, why he wouldn't be at all three meetings of the year.

And my second question for the Premier would be, then, in his absence at those meetings, who would represent the Premier and the Cabinet at those meetings?

Mr. Selinger: Again, when the larger group gets together, often it's to do what I suggested earlier, to deliberate and discuss as a total group some of the work done by the subcommittees, and then, at a later date, they forward that information to myself directly or to senior staff for consideration. So I don't want the member to take anything other than the fact that we have a high regard for the work they do and we're not in any way dismissive of the work they do.

They operate quite well. There is a secretary to the committee who works well with them and often comes in and reports on what's going on and some of the ideas coming out of there. And then, at a later

time, I'll often meet with, for example, the co-chairs and get their recommendations or specific members around specific ideas, and then I try to attend one of their overall meetings on a fairly regular basis to, in some ways, hear from them, but also to give some feedback from our side about which of their ideas we've been able to take forward as government initiatives.

Mr. Friesen: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) indicated he'd supply some information to us based on questions I just posed. I wonder if he could also indicate, when it comes to this particular group and the members of this committee, when they attend meetings, is there any kind of registration of their attendance at these meetings? Does any—even if there isn't a formal keeping of minutes or a Robert's Rules kind of construction when it comes to these things, is attendance of these members recorded in any way?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I believe they do keep a record of who attends, and that's—they do that on a regular basis.

Mr. Friesen: And also on the same line of thinking, and I realize this is a bit of an ad hoc committee and it's done by invitation—maybe ad hoc isn't the correct term, but it's not a—certainly these positions don't come with remuneration, and so we wouldn't see in orders-in-council. Or perhaps the minister—the First Minister can clarify for me, because I'm newer to this enterprise than he is, would I see names of those people appointed to the Economic Advisory Council, would I see those in order of—order-in-council appointment? I'd be inclined to think I would not because there'd be no remuneration attached to these positions.

But then the follow-up question I would have for the Premier would be are there set terms of service or is that also more casual, a tap on the shoulder and continue for some time and things are just negotiated on a more casual basis or a flowing basis?

Mr. Selinger: The member's correct, there is no orders-in-council; they do serve without remuneration. There's no fixed schedule of starting and finishing. People serve for a period of time. Some people serve for longer periods of time. Other people serve for shorter periods of time. It's often guided by their capacity to be available for the meetings, given their other career activities. We do find that many people make a real effort to be there and sometimes change their own work schedules to be there. And, if they're having trouble attending, at a certain point they might decide, after consultation with the

secretary, that they just don't have the time to do it sufficient to make the contribution they'd like to make. So we tend to work with them and find a way to allow people to contribute and get involved and then go from there.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the First Minister for that clarification.

Now, when it comes to orders-in-council, though, one thing we would see would be we would see, perhaps, like, for instance, the position of the executive co-ordinator, if that was a position that then would turn over. I notice that the executive co-ordinator's position with respect to this Economic Advisory Council comes with a remuneration of \$130,000. That was in 2013-2014. First of all, can the Premier confirm that Pat Britton is still the executive co-ordinator in that position, and perhaps I'll just leave him with that question first.

Mr. Selinger: I just want to clarify, is the question what is the 'remuneration' of the co-ordinator or secretary to the committee?

Mr. Friesen: Just looking for a clarification that the executive co-ordinator for this particular committee is still Pat Britton.

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. Friesen: When the minister—when the First Minister gets back to me and also provides some of the information that he's committed to provide, I wonder if he could just also then provide information on whatever administrative support comes along with that managerial position. It looks like it's an FTE 1.0. If he could indicate the name of that individual and how long they've been in that position.

My follow-up question for both of those, both from Pat Britton's position and for the administrative support, would be I'd like to know how long they have been in that position, but then also I imagine it would be the case that neither of these individuals would have any kind of responsibilities outside of this elsewhere in government. This is a 1.0 position. Could the Premier also confirm that neither of these individuals has other roles anywhere else in administrative or managerial across the operation of government?

* (15:10)

Mr. Selinger: Yes, subject to verification, I believe that's the case that their duties are devoted to the functioning of the council.

Mr. Friesen: The reason I asked the question is because also included in the information that I have here is the fact that Ms. Britton has been an NDP donor every year since 1999 and has given more than \$10,000 in the last five years alone to the NDP party. And, certainly, we understand that there's, you know, people who come to our enterprises who have political background, but this is a pretty important position to have someone on who comes to it with that kind of donor history to the party. And not wanting to question their credentials, but the Premier (Mr. Selinger) comfortable that someone who's giving that much to the party is able to provide the kind of independence in that office to be able to consolidate all of these non-partisan efforts around providing advice to Cabinet?

Mr. Selinger: There's been no complaints about the capacity of this individual to do a good job for many members of the committee that I'm aware of. I think there's a feeling that the efforts made serve the committee—serve the advisory council well.

I do have a list of members as of December 10th, 2014. Is that the most recent information the member has?

Mr. Friesen: Looks like the Premier's information is a little more up to date than mine. The information request looks like it was dated October 29th, 2014.

Mr. Selinger: I'd be happy to make a copy of this available. We could provide a copy of this to the member.

Mr. Friesen: And also, with respect to the membership list—and I thank the First Minister for providing that. Oh, he's just answered my next question. In most cases I could tell already because Manitoba can be a small pond in terms of people's names and faces and positions, but I was going to ask the First Minister to provide an indication of which company or which non-profit each of these individuals represents, and he has now provided that information, so I thank him for that. In most cases, then, I can surmise from the information here what sector the individual is there representing on the Premier's Economic Advisory Council.

I wonder if I could trouble the First Minister to also—probably—I mean, this is probably not something for this context, but could he commit to provide a list of the individuals' names but then also what sector—in what capacity they are tasked to this committee? So, in other words, I mean, I see here, you know, Carole Vivier on this list would—of

course, she'd be there representing the film industry. I see others. I see industry leaders here and so forth, but if the minister—First Minister could commit to providing in what respect they are there—what sector they represent, I would appreciate that information.

So if he could confirm that, and then also the follow-up question I had with respect to that is not only what sector they represent, but with respect to subcommittees, could the Premier provide a list—a complete list of the subcommittees, because he did mention the fact that there were subcommittees or subgroups. What subcommittees would there be proceeding from this list of individuals that he's supplied?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get more information from that for the individual.

I would just say this: We've given the names of the individuals and what connections they have to the community, through which institutions, what roles they play. I'm not sure that it's appropriate for me to try and classify them. They'd best classify themselves.

Some of these people, for example, the first one, Sylvie Albert, dean of the faculty of business and economics, she could claim she represents the university sector. She could claim she's quite knowledgeable in the business sector. She may have a specific specialty in the business sector. So I'm going to decline the opportunity to try and classify them at this level.

But I hope the member would look at the committee and see a wide range of views and expertise there. I mean, if you go through it, I've indicated the first person and the next one in alphabetical order. Mr. Ashton, the director of Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, do a wide range of studies on rural issues at that institute; John Baert, communications for the Manitoba government employees' union; Michael Bennaroch, dean at the Asper School of Business and the chair in business leadership. So, I mean, these people bring a wide range of expertise. So I'm going to be a little reluctant to try and classify them in a too narrow a way. But another individual, just by way of example, Ian Smith, president, Innovative Biodiagnostics, a lot of background in technology applications for both health and business purposes. So you just have a wide range of people here with a wide range of backgrounds that bring a lot of expertise to the table from different sectors in the Manitoba in—within the Manitoba community.

Mr. Friesen: I notice that one of the names in the list also was Al Morin, retired president and CEO at Assiniboine Credit Union, and that provides me, perhaps, with a good segue to a different line of questioning for the Premier (Mr. Selinger).

I noticed in order-in-council just from last week, there's an order-in-council appointment, temporary, of Ken Lofgren with acting status to the position of superintendent of Financial Institutions on the staff of the Department of Finance. I noticed this appointment simply because of the fact that right now in Manitoba, as the Premier is aware, there is an attempt for two major credit unions to merge, and, some weeks ago that initial attempt to bring about a merger between Assiniboine and Access credit unions was voted down, and I wonder if the Premier could comment, so if Ken Lofgren is appointed acting, I guess temporary appointment so he's acting registrar with respect to credit unions in Manitoba, could I ask him what conditions led to the temporary appointment of Mr. Lofgren at this particular time, and is there any concern about the registrar position being changed exactly in the middle of what is the biggest merger of credit unions in the province of Manitoba? Is there any sensitivity around that?

Mr. Selinger: And, again, this one, I must say, would best be discussed with the minister. This is, you know, we don't—I don't have detailed information, but I understand the previous incumbent had retired so they appointed somebody to make sure the post was occupied.

With respect to the credit union merger, I think the decision on whether the merger proceeded, if I understand it correctly from media reports, was entirely in the hands of the members of the institutions involved.

Mr. Friesen: I had anticipated that the First Minister might direct me back to the Finance Minister on this one, and we will have the opportunity in concurrence, so I will probably be asking the Finance Minister at that time.

I think, perhaps, in this context, though, if I could direct one more question to the First Minister on this subject. It has to do with changes that, perhaps, we as legislators will have to contemplate with respect to the credit union act at some point in the future, and certainly the Premier and I won't take this opportunity to both speculate on the possibility of change in the legislation. But what I have noticed about it, or perhaps what this latest merger initiative has revealed is that as credit unions become larger in

the province of Manitoba and as they—and as the assets within those credit unions continues to grow we're finding that there's a hiccup when it comes to the mechanism by which the merger votes are accommodated. Currently, in legislation the wording reads that when the vote is taken, and in the case of the Assiniboine and Access credit union mergers, this was interpreted by the registrar to mean that they're in one location.

*(15:20)

Now, I think that that would have worked well, and certainly that's the issue with legislation, is we can't always anticipate all of these roads that we will go down as a result of the particular wording of any legislation. In this case, I think what it meant is that a generation ago, when one small credit union merged with the one next door, it was easy to accommodate one voting centre and people had easy access to get to the voting centre and to cast their ballot and either support a merger application or to decline to support it. Now, as Assiniboine and Access attempted to get their members to a meeting, it was decided that there would be only one place for members to cast their vote.

Now, in an urban area where Assiniboine primarily has its branches, that perhaps works better than with the Access Credit Union, which is flung quite widely along the southern part of the province, which, I'm sure, the Premier is aware. What I meant, at the end of the day, is that there was one voting location for a very large geographic area. I don't claim to have the answer on this. It's an issue that came to my attention. I believe probably there are ongoing discussions between those Assiniboine credit—sorry, between these credit unions and the registrar's office. Undoubtedly, Credit Union Central is weighing in on this.

Does the Premier think that we're going to have to, in time, take a look at the wording of this to make sure that it better reflects the ability for all Manitobans to have their say and address the issues of accessibility that might arise?

Mr. Selinger: I haven't—the member raises an interesting question. This is a question that has implications for all democratically based membership organizations about access to the vote. And the credit unions, which are a form of financial co-op, have a long tradition of democracy—one member, one vote—and they follow the co-op principles more broadly, but they do restrict themselves to one

member, one vote with—regardless of the amount of equity each member has in the institution.

I'd have to check the legislation, but I do believe there is some flexibility on how they organize the vote among their own. They could have, I think, within their own decision-making capacity, they could look at more than one approach to having the vote. Now, they may feel that they needed to have people in one place at one time to do that, but I'm not sure that it's entirely restricted to always having to have a vote in one place at one time. I'd have to check the legislation on that, but if there's an interest on the part of the credit union movement broadly to look at other methods of enabling people to exercise their franchise as members of that institution, obviously, we would give that serious consideration. We don't bring a preconceived notion against that.

Obviously, in any democratic process, you want the people to have the ability to vote without fear or favour of any undue influence on them one way or the other, which is the same thing we try to do with our own democratic institutions for this Legislature. But, yes, I mean, there's always new technologies coming on stream that allow for more participation both in the business side of the organization as—perhaps as well on the democratic side. I think there would have to be an open mind to discussing these things. They're not easily done or arrived at. The institutions themselves have strong traditions. I mean, it's fairly typical for an annual meeting of an organization to have its meeting in one place at one time, subject to the notice put out.

The member does correctly note that these institutions have been getting larger, and there's been consolidation going on in the credit union movement for—since the 1970s. The consolidation movement probably started then when there were literally hundreds of credit unions in Manitoba, and slowly they started merging together. I think we're down into, you know—we're under 100, I believe, overall in terms of the number of financial co-ops or credit unions we have in the province. And they've been doing it for a variety of reasons: greater ability to have efficiency in organizational delivery of services, greater ability to invest in new technologies, more access points for their members. There's been a number of advantages to that. At the same time, they've tried to preserve their democratic character. And, if they have ideas on how they can strengthen their ability to incent the members to have more participatory role in the organization, I think we'd be open to that.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the Premier (Mr. Selinger) for that response. And, certainly, I would want to also put on the record in this context that my comments in no way were—are reflecting either a bias toward or against the merger. That's a decision, of course, for members to make, and it simply came to my attention from numerous parties, both in my constituency but also in my role of Finance critic, and that's why I posed the questions in this context.

And the Premier is exactly right is that there's been more and more interest and effort in merging credit unions, and there's many reasons for that, of course. And, you know, there's economies of scale that can be realized, and there's efficiencies that can be realized as a result, and service to members.

There's a lot of competition out there in the banking industry, of course, to provide all kinds of services to members even on a personal banking scale not just for corporate banking, and, you know, there've been all kinds of advances when it comes to the ability to pay bills by telephone now.

I know—I was working with my son a while back and he needed to pay his dad for a birthday gift for someone, and he advised me that he could just send me the money on the Internet and so we are being led in some of these discussions by the next generation. So I was brought up to speed as to how this all worked and then that worked out well, and, actually, because he—I believe he is a member of the credit union and so he was able to use those new services not just as a, you know, as a member of a large charter bank but as a member of a credit union. So that pressure is on, and, of course, that moves—that pushes that movement towards amalgamations in some respects.

But I appreciate the Premier consenting to look into that matter. *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: We have some more information. Back to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council, I'm informed that the budget's been pretty much the same between 416 and 431 over the last five years. The difference on expenditure in year was based on activities, for example, they held a skills summit in 2012-13, which brought them very—well, just a little bit over budget by \$6,000.

So it depends on the programs and events that they organize throughout the year in terms of the actual expenditures.

In addition, the member asked about the recent appointment of the acting superintendent of Financial Institutions. I indicated that it was due to a retirement. The Securities Commission and the Financial Institutions Regulation Branch was merged in 2012 to create the Manitoba Financial Services Agency. This was an efficiency measure within government. One that I haven't mentioned in question period yet, but I'll try to remember to do that in the future, that's another example.

But the branch was operating with a director-superintendent of insurance and trust co-ops and two deputy superintendents. When the former superintendent retired at the end of '14, this special operating agency decided to streamline and operate with only two senior management positions including an acting superintendent and a deputy acting in both the insurance and trust areas. This reduced the management from three to two.

They've sought Cabinet approval and received it to temporarily appoint the individual in question on an acting status to the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. He's been with the Financial Institutions Regulations Branch since 2008, but has 30 years of experience in management institutions with financial institutions across the province.

So they're going to monitor the streamline approach and see how it works. But, again, it's another example of trying to generate reduced overhead costs so that there can be more money committed to front-line service delivery in Manitoba, and this individual stepping up is part of that process.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the First Minister for that information, and we'll examine that when it comes out in Hansard.

We can see the title and see that reduction, as he says, in management that that special operating agency—still, you, know, I know it, I just would want to express that it's a tough time for someone, you know, understanding that they've experience in this sector, to come into that particular position backdropped against the largest attempt of two credit unions to merge in the province of Manitoba.

So that's definitely a challenge. It makes for some challenging conditions, and so we—certainly, we're aware that Mr. Lofgren faces some tough decisions.

I wonder if I could ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger) with respect to the Taxation, Economic and Intergovernmental Fiscal Research

Division, was there a name change here, and did this use to be the federal-provincial relations branch? Is that the same entity renamed?

* (15:30)

Mr. Selinger: So, if I understand correctly, the question is is federal-provincial relations and Finance federal-provincial relations, were they together or are they separate. Is that correct?

Mr. Friesen: That's correct. I'm wondering if there's been a name change or just a title change somewhere along the line. I used to refer to a page where I would see an area of government that was referred to as federal-provincial relations branch. I'm not finding that now, but I am finding a Taxation, Economic and Intergovernmental Fiscal Research Division.

Is there more than a name change going on here or is it a simple name change, just a renaming of the title of that area of operation?

Mr. Selinger: There are two functions there. There are the fed-prov fiscal and financial group there that work on all things related to federal-provincial relations in—with respect to transfer payments and other fiscal relationships, taxation policy, et cetera. And there is a group that works on federal-provincial relations more broadly and in—that actually includes they pay attention to international relations issues as well—intergovernmental relations at an international level. So there are two groups there. One's focused more specifically on all the fiscal relations, taxation relationships and transfer payment relationships between governments, and the other one focuses more broadly on federal-provincial relations on all matters and includes some international matters as well.

Mr. Friesen: Would this be the same office that administrates and controls the whole Building Canada infrastructure program? Is this—is that a different area? I'm wondering if that's under infrastructure or if there's any responsibility pertaining to that—shared infrastructure model back in 2007-08, and then the second iteration now. Could the Premier just bring that clarification of whether there be any overlap with respect to these groups?

Mr. Selinger: The understanding is the Building Canada Fund is handled through Municipal Government because of the nature of it. It has a strong component of involving all three levels of government: municipal government, provincial government and federal government. I'll verify that for the member. But I believe the secretariat that

looks after those interprovincial and inter-governmental infrastructure programs is handled through Municipal Government. But we're just going to try and verify that for the member. It—for sure it doesn't come out directly out of this operation over here that he's referring to in the Department of Finance.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes—

Madam Chairperson: Oh, sorry, honourable First Minister, to conclude.

Mr. Selinger: Remember the infrastructure Canada-Manitoba agreements are indeed under Municipal Government.

Mr. Gerrard: My first question to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) is a follow-up on the situation of Mr. Michal Vancura. I'm wondering whether the Premier has any update on whether there's been any progress in identifying an individual who might be a mediator or in that area.

Mr. Selinger: I have to say to the member, I—he's offered a suggestion, I followed up on it immediately, and there was an attempt to try to reach that individual. That individual has not been able to be contacted yet. So other individuals of a—with a similar kind of experience are being reached out to as well. We're pursuing an individual to do that.

I'm a little nervous about getting into all the specifics of an individual's case in the Legislature. As the member knows, we try to protect privacy in that regard. So I'm not going to refer to names, you know.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, I appreciate that. I just wanted to know whether there had been progress.

The—I had asked the other day about the recognition of the marriage of Rich North and Chris Vogel, and, you know, this is a marriage that was, I think, 41 years ago. There's a feeling that 41 years is a long time to wait for such a marriage to be recognized, and I just, you know, have a sense that, you know, a little more effort might be appropriate under circumstances such as this where there has been 41 years and still not a resolution to this.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I believe I indicated last time we are pursuing solutions in this regard. Some of the constraints are what laws we can bring in—enact in Manitoba versus what federal government laws can be enacted. But we are actively pursuing solutions in a positive way. We do think the marriage should be recognized, and we'd like to find a practical way to

do that, and so we are pursuing those measures, and I can assure the member that we were—we are not ignoring this, but we are trying to find active ways to pursue this file on the interests of the two individuals he's mentioned to be able to make their marriage fully legal in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, want to ask the Premier, this week, under our rules, we would close the sitting tomorrow, and, again, under our rules, if there were to be a session or a sitting next week, it would have to be at the call of the Premier and it would be an emergency sitting. Just—is the Premier considering such an emergency sitting next week?

Mr. Selinger: I understand discussions are occurring between House leaders and the member from River Heights on different initiatives that could be taken with respect to a calendar and also rules reform. And I'm being apprised of that by our House leader, and we look forward to an agreement being arrived at that everybody supports.

Mr. Gerrard: Just one brief follow-up to that: if there were to be an emergency sitting next week, what would be the emergency?

Mr. Selinger: I would like to suggest to the member that that's in the category of what we call the hypothetical question about a hypothetical situation and it's probably best to focus on constructive solutions at this stage of the game and avoid speculation about hypothetical situations which have not transpired yet.

Mr. Gerrard: I want to ask several questions on the situation with regard to climate change because when the Premier became Premier, there was a commitment of the government to—a legislative commitment to reach the Kyoto targets by 2012. In December of 2011, the Premier announced that they would be breaking that commitment and would not be meeting those targets.

The Premier has been talking about the greenhouse gas emissions being, you know, flat. In fact, the graph I have, over the last couple of years, shows that the—there's been a fairly steep increase over the last two years in the—of the amount of greenhouse gas produced in Manitoba. And we are—I think it's just over 4 megatons above where we should be in terms of the Kyoto targets. So I'm trying to understand, you know, there's been no new targets set up. There's been no plan put forward at this date. You know, what is the Premier's intent? Clearly, things are proceeding fairly slowly at this juncture.

When will the Premier (Mr. Selinger) be putting forward new targets and present, you know, a revised plan?

* (15:40)

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the member will know that between 2000 and 2012, our economy grew over 30 per cent. I'd have to verify the number. I think it was 31 to 37 per cent. And we were able to keep our greenhouse gas emissions flat. That did not achieve the Kyoto target, but it was a pretty strong achievement in the face of a growing economy. Some economies have done very well meeting their Kyoto targets, but the solution may have been worse in the short term at least for some of those groups because they had massive recessions. And that created some dramatic reduction in economic activity which allowed them to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. We have not followed that course of action. We followed a course of action to try and create more opportunities in Manitoba, but to do it in as sustainable way as possible.

So the member will know that the challenge on climate change is very large on a planetary basis, and we're all looking for practical ways to do that but using a sustainable development model to do that, and a sustainable development model has three important components to it. One is to be able to do it in a sustainable way in terms of climate change and other environmental policies. The second element of that is to do that in a socially inclusive and socially just way, to allow people to participate in the economy. And the third element of that is to do that in a way that allows for more opportunities for people with more economic growth which is sustainable and inclusive.

So we take that model seriously. We don't claim perfection, but we've tried to follow that approach in the way we come at things. And so we have worked hard to do a number of initiatives that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Manitoba.

Yes, our economy grew 31 per cent and our population grew by 11 per cent between 2000 and 2012, while our emissions decreased by 2 per cent, so it has been more difficult in going forward. We—many initiatives that we've taken have made a huge difference: ethanol mandates; Green Building Policy; work with municipalities on sustainable community development initiatives that they've done; a biodiesel mandate; of course, the development of Manitoba Hydro in a way that partners with First Nations communities for that social inclusiveness component

and social equity component; and, at the same time, producing a source of energy which is considered among the greenest around with low-head dams, less flooding. So all of these things are intended to have a sustainable model. We've protected forests and wetlands.

So our—we're working on this on all levels, and we are looking at ways we can continue to do that, including: initiatives we've taken around recycling and landfill sites; by taking the Selkirk Generating Station out of commission—it was a coal plant—and converting it to natural gas; and putting the plant in Brandon on sort of backup and with an eventual target of phasing it down and eliminating it; and a coal tax in Manitoba, too, which—the proceeds of which have been reinvested in biomass activity.

So there's a number of initiatives going on. The member may acknowledge also that Manitoba is a relatively low-emissions province in terms of the economy. And there's not any one big thing that you can do that will dramatically reduce emissions when you have 98 per cent hydroelectricity, but there are a variety of things you can do that will be helpful, and then you have to see if they yield sufficient reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to be meaningful, in terms of the targets we're trying to meet.

I'm prepared to answer the questions, and there's lots more we can talk about on this subject, which is an important one.

Mr. Gerrard: I note that the approach, you know, being argued by the Premier, which is greenhouse gases in relationship to GDP, is a bit like the—what's called how intense or the intensity of greenhouse gas production which Prime Minister Harper has been talking about and has been rather discredited by many people because, you know, the fact is that if we continue to produce the exact same amount of greenhouses gases as we're producing now on a global scale, we are still producing more because there's a net increase every year in the amount of carbon dioxide equivalents in the atmosphere.

And so when we look at Manitoba, I mean, that was the original objective which was to, you know, grow the economy, but actually reduce greenhouse gases overall and not just in proportion to GDP. And if we're going to survive as a planet and avoid continual massive overheating of our globe, then we're going to have to reduce greenhouse gases in

absolute amounts, not just in amounts relative to GDP.

Now, in looking at the most recent numbers which are for 2013 which, I think, are the year after the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was quoting—that there was a significant increase in greenhouse gas production in 2013 and that we would now be, based on the 2013 numbers, something like 2 per cent over the year 2000 number. So, you know, even if you compared to 2000, which was a relatively high year in terms of greenhouse gas production in Manitoba, in 2013, the most recent year for which we've got measurements of the greenhouse gas production in Manitoba, we are going in the wrong direction, and clearly it needs a new and different and more effective approach.

So let me go back to the question which I'd asked—is that, when is the Premier planning to set some new targets, and when will there be a new, you know, plan rolled out for addressing greenhouse gases in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: As I've indicated in my previous question, we're working on a variety of initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as protect our water, expand our parks and we're working on it right now. We'd like to be ready for the coming—some of the major events coming next year at the global level on a new agreement for global greenhouse gas reduction.

I do note for the member that our hydro exports are over six megatons. They displace over six megatons of fossil fuel emissions from other jurisdictions, which would, if they counted exclusively in Manitoba, would be double the target we have to meet, so there's lots we do that make a difference on a global basis. The Pimachiowin Aki Land That Gives Life initiative for UNESCO World Heritage designation is 33,000 square kilometres of boreal forest which is a tremendous storehouse for carbon. Our policy on peat—protecting peat and wetlands—as the member knows probably as well as anybody in the Legislature, if not more so—are also great storehouses and sinks for carbon storage as well. So we've taken a number of initiatives never seen before in the province of Manitoba to protect these natural resources which are—they do a good job of capturing and storing carbon, and if they were destroyed, would emit enormous quantities of carbon.

There are some challenges with the climate-change approach where, if you take a natural

resource and start destroying it and then stop doing that, it counts as a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. But if you prevent something from being destroyed, it doesn't count at the moment, because it doesn't reduce emissions; it just stops them from being increased in the future. So we have some challenges here in acknowledging some of the very positive initiatives that we can take that prevent things from being destroyed and overdeveloped. So those are some of the challenges.

In the face of all that, we still think that a focus on climate change can be a source of innovation in Manitoba. It can help us generate jobs in Manitoba—green jobs. It can help people live more sustainable lifestyles and potentially healthier lifestyles, and it can protect our natural resources as well.

So we know the global challenge is large. We know that many, many countries across the world who want to meet this challenge are working on ways to do that without 'stag'—hampering growth in their economy.

*(15:50)

Ideally, you would be able to grow your economy in a more sustainable way and more innovative way and a greener way by embracing the challenge of climate change, and that's how we look at it. That's one of the reasons, for example, we think hydro development can play a big role. That's why we think biomass can play a big role, why we've done some wind power projects in Manitoba, why we put a big emphasis on demand management, the Green Building Policy where we work with families and businesses and communities to reduce their consumption of energy, which reduces their greenhouse gas emissions and their carbon footprint, which is why we support public transportation investment and active transportation investment and healthy lifestyles, which include people using more self-propelled ways to get around, such as walking and bicycling.

So all of these things are part of an overall approach to create a more sustainable planet and healthier lifestyles and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. But it's also true that when you're a low-emissions province that there's not a lot of low-hanging fruit in this regard that you can just jump on and immediately eliminate and things are going to be better off, so it requires us to be more innovative, more creative and find as many possible ways to do this as possible.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, one of the areas where we have seen significant increases in greenhouse gas production in Manitoba since 1990 is in the agricultural sector, and, you know, that's both methane from livestock and also, significantly, nitrous oxide, which is a very potent greenhouse gas, coming from farmlands where fertilizer has been applied and the land often, when it gets wet, will—the nitrogen will go up in the air as nitrous oxide. It's an area where the government has had not much of a plan and it's an area where the greenhouse gas production has increased quite significantly and was really a major reason why that the Kyoto targets were not met.

And so I wonder if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has, you know, paid any more attention to agriculture and the possibility that there may be, for example, some win-win scenarios where you're reducing nitrous oxide production and, you know, farmers are able to use the nitrogen for their crop instead of it going up in the air as nitrous oxide.

Mr. Selinger: The member is correct the ag area is one area where there is the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and we want to work closely with the community to do that and see what's possible there. They have adopted many modern practices in the ag field, zero-till practices, for example, and we're seeing, with climate change, that some of the crops that can be grown in Manitoba are changing now. We're seeing greater, for example, production of soy in Manitoba, greater production of corn in Manitoba, which maybe 30 years ago just wasn't being done because of weather conditions, so there are changing conditions as climate change impacts the growing seasons, for example. And then, of course, there's the whole research and development side that breeds hardier plants, et cetera, so this is an area that we're going to have to pay some attention to and have proper discussions with the people that look after the land and grow food on the land, and work with them.

But one thing about the ag sector that I've always been impressed by is they've always been a sector that is innovative. From the earliest days of agriculture in Manitoba and western Canada, there's always been a big emphasis of—in ag departments and in agricultural societies and in communities to find better ways to do things, 4-H clubs. The Ag Department has always had a knowledge transfer sector. They've always worked hard on helping producers adopt new methods of doing things. At one point it was adopting the use of electricity; now

it's reducing the use of electricity. But there is a strong tradition there of innovation in the ag sector that I've always been aware of, everything from equipment to choices of how you grow crops, how you fertilize crops, et cetera. So I think we've got to work closely with that sector to see what we can do there to the mutual benefit of everybody.

Mr. Gerrard: One other area where climate change has come up is with regard to the energy pipeline. Has the government had a look to see to what extent there may or may not be greenhouse gas produced as a result of the construction of this and operation of this pipeline?

Mr. Selinger: We do expect anybody who is a proponent to indicate what the greenhouse gas implications are of the pipeline, and that's information that we expect to be provided by people that are proposing pipeline expansions or conversions in our jurisdiction or in any jurisdiction, and then take a look at that.

Mr. Gerrard: But the Premier won't have a review by the Clean Environment Commission that could, you know, make sure that those numbers are obtained and are looked at carefully from Manitoba's perspective.

Mr. Selinger: As I've indicated to the member before, we do—have sought full intervener status with the National Energy Board, which is the regulatory authority in charge of interprovincial pipelines and we expect them to do the proper review of that and we will be making an intervention to ensure that those kinds of issues are looked at. We are interested in protecting water in Manitoba, communities and the environment, so we're interested in finding ways to make representations on that. And other groups in Manitoba have also sought intervener status on some of the similar issues, so we do want to put forward the interests of Manitoba in this regard and we want the National Energy Board to properly review and take account of these measures, and there will be many interveners from all across the country on similar themes, and we can learn from each other in this regard.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the Premier.

I think the MLA for Tuxedo has some questions.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): My question for the Premier: I did ask a series of questions last week regarding the summary versus core budgeting, and what happens with respect to—in the event that one of the health authorities runs a deficit. I'm just

wondering if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has—he indicated that he would get that information to me, and I've yet to see it. I'm just wondering if he has that information today.

Mr. Selinger: Officials don't think they've received that information yet, but we're going to follow-up on it and see what we get for you—for the member.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. I hope we can get that in the fulsome of time.

I do know that in the case of the—with respect to the annual report of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, in the statement—the condensed statement of operations, it says that there is a deficit of just over \$1.1 million.

I'm just wondering how that would be reported with respect to—would that be part of the summary budget or the core budget?

Mr. Selinger: Well, my understanding is for sure everything's reported in the summary budget, so it would be part of that, and then we'll find out if it's reported in the core budget as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: Does the Premier believe that it should be something that is reported in the core budget, being that it is the delivery of health-care services in our province?

*(16:00)

Mr. Selinger: And these are some of the questions that we want to ask and get—I mean, what I think is important, but it might be more important what the accounting standards say with respect to these matters. And so, I mean, it's important to know what the status of health authorities are and then to take account of what public sector accounting standards are with regard to how these matters are treated, and then we'd go from there. But, you know, obviously we don't encourage any RHA to hold a deficit of any kind, and we usually work with them to resolve that matter regardless of where it's reported.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and, of course, there are accounting rules that need to be followed, and I respect that, certainly, but I know that there are also laws that govern this province as well, and right now it indicates that the government has to abide by a summary and cannot run a summary deficit in our province without penalties over a four-year rolling average or whatever the current legislation does read.

So it is very important to find out whether or not this is part of the summary or core, because the

Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) has just indicated in his recent budget and in various comments subsequent to that that there's going to be this shift back to just looking at the core operations of government with respect to reporting of deficits. And I think it's very important that if there is that shift back to core that—you know, that certainly health-care delivery, the delivery of health-care services, be a part of that as it is a significant portion of the services that are delivered by the Province of Manitoba.

So I'm just wondering if the Premier can indicate, does he agree with that, that the delivery of health-care services and the way that they're reported should be part of the core reporting?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I would say to the member, I think it is important to have the information about the financial status of any health authority. And I think it's important that we understand what—how the accounting rules apply to the finances of health authorities and what that means for both summary and operating budgets.

And we have to explore those questions as we review these matters. The balanced budget legislation was conceived of in the mid-'90s—'95, '96, I believe, in that era. And there's been many changes in accounting rules since then, and there's been many changes in the political and economic realities that governments face, and there's been many changes in the evolution of health care, quite frankly. You know, 30 years ago, there weren't health authorities; there were commissions, and institutions delivered each program. There was no regional basis for co-ordinating and managing programs in the interests of a population group.

So all those matters need to be examined as we review this area, but the member has the information, for example, on one specific health authority, and we work with them to resolve any deficit they might have and ensure that they stay financially viable going forward so they can deliver services to their regional populations that they're set up to serve.

Mrs. Stefanson: Are there other regional health authorities that the Premier's aware of that are also running deficits right now?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check for the member. I—you know, that's usually the—asked in Health Estimates.

Mrs. Stefanson: I do recognize, of course, there has been many changes—not so much many changes to

national regulations with respect to the reporting of government finances, but I know that there certainly has been many changes to the balanced budget legislation under this NDP government. And much of it—some of it was, yes, as a result of changes to those reporting entities, but much of it was done for the basis of political purposes, to be able to basically, you know, sort of hide what it is that this government is doing.

And so many of the changes that took place were more for political purposes. If the government couldn't live within the means of the existing legislation, they simply just changed it. And that seems to be what happens. And I remember many years ago when the changes to summary accounting came about, there was much controversy around that at the time, and, of course, there are—our Crown corporations were maybe doing a little bit better at the time, and so it was of a benefit to the government to include the finances of those Crown corporations.

And now it seems that, in particular, in the case of Manitoba Hydro where the projected—the projections are not so good for Manitoba Hydro, that it's in the government's best interest to now suddenly shift back to core reporting, and so it just seems that many of the changes that have taken place with respect to the balanced budget legislation have been more for political purposes than they were for accounting purposes by way of legislation, and just wondering if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has a comment on that. I'm sure he does.

Mr. Selinger: I would say the member should probably not attribute motives for changes, saying that it's political as if that was something negative.

The purpose of any budgeting process or any legislation is to serve the public interest. And so the question always becomes what's the best way to serve the public interest and whether the legislation helps or hinders that. And it may have helped at one point and hindered it at another point as times change and as practices change and as organizational structures change and the economy changes and, quite frankly, accounting rules change. All of these things bear upon these kinds of discussions.

And what we've seen, and I think I've indicated this, I know I've indicated this before, is governments all across Canada that had balanced budget legislation breached that legislation when the '08-09 recession came because they believed they were acting in concert with each other and as well as the federal government, who had said they would

never run a deficit. They believed they were all acting together to promote the best interests of the Canadian economy and the Canadian public. And they did that in the face of a recession, which is now called the great recession, and their interests, their actions in the public interest were to ensure that we didn't dip into a depression because the lessons of history were still present in the minds of policy-makers, both at the political level as well as in central banks across the world, as well as many international economic agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank and OECD, et cetera. They were all saying, my goodness, you can't just let all these global economies be pulled down into a depression; you've got to do some stimulus spending; credit markets have seized up; rates are going through the ceiling; and in the absence of government action, things'll get much worse for everybody, including governments, but more importantly, things will get worse for their populations and for their citizens.

So they breached all of this legislation because there was an urgent requirement to do that in the public interest. And so now we're looking at what kinds of legislation would best serve the public interest now. And there's many dimensions to that. One dimension is sustainability of our public finances. Another dimension is sustainability and delivery of our public services. Another dimension is the ability of the economy to continue to grow during difficult times and to create jobs and employment for people.

So these are all things that have to be considered in the role that we serve as legislators and members of the executive in the Legislature. So there's no absolute formula on this. There's no precise road map on this. These are matters of judgment and policy, and different governments take different approaches, but they try, presumably, to serve the public interest in what they do, unless they have the strong evidence to suggest otherwise.

Mrs. Stefanson: I do want to switch to some questions just regarding the stadium, if I can, and I'd like to ask the Premier. There has clearly been a significant number of construction issues that have been identified over the course of the last little while, with respect to the repairs that are needed as a result of some flaws in the original design and—potentially, the original design and so on. And there's all sorts of allegations around that and so on, Madam Chair.

But I do want to ask the Premier if he could just give us an update right now as to what is being done

right now to get to the bottom of what the extra costs will be as a result of these design flaws—or the construction issues, I should say.

*(16:10)

Mr. Selinger: I believe the owner of the stadium, Triple B corporation, which acts on behalf of the owners, which are the university, the City and the Blue Bombers, are investigating what they consider to be any issues on the construction of the stadium and identifying what remedial actions are necessary and what the potential costs of that are. I believe that's what they're doing.

Some measures are being taken already to—I mean, there were issues identified before that needed to be addressed. Insulation of pipes, for example, is one that I recall. And I think where they know that something needs to be done, they're moving on it already.

My understanding is is that the issues were not posing any safety risks to the current use and operation of the stadium. And the member will know that there's been, I guess, tens of thousands of people out there in the last week or so with the FIFA international women's soccer tournament going on, and over 31,000 people on Monday night, and so the stadium's operating in a way that's very satisfactory.

But they wanted to get an examination of these other issues for the long-term usefulness or lifespan of the stadium and address some of those issues and make sure that they're properly addressed before things get worse or things potentially get worse. So I believe that's the approach they're been taking on this matter.

Mrs. Stefanson: Originally, as I understand, these projects of this nature are to receive certification, the leader—Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification. And I'm wondering if the Premier can indicate, did that process take place? Did that certification—was that obtained prior to the building of this stadium?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the specifics of what levels of certification, if any, they received on the construction of the building.

Mrs. Stefanson: It's my understanding that it—there's a—it's possible that it was not obtained prior to this, and that's a significant provincial piece of legislation. And just wonder if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) could indicate if—when he would get back to me on that because this is a pretty significant issue.

Mr. Selinger: I think there may have been public declarations with respect to this in terms of what standards were met in the construction of the building. A stadium, I think, being an outdoor facility, may have had different standards than other facilities, but again I'll have to seek specific information for the member on this.

But if the member's asking did the stadium get built to sort of a green-building standard, I'm not sure that that was in fact a requirement of the construction of this project, given its unique nature.

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe the original memorandum of understanding that was signed back in, I believe it was 2010, with—the original deal was about \$115 million. And that was the original memorandum of understanding, I believe, was signed with Creswin. Were there other—what other parties were signatory of that?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to go back and get information for the member on that.

Mrs. Stefanson: There was a point in time the original deal was budgeted at \$115 million, and I believe it was around March 2010, and fast-forward a few months and something happened here where all of sudden the cost of the deal rose to \$190 million. And I'm wondering if the Premier can indicate what was the reasoning behind the fairly dramatic increase in the budget for this project.

Mr. Selinger: You know, I—again, I'd have to seek specific information, but my understanding was is that the early numbers were a high-level number based on a conceptual design without finalization of site and all the details.

The member might know that when you're looking at a project there's many different stages in the estimates process for what a project will cost and can sometimes have five different levels of estimates as they get further refined, sometimes more. And design changes can have an impact on that as well.

So I think early estimates of the cost of it were very high-level estimates, I think, put on the table by players that were involved directly at the time under perhaps different ownership models and even potentially different sites. So, as things became further clarified as to the location of the site and final design details and size of the stadium and the materials being used, et cetera, I think estimates changed as time went along.

But that's not surprising with these kinds of projects in some respects, because they're unique projects. And I think there's been challenges in other jurisdictions with respect to this as well. But these things are worked through as part of the—refining the numbers and refining of the estimates. And, when bids come in—quite frankly, when they go out to market to see what is on offer from people that can do the work and the marketplace often has a different price point than the original estimates, and that has to be taken into account in the final decision making and final estimates.

Mrs. Stefanson: Was there a significant change in the design of the project from the original 115 to the \$190 million?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check on that. I think one of the issues always was whether the roof component would be in or out and what that impact would be on the final price. But I'd have to check it out. I think location had a bearing on it as well, but the notion of—I always think the original design, this notion of having a oval as opposed to an open-ended stadium was always sort of integral to the original design of it.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, there must have been some significant changes, and I'm not sure what they were. But I thought in the original memorandum of understanding that was signed with Creswin, that there was discussion at that time, and I thought it was part of the design at the time to have a bubble roof over the top like a seasonal one, and then all of a sudden, you know, we fast-forward just a few months later to \$190 million project, \$75 million more, and this particular project didn't include that at all. And so it doesn't make sense to take something away and add a significant—at cost to it.

So I'm just wondering if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) can indicate, you know, if the roof was taken away, was there something else that was added to it?

Mr. Selinger: I think we should clarify between the temporary dome or bubble, as we called it, and the roof which is there. And the roof is a very wide-spanned structure, a challenging structure to both manufacture and put in place. But I think it's been well received in terms of the role it plays in the stadium and the architectural design of it as well.

So, as I said to the member earlier, these estimates change as time goes along, and further refining occurs as to the cost of materials and, quite

frankly, what the bids are on the price from the people that can do the work, and, you know, the bids can be higher than expected. Early estimates are just that: early high-level estimates based on a conceptual design without, you know, the details of site location, the materials costs, what the current market price is for different types of materials, for example, steel. All of those things could be factors in final design, and the firms that bid on it that have the capacity to do it.

It's a pretty unique project. I mean, how many stadiums do we build in a country in a year?—one or two maybe, you know. And I have no idea how many are built on a global basis, but not a lot, I would suspect, and each of them probably is unique in their design or has unique features at least specific to the communities they're located in and specific to the client's requirements and what they ask for.

So these are not off-the-shelf projects in any way, shape or form. So that creates potential for additional costs as well. But, again, the price of the stadium, I think, will prove to be one of the more cost-effective ones compared to other alternatives and for the value that was received. And we've already seen some big economic benefits that have come out of having the stadium in Manitoba, operating in Manitoba, operating in Winnipeg.

I did an event with the Bombers this week, on the Grey Cup festivities—not just with the Bombers but with other members of the community, the universities and many of the groups that are participating, including the Santa Claus winter parade and just informally chatting to some of the people there. They believe that FIFA will exceed, dramatically, the expectations on what economic benefits it will bring to the community. They've seen a tremendous number of people come to Manitoba to be fans of the FIFA competitions that are going on, and we've heard that the hotels were filled—all—and it's really, really hard to get a reservation anywhere in Winnipeg right now. And there's—people are participating in the economy in our community and obviously providing themselves with essential services such as meals through restaurants, et cetera.

* (16:20)

So the stadium has already generated quite a bit of positive economic activity for the community, and the member will know that one of the outcomes of the new stadium is we've been able to host the Grey Cup this fall, and that will also provide a pretty significant boost to our economy. Estimates are

anywhere from 80 to 100 million dollars of economic activity. If FIFA came close to that, in one year, we would've had somewhere between one and two hundred million dollars of economic activity off special events alone. And then—so that really helps acknowledge on the ground the value of having these first-class assets which can attract national and international events to our community. And we see the potential for doing that in the future as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: Clearly, there was some sort of a breakdown that happened over a few-month period in the early to mid-2010 year, and what was originally driven as a private-sector initiative, driven by Creswin Properties with—under the direction of David Asper, there was some sort of a breakdown that obviously took place, because he ended up exiting the deal. And I'm just wondering if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) can indicate why Creswin exited the deal. Did they exit on their own terms, or were there—was there a reason? Did the government at the time decide that they wanted to take over the project for some reason?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, again, I think I don't want to speak on behalf of Creswin. They would have their own explanation for why they chose the path they did.

But, clearly, there was an interest on all—everybody in the community in getting a new stadium, a new facility, because the existing facility at Polo Park had been built, I believe, in the 1950s. It was quite old, and it was considered to be at risk for safety for the public—the people using it, and requiring very significant investment for upgrades. And there was a view that it probably would not be the best use of resources to try to upgrade the existing facility. We might all be better off by building a new one. And I think that was sort of the macro or the overall thinking is that if you're going to put significant resources into a stadium, it might be best to build a brand new one and then to take down the old one and redevelop that property for other purposes—commercial purposes, because it's in an area of Polo Park, which is one of our—which is one of our class A shopping centres in Manitoba.

So location was one of the things that was part of the discussion. As this project unfolded, Polo Park was one site. At one point, Point Douglas was considered as a site. Finally, there was a view that it would be well located at the University of Manitoba, because it would solve more than one problem, not just the problem of a stadium for the Blue Bombers,

but the problem of a stadium for the University of Manitoba who had a very old facility, very inadequate facility for their amateur teams, whether it was football or soccer or field hockey or even community use. I mean, part of the purpose of the stadium is to serve the public, as well, for a variety of amateur events—sporting events, and there's a lot of community-based leagues that can benefit by using the stadium. So the whole idea was to get the maximum value for the dollar in terms of the number of people that could benefit by that as an investment and that was the direction we all decided made sense to move in.

Madam Chairperson: Just for the information of honourable members, you have to be in your seat in order to ask questions in the Chamber.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): I understand that there are several deficiencies that have been identified with the stadium. Can the Premier tell us: Are there renovations being planned to correct the deficiencies on the stadium?

Mr. Selinger: I believe I've just answered this question for the member from Tuxedo, and I indicated that the body acting on behalf of the owners, Triple B, had reviewed the facility and it was assessing what long-term risks there are to the durability and the lifetime use of the facility, and have already identified some things that they believe corrective action needed to be taken on to get better use of it. And the example I gave was that, for example, they saw some pipes and—that needed insulation, et cetera, so I think they've compiled the list of concerns they have. It's—I'm sure it's part of the claim they've made in court, and I think that's publicly available.

Mr. Schuler: What time frame is contemplated for these construction projects?

Mr. Selinger: Again, that, I'm sure, will be determined by when the final assessment comes out, but I know upgrades and corrections are being made now to anything they consider to be problematic. We've been assured that any changes or improvements will be made at a time that doesn't interfere with the ongoing use of the facility, and we've also been told that there's no risk to public safety at this stage on any of the issues that they believe need to be addressed.

So it is being used. There's been literally tens of thousands of people there in recent weeks, and people have made very many favourable comments

on the facility, just how attractive it is, how functional it is, how good the sightlines are, ease of access and egress, and it's an excellent piece of architecture, too, in terms of the aesthetics as well.

Mr. Schuler: Is there a cost estimate to these construction projects? *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: –heard of a number at this stage of the game, but that's presumably the purpose of the assessment, is to identify what the potential risks are and to quantify that in terms of dollars.

Mr. Schuler: Without getting into the legal dispute, could the Premier (Mr. Selinger) tell us who will pay the initial amount for the construction projects?

Mr. Selinger: We will sort that out as we go along, and I thank the member for not asking me to get involved in the legal suit, because there is the potential for insurance claims, et cetera.

Mr. Schuler: Will the reconstruction schedule conflict with the Grey Cup?

Madam Chairperson: Honourable member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), to repeat that question.

Mr. Schuler: Will the reconstruction schedule conflict with the Grey Cup?

Mr. Selinger: I believe I indicated earlier that we were informed that any corrective measures would not interfere with planned activities for the stadium.

Mr. Schuler: Considering that the football schedule does go basically up to the Grey Cup and we're under the impression the Bombers would do well, is it fair to say that none of the construction projects could actually start until after the Grey Cup?

Mr. Selinger: I don't believe so. I believe activities are going on on an ongoing basis to correct things where they can be corrected in a way that doesn't affect programming activities.

Mr. Schuler: Every year there's the classic hockey game; I believe it's an outdoor hockey game. Is it being planned for this year, for Winnipeg?

Mr. Selinger: I don't believe there's any plan to have a outdoor winter classic hockey game at the professional NHL level in 2015.

Mr. Schuler: I take it that would include 2015-2016, the winter.

Mr. Selinger: I haven't heard of any firm dates or commitments for 2016.

Mr. Schuler: So there's no outdoor hockey classic game being planned for the stadium for the winter of 2015-2016?

Mr. Selinger: Nothing that I've had confirmed or seen public statements confirming it. I do think we will have a winter classic, but I think details on that are still being worked out among the owners and the participants in the NHL.

Mr. Schuler: Would the reconstruction timeline impact that decision?

* (16:30)

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've been told that any corrective measures that need to be taken in the stadium would not impact any planned activities, that they believe they can handle that without impacting programming.

Mr. Schuler: So, from what the Premier has said, that the reconstruction projects can proceed even though there are events planned at the stadium?

Mr. Selinger: That's my understanding, that corrective measures in terms of the facility can proceed without impacting programming in the stadium and the schedule, for example, of the Bombers or even the Bisons or any other planned uses of it, including FIFA international world women's soccer.

Mr. Schuler: So—and just in concluding, so that means there's—there is actually nothing substantive that has to be done that could relegate the stadium to be non-operative for a Bomber game or for the Grey Cup, that these—the Premier mentioned that pipes having to be insulated—he's under the impression it's that kind of level of a project, not anything more substantial with the structure that would stop the building or one side of the building from being used.

Mr. Selinger: My understanding is that any corrective measures that need to be taken do not impact on current programming or planned programming, that they're more related to ensuring that the lifespan of the facility can be extended to its full expected use, in other words, that there's not something happening that will shorten the expected lifetime of the facility. And we know that these facilities wind up being in use for decades. I think the previous one was around over 60 years. And I think the measures they're looking at would ensure that it gets its full life expectancy realized. Now, any facility like that's going to require improvements as time goes along as we saw with the old stadium.

Over the decades, there were many, many improvements on everything from seating to concessions, et cetera.

I think what they're looking at here is they want to make sure there's no issues that would affect the active use of the stadium whether it's—for example, and I don't know this to be the case, but they might want to make sure that there's proper drainage so that cement works don't get eroded by pooling of water, for example. So those kinds of issues, I think, are the type of things they're looking at that don't have an immediate negative impact but, over time, could shorten the lifespan of the very significant investment that's been made in that facility.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just further to that line of questioning, of course, one of the issues that was cited was extensive concourse slab cracking. And there was an engineer who was quoted, and I'm just going to paraphrase the quotation, but as I recall, he stated that these cracks could be an indication of a much more serious issue. Do you know if this issue is being investigated further, then? And this could—could this be something—what would he mean by a more serious issue? Is this—could this be foundation issues, or.

Mr. Selinger: I'm assuming that if an engineer made a comment like that, that that issue would be pursued and that would be part of the assessment, to see if there are any deeper issues that might require correction.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, because I recall when this whole thing came out, when the statement of defence was filed, there were—questions, I guess, went out, and an engineer did come forward and was interviewed, and I can't recall by whom, but I know that it was out in the media, that he stated that this could be an indication—these cracks could be an indication of a much more serious issue. And I would think, you know, as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and as the government, here, and—would want to ensure that we get to the bottom of this. Is that something that you are looking into or your government is looking into right now because those are pretty serious—potential, you know, serious problems.

Mr. Selinger: The government's not directly looking into it. That's the role of the owner of the stadium. The Triple B corporation is looking into these matters as the responsible agent for the owners of the stadium, and they are looking into it and they are—I believe that's why they took the action sooner as

opposed to later, to make sure that none of these issues were left to linger and that proper investigations and assessments were done to ensure that if there are any deeper issues that they're identified early and corrected early.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just think that, you know, Manitoba taxpayers are on the hook for the vast majority of this project and—if not all of it, indirectly. And, you know, I know that there are—there is government representation on the board of Triple B.

Does the Premier know: Is this being investigated right now?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the type of issue that the member raised, I'm sure, would not be ignored. If that kind of statement was out there, I'm sure it would be investigated. But that's the point of doing the assessment. They're checking to make sure that the stadium can fulfill its useful life expectation, and that would include looking at whether there's any structural issues that need to be addressed early.

Mrs. Stefanson: What is the time frame around this assessment? Again, I know my colleague from St. Paul was asking around this earlier. You know, obviously, with the Grey Cup coming, there's a time frame here.

What sort of a—what are you looking at in terms of getting a completed assessment done in terms of time frame?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check to ensure what the time frames are, but I think it's under way. They're looking into it. I think there's been some preliminary work done, which probably prompted them to take the actions that they did to make sure they protected themselves while they did further work and further investigation. But, again, I've been assured that it won't have any impact on planned programming activities, such as the Grey Cup.

Mr. Schuler: Just on that one, the Premier's indicated that, basically, as far as he knows, the stadium has minor flaws. There should be no problem with timelines, no problem with paying, no significant displacement of schedules, yet we don't have the final assessment. And either the Premier is clairvoyant or he knows something more than he's declaring here. Like, without the final assessment, how can he be making these pronouncements on the stadium?

Mr. Selinger: I don't think I've said all the things that I was just quoted as saying. I think the member

may be overstating the case. I'm saying that a proper assessment's being done, that programming has continued and that the public is assured of their safety in the facility as programming continues, and that it's generating very significant economic benefits to the city. The assessment will determine and quantify what corrective measures have to be taken. Some of those measures are ongoing as we speak to make sure the facility's in good shape for use, and, if there's any deeper matters, that will be brought to everybody's attention and solutions will be found as we move forward.

Mr. Schuler: Well, and I appreciate that those weren't the exact words that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said, but the Premier is sort of doing the don't-worry-be-happy routine.

And, I mean, I think, basically, what the public wants to make sure of is that we're not putting lipstick on a pig. Like, is there—is there a problem here or isn't there? Like, first, the Premier does the, you know, don't-worry-be-happy. And now he's saying, well, actually, that's not quite what I said. And, without a final assessment and without a date of a final assessment, how do we know that these are minor flaws, or are they substantial flaws.

And, again, who puts the initial outlay of cash out for this? Because it is in the courts and it is being disputed in the courts, so, initially, somebody has to pay the amount and then it has to go to court and decided who's going to pay for that amount. And there are some substantive programs planned, or events being planned for the venue, and they also would want to know, like, are there going to be disruptions as far as seating goes, are there going to be sections of the stadium that won't be available.

I mean, those are all very valid questions and valid issues that individuals would like to know, and, you know, without the final assessment, I guess, I'm just surprised that the Premier believes that it's, you know, don't worry; be happy.

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member's characterization of what I said I don't believe is accurate, and that's unfortunate, but I just want to categorically say that his summary of my approach on this, I don't believe, is an accurate reflection of what I've been saying.

What I've been saying is that there is an assessment going on. Some corrective measures are already being taken. The quantified amount of the cost has not been determined yet. The seriousness of the issues has not been finally verified at this stage of

the game. But we have been assured that any measures that need to be taken would not affect current programming and activities and those programs that are currently planned and are underway are yielding very significant benefits to the community and very significant benefits to the economy, which demonstrates the facility has played a positive role in our community, and it will continue to play a positive role in our community as these issues are addressed to ensure the long-term viability and lifespan of the facility. So I don't want the member to be overly dramatic in summarizing what I may have said and putting a characterization on it that, in my view, doesn't reflect the message I've been trying to convey to him.

* (16:40)

Mr. Schuler: On a different note, a project that's near and dear to my heart—well, the first one was the soccer—or the field house for the University of Winnipeg, something that I've pushed for a lot of years, and I'm glad to see that it was built and it's being utilized for all the right reasons, targeting inner-city youth who don't have the same travel capabilities that others might have. And it's being used in the proper fashion in that the teams travel from the more suburban communities to the university and it allows the inner-city teams to then be able to play and play teams from the suburban communities and, from what I understand, it's just a terrific project.

And now we're, I understand, from what I could see, I was at Polish Sokol days at Garden City and had a little chance to look across the field and see what's happening with the northwest soccer pitch, and it's coming along well.

Could the Premier give us a report? He and I have talked about this, and I've—I think I've mailed him more documents than not on this particular issue, and it was the right location for the project because I think I pointed out to the Premier that Leila and McPhillips is, if you will, is the downtown of The Maples and for Kildonan and it's where all the buses come together at the shopping centre. Could the Premier give us a little bit of a report on how the project is going?

Mr. Selinger: First, I'd start by acknowledging the positive comments that the member has made about the new field house at the University of Winnipeg. I was in attendance at that facility this week, and it is a spectacular facility, like the stadium, quite frankly, in terms of the public reaction to it, and I know the

member feels exactly the same way about both of those facilities in spite of his concerns about some of the long-term other issues that may be arising. But the reality is the field house is a fantastic facility. As the member will know, that there was a charter put in place that ensured the use of that facility by inner city and neighbourhood organizations in the area of the facility, and I've been informed that there are literally thousands of inner-city youth and members of communities using that facility on a weekly basis. It's an excellent facility.

It will also be available for free programming with respect to the Grey Cup festivities. So it will be a venue that serves the public well during the Grey Cup festivities as well. So we can see the investment in the stadium and the investment in the field house are leveraging each other to provide more opportunities for quality of life for Manitobans and for people that are visiting Manitoba at that time. So it has worked out really well.

Just note for the member something I learned recently that these large projects have very big spans of steel, and those steel spans are manufactured in Manitoba in a company called BEHLEN Industries in Brandon. So there are other economic benefits that come into the community for job creation in some of the components that are used in these facilities. And BEHLEN Industries, apparently, is a world-class organization when it comes to manufacturing these very large stadiums and other related facilities, field houses and sporting complexes, that they do that kind of work all over the world and do it in a very—I was there when I saw the use of computer technology and doing welding and the skills that were being transferred to people for doing the work there, and we're working with them on making sure that they can get more skilled labour trained in Manitoba to do these projects that exported around the world. But I was pleased to know that they played a major role in the downtown field house at the University of Winnipeg, which was a promise we made in the '11 election, and I'm pleased to see it's up and running and providing good services to the community.

With respect to the Garden City facility, I understand it's moving forward, it's under way. I've—members of the community have approached me and said they're really excited about how it's coming along. More specific update I'm not able to give the member right now. I'd have to undertake to get information for him on that, but the anecdotal evidence I've heard back from members of the

community that are directly involved in the project is they're feeling very positive about it.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, and again, any time that there is a facility that will further youth sport—and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) will know because I've sent it to him; I'm very big on this—I believe we can save a lot of health-care dollars. It's a long-term investment. This isn't a quick fix and it's not going to save money instantly. But by getting young people into healthy lifestyles and getting them to buy into it over their lifetime, we can save a lot of money on health-care dollars. And we have to look at a holistic approach, that we've got to get five- and six-year-olds involved in sports and get them to buy in, and, if they lead a healthy lifestyle, the ramifications of that are tremendous.

And I've mentioned to the Premier before, all of my kids have been involved in different sports programs, and they were told by coaches, you know, I catch you smoking, you're off the team. You cannot be a smoker, and you cannot be an athlete. You have to choose one or the other. And, when young athletes hear that, a parent can say it a hundred times and it doesn't have the same effect as a coach saying, you know, smoking and athletics doesn't fit together, and they get that message very quickly. You know, those are the kinds of things we need to enforce the—and, of course, we as a party and as a Legislature have supported these.

My question is with the field house being built, and I don't know yet what the name is going to be. I don't know if they've coined a name for it. But it'd be the Garden City or Seven Oaks field house. How is that being funded?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check that. I know there's a community contribution. There's a contribution from us. There may be a federal contribution as well under the Building Canada Fund. I'd have to check the facts for him on that. And I'm assuming the City's putting some money in as well. So it may be a tri-level project with a community contribution, or it may just be a bi-level city-provincial project with a community contribution. I'd have to check on the role of the federal government on that one. That one I'm not clear on. But I'm pretty sure the City—I know we're in, and I'm almost certain the City's in, and I know the community's making a contribution as well.

Mr. Schuler: Of course, one of the first one—the real field houses to be built was the one at the University of Manitoba. And it was this—the predecessor of this

current Premier (Mr. Selinger). They made several mistakes with it which is now being corrected at the Seven Oaks. And one of them was that they decided they'd save some money and not continue the walkway around the field house at the University of Manitoba, which is just an unmitigated disaster and far too expensive to correct now, and I understand they're going to do it the right way with the new one.

But, when they opened up the new one at the University of Manitoba, they also came up with this great idea that they were going to charge everybody coming in a fee. And there was a substantial howl of protest that the predecessor to the current Premier made sure that that was not going to be the case.

Can the Premier tell us, is there any thought of charging a fee to get into the Seven Oaks field house, or, again, will that be something where it has to be self-supporting, meaning teams and users have to pay for it?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not any—I'm not aware of any charge at the door for anybody entering. But the member's correct that the users of the facility often pay a fee for the use of it, the hockey teams and the sporting teams, et cetera. And, of course, I'm sure they'll have concessions, which generate revenues to support the facility as well.

But I'm not aware of, like, a charge just to walk in the door. I mean, there might be charges for specific events like a hockey tournament or some special event going on there, like in any facility, but I'm not aware of that at this point in time. But I'm sure they've developed a business model on how to be—to make the facility sustainable over time.

* (16:50)

Mr. Schuler: Yes, I had the opportunity of being at Polish Sokol Days on the weekend and those of you who missed it, you missed a great show. Like I said, the food was hot and the entertainment was cool. And, in fact, it's the first time I've seen Polish river dance. In fact, one of the Irish groups was dancing at Polish Sokol Days, and it just somehow seemed to fit perfectly. It was great to see.

But I also had the opportunity, again, and we've had a tour of the arenas that have been built next to the Seven Oaks soccer complex and community club and the two arenas. You know, there's no charge to get in and they have amazing facilities. They've got a—I think NRG has put a workout studio there, and they've got a place where you can buy paraphernalia, and they've got a very good food service and they

provide a lot there. And one of the concerns I do have is that, if people have to pay to get into the facility, it certainly does detract from the facility, and there are some individuals that turn around and walk out. And we know that that is problematic.

And I've always—I know when we go to games on McGillivray when they have the provincial soccer games, you pay, I think, three or four dollars a game to go in, and that—all that money goes to help the provincial teams travel—whatever else—and those are special circumstances. Usually, you don't have to pay to get in, so, again, I'm always cautious when I talk to sports organizations that you don't charge people to come in and sit in the stands and watch a soccer game, a hockey game—that kind of stuff—because it really does detract from that community support. And if there was an indication that the community or the organization—I believe it's going to be the Winnipeg Soccer Federation that's going to be overseeing it—is this something that the Premier would withstand or does he support this kind of a thing?

Mr. Selinger: I want to be specific. What is the member asking me to support or not support?

Mr. Schuler: Yes, if there were an attempt to charge a standard fee for entry into the Seven Oaks—the new Seven Oaks field house, would the Premier indicate that that was not something that would be agreeable just like it was done for the University of Manitoba field house?

Mr. Selinger: Again, they're developing their own business model. I don't—I have not heard of any suggestion that there be a price just to enter the facility. There might be a price for specific events. There might be user fees for the people using the facility. But, again, I don't think they're trying to set it up so they have a gate that somebody has to pass through and pay a fee just to be present there under normal circumstances.

So we always encourage the people that are in charge of these facilities to make them as publicly accessible as possible, because they are financed in part with public dollars, and we want them to be accessible and usable by the community, so presumably they would take that into account in their own planning.

Mr. Schuler: And, of course, it's user pay, and I think everybody understands that. Teams have to pay to use that, but that's why they charge parents fees so that those fees go to rent facilities, certainly indoor.

Outdoor is a little bit different because you'd have access to a lot more fields, but even there, fields have to be rented; fields have to be maintained. And it's just the general public, because one of the things that I've seen is a lot of the community just comes out and participates by watching the games and cheering, and they don't necessarily have somebody out there playing, but they love to come out. Or friends come out and support their friends. And a fee to get into the building to me is just troubling. And I know that it was tried at the University of Manitoba and it was the predecessor to this Premier (Mr. Selinger) who indicated that that would just not happen, and it was stopped.

And I haven't seen the business plan. I don't have the availability to it like the Premier does. Can the Premier endeavour to have a look at it and ensure us that that would not be the case, that there would be a fee to enter the building?

Mr. Selinger: We could make some inquiries to see what plans they have in that regard.

Mr. Friesen: I want to ask the Premier, specifically, a question that proceeds from the Moody's Investors Service statement that was published on May the 1st. This was a statement that was made by Kathrin Heitmann, the assistant vice president and analyst for Moody's, responding to the government's budget, and I know that the Premier has a chance to discuss this matter previously with the leader of the opposition. But I had some questions of my own pertaining to this statement.

And I know the Premier understands that Moody's had made a report or given a report earlier expressing concern about the Province's willingness to get back into balance and that, at the time, they had changed a stable outlook to negative. So not a credit downgrade yet, but a—certainly, a shot across the bow, and, at this point in time, I noticed that the subtitle for this statement is the Manitoba budget "shows reduced willingness to return to balance."

And I'm concerned by that characterization by Moody's, an international bond-rating agency, when it comes to the progress that this government is or is not making with respect to meeting its targets reducing deficit. And it cites what it sees as prolonged deficits and high capital spending that will work together to degrade Manitoba's position and actually increase the debt burden going to at least 2017-18.

My questions for the Premier: Should Manitobans be concerned? Does Moody's have this right when they say, "reduced willingness to return to balance?"

Mr. Selinger: I'm glad the member identified that I've discussed this matter already with the Leader of the Opposition. I'd invite him to read Hansard on that. But I indicated there that our operating deficit, as a proportion of the economy, is shrunk on a percentage basis and on an absolute basis. I indicated that we've taken several measures to manage expenditure, and I believe I indicated—and it's available in the budget—that our per capita expenditure is among the fourth lowest in Canada among the provinces, and that we continue to practise fiscal prudence but balance that off with a desire to keep the economy strong and, at the same time, create more employment in Manitoba and provide essential services that Manitobans expect.

And so we've—I made these points. They're all available in the Hansard for the member opposite, and I just would ask him to take a look at that. But the member should also be aware that there's other advice out there, and the other advice that we're seeing around the world is that there—pay attention to growing the economy, pay attention to making sure that you're creating employment, because employment hasn't recovered yet on a global basis from the '08-09 recession. And so our debt-to-GDP ratio is the—in the lower end for the provinces. Our total expenditure growth is in the top four over the last five years and, certainly, better than provinces to the—not all provinces but some of the provinces to the west of us, at least two of them.

Moody's has their view. We respect that and we take account of that, but we also have an obligation to ensure Manitobans continue to have opportunities for employment, and we need to continue to growing the economy, which was the advice that's coming from other economic agencies on a global level.

Mr. Friesen: I understand that the Premier or the Finance Minister, or both, will be in the—I believe in the—after the second quarter reporting, probably meeting again with Moody's to have a meeting, and I would imagine that those meetings go on on a regular basis following quarterly reports.

Can the Premier, though, indicate when he'll be next meeting, for instance, with—when he and/or the Finance Minister will be meeting with Standard & Poor's?

Mr. Selinger: There's no scheduled date to do that. I would want to point out to the member on page 14 of the budget that Core Program Expenditure has been shrinking as a proportion of the economy—it's gone from 21.2 per cent down to 18.8; that debt servicing costs have reduced as a proportion of the economy from 1.5 per cent to 1.2 per cent; and the total expenditure has reduced as a portion of the economy from 26.3 per cent—

Madam Chairperson: 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 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 10, 2015

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