

Fifth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
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WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	Inkster	
<i>Vacant</i>	Lac du Bonnet	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 28—The Public Schools Amendment Act
(Reporting Bullying and Other Harm)**

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. Selby), that Bill 28, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Reporting Bullying and Other Harm); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (obligation de faire rapport des cas d'intimidation et des préjudices subis), be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Allan: Bill 28, reporting bullying and other harm, furthers the great work being done at the grassroots level by educators, school divisions and parents to provide safe and caring learning environments for our students.

Under this bill, a school employee or a person in charge of pupils during school-approved activities, must make a report to the principal if they think a pupil has engaged in bullying of a serious nature or other unacceptable conduct. A principal who believes that the pupil has been harmed by the unacceptable conduct must notify the pupil's parent or guardian.

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

**Bill 207—The Regional Health Authorities
Amendment Act (Accreditation and Disclosure)**

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I move, seconded by the member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), that Bill 207, The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Accreditation and Disclosure), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Driedger: This bill amends The Regional Health Authorities Act. It requires every regional health authority to be accredited. In addition, every regional health authority must make a variety of documents available for public review on its website. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PETITIONS

PTH 5—Reducing Speed Limit

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Concerns continue to be raised about a number of motor vehicle accidents at the intersection of PTH 5 and PR 276 and at the intersection of PTH 5 and PR 68.

The Rural Municipality of Ste. Rose and the Town of Ste. Rose have both raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about the current speed limit on that portion of PTH 5 in the vicinity of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Other stakeholders, including the Ste. Rose General Hospital, Ste. Rose and Laurier fire departments, East Parkland Medical Group and the Ste. Rose and District Community Resource Council, have also suggested that lowering the current 100-kilometre-per-hour speed limit on a portion of PTH 5 may help reduce the potential for collisions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider the importance of reducing the speed limit on PTH 5 to 80 kilometres an hour in the vicinity of the town of Ste. Rose from the west side of the Turtle River Bridge to the south side of the access to the Ste. Rose Auction Mart to help better protect motorists' safety.

This petition is signed by A. Gamache, A. Pinette, S. Gregoire and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Auto Theft—Court Order Breaches

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

On December 11th of 2009, in Winnipeg, Zdzislaw Andrzejczak was killed when the car he was driving collided with a stolen vehicle.

The death of Mr. Andrzejczak, a husband and a father, along with too many other deaths and injuries involving stolen vehicles, was a preventable tragedy.

Many of those accused in fatalities involving stolen vehicles were previously known to police and identified as chronic and high-risk car thieves who had court orders against them.

Chronic car thieves pose a risk to the safety of all Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all court orders for car thieves are vigorously monitored and enforced.

And to request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all breaches of court orders on car thieves are reported to police and vigorously prosecuted.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by C. Timmerman, C. Matsalla, L. Lu and thousands of other Manitobans.

Convicted Auto Thieves—Denial of MPI Benefits

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

In Manitoba, a car thief convicted of stealing a vehicle involved in a car accident is eligible to receive compensation and assistance for personal injury from Manitoba Public Insurance.

Too many Manitoba families have had their lives tragically altered by motor vehicle accidents involving car thieves and stolen vehicles.

It is an injustice to victims, their families and law-abiding Manitobans that MPI premiums are used to benefit car thieves involved in those accidents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Justice deny all MPI benefits to a person for injuries received in an accident if he or she is convicted of stealing a motor

vehicle accident—motor vehicle involved in the accident.

And this petition is signed by D. Gaultier, S. Colvin, C. Claggett Woods and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Bipole III—Cost to Manitoba Families

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

This will cost each family of four in Manitoba \$11,748 more than an east-side route, which is also shorter and more reliable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to build the Bipole III transmission line on the shorter and more reliable east side of Lake Winnipeg in order to save each Manitoba family of four \$11,748.

And this is signed by D. Penner, P. Driedger, L. Mackey and many, many others.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): I'm pleased to table the 2011-2012 Supplementary Information for Manitoba Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table the following report: the report from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in accordance with section 43(1) of The Fatality Inquiries Act.

* (13:40)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flooding and Ice Jams Update

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Officials continue to monitor the dikes and flood protection infrastructure across the province following the weekend storm to ensure that they are in shape to handle prolonged high water levels.

In Brandon, the super sandbag dikes along the 18th Street are being monitored and pumps are

working to remove normal seepage from around the dikes. The super sandbag dikes across the intersection of 18th Street and PR 459 are also being reinforced with more bags to provide additional seepage protection.

Yesterday, 87 people from Peguis First Nation returned to their homes, leaving 575 still evacuated.

In total across the province there are currently 1,827 evacuees remaining.

The Red River has now crested south of Winnipeg, up to the floodway inlet, at levels which are the sixth highest in recorded history.

James Avenue is at 19.49 feet as of this morning and is expected to crest between 19.5 and 20 feet tomorrow or Thursday. Without the flood-protection works in place across the province, water levels at James Avenue would be over 11 feet higher, and flows would be 111,000 cfs higher than the 1950 peak flows.

Again, I'd like to emphasize for the House that even once cresting is behind us on most rivers, the flood season will be far from over. Water levels in our rivers and lakes are expected to remain very high for weeks or even months, and this will present ongoing challenges for our flood-protection infrastructure, particularly during storms and high winds.

Close monitoring and reinforcement of dikes, where necessary, will continue going forward. Thank you.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the latest update.

Flood 2011 is proving to be a marathon as opposed to a sprint. Flood warnings and watches continue in several regions. A prolonged crest of the Assiniboine is expected in Brandon, and officials are preparing accordingly. The crest of the Red and the Assiniboine River in Winnipeg are expected over the next few days. Communities north of the city are finalizing for the Red River's crest to hit their region thereafter.

We appreciate the efforts of the provincial government and other emergency officials who are diligently monitoring the network of permanent and temporary dikes. With a protective flood event, that work is essential.

As we have discussed previously, agricultural producers are very concerned about the effects of the lingering flood.

The Canadian Wheat Board reported yesterday that spring planting in western Canada is behind schedule due to the flooding.

Similar information was conveyed in Manitoba Agriculture's first crop report for the season. Manitoba Agriculture's update also noted that years of excess moisture conditions are taking their toll on pastures in the Interlake.

In addition, some producers in the Shoal Lake and Meleb-Rembrandt area are expected to have to find alternate pastures for spring and summer grazing. These conditions are very challenging for the affected producers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to ongoing updates for the flood.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his update on the ongoing challenges that we face with respect to the flood this spring.

Clearly, the size of this flood is large and the ongoing challenges are going to be big.

I would hope that in his updates in the next day or two, the minister would provide a clearer understanding and—of the situation for farmers in Manitoba, as I've been calling for, and a clearer picture of what the government will be doing in this respect.

I also think the minister should be providing a clearer understanding of the impact on lakes like Lake Winnipeg and what the plans are in that respect, and I look forward to hearing that in the near future. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Richer, Manitoba, we have Mr. Leon Tetrault, who is the guest of the honourable member—honourable Minister for Local Government (Mr. Lemieux). On behalf of all, we welcome you here today.

Also in the public gallery we have from Kildonan-East Collegiate, we have 60 grade 9 students under the direction of Michelle Lawrence. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

And we also have in the public gallery from Twin Rivers Country School, we have 10 grade 6 to 8 students under the direction of Mr. Darrel Towes. This school is located in the constituency of Lac du Bonnet.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Emergency Health-Care Services Government Record

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, 11 and a half years ago, this NDP government promised to Manitobans that they would end hallway medicine. Today, Manitobans continue to languish in hospital hallways all throughout Winnipeg, all throughout the province of Manitoba.

I want to ask this Premier: Why did he break his promise to the people of Manitoba?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, in 1999, the average number of patients in hallways was 34. Today—and that information wasn't reported to the public, I might add.

Today, we now have a public reporting system on a daily basis and does the count, and the average number of people in the hallways is one or two.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, what they did was they put numbers up in the hallways, and then they tried to rebrand the hallways into something other than hallways, when what we know and what health-care professionals know, what Manitoba families know is that if you go through a hallway, a hospital hallway in Manitoba today, they are lined with patients. We also know that we have seniors being denied access to personal care homes. We know that we have paramedics lining the emergency rooms waiting to transfer patients.

I want to ask the Premier again, because their promise was very direct and very clear. They said they would end hallway medicine. Why haven't they done it?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, it's a dramatic difference between 1999 and this year. The dramatic difference

is not only do we report how many people are in the hallways when the members opposite would never disclose that to the public, we now report and we show an average of 34 patients in the hallways in 1999, an average of one or two now; 405 doctors more now in Manitoba; over a hundred specialists more now in Manitoba; over 2,500 more nurses in Manitoba versus 1999.

We're hiring nurses; they fired nurses. We're training doctors; they cut the number of places in the medical schools. We have less people in the ERs and we report it and are accountable for it; they had more people in the ERs and they hid it.

That's the difference and that's why we're moving Manitoba forward.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, for them to be celebrating the fact that they left Brian Sinclair waiting in an emergency room for 34 hours is unbelievable.

The fact is that leaked documents from the WRHA from about six months ago show that they were denying seniors access to personal care homes. We know today that there are patients lying in hallways of hospitals throughout the province of Manitoba. We know that ambulances are waiting in emergency rooms. We know, as well, that this government has failed in every way to deliver on their promises.

Their promise, Mr. Speaker, was that they would end hallway medicine. They haven't ended hallway medicine; there are still patients in those hallways. Why won't the Premier just admit today he has no intention of keeping his promise to the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we have every intention of protecting health care in this province.

It was less than nine months ago that members opposite wanted to cut a half a billion dollars out of the budget. They wanted to lay off nurses. They wanted to lay off doctors, as well as people in other disciplines in this province.

We have taken the medical school enrolment from 70 to 110. We have increased the number of nurses in this province by over 2,500. We have remodelled and improved the flow of patients through all the emergency rooms in Manitoba and we are going to make more investments in emergency rooms.

In the result, Mr. Speaker, we now publicly report the number of people in hallways on a daily basis. It's there for everybody to see: one to two patients a day versus 34 patients a day when they were in office and would not disclose it.

There's a dramatic difference, Mr. Speaker, in health care in Manitoba, and that difference will only be preserved by keeping the NDP in government and not letting the people opposite come in and slash the budget like they tried to do just nine months ago.

*(13:50)

Ambulance Services Patient Off-Load Wait Times

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on—

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. McFadyen: He can make all of the desperate attacks that he wants, Mr. Speaker; it doesn't change the fact that he made a promise. He promised to Manitobans he would end hallway medicine. He broke that promise, and now what they're doing is they're turning our emergency rooms into parking lots for ambulances.

Mr. Speaker, we've learned through freedom of information numbers that between September of 2010 and January of 2011, over a period of five months, ambulance crews in Winnipeg spent over 15,000 hours waiting in emergency rooms in the city of Winnipeg, the equivalent of 633 days spent waiting in emergency rooms, not available to respond to calls, waiting to transfer payments—patients into emergency rooms which are overflowing. People are waiting for 34 hours because people are in hallways.

I want to ask the Premier who's getting record levels of financial support, who's spending record levels of money: Why is it, Mr. Speaker, that they're leaving ambulances waiting for record periods of time with patients waiting to get help in the emergency rooms in the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, not only do we have more ambulances in Manitoba, not only do we have more paramedics in Manitoba, not only do we have more doctors and nurses in

Manitoba and not only are we treating and looking after more people in all facets of health care, including emergency rooms, we now have plans in place and are following up to make sure that people do not have to go to emergency rooms. They can go to access centres. They can go to quick-care clinics. They can get treated by their family physician on a more immediate basis because we now have more family physicians in Manitoba, and they can now get treated for the first time ever by a nurse practitioner because we have nearly a hundred nurse practitioners in Manitoba.

In every dimension, there is more service available to Manitobans, and our plan, as indicated earlier, will be to increase the number of primary care health physicians. Eighty-five per cent of people have one now. We will move that up to close to 100 per cent. That's our commitment, not cutting the number of people allowed to go to medical school in Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, when somebody is picked up in an ambulance and taken to hospital, they deserve to get immediate care. They shouldn't be left waiting for hours on end while they try to cope with the challenges in those emergency rooms.

Mr. Speaker, over 15,000 hours of waiting—only in the city of Winnipeg—over a five-month period between late 2010 and the early part of 2011. I want to ask the Premier, who has failed to keep his promise on hallway medicine, why it is that he's now creating a new phenomenon in Manitoba of parking lot medicine.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba now, we have a record number of new ambulances, and we now have the Manitoba transportation centre in Manitoba working out of Brandon which serves every community in Manitoba—rural and northern community—with immediate service when people need it, including GPS positioning of ambulances.

Even during this period of flooding when many municipal roads have been taken out of service, we have been able to position ambulances to provide access to patients and response to patients within the required response times, unheard of in any previous flood in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we're taking more people to emergency rooms because we're picking them up instead of ignoring them like the members opposite used to do, and now we have doctors at emergency rooms and

nurses to serve them unlike when the members opposite were in office.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the desperate attacks and the member opposite, he wants to spend—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have a little decorum here. Order. Getting pretty difficult to hear. Let's have some co-operation.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And if the member—if he wants to go back and debate the Jim Maloway era of provincial politics, he's welcome to do that, but we're talking about 2011 and beyond.

Today in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, we've got patients in hallways. We have patients waiting in emergency rooms, and now we have ambulances parked in parking lots because they cannot transfer those patients from the ambulances into the emergency rooms, more than 15,000 hours of waiting in parking lots around the city of Winnipeg.

Will the Premier just acknowledge today that he's failed on hallway medicine, he's failed in emergency rooms, and now he's created something brand new in Manitoba, parking lot medicine and patients unable to get access to care when they need it?

Mr. Selinger: You know, Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the members opposite don't like the contrast between when the member opposite was orchestrating health-care reform with Connie Curran. I know why he doesn't want to go back and compare that, because they were laying off and firing thousands of nurses during that period of time. They wiped out the entire licensed practitioner nursing program in the province of Manitoba. They took a whole layer of nurses and made them irrelevant. We're bringing them back.

Mr. Speaker, in this very period of time, more people are going to emergency rooms because we have more ambulances, we have more paramedics, we have more doctors and we have more nurses and, for the second time, we have the STARS paramedic ambulance program through the helicopter, and it has gone out and picked up over 30 people in critical situations. Seventeen of those people have been to emergency rooms, and many of those people have had their lives saved by that additional service that we've had in Manitoba.

And the interesting thing about STARS, which also is in Alberta and Saskatchewan, they think our transportation co-ordination system is—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ambulance Services Patient Off-Load Wait Times

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, ambulances are often stuck at our hospitals waiting to off-load patients. According to a freedom of information document, in just five months ambulances were forced to queue up and wait over 15,000 hours. In fact, just recently one ambulance was stuck at the Grace Hospital for nine hours.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us: Why does this continue to happen under her watch? Why have we gone from hallway medicine to parking lot medicine?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I welcome the opportunity to debate with the member opposite any day, twice on Sundays, our record on health care versus theirs.

I can acknowledge to the House that every province in the nation is dealing with issues in emergency rooms. Part of those issues concern off-load times with paramedics, and we have engaged in a number of initiatives with our paramedics, with the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, including developing paramedics at Main Street Project, the Downtown BIZ foot patrol, protocols in place concerning respiratory therapists that can take the patients on off-loads. We're using Health Links to assist in decision making. We have increased funding to Winnipeg by \$4 million—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, paramedics are telling us that because ambulances are often stuck at hospital ERs trying to off-load the patients, there are times when there are no ambulances on the streets of Winnipeg, and the paramedics have been telling this government that for a number of years.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health: Does she think that's acceptable?

Ms. Oswald: The only thing in this dialogue that's acceptable, Mr. Speaker, is ensuring that people get the emergency care when they need it from the professionals that they need it.

We know that over the last couple of days, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite has raised issues

on a couple of cases. We've done some further investigation with the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service on some claims about a patient that was suffering from a gunshot wound that didn't receive care. In actual fact, we know that that patient arrived at the ER at HSC, which generated a call from paramedics. This person was not under the circumstances that was described by the member opposite.

Another critical case that was raised, in fact, saw the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service arrive in less than four minutes.

* (14:00)

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, desperate facts from a desperate government doesn't change the facts of what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, what this government has done is they've taken hallway medicine and they've downloaded it into the ambulances. When an ambulance is stuck at a hospital for nine hours, that patient is stuck in the ambulance waiting to get into an ER.

So I'd like to ask this desperate and tired government: What are they going to do to make this situation better for patients? This is not in the best interest of patients and it's not in the best interest of patients' safety. What is this government going to do about it?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, she can put whatever label she likes, but the very fact that she is at least interested in talking about facts is a real step forward, and I'll tell you what the facts are, that every jurisdiction in the nation is looking at the complexity of off-load issues and we are doing that as well.

I can tell you that the facts are, Mr. Speaker, that in the 1990s, when patients measured in the hallway existed and the premier of the day had to be dared and shamed into going to the hospital because he refused to pay attention, that at that time we were looking at numbers of some 34 across the system. Today, counting exactly the same way, the number is zero or one.

Do we have to keep building our system? Yes, we do, and the way that we do that, Mr. Speaker, is to continue to invest, not suggesting in one year that we'll rip a half a billion dollars out of the system and hurt people.

Shoal Lakes Flooding Minister's Tour of Area

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I raised the case of Pete Doerksen of Vestfold Ranch whose 5,000 head of bison will be out of feed by tomorrow because of—due to access of roads to the Shoal lakes area and flooding. The Minister of Agriculture sent staff but given no authority to act.

This is a very serious situation. These animals will be out of feed but this government offered no help. Instead the minister—instead of the minister demonstrating some leadership, the minister needs to see first-hand what these farmers and producers need in that area.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture agree today to touring the region and to assess producers like Pete Doerksen and others who desperately need assistance in the feed program?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Absolutely, I will, Mr. Speaker, and that would be in addition to people from our department and MAFRI meeting with these folks on an ongoing basis as early as yesterday, as I reported to the House, as far back as starting in the fall when those meetings were taking place with many of the people that the member for Lakeside brought forward yesterday in question period.

And, Mr. Speaker, not just in the fall but through the fall and the winter, people with MAFRI have been meeting with farmers in the area to look at individual cases and how it is that we can work together. They certainly do have—*[interjection]* They may be interested—this is a serious issue, Mr. Speaker. They may be interested in an answer.

On an individual basis, Mr. Speaker, people from MAFRI have been meeting with farmers looking for all of the options that can be put in place—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Options for Livestock Producers

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I realize the minister is talking about his visit last fall, but we're talking about up-to-date information that he needs in order to make decisions for the producers in that area, so he has the first-hand information on it.

Stakeholders warned this government there would be serious challenges in the Shoal Lake area

this spring. The Doerksens urgently needed the way to get feed to their bison. Many of the livestock producers are facing similar challenges. Their animals have to be fed. Yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture admitted that producers in the Shoal Lake areas are up against the wall. The minister reminds us that his staff had to look at the producers and talk to producers; however, he is the one who has the authority to take action and action needs to be moved on and quit stalling.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister responsible for the Shoal Lake flooding finally demonstrate some leadership? Will he announce some action plan today to ensure livestock producers are able to feed their animals in a satisfactory manner?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the information that the member for Lakeside brings forward and we are very much willing to work with him, farmers, farm leaders, whoever it takes, municipalities, to make sure that farmers in the area can feed their cattle and livestock.

We have the authority. For example, if a farmer needs to get in and the road has poor access and is wet, we—

An Honourable Member: No access.

Mr. Struthers: —and maybe it's no access, Mr. Speaker, we look at options in which our staff can work with farmers to make sure we get that feed to where it's needed.

For example, we have been clear that we can rent equipment that can get into fields and areas where cattle are, whether they be bison or other livestock. We can rent equipment that can help out in that situation, and my staff has authority to deal with that.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, the—we have a number of the flood-affected people right here in the gallery today. Today they have—want to hear what the minister has to say in this regard. And from time and time again, we have asked this government, they have asked this government about their short-term and long-term solutions. They have to be able to feed their livestock. They have to get their kids to school and the other things that are necessary as far as emergency service and so on.

They've shuffled it from one department to the other. In fact, in October they wrote the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of the province, who referred it over to the

minister of 'watership', who have not got a letter back to the people in the concerned area, which is shameful.

They want a meeting. They'd like a meeting with the minister today after question period. Will the minister agree to meeting with the Shoal Lake producers here today right after question period, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, they can come and meet me in my office. That can be—that can very much be accommodated. I'd look forward to that opportunity, because whether it's from the member for Lakeside or whether it's the producers in the area or municipalities, I'm interested in working together to make sure we get feed where it's needed.

We've been working at that, as I said earlier, from the fall on, when we made some announcements in terms of some support. Mr. Speaker, we're contacting our counterparts in Ottawa, once they sort themselves out a little bit. We'll be talking to them again about a program much like we had in place last year to help out in terms of getting feed and getting support to the farmers who need it, and they need it in the days—in just the short days that follow. So we'll be moving as quickly as we can.

Shellmouth Dam Spillway Levels

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Shellmouth Dam is having difficulty handling the amount of water flowing through it.

Two weeks ago, we were told by the Minister of Water Stewardship that everything was under control and, Mr. Speaker, that it would be unlikely whether the spillway would be used this year. Three days later, a flood warning was issued. Five days later, the water was flowing over the spillway.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Water Stewardship why it is that her projections are so far out when people who are living around the Shellmouth Dam told her long ago that the water would be going over the spillway this year in short order.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, the question's absolutely moot. I never said that water would not be going over the spillway. I said that we would be maintaining an even flow, that we were looking at what was flowing out of the conduits, we were

looking at when the spillway may overtop. We're looking at what's coming in from the area through which the Shellmouth Dam gets fed.

The member is just wrong again.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, my colleague the member from Arthur-Virden and I were both present when we were told that the spillway would probably not be used this year. This was given to us by government officials. Three days later, a flood warning was issued. Five days later, the water was spilling over the spillway.

Mr. Speaker, people in the area have constantly told the government that, indeed, the projections are lower than what the reality is, and I want to ask the minister today what her—what she's going to tell Manitobans about her projections in terms of the inches of rain that fell on the weekend and the one foot of snow that was received in the Shellmouth area and how that'll affect the area below the dam and Manitobans who live along the Assiniboine River.

* (14:10)

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, in his first question he said that I made that comment. Now it's somebody else made that comment. The third one will be, well, maybe he heard somewhere in a dream someone made a comment.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is we have been planning for the high water that is coming through the province of Manitoba now. We are balancing the inflow of what is coming into the Shellmouth Dam, which is two and a half times its capacity. We have been drawing out at record levels for a record period of time. This is the lowest drawdown ever in the history of the Shellmouth Dam.

We started to peak shave yesterday, which means we are balancing the flow of what's coming over the spillway into the conduits. *[interjection]* The members laugh, Mr. Speaker; they make it a joke. We take it very seriously and we're working with all Manitobans for their safety.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we're told something by officials from the government, we believe that, in fact, it is the official speaking through the minister. If she's denying that and if she's contradicting her officials, then I ask her to get her house in order.

Mr. Speaker, monitoring on tributaries coming from Saskatchewan is not being done. Those

tributaries are adding thousands of cubic feet of water to the Shellmouth Dam and to the Assiniboine River below the Shellmouth Dam as we speak. All of that is contributing to the flooding that is being experienced below the Shellmouth Dam in places like St-Lazare, Brandon and the people who live in the valley.

And I want to ask the minister whether or not she's been in contact with these producers to assure them that, in fact, the government is prepared to deal with that and that they understand the amount of water that's being added by the tributaries coming out of Saskatchewan.

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that we deal with facts, that we have been dealing with the Shellmouth Stakeholder Liaison Committee on a constant basis. We deal with them all year round. We were discussing the issues of this spring with them last fall. We were talking to them about determining the flows in and out.

And I think the member from Russell should be ashamed of himself for picking on the people not only in the provincial—at the provincial level, but the local EMO level, trying to make it seem as though they have misled him. He has not understood the importance of this issue. He continues to make mischief with it.

We stand behind the people who are fighting that flood, over 700 *[inaudible]* the provincial government and hundreds more in the EMO. We stand; we work them—work with them, and we'll continue to protect all Manitobans.

Newborn Hearing Screening Program Government Support

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): The effects of late identification of hearing loss are detrimental to the well-being and development of a child.

Hannah Brown, a 16-year-old who was diagnosed at 14 month—14th month of age with severe to profound hearing loss said, and I quote: I want babies to be screened when they are born so that none of their potential is wasted. The earlier you are diagnosed, the sooner you can start to learn to listen, hear and speak, which leads to better language development at an earlier age.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) please explain to Hannah why he is turning his back on a health matter that is so

important to her and so many other families in Manitoba?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Of course, as I've said before, our government is committed to doing more screening, not less.

And, indeed, we know that when we began in 1999, there was no universal screening program anywhere in Manitoba, and today we know that we're making steady, concrete progress. We have universal screening across Brandon, Assiniboine, North Eastman and Burntwood RHAs with a view to having universal screening across Manitoba. We believe that screening for hearing for newborns is very important in addition to a number of other kinds of screening that we've introduced during our time.

What I would say to Hannah is we care about what she has to say and we support her.

Mrs. Rowat: Andrea Wohlgemuth of Swan River wrote, and I quote: I am the parent of two hearing-impaired children who would not have been as delayed in the newborn screening if it would have been available to us. Our hospital here in Swan River has the equipment to screen newborns and audiometrics, but the newborns were not screened.

It is clear from that that we have the tools and supports in place to identify, screen and treat families like the Wohlgemuth who have children with hearing loss. Mr. Speaker, why is the government not screening for newborn hearing loss within the Swan River health facility?

Ms. Oswald: I will say to the member that, again, we are building towards a universal—that is, all Manitoba—screening program. Right now in the regions that do not have universal screening, we do know that individuals that are at risk at birth receive additional screening.

But we know that we can do more, Mr. Speaker. That's why, as we build our complement of health professionals across the system, which we've been absolutely committed to do, a net increase of 405 doctors, an increase every year since '99, a net increase of over 2,500 nurses and other health professionals—it's by building that system that we're able to build our capacity for doing screening, and, indeed, that's exactly what we intend to do.

Mrs. Rowat: And my understanding is there's been no activity from this government for almost two years, Mr. Speaker.

The Healthy Child Manitoba program states that every child should have the best possible start in life. Bill 215, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, is true to this vision statement.

Mr. Speaker, Chris Brown, Hannah's father, said, and I quote: Manitoba should be ashamed of its record of dismal failure towards children with hearing loss.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) why his NDP government will not support Bill 215, a bill that would immediately act to co-ordinate and implement a much-needed hearing loss screening program in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I would say to the member, as I said this morning during debate, that I believe it's agreed that all members of this House believe that children should have the best possible start. That's the mandate of Healthy Child Manitoba.

Interestingly enough, we know that the Maternal and Child Directorate under their watch was cancelled out of hand, in addition to screening for dental for children—shocking, you know, that they've had this conversion, but I digress.

What I say, Mr. Speaker, is that we're committed to universal newborn hearing screening. That's why we're expanding it region by region as we build our capacity. And, further, the member opposite makes no mention whatsoever that we announced \$1.5 million a couple of weeks ago to do cochlear implant surgery right here in Manitoba for the first time in its history, a program that members opposite didn't even breathe up.

Affordable Housing Need for Government Initiatives

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, students and new Canadians are begging for access to affordable housing. There's almost 16,000 new Canadians who came to our province last year, and yet our vacancy rate keeps going lower and lower.

A report from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation shows that Winnipeg has the lowest vacancy rate, 0.8 per cent, of any major centre in Canada. The NDP's policy of poor planning and neglect and indifference to providing sufficient affordable housing hurts students, hurts new Canadians, hurts people on low income the worst.

When is the minister going to do her job, ensure there's sufficient affordable housing for students, for low-income Canadians and for new immigrants?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that we've committed to 300 units a year for the next five years of new affordable social housing in Manitoba, and the reality is we've actually exceeded that. We've achieved 700 units in our first two years and we will continue to build new housing in Manitoba.

And let us not forget that when the member opposite was in government, he cut the programs for social housing at the national level across this country.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, you know, 2,000 new Canadians is the NDP's goal but 300 new houses. It doesn't add up.

Students in Manitoba can't wait for NDP action. New immigrants can't wait for better NDP action. The government is ignoring pleas from new Canadians and from students for affordable housing to accommodate their basic needs of somewhere to call home. It's the government's fault and it seems to have no interest in actually solving the problem, just say we're going to do a little bit here and there.

We need to make sure new immigrants have somewhere to live. When will the NDP admit that it's failed new immigrants and failed students and failed people in low incomes in this province?

* (14:20)

Mr. Selinger: Not only have we committed to housing in the public sector, but there's a record number of rental units being built in this province, the largest number since the 1980s being built right here in Manitoba right now.

So it is true we have the best immigration program in the country at the provincial level, our Provincial Nominee Program, and it is true that we've had close to 16,000 newcomers come here this year, the largest number in the last 40 years.

But it's also true that we have a record program of new rental housing units being built in the private sector. In the housing itself, 5,200 units are forecast this year, a very strong year for private housing construction and, of course, our program of 1,500 new units over the next five years.

And, Mr. Speaker, let us not forget we also have RentAid to serve people, and we're building student

housing as well. The University of Manitoba has a major student housing project under way as we speak. Red River has a housing project. University College of the North has a housing project and the University of Winnipeg is building student housing.

Mr. Gerrard: Lots of rhetoric but, in fact, in actual fact, very poor planning.

The bottom line is that Winnipeg has the lowest vacancy rate of any major centre in Canada, and the NDP have been hopelessly inadequate in ensuring and addressing this crippling issue. If Manitobans want to know why homelessness is such a rampant problem in this province, there's an answer—the NDP.

Students are pleading for affordable housing. New Canadians are pleading for affordable housing. Mr. Speaker, when will the government accept responsibility for failing students and for failing new Canadians?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we're building a record number of units in the public sector. There's a record number being built in the private sector. Private homes are at a very high level in this province. Student housing is being expanded like we've never seen before.

We want a growing population in Manitoba. We know that a growing population will generate more demand in the private sector for housing, for apartment blocks, and it will be built and we will supplement it in the public sector as well.

We think Manitoba is moving in the right direction with our young population. For the first time in over 20 years, the population is showing more youthfulness instead of just getting older. People are coming back to Manitoba. Young people are staying in Manitoba, and as they stay in Manitoba, they're getting good jobs; they're building houses.

And 75 per cent, 75 per cent of our newcomers own a home within five years and get a job within six months. That's progress, Mr. Speaker.

Health-Care Employees Workplace Safety

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, there are two approaches to health care. The government's side of the House makes it a priority and protects front-line services in the face of tough economic times. The opposition side of the House openly admits health care is not a priority and makes devastating cuts to front-line services.

Despite having a Health critic who used to be a nurse herself, we know members opposite fired 1,000 nurses, experimented with privatization and still seem to want to cut health funding, and on top of all that roll back workplace safety and health.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind members that when the Speaker is standing, all members should be seated and that the Speaker should be heard in silence.

Question period is a very serious time and every member has the right, if it's their turn, to ask a question, and all the other members have the right to hear that question. And it's getting very difficult to hear. I'm asking co-operation here.

The honourable member for St. James has the floor. You have only a few seconds, so if I was you, I would put my question very quickly.

Ms. Korzeniowski: Can the Minister of Health update this Chamber on what the government side of the house is doing to support nurses and other health professionals in Manitoba?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Well, Mr. Speaker, seems the members opposite are a tad sensitive in talking about their record on health care, but I'm very pleased to say that in addition to building our workforce, in seeing net increases in the number of doctors on the front line and seeing over 2,500 nurses added to our health-care system, we've been listening carefully to what nurses say, and we want to work with them to address any concerns that they may have about safety in the workplace.

And that's why, in partnership with the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) and the Manitoba Nurses' Union today, we were very pleased to announce, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to work as a team to review current workplace health and safety policies to prevent violence in health facilities. We're going to add a new workplace health and safety fund for equipment and other initiatives, and we're going to work together on an advisory group to change the face of workplace health and safety for nurses and other health—

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Gary Gilmour

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I'm pleased to recognize a good friend of mine, Gary Gilmour, for

receiving the 2011 Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Award. The volunteer awards are an opportunity to recognize exceptional Manitobans who have made outstanding contributions to their community.

It is through volunteers that communities are able to thrive as they contribute their energy towards improving their neighbourhood and province. Manitobans have continuously shown that they are among the most generous in the world when it comes to donating their time.

Gary Gilmour has contributed a great deal towards the success of the area Lions Club, as he has been a Lions member for many years. Through the Lions Club, he became the co-ordinator for Canadian Blood Services blood donor clinics in the area. To date, Mr. Gilmour has run close to 50 blood donor clinics in Winkler and has volunteered his time and effort towards planning the events from set up to tear down on clinic days. His volunteer work since 2002 has led to the collection of more than 11,000 blood donations. These donations have helped to save as many as 33,000 lives across the country. Mr. Gilmour has personally donated blood more than 115 times since he was a university student forty years ago.

Gary Gilmour has also been an instrumental part of my campaign during my 16 years in this Legislature. He has introduced me to many people in the Pembina constituency and is currently the president of the Pembina Constituency Association. For this, I owe him a great deal of gratitude.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my most sincere congratulations to Gary Gilmour for being awarded the 2011 Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Award. I understand first-hand that the work Mr. Gilmour has done in Winkler has made a difference, and I know that members of our community are grateful for the contributions that he has made. Thank you.

Leon Tetrault

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): Today, I'd like to recognize an outstanding individual in my constituency, Leon Tetrault, who was recently honoured with the Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Award for his dedication for volunteerism—to volunteerism in the community.

Leon is a resident of Richer, Manitoba, and throughout the years has been a driving force of

many great initiatives. If you hear about anything happening in Ste. Anne or Richer, you can bet that Leon was there.

Leon has served in the Southeast Region Chapter of the Manitoba Métis Federation for a number of years now, in addition to his involvement on a variety of other boards and committees. But this involvement is—hardly confines—or is confined to the board room. Leon has been a driving force in countless fundraising drives including fundraising to show support for a family in St. Malo who had to travel out of the province. And Leon spearheaded a breakfast program for Richer School and continues to ensure that the program has enough funding each year to keep it up and running. This is just one example of Leon's energy, and when he sees something that needs to be done, he goes for it and makes it happen. He has been instrumental in seeing improvements to the Richer Community Club and also very active in the church. These are, of course, are just a small example of the things he has been involved in over the years.

* (14:30)

It comes as no surprise that Leon was honoured last week with the Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Award. This award is presented each year to one individual in each region of the province who has embodied the spirit of volunteerism and is making a lasting contribution to his or her community. Leon is the perfect recipient for the Eastman region award. The award was presented to him at the volunteer Manitoba awards dinner during the National Volunteer Week this past week. This annual dinner is an event that reminds us that many of the services Manitobans enjoy would not exist without volunteers.

Someone that has put so much energy and time into the community services, Leon certainly deserves recognition. Community members describe Leon as someone who is trustworthy, unafraid to lend a hand and a great friend that is always there to help to get things done. The mark that he has left on the community is really beyond measure. Congratulations Leon and thank you very much for your hard work. Merci and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Paige Lawrence, Rudi Swiegers and Kaleigh Hole

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I am proud to recognize three young people in my constituency who have made an impact in figure skating in Canada and internationally. Paige Lawrence, Rudi

Swiegers and Kaleigh Hole have all had a successful year on the skating circuit and have been exceptional to watch as they display their skills. Virden has become a centre for figure-skating excellence because of their success on the world stage showing young people that with intensive training they can accomplish the goals that they set out for themselves.

Virden-based pairs figure skaters Paige Lawrence and Rudi Swiegers recently placed third at the 2011 BMO Canadian Figure Skating Championships, which were held in Victoria from January 21st to the 23rd. The bronze medal earned them a place in the International Skating Union Four Continents Championship in Taiwan. The pair were exceptional during the international competition and turned in a bronze-medal winning performance during the event.

Although Swiegers and Lawrence are originally from Saskatchewan, they now call Manitoba home, as they both live in Virden to train with their veteran coach, Ms. Patty Hole. Ms. Hole has proven to be a very successful coach and even has a daughter making headlines of her own in figure skating.

Patty and Howard's daughter Kaleigh Hole of Virden and her pairs partner Adam Johnson of Ontario finished in fifth position at the Canadian Figure Skating Championships. The pair train full time out of Strathroy, Ontario, and, like Lawrence and Swiegers, they hope to make it on the Canadian Olympic team in 2014. Although she has only recently turned 18, Kaleigh Hole has accomplished a great deal in her career to date and remembers that, for her, figure skating started in Virden and Brandon as a former member of Skate Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to have such distinguished figure skaters reside in the Arthur-Virden constituency. Paige Lawrence, Rudi Swiegers and Kaleigh Hole have made a positive contribution to the Virden community and have become role models to skating and non-skating youth in the area. I wish them all the best as they further their figure-skating careers in and attaining—or and in attaining their goal of becoming team Canada pairs team members at the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia. Thank you.

Oscar Lathlin Collegiate

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, just this past week, I had the pleasure of attending the grand opening ceremony of the new school at the Oscar Lathlin Collegiate at Opaskwayak Cree

Nation. I was there along with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and many others to mark this momentous occasion.

The official opening gave us a reason to celebrate this beautiful new school and what it means to our community. This school represents more than just a building. It represents hope and opportunity, and extra care was taken in the design to reflect this fact. The design integrates the school into our own landscape and creates a special connection to nature. Circular elements throughout the school reinforce the cyclical nature of life's continued journey. The building itself is in the shape of an eagle in flight. These and many other elements of the building make this school a truly special place for the students of Opaskwayak Cree Nation. It is a first-class facility and an undeniably beautiful school. This school will give our kids a fighting chance. A place like this is exactly what we need to engage students in their own education and prepare them for future success.

This school is an inspiring example of partnership, of people coming together to realize the importance of investing in our youth. The importance of education cannot be understated. It is an issue that I hold close both in my daily life and in my work.

Education of Aboriginal people and students is a key priority of this government, as was reflected in the 2011 provincial budget and many other investments over the past 10 years.

The late Chief Oscar Lathlin, minister and honourable member of this House, would be so proud to see this school today. We all remember Oscar as a champion of the north and a voice for youth and education. His life, his accomplishments and the things he did for his community will always be with us. He worked tirelessly for all of us and especially for the young people of Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

This school is the perfect way to honour Oscar and I know his spirit and legacy will see great things happen in the Oscar Lathlin Collegiate. I really can't say enough about the significance of this school in our community. It represents the vision of Oscar, the people of Opaskwayak Cree Nation and will give our youth the start they need to follow in his footsteps and make great things happen in our community.

I would like to congratulate in everyone that has been part of making this school come to life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

George and Myrtle Hutlet

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to congratulate fiddle enthusiasts, George and Myrtle Hutlet, for being inducted into the Manitoba fiddlers' Wall of Fame.

These two musicians, George on the fiddle and Myrtle on the piano, have been acknowledged for years of dedication and passion for preserving the art of fiddling.

George grew up in Bruxelles, Manitoba, and for the past 66 years has lived and farmed near Cypress River. Music has always been a part of George's life. He first heard a fiddle being played by his uncle Nick Messner of Somerset. His uncle gave him a broken fiddle and with the help from his father, George glued the broken pieces together, made a bow out of a willow branch and hair from the mane and tail of their chore horse, and managed to learn to play. He became the area's newest fiddler at the age of 17. He played his—for his first dance in Mariapolis a year later and by 1950 George had hooked up with some locals to form the Richmond Hill Orchestra. For many years George and fellow musicians played at school dances, community events and house parties.

Myrtle Hutlet, née Jackson, grew up in the Rounthwaite area, west of Wawanesa. Myrtle always had an interest in music but never played until she'd taken piano lessons at the age of 11, while she attended the Bruxelles Convent. She took part in the University of Manitoba exams for theory and practical application of piano. Her interest in music continued after school and became an important part of her life.

George and Myrtle were married in 1957 and music continued to be an important part of the family. For over 25 years, the Hutlets have been part of the Tiger Hills Group and the Southwest Manitoba Old Time Fiddlers, fiddling and playing for community events and senior care homes. The Hutlets have travelled to perform across Manitoba and into Saskatchewan and the United States, donating all their proceeds to senior health charities.

The Hutlets have also been advocates for the development of youth and fiddling in the areas, sponsoring many years the best jig contest in Holland, Manitoba. They have taken many opportunities to support the fiddle and fiddling contests throughout Manitoba.

The fiddlers' Wall of Fame was created by the Manitoba Fiddle Association on November 28th, 2004, in the Carman Community Hall, with the intent of—to preserve the province's rich and diverse fiddling heritage.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me in congratulating George and Myrtle on receiving this honour. Their contribution to the history of fiddle music and passion and for sharing their talent has been appreciated by many.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday, will be one put forward by the honourable member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun). The title of the resolution is Child Care.

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to rule 31(8), it's been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one that will be put forward by the honourable member for Rossmere and the title of the resolution is Child Care.

The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Ms. Howard: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Tuesday, May 10th, 2011, at 6 p.m., to consider the annual reports of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal years ending February 29th, 2008; February 28th, 2009; and February 28th, 2010.

Mr. Speaker: It's been announced that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Tuesday, May 10th, 2011, at 6 p.m., to consider the annual reports of the public—Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal years ending February 29th, 2008; February 28th, 2009; and February 28th, 2010.

The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to move into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Orders of the day. We'll be moving into Committee of Supply. And in the Chamber will be Family Services and Consumer Affairs; room 255 will be Justice; and room 254 will be Finance.

So will the respective Chairs please go to the rooms that they will be chairing, please.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FINANCE

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Mr. Chairman, before we get to the questions, I'd—the member asked a few questions yesterday and I said I would get her some information. And she—she was asking what the occupations of the new immigrants were, and I have a report here, a statistics report that I can share with her. But if you look at the report, the main skills that people come in with over the past two years and this year there's industrial, butchers, truck drivers, welders, accounting and related clerks, engineering with combined disciplines, cooks, farm supervisor and specific livestock workers, health professionals, including doctors, physicians, nurses, radiologists, dietary, nutrition, medical lab professional, midwives, practitioners and other health professionals, medical—motor vehicle mechanics, administrative clerks, financial auditors and accountants, college and other vocational instructions, computers, computer network technicians, general office clerks, electric and electronic engineers, nannies and in—care—in—live—in caregivers, custom service, bookkeepers, computer programmers, interactive media developers and post-secondary teaching and research assistants and mechanic tool operators.

So I will provide the member with this information and what I've outlined is on page 23 and

24. And, as well, if I could, there was another question that the member asked about: What is Manitoba's growth with population in the past year? And there's just a new report that's out from the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics and in that report it says the population of Manitoba grew by 16,900 people over the past 12 months. That's the largest gain in 39 years.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I just want to thank the minister for endeavouring to get me this information. I appreciate that.

I had asked a question at the end of the day with respect to land transfer taxes, and I know at the time I had asked—I believe the question was: What other provinces have land transfer taxes?

Ms. Wowchuk: Four provinces imposed flat fees and six provinces, including Manitoba, imposed graduated taxes. Our top rate is at 2 per cent on properties valued at over \$200,000 and BC and Ontario's top rate is 2 per cent. So, yes, there are other jurisdictions that do have either—other—either a flat fee or a graduated tax.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that, and, yes, just looking at British Columbia, they do, I believe, have an exemption for first-time homebuyers. Is that—or some sort of an exemption for first-time homebuyers. Is that right?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, that is.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I believe in Ontario they do as well.

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, they do.

Mrs. Stefanson: The other two that I see that I'm looking at are Nova Scotia, which, as I understand, they calculate theirs—it varies by municipality in a range between zero and 1.5 per cent, but in the area of Halifax, which I assume would be the—one of the larger communities is about 1.5 per cent. Is that correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: That's right, yes.

Mrs. Stefanson: And in Québec, again, it sort of varies, but it has a graduated rate, I guess, as well, in terms of up to \$50,000 is point 5 per cent, from 50 to 250, it's at 1 per cent, and then over 250 it's 1.5 per cent. Is that correct?

* (14:50)

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is right. There is a variation in different jurisdictions. In BC it's from—

starts out at 1 per cent and then it goes up to 2 per cent for above \$200,000. Alberta has a one dollar per every \$5,000 in value. Saskatchewan—every jurisdiction has a different rate, yes.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. And those are all land transfer taxes? I thought Alberta and Saskatchewan did not have a land transfer tax, so is that not correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: In some jurisdictions it's called a land transfer tax; in other jurisdictions it's called a fee, but in Alberta it's a dollar per every \$5,000 of value. In Saskatchewan it's \$12.50 for a 500—up to \$8,400 and .15 per cent over \$845,000.

Mrs. Stefanson: So some areas have just fees, and I know in Manitoba I believe there is a registration fee as well as a land transfer tax. Is that correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, that's right. But other provinces would also have a basic administration fee like we do and then they would have these other fees as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: It just seems from the numbers that I'm getting, I mean it looks like Manitoba has among the highest, if not the highest, land transfer tax rate in the country if you look at the threshold where anything over \$200,000 at 2 per cent, without any other kind of exemptions for first-time homebuyers like Ontario and BC have, because I understand greater—I guess, in BC, greater than \$200,000, or sorry, yes, they might be 2 per cent over \$200,000 as well, but it looks like there are some exemptions for first-time homebuyers there as well, so it looks to me like we're one of the only provinces that sort of has—we're among the highest rates and with the threshold being \$200,000 or greater for the 2 per cent without any kind of exemption for first-time homebuyers. I'm just wondering if the minister has any comments on that or if she could—

Ms. Wowchuk: You know when you look at these issues you can't just pick out one tax and say this is higher but not take everything else into consideration. And this—as our government—this government has been addressing issues like personal income tax, property tax credits. When you look at property tax credits that we have put in place since 1999, annual property taxes have been reduced by \$329 million. Homeowners pay a land transfer fee only when they buy the home, but then—but they benefit from the property tax credits since 1999. So they benefit with the property tax credits for a longer period of time, as they do benefit from the education support levy that was phased out by 2006, as they

benefit from the Education Property Tax Credit or for the senior Education Property Tax Credit or farm owners with their education tax credit.

So you can't just look at one part of it, and say well, you're paying more in the transfer fee which you pay once, or when you buy a home, but all of those other tax credits are in place for a longer period of time. You also have to recognize that Manitoba does not impose sales tax on real estate commissions or on the sale of a house. Provinces that are harmonized with the federal GST collect provincial HST on real estate commissions and on the sale of the new home. For every dollar in land transfer tax revenue which a Manitoban will pay once or twice in their lifetime, the Province returns \$5.30 in property tax relief to that homeowner every year.

So picking out one tax and saying, well, this is more expensive than what other jurisdictions are doing; your taxes are at a higher rate, you have to look at the whole picture and look at what other jurisdictions are—other tax relief we are offering and spreading it over many years instead of only in the year that you buy the home.

Mrs. Stefanson: And just—while I recognize that there are many other taxes that we can get into and to be discussing in Manitoba, and we will get into those a little bit later, but we are discussing the land transfer tax right now. So we've talked about where we compare with the rest of the provinces, and I think the minister, through her comments, is admitting that we are among the highest and that Manitoba—Manitobans pay a higher land transfer tax than most other provinces across Canada, if not all. And that's why she's getting into some of these other areas and trying to justify it.

The—I'm just concerned about the direction that we're going here with respect to—because we've had a number of stakeholders in the industry who have come forward to us and are quite concerned about the direction that the Province is taking here. In particular, I know Don Cook, the chairman for the civic and legislative affairs committee for WinnipegREALTORS, has—he has indicated that—and I'll just quote from a *Free Press* article. He says: Having to pay land transfer taxes up front is diminishing house affordability for young people in particular in our province.

And I know the minister's talking about the 16,000-some-odd new Canadian citizens coming to Manitoba, the young people who—wanting to move them into, especially as they start to have families, to

move into—to start purchasing homes, to free up rental housing, which we know there's been a shortage of in Manitoba. What are the incentives that you're giving for those young people, because I know that there was a bill before the Legislature not so long ago where my colleague the member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) brought forward an exemption for first-time homebuyers of the land transfer—an exemption of the land transfer tax for first-time homebuyers in Manitoba, which I think would help in this whole situation. I'm wondering why the minister would not have supported that piece of legislation to help these people that she claims she wants to help in Manitoba.

Ms. Wowchuk: The land transfer tax—and there are land transfer tax and fees on transfers of titles in every jurisdiction; every province has some of them. I would say to the member that, you know, she talks about this deferring people from buying homes. If you look at the market, homes there are selling very well in Manitoba. People are buying homes. And I think when people look at—when they do buy their home, when they make the decision to buy the home, they look at a lot of things. They look at the cost of the home, the cost of the transfer fees, but they also look at other tax incentives that are there in—as well. And I think that when they look at their tax credits that they're going to get over a long period of time, not just the one—that land transfer tax that she is referring to.

If you look at the house prices-to-income ratio in Manitoba, this—Manitoba is in the lead—we are the third lowest in the country. So Manitobans are buying homes here, and they take into consideration all of these things and they look—and they do look at the Manitoba advantage. They look at the advantage of the lower cost of living here, the lower hydro rates, the—and the tax system that we have, tax credits that we have in place for them. So they take into consideration all of those things, and Manitobans, when they're buying their homes, they know that it's no different in Manitoba than in other jurisdictions and that there is a land transfer tax or fees on the transfers of title as there is in every other jurisdiction.

* (15:00)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and I believe the minister's indicating the average cost of housing is going up in Manitoba, and I'm not saying that that's such a bad thing in terms of—I mean, it indicates that the economy's doing well and that things are growing,

but what's happening here is that because we're not adjusting these rates for the land transfer tax, is that you're essentially taking advantage of those increase in prices for the houses in Manitoba.

And I—just to give you an indication, that since the land transfer tax was brought in—and I will—it was brought in in 1987, I guess under an NDP government at the time, the average house price has risen from \$80,000 to over \$200,000 today, and the dollar volume for all MLS property sales has more than tripled to \$2.4 billion, and that might even be more than that now, probably.

Well, maybe I'll ask that. What—maybe you could—maybe the minister could indicate for me—I mean, I know it's really, really risen quite dramatically since the late '80s when this was first brought in. What is the average house price in Manitoba today?

Ms. Wowchuk: When we did our Manitoba Advantage comparison, we looked at two homes and we looked at a detached bungalow, and if you look at the prices of that detached home in—that home would be worth \$642,000 in British Columbia; in Alberta, it would be \$392,000; in Saskatchewan, it would be \$328,000; in Manitoba, it would be \$258,000; in Ontario, it would be \$406,000; Québec would be just slightly higher than Manitoba, \$267,000; in St. John's, it would be \$178,000; in Nova Scotia, it would be \$228,000; in Prince Edward Island, \$126,000; and in Newfoundland and Labrador, \$219,000.

So the price varies of a house or—but Manitoba comes out about—whether it's in the detached bungalow or a two-storey home, if you look at it and you compare the—all the provinces, BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan are higher. Manitoba's in fourth place when it comes to the average price of a home, whether it be a detached bungalow or a detached two-storey.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that. I think the point here is that under the under-\$100,000 sales, which used to represent 60 per cent of the total sales in the late '90s, it's now hovering around 10 per cent and maybe even less now of the total sales, while over \$200,000 sales are approaching nearly one out of every two sales.

And so I guess the point that I'm trying to make here is while other jurisdictions appear to be adjusting their land transfer taxes relative to the

markets, we don't seem to be doing that here. Why is that?

Ms. Wowchuk: I can say to the member that the other provinces haven't been adjusting their rate—the rates they've had. They are not adjusting those rates down.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, well, over that period of time the housing prices have been going up in Manitoba, and yet the provincial government raised the over-\$200,000 land transfer tax bracket from 1.5 to 2 per cent in 2004, Mr. Chairperson. Why was that? *[interjection]* That the provincial government raised the over-\$200,000 land transfer tax bracket from 1.5 to 2 per cent in 2004. Why is it that when they're going up, you're also raising the rates?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, there was a change made in the land transfer tax in 2004, but I think the important part that we have to look at here is if you look at the home prices in Manitoba, if you compare it to the income, we still have the third most affordable houses in the country. So the price of our houses are affordable. People are buying homes, and when people are buying those homes, they are not just looking at—they know that they have the land transfer tax to pay, but they look at other things as well. And they look at our—at the other incentives, the other supports that Manitoba puts in—this government puts in place that are there over a long period of time, whether it's property tax credits or education tax credits, all of those make a difference over a longer period of time.

And I would also indicate to the member that in the provinces where there's a harmonized sales tax, there is a new tax on homes for those people in those jurisdictions.

Mrs. Stefanson: It just seems to me that at a time when the housing prices are going up in our province that we shouldn't be trying to put an even further burden on those that are trying to move within our province or trying to buy new homes in our province, that we want to attract more sales in our province, we want to attract people to our province.

As a matter of fact, a study conducted by Altus for the Canadian Real Estate Association revealed that for every house transaction in the Prairies there is an economic spinoff of \$40,100, and the same report also estimated that there are 5,800 direct and indirect jobs that can be tied to the sales—the sale of MLS homes. And that was conducted April 24th of 2000—or 2009.

And I guess what seems odd to me is that if we want to create this economic spinoff, if this is what we want to have here, that it sort of—it's counterproductive to be placing a further burden like your government did in 2004 by increasing the land transfer tax bracket for those homes over \$200,000 from 1.5 per cent to 2.5—or to 2 per cent. And it just seems to me, if we want to create more economic activity in our province like the Altus Group report suggested, that your government is being counterproductive in this area.

Is there something that you're planning to do to address this issue?

Ms. Wowchuk: As I—the member indicated earlier on, I believe that she said that what was once an \$80,000 home is now a \$200,000 home and that is—when you look at all things, you know, wages have gone up, the economy is growing, all of those things have changed the prices of the homes.

But the member opposite wants to take a step to reduce the land transfer tax and that's—that would be something that her party would do or if she—and she mentioned that this was in a bill put forward by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), I believe she said.

But our government has taken a different approach. We have taken the approach that we are going to have annual reductions in property tax. We have—we are increasing the Education Property Tax Credit. We're—the education support levy is phased out. There's additional increases for seniors' Education Property Tax Credit, the farmland owner tax credit. So we've taken a different approach.

We have taken an approach where we will distribute the deduction in property tax over a larger base and, in fact, since 1999 our property taxes have decreased by \$329 million. This puts the land transfer tax the member talks about—is people expect that when they're going to buy their home, they're going to pay it once or twice in a lifetime.

But having these other kinds of grants to help properties affects people over a longer period of time and is much more—has a much more significant impact on a broader base of people.

* (15:10)

The member talks about this slowing down the economy. I would have to disagree with her. If you look at the housing market here in Manitoba, we have a very strong housing market and, in many

cases, you see people bidding up the price of the house, not—so there is—the housing market in Manitoba is not in a downturn. There are more people that are buying homes and there are more people that are building homes. And it is—it shows that our economy is doing well and the investments that we're making to—in the various aspects of housing or in other places to stimulate the economy is, in fact, helping the housing market.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think just to be clear here, I'll tell the member that something that we on our side of the House would not do and that we would not choose to place a further burden on Manitobans who want to participate in the housing market in our province by raising the land transfer taxes, like her government did back in 2004. Yes, madam—yes, the minister is right, that her government has taken a different approach than we have. And she has chosen to raise those taxes and we would not have chosen to raise those taxes. And so I, you know, I just thought we should be clear about that, that, yes, there is definitely a difference between our government and our side of the House.

In 2010, it—I believe in the books it mentions that the—Manitoba has collected—the revenue from land transfer taxes collected was \$53.7 million. Is that correct for 2010?

Ms. Wowchuk: I would just wait for that number. But I would remind the member that we—one of the reasons that we decided not to harmonize sales tax is that would have added another tax.

But the member talked about 1987 when I think she said—when the land transfer tax was put in place and then increased in 2004. I would remind her that her party was in government throughout the '90s, and I don't recall the land transfer tax being reduced or being eliminated. So it's quite fine to say, you shouldn't have imposed it, but when we're in government we'll collect it. And so I remind the member about—just remember that it was our government in—that put the tax in place. It was the Conservative government that collected it for over 10 years. And it is still a source of revenue and is it—*[interjection]* and the member is accurate. In 2009-10, it was \$53.7 million.

Mrs. Stefanson: And what's the projected revenue for the 2011-12 fiscal year?

Ms. Wowchuk: As I had indicated, Mr. Chair, our—we have a very active housing market. There are many homes that are being built and many people

buying their—buying homes in this province, and it's anticipated that the land transfer tax will generate \$62.6 million in 2011-12.

Mrs. Stefanson: Wow, that's quite a number, Mr. Chair, and it's astonishing that when you go back to March 31st of 2000, for the year ended March 31st, 2000, the Province collected some just over \$12 million at the time. And you fast-forward to today; boy, that's what, close to five times—oh yes, it's about over five times the amount that—since this government came into power. And I think you can see that what's happening here, and you can see why there is a frustration within the industry that, particularly the real estate industry about the direction that this province is going in, that it's astonishing.

And I guess, you know, I'm wondering, is there—at what point—is this just something that's going to continue to increase and increase over the years? Is there a plan to further raise the land transfer tax bracket? What is the government's plan, long-term plan to get this tax grab under control?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, you know, Mr. Chairman, it's clear to see that—the—that we have—in the last 10 years we have had a very strong economy in this province. We've had a very strong economy. There's been a lot of construction. There's been a lot of investment, and there's been a lot of sales of properties. Whether it be residential or commercial properties, those properties are selling in this province.

But the member talks about the—and I—and the collection in 2010 was \$53.7 million. She doesn't want to recognize that since 1999, since we've taken office, annual property taxes have been reduced by \$329 million. Property taxes are being reduced by that amount. The education support levy that was phased out in 2009 has saved homeowners a total of \$145 million annually. The 2011 increase in basic education property tax credits, with the adding of the five—\$50 to a total of \$700, saves Manitobans eight—\$16 million annually. This is a 400—this is the increase that we've had. The 2011 increase to seniors' property tax credits, raising that amount also puts money back into people's hands. The farmland tax rebate puts money into farmers' hands. So if you look at all of it and if you total the amount that—of the property taxes that have been reduced on an annual basis, it's significant, \$329 million.

An individual who is buying a home pays their land transfer tax once or twice in a lifetime but is able to collect these property tax reductions year

after year after year. And that is the decision that we have made. Yes, you—just as in every other jurisdiction, you pay a fee when you—and a transfer tax when you buy your property. You know when you're buying that property that you're paying that fee.

Now—but, as well, I would remind the member that we made a decision not to harmonize the GST, and if we had, there would have been an additional transfer tax there.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I know Don Cook, again, has refuted this—the minister's argument by saying that, and I'll quote from him, that this is like mixing apples and oranges, when you start discussing tax reductions and tax breaks on one hand with the land transfer tax and how it works, and he said, and I quote: It is a totally different situation. Having to pay land transfer taxes up front is diminishing house affordability, for young people in particular.

So it's keeping young people from getting involved in the housing market in Manitoba. And so, really, I understand why she's trying to link them, but, you know, here we've got someone from the industry that's saying it's like mixing apples and oranges, and so I think what he's saying is that that's a little bit of a dishonest way of trying to deal with this issue.

Having said that, I'd like to know: Does this—do these—does this go into general revenue?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, it does go into general revenue, but I want to just give the member—the member keeps talking about this as this is having a negative impact on the market, and I'll say to the member she knows full well that the housing market is quite aggressive here in the province.

* (15:20)

But since—if you look at the—you know, the one-time tax that you pay when you buy the home, you know you have to pay that. But if you look at what we have done since we've been in government, since 1999, Manitoba has reduced property taxes by \$336 million. What does this translate into? This translates into annual savings on a \$200,000 home—the member was referring to \$200,000 homes—this is an annual saving of \$1,412. This is something that they save every year on an ongoing basis. You pay your land transfer tax and your fees when you buy the home, and then you have the benefit of the policies that this government has put in place for years to come, and it is a significant benefit when

you can see your taxes reduced by that amount of money on a \$2,000 home.

Mrs. Stefanson: As funny as it's—and I'll remind the minister that it was not me who was saying this. I was quoting an industry professional who represents people, Winnipeg realtors and people in the industry who I was quoting as saying that.

Having said that, if this is going into general revenues, what happens if there is a downturn in the housing market in Manitoba causing the land transfer taxes, a decline in those. Is it then the minister's plan to then increase the fees again to make up for those losses of revenues, or how will she make up for the losses of revenues?

Ms. Wowchuk: Manitoba's economy is growing. Our population is growing. The stimulus money that we have invested is keeping Manitobans working. We're keeping people working in schools and hospitals. We're hiring more doctors and nurses. As you have more doctors and nurses, you have more people that are looking to buy homes.

The member is asking what would happen if there was a downturn in the economy. Well, we had a downturn in the economy in—and we put in place a five-year plan. We have not raised taxes during our economic downturn. In fact, we haven't raised taxes in the 12 years that we've been in government, and it is not—there has been no indication by anyone that we intend to raise these fees, but we will continue to take steps, as we have, to keep Manitoba the most affordable place to live and continue to put in place things like we did with the property tax reductions that has put money back into people's pockets.

Mrs. Stefanson: The minister was just referring to an economic downturn in the last five years. Can she indicate when that was?

Ms. Wowchuk: We're all aware that the economic downturn started in—people were aware that it was happening in 2008. In 2009, we had no growth in this province, but we were able to maintain the level in Manitoba because of the decisions we made and by the investments we made to stimulate the economy and the investments we made to keep front-line—to protect front-line services because by keeping people working, by investing in and protecting those front-line services, by keeping people working through stimulus money, we were able to protect the Manitoba economy much better than other jurisdictions did, and, as a result,

2009 saw no growth but significant investment in stimulus and in protection of front-line services.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the minister has just indicated—you know, there's a big difference between no growth and a decline in the economy, and she's just saying now there's no growth. A couple of minutes ago, she was saying there was a downturn in the economy in Manitoba and, you know, so a little bit all over the map here, but I'm digressing here, and so I'd like to get back on track with the questions that I was asking with respect to land transfer taxes in Manitoba.

In terms of the—so the minister has indicated that these go into general revenues. So they're just earmarked for—they're not specifically earmarked for any programs to do with housing or anything within the province?

Ms. Wowchuk: As the member knows, we have a very active housing program through the Department of Housing. I believe it's in the range of \$50 million that is being invested and ensuring that we rebuild a housing stock that, for many years, has not had as much investment as it should have.

But, if the member is saying, is there a specific line that takes this money directly to Housing? This money goes into general revenue. Then we work very hard with the departments and the treasury board division to decide how—where we will make investments. And, of course, in this we are—we have our five-year plan and within that five-year plan, we will make the investments that—as many investments as we can to stimulate the economy, to keep people working, and to keep those front-line services going.

Mrs. Stefanson: I probably should know the answer to this having just bought a house in the last couple of years in Manitoba, but who actually collects the land transfer taxes? Is it the Land Titles Office or—

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, that's right, it's collected at the Land Titles Office.

Mrs. Stefanson: And what is the cost to administer the collection of the land transfer tax?

Ms. Wowchuk: That would be information that would be in consumer and corporate affairs. We don't have that answer here.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, and yes, I believe this used to fall under the consumer and corporate affairs.

Did Consumer and Corporate Affairs use to—did they use to collect the revenues at one point or—

did it always go from the land—where does it go from the Land Titles Office? Just directly to the Department of Finance?

Ms. Wowchuk: Then it would be remitted—from that department it would be remitted to Department of Finance into general revenue.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, but the administrative cost is under the department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs? Is that the—

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes. The department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has the responsibility to collect that tax and they have the administration cost.

Mrs. Stefanson: Does the minister think that the administration of this would be anywhere near \$62 million?

Ms. Wowchuk: Absolutely not. The department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is very efficient, and I can assure her that it's not \$62 million to administer \$62 million.

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you very much. I just thought I would get that question out there for the minister—just to see if you're still awake.

I'd like to—just, oh yes, with respect to—just still in the area of taxation, but moving away from the land transfer tax here, and moving to the PST. Were there any additions—like additional items that were subject to taxation under the PST? New additions from last—yes, this year from last year.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, there were not.

Mrs. Stefanson: So there's been no expansion. I believe one year there was an expansion in the area of fees for—what about services? Any expansion in services that are now being collected this year over last year?

* (15:30)

Ms. Wowchuk: No, if there were any, they would have had to have been announced in the budget and there were none.

Mrs. Stefanson: They'd be announced in the budget. Would that be subject to—if there are announcements of an expansion of the base and then in what you're taxing, would that be affected by the balanced budget legislation?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, it would not.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, with respect to the balanced budget legislation, is it still the case where there is a

referendum that needs to be called if there is an increase in the percentage of PST collected?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, it is if there are major taxes that are increased. For example, if the recommendation by the Business Council to raise 1 per cent of PST, that would have required a referendum. So that clause is in the act.

Mrs. Stefanson: So does that—sorry, and I don't have the act in front of me right now—does it go beyond just an increase in taxes in the PST or is it also an increase in other—an increase in any taxes, like education taxes and income taxes, or is it just the PST?

Ms. Wowchuk: The section on tax referendum requirements under the balanced budget legislation has stayed the same, and it says: Subject to subsection (2), the government shall not present to the Legislative Assembly a bill to increase the rate of any tax imposed by an act or part of an act listed below, unless the government first puts the question of the advisability of proceeding with such a bill to the voters of Manitoba in a referendum, and a majority of the persons who vote on the referendum authorize the government to proceed with the changes. And that is The Health and Post Secondary Education Tax Levy, The Income Tax Act and The Retail Sales Tax Act.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just would like to get into, if I could, user fees that are collected in various government departments. If there's any increase in those user fees, if it's in Advanced Education, if it's in Conservation, any of those departments, does that all just go directly to those departments or does any of it go to general revenues?

Ms. Wowchuk: If there are any increases in fees, they do not go to the department, they go to general revenue.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. I wonder if the minister could please outline if—I'm sort of getting into user fees now, away from taxation. So, sorry for all of you coming up here now. But, in terms of general education development fees for testing and duplicate transfer—transcript fees, have these fees gone up since last year and, if so, by how much?

Ms. Wowchuk: I don't believe so. But that would be in the individual departments where you could get the accurate information. If there are any increases to any fees or charges we would not have that number here.

Mrs. Stefanson: So you only have the breakdown in terms of what you receive from each government department in the way of revenue then, and you don't have the breakdown of how much they would increase by each user fee here?

Ms. Wowchuk: That's right.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. Then can the minister indicate how much user fees in general across all government departments are up from last year, if you want to do it? I guess it's in the book, but just a general number of how much more is being collected this year then over last year.

Ms. Wowchuk: Would—we can look for that information or, if the member is willing, I can provide her with that—oh, I think we've got some information here. Let's just wait for a minute.

Okay, there were a few fee changes that were—it was a fact sheet that came out with the budget and it says this year fee increases are \$581,000, with fees decreasing \$2.5 million, resulting in a saving of \$1.9 million for Manitobans.

So in Advanced Education and Literacy, there was general education development fees for testing and duplicate transfer fees. That's an increase of \$4,000 in total.

In Manitoba Conservation, wood-fire timber permits are up \$41,000, but park fee entrances are down by \$2.5 million. So in Conservation that's where you have the saving of 2.45–\$2.46 million.

In Culture, Heritage and Tourism, printer copying, digital scans, CD, DVD copies and reproduction of audio-video materials, there is a total of a thousand dollars in revenue.

In Family Services and Consumer Affairs, credit union fees, there's an increase of—total revenue of \$5,000. Fees for redirecting rent, \$2,000. So in family consumer—Family Services and Consumer Affairs there's a total of \$7,000.

In Infrastructure and Transportation, terminal space and land fees, there's a total of \$40,000.

In Justice, there's a law filing fees for a total of \$35,000.

In Manitoba Labour and Immigration, there's annual fees for registered pension plans with a total of \$100,000.

So, as I said, there are some increases in fees, but when you do the net amount of it—oh, just a minute, I've got some on the other side.

Local Government, municipal planning fees for subdivisions, application and lot registration, that's \$75,000.

In Innovation, Energy and Mines, well fees, geographic licensing, battery permits, pipeline application, well transfers, salt water disposal conversions, enhanced oil recovery reduction spacing, there's a total of \$228,000.

And in Vital Statistics, electronic notification or verification, there's a total of \$50,000.

As I was saying, if you look at all of it, there are some increases but on—when you average—when you take the increases versus the savings, there's a total saving of \$1.9 million for Manitobans.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, yes, I thank the minister for that. I believe that was a government press release that was sent out. So I was aware of the revenues, but I really just wanted the fee increases or decreases, but you said that it had to be done on a department-by-department basis. So thank you for—

Ms. Wowchuk: I'm—[interjection] If the member is looking for the individuals, what I gave her was the total amounts for the department, but if you're looking for the percentage increase, that would have to come from individual departments, and I apologize if the member didn't—wasn't looking for that particular information.

Mrs. Stefanson: No, that's fine. I appreciate the information. I do recall seeing the totals in terms of all of those areas where there were increases or in the case of provincial park entrance fees, the decrease there.

So thank you for that, but I will endeavour to go around to the various government departments to find out in some of those government departments why and—why the increase in some of those services. So—or the increase to some of the fees, I should say.

I just wanted to go on to—if I could for a moment here. I have lots of questions on the debt, et cetera, to ask about, but I would like to just talk about the I'm Worth It campaign, if I could for a little bit. And I'm wondering if the minister can indicate what the total cost is for the I'm Worth It campaign?

* (15:40)

Ms. Wowchuk: That's in the Securities Commission, and if I'm remembering accurately, they budgeted \$75,000, but the total amount has not been spent.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can I just, from the minister, get an indication what she was trying—what are they trying to—what kind of a message are they trying to deliver Manitobans with this campaign?

Ms. Wowchuk: The message was, plan for your future. Make yourself aware of how financing works. Look at ways to put yourself in a better situation when you retire.

We know that when you look at the statistics, women end up poorer than men do in their retirement years, and so the Securities Commission put together a group of people, and they interviewed people, and looked at ways that they could get information out to help women plan—to have more knowledge of financial planning and have—be able to do the things that they have to do, whether it's investments or education, to put themselves in a better position when they reach those golden years, because there is a true recognition that women, in many cases, do not have as much experience in financial planning. And women, in many cases, because of the role that women play, sometimes they don't have as many years working, so there—this was—the objective here was to give more people—give people more skills.

We know that adult—that financial literacy is a big issue. It's an issue right across the country. It's an issue that's been talked about by the federal government. It's an issue that's being talked about in every jurisdiction. Here, in Manitoba, we were the first ones out of the gate to start with doing financial literacy with the financial institute and in schools, for young people to start to learn about financing.

And it was very interesting. I had my grandson come home from school one day, and he said, you know, there's somebody from the bank, and they're telling us how we set up bank accounts and what we should do with our money. At a very young age, he's nine years old.

So, I think that this is important, and at the same time that that was happening, there was a recognition that we could help women as well and it—I have to tell you that it was very well received. The number of hits on that website, on the first day, was probably one of the most accessed sites in government in a long time. Women are interested, they want the information and they are accessing it.

Mrs. Stefanson: I got a bit of a different response from people, and primarily the response that I got was that it was somewhat stereotyping women as being financially illiterate and irresponsible and, again, this is coming from other people out there who just found that it was offensive. And I'm wondering if the minister can indicate to those people why it was targeted just at them and not, in general, for all Manitobans, and why it was just targeted specifically at women and stereotyping them in such a way that to some of these people they found it quite offensive. What do you have to say to those people that we have heard from?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, I guess I would say to the member that this is just one piece of information that's out there. It's Minister of Finance, and he has been one of the people that has been pushing the hardest on this matter of doing things to provide information to people so that they can do better planning.

And I—you know, there are some women who are out there who are the best financial planners in the world. They don't need this information. They don't. But there are other people out there who have been identified as people who could use more information. Nobody is saying you have to use the information. It's there, and I say to the member if some people were offended by the information, then they don't have to use it.

But I can tell her that there is a tremendous amount of interest because there are more people going to this website than there have been to many other websites. So, as I said, there is work being done in the schools starting at a younger age with very young children. There is work being done—people do work with their financial planners, and this is another aspect of putting information out, and those people who don't need it, don't have to use it, but those people who need some help or want some help can use the information.

And if the member will look at the pamphlet that's been put out and listen to some of the people that were interviewed, there is an interest in this. It's not for everybody, but there is a recognition right across the country from the federal Minister of Finance to ministers across the country to many organizations as well that are talking about the need for community service groups, other—NGOs. All people are talking about the need for—to put more material out. We've put more material out. Some

people will use it; some people don't need it, and they won't use it.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I guess why some people are a little offended by the ad campaign is that it depicts women as binge shoppers and that they've got—you know, they can't control their emotions and so they do buy—you know, going out and just doing this emotional shopping and they go on these shopping sprees.

And I'm just wondering, like I just don't—I don't know how that goes in the right direction in terms of empowering women when it comes to encouraging financial independence and recognizing that a lot of women actually run their households and they manage their books, their own books and their own households. It ends up, you know, in many cases, we're still in a situation where, you know, women—the majority of women probably take on those roles, where they manage the household finances.

And I think for those women it just—it came across as being very offensive because these are the women that really are trying to live within their means on a regular basis in this province, and I think this campaign just offended them because, in spending \$75,000 on a campaign telling women that, you know, they're a bunch of binge shoppers when there is a lot of women out there who are very good with their own finances at home and I think we can learn a lot from them.

And so, you know, I know the minister's saying, well, this isn't for those people, but, you know, it has offended people in a way and I just—I think, you know, I'm wondering how this all came about and if the minister really feels that this is a proper depiction of women's role in finance in this province.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, I will remind the member that she's the one that's called women binge shoppers, not me. That's—the member opposite just said women are a bunch of binge shoppers. Well, that's not the intent of this campaign that was put out. I thoroughly respect women and the role that they play in finances at homes, in the business world. There are many women in many different fields.

* (15:50)

The issue of financial literacy is one that has been raised across the nation. It's been raised at the federal level, at every provincial jurisdiction. Other jurisdictions are looking at what Manitoba has done and how we've implemented financial literacy with the financial institute into schools so children start to

learn earlier about financial planning. And the member may want to deny the fact, but the truth of the matter is when you look at statistics, women in their senior years, many times end up poorer than men do. That's a fact of—a true fact. Let her look at the statistics that are out there. This is another piece of information that's there for those that want to use it, and it is women who have—are in different financial situations telling their story about how their—what their finances were and how they'd been impacted and how they have learned.

We should be looking at putting every possible tool in place that we can, whether it's about—with young people, whether it's with women. You know, there is—if you look at the Department of Agriculture and the farming community, there is programs that are there within government, between the department of MAFRI, to help people with financial planning.

So no matter where you go, finances are a part of our everyday life. Some people want to use information to change their finances; some people don't want to. And this is another tool, along with working with young people, to help people who might want help. Not everybody needs it.

And I want to say that I would never refer to women as binge shoppers. I think they are some of the most intelligent people in the world.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I'll tell you right now, Mr. Chairperson, that in the guide it contains recommendations on emotional shopping, and that is very—that is stereotyping women. And, you know, whatever the minister wants to say, I mean, it's—this is people who are coming forward to me from our community who have a serious problem with this ad campaign and the stereotyping of women and how it does that. And, you know, she can say all she wants and accuse me of whatever she wants, but the fact of the matter is people are offended by this.

And I guess I would just ask her that, you know, why—why would it be that a campaign would not be targeted at all Manitobans who, if they need help, here's where we are and here's how we can help you, as opposed to this kind of a campaign that targets, you know, basically, women in a very stereotypical way?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, in fact, Mr. Chairperson, that information is there. There is a financial literacy website that's available for everybody. It's available for everybody and people can access that website to

see what information is there, what kind of tools there are to help people.

This is an issue that was identified through the Securities Commission, an issue that was identified across the country, and, as I said, there are different parts of the program. There's the financial literacy website. There's a program where we are—that young children are being targeted so that they would understand their money and savings and bankings. And there is now this program that the member refers to that was put together by the Securities Commission in conjunction with a group of women who helped to design the pamphlet and put their information out.

There—as I said, it may not be for everyone, but those that want to use it know that there is now a site for them to go to for an—any additional help that they might need. So the—as I said, there is information for everybody on the website.

Mrs. Stefanson: How was this issue identified through the Securities Commission?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, the Securities Commission has always been interested in financial literacy, how we can improve the financial situation of people in this province. As I say, there are other jurisdictions that are doing similar things. And there was the Make it Count campaign. Now there is this campaign, and there is information on the website.

Security commission looks at various areas and looks at where their—they can identify need, and, certainly, when you look at the area of women, there is definitely information that shows that women in their senior years many times do not have the same kind of savings or financial planning that—have not been on the same kind of financial planning that man or families, others have done, and this is just another tool for people to get the financial information that they need, and the Securities Commission has worked on this for many years on these kinds of issues and will continue to work on it.

Mrs. Stefanson: So who did they meet with in particular, though? Was there a group or an organization that came forward and made a suggestion here, or how did they come up with this campaign? How did they come up with this campaign?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chair, part of this—the role of the Securities Commission is public education and that's a part of consumer protection. So the Securities Commission did a research project. They did polling.

They did focus groups on what the investment needs were. And they polled men and they polled women. They went—and different demographics, and it was women through that research project with the Manitoba Securities Commission who identified the need. They identified the need for more information on financial literacy and planning.

So that—it was women that requested it. It was the Securities Commission that led it, and I want to say to the member that this project is endorsed by Evelyn Jacks who is on the National Literacy Task Force, which is Minister Flaherty's task force. This is something that she has endorsed, as has others.

* (16:00)

So did—how did it come about? It came about because the Securities Commission has a responsibility and this was an issue that was identified. And they worked very closely on it with people to develop what was requested by women when they—through this—these focus groups and this polling.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, and I don't think that the people, certainly, who we've heard from, I don't think that their issue with it was the issue itself. I think that, you know, any kind of public education program for men, women, students, whatever, whatever it may be, is a positive thing. I think they're just—their issue was how it was—how the issue was portrayed, okay. So, you know, I'll leave it at that, but I'm wondering if—and the minister can respond to this—but I wonder if the minister can just indicate who actually did the advertising campaign. Who—what advertising company did that?

Ms. Wowchuk: I thank the member for those comments, for recognizing that there is the need for this kind of education. And if there are people who want more information, I would certainly welcome their calls at my office, and I could provide them with more detailed information as to how this came about. I'd be happy to do that. If she's interested in providing some names, then I would have to get back to the member on the company that did the advertising; we don't have that information here, but I will certainly get back.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, well, if the minister could get back to me on that, that'd be very good.

And I'm just going to pass on the floor right now to my colleague from River Heights to ask a few questions. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'd like to start with a question about the equalization transfers. For this year, you've got an estimated equalization transfer of \$1.94 billion. And my first question is: Can you provide some information about how secure that number is in terms of that will be the final number for this year?

Ms. Wowchuk: The formula that we have is in place till 2014, but each December the federal minister provides us with a number of what our transfer payments will be. So the number that we have this year is secure. He's given us that information and next December he will give us a number for what our payment—transfer payment will be next year.

Mr. Gerrard: When you say that the formula is good till 2014, is that the 2013-2014 fiscal year or the 2014-2015 fiscal year?

Ms. Wowchuk: It expires March 31st, 2014, but I can also say to the member that work has begun. All jurisdictions are—because this is not something that's put in place overnight, so work has begun to plan for what will happen in—after that date.

Mr. Gerrard: Just a question about the formula. I mean, there was a period where the amount of equalization depended very much on how one province would do relative to other provinces economically, and so that if Manitoba's growth was above the rest of the country, then there could be quite a decrease in the amount of equalization transfers to Manitoba. So my question deals with whether the current formula is, you know, has this aspect that if growth were to be in Manitoba ahead of other provinces, would we have less money in terms of equalization?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, the current formula has been in place since 2007, and in 2008 the federal government put a cap on the amounts that they would pay out. But how—it's quite a complex formula. It is based on the moving average of Canada's GDP and then there is the provincial GDP and all of those numbers come together and, as I said, it—as our economy grows, then that would mean less money for us because of the whole cap.

And two years ago Ontario came into the formula. They weren't in it before so that resulted in dramatic changes in equalization. That—so all of those things have an effect.

Because there's a cap on it, there's only so much money that is there. When one economy goes down, you have to take more money over to that one, and

our economy has been performing reasonably well, so that affects us as well.

One of the things that we can say is that in this economic downturn, the federal government had decided to keep all provinces whole with regard to the transfer—the health and education part, the social transfer and the equalization. We could have—because of our growth, we could have had some decline but the federal government made a decision that they would, rather than making that reduction, they would keep us at the same level. So that has been helpful for us for the last two years and we hope that we can maintain—that the federal government can maintain that commitment and then be kept whole, rather than have the reduction that was anticipated because of the change in formula, the change of dynamics in other jurisdictions and the cap.

Mr. Gerrard: So, as I understand it, that without the decision not to reduce the equalization for provinces like Manitoba, there could have been a decrease in the transfer to Manitoba. So I would ask, is that agreement firm for this coming year or is there a possibility that in the next—from 2012 to 2013 and 2013 to 2014, that there could be some reductions?

*(16:10)

Ms. Wowchuk: The federal government put that in place last year, it's firm for this year, and after that we're not sure. But, the federal minister—Prime Minister and the federal minister both said they would not balance their books on the backs of the provinces. They said that it in public so we're hoping that they will keep their word to that, and that this guarantee that they have given us to keep us whole will continue on until we have—our—the economy's turned around and until—when a new formula is negotiated. Because that will happen in—as I indicated earlier—that's in the process. People are starting to work on what next phase of federal transfer payments will be.

Mr. Gerrard: Let me move to another area. Thank you for that information relative to equalization.

I notice on, I think it's page 22, of the budget and budget papers, the Manitoba Summary Financial Statistics that the summary net debt for 2009-2010 was approximately \$11.8 billion; for 2010-11, the forecast is \$13.2 billion; and the forecast for 2011-2012 is \$14.8 billion.

Now, what's striking is the, you know, significant increase in debt relative to the deficit. I

mean, the summary deficit for the last—well, in 2009-2010, was 201, in 2010-2011, it was forecasted \$467 million and 2011-2012, forecasted \$438 million.

So that, for example, in 2010-2011, the increase in net debt was one billion larger than the deficit. And for this year, it would \$1.2 billion larger than the deficit in the summary budget.

So I wonder if for 2010-11 and 2011-12, if the minister could provide, you know, some indication of where those additional, you know, expenditures are that accounts for the increased borrowing.

Ms. Wowchuk: We have made a decision that we would stimulate the economy by making investments in assets and those are the kinds of things that we have done. And if that increase in net debt is related, for example, in 2011, we said that we would put \$1.8 billion in capital assets and then that has to be amortized over time, but, you have to put it in—onto the books. We have put plans in place about how we will address those and made different changes.

But, we have—the biggest part of this increase is the decision that we made in our five-year plan that we would make those investments in infrastructure, and our tangible capital assets have been growing faster than the net debt over the past five years, 2011 is the fifth year of our 10-year, billion-dollar highway strategy. We're putting more money into roads, more money into bridges. Certainly, a major investment that's reflected in here is the investments in CentrePort and Canada Way where there's land that's been accumulated to CentrePort, roads that have been built there. There's—we've made capital investments to create jobs to promote economic growth.

We've made all of these investments and, of course, they have to be paid for overtime. But that was a specific step that we had taken in order to stimulate the economy; get more infrastructure in place, and then pay for that overtime. And there is a plan on how it will be paid for.

Mr. Gerrard: Just to clarify, first of all, the assets were being amortized. Are those all newly constructed or newly built assets, or are those, in some cases, existing assets which have been there for some time which a decision was made to amortize?

Ms. Wowchuk: This did happen. The decision to amortize did happen a few years ago. It was in 1999 that the decision to amortize general assets was put in place, and in 2004 infrastructure was—we began to

amortize infrastructure. So when you amortize it is—the day-to-day repairs and activities don't go under amortization, but when there are significant refurbishments or—that happen to a particular asset that cost might—could be amortized.

So, specifically, this has been happening for a long time now, over 10 years on the general assets and infrastructure in 2004.

Mr. Gerrard: Just to clarify, in the new debt which is going in for, you know, let's say 2011-2012 in this coming year, that—is that new debt—I mean, I would presume would be new infrastructure spending, but is that because the debt that has been added and amortized from previous years would already be in the books? Is that not the case? Or is this, in fact, debt which is from previous, you know, something that was built in 2003, for example?

Ms. Wowchuk: The 1.8 that I referred to is new capital spending. That's what we talked about in the budget about investment in stimulus, and for this year it's \$1.8 billion in new capital.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay. So of that \$1.8 billion in new capital spending, if one then takes, you know, the increase in the net—summary net debt of 14—up to—well, it's actually \$1.6 billion. You know, of that \$1.6-billion increase in the summary net debt, about \$438 million is deficit, which, I presume, would go straight into the summary net debt. That would leave about \$1.2 billion that is amortized capital assets.

Now, my understanding is that the capital assets would be amortized over varying periods of time. Some might be 20 years. Some might be 40 years, and so on. If a capital asset was amortized over 20 years, then the question is how much of that actually gets amortized the first year and, you know, later on.

* (16:20)

I'm just trying to get a rough understanding of the procedure that's undertaken here and, you know, how the new capital assets expenditure of \$1.8 billion relates to the increase in the net debt.

Ms. Wowchuk: In—for 2010-11, our summary net debt forecast—the member is accurate—is 13 million two hundred—13 million two—billion—\$13 billion, 244 million. So our net investment on tangible assets for core government is \$637 million. Our—and then for other reporting entities, it's \$485 million. So that brings us to—that totals \$1.122 billion.

Then, if you take the projected losses for the year on core government and other entities, that totals \$438 million. That's our deficit. That's what we have projected as \$438 million. So the change in debt-net debt is 1.560, and that brings us to the summary net debt in the budget of 14.804.

So we have the capital investments less amortization which is the 637 that I had mentioned, and then we have the other reporting entities and amortization on the 485 that I've talked about.

So when you look at what the capital investments are, what the amortization costs are, what the other reporting entities, capital expenditures are, that's how you come to the numbers that bring us to what the member was referring to in the summary net debt as a summary net debt of \$14,804,000,000.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you, that's helpful.

You mentioned that the \$637 million is the government investment in capital assets. That's the amount which is amortized. Is some portion of that total investments in capital assets, is some portion of that allocated for the current fiscal year or is it—the whole thing amortized?

Ms. Wowchuk: The capital investment is 808 less amortization of 171, and that's how you get the number of 637.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, that's quite—are those numbers somewhere in the budget papers or they're just—they're background or they may be in the annual report? Is that where—

Ms. Wowchuk: Not quite exactly like that, but they are throughout—the department has pulled out—and to indicate how we've come to this number because others have asked how we came to the number of 14.8 and we wanted to be able to say, this is where the money is; this is how the—this is the capital investment; this is the amortization cost; this is how we got to this number.

Mr. Gerrard: Ok, so, now, moving forward on an ongoing basis, and there've been large amounts added to the amortized capital assets in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012 fiscal years, what's the expectation in succeeding years? Being—presumably, there will be some ongoing infrastructure expenditure, will all, sort of, your amortizing roads, bridges, CentrePort, what have you, that those—will all assets continue to go into this and be amortized or will some be excluded? And to what extent is the prediction that the, you know, the net—summary net

debt would continue to grow larger than the deficit or would it return to what it had been, which was a number closer to what the deficit was?

Ms. Wowchuk: As assets come on, every department has to budget for their amortization of their assets. So this is a disciplinary step that we have taken to ensure that there is careful planning and that if the people are be—able to cover the costs of the assets that are in that particular department over time. So they—it is in the department they have to plan for it. As they plan for the assets, they have to also plan for how they will amortize these assets.

Mr. Gerrard: So I would guess that there would be considerable ongoing capital expenditures even without the stimulus, that there will be, for example, continuing new road construction. Can—just to get a picture of this, can the minister give us sort of a summary of the capital assets which will be added and amortized on a yearly basis?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is aware that we have a 10-year plan for capital. In Infrastructure and Transportation, we've been through that—the first five years, and shortly there will be the other 5-year. The plan will be laid out that determines how we will proceed with that capital investment. But, yes, there will be construction; there will be hospitals; there will be schools that are needed. They—but—all of this becomes part of the replacement value of public assets, and that is valued at \$37 billion now

* (16:30)

So, but what is important at—is that there is—has been discipline built into what can be built because of how you have to account for the amortization costs in a department, so there is some discipline there. We are, in my opinion, we are—there's certainly additional work that—we needed that 10-year plan on infrastructure on roads and bridges. There was a lot of work that had to be done, and there still is a lot of work that has to be done.

My hope is that we will catch up a little bit with other capital needs, but, you know, and there are significant investments that are being made in hospitals right now, whether it's the birthing centre or the Children's Hospital or women's centre—all of those things, and hopefully some of those assets—some of those as that happens, it—they become part of the replacement value of the public assets.

And some we will catch up on, but there's always going to be a need for another school or a replacement of a school. There's always going to be a

need for other things, and it has to be done in a way that is sustainable, that you can plan for the amortization, and it has to be done in a way that maintains our net debt-to-GDP ratio at a reasonable level. We've brought that down; it's bumped up a bit now because of the stimulus dollars. And it's our goal to maintain that balance at a reasonable level in comparison to the growth in our economy.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, so from what I'm hearing, the capital assets, the major ones, would be roads and bridges, dams, schools, hospitals. There are other major categories?

Ms. Wowchuk: The major ones are certainly our—what we have said in our capital infrastructure, but there are roads and highways, universities, colleges, public schools, health facilities, floodway expansion and water-related infrastructure, housing, public service buildings, parks, camping infrastructure. So those would be the main capital infrastructure investments that we make.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if you could give us the, you know, the amortization—the number of years that roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, dams, et cetera, would be amortized over, if you would have that.

Ms. Wowchuk: Buildings that are made of bricks and mortar and steel are amortized over 40 years. Wood-frame buildings are amortized over 25 years. Vehicles, five years; aircraft, 24 years, but their motors are five years; other equipment is a 10-year amortization; machinery for road construction is 15 years; I can't see roads. Where are roads in here? *[interjection]* Sorry about that. Roads are—land improvements, 30 years; traffic lights, 20 years; bridges, 40 years; and roads vary over depending on what the surface is—somewhere between seven and 40 years; airstrips are 40 years; dams and water structures are 40 years; minor bridges, 10 years; culvert installation, 40 years.

So you can see that there's a broad range, but a good majority of them are amortized over 40 years and some are much shorter, you know. Computer hardware is not going to be amortized over 40 years, it's going to be amortized over five years and then it might be delinquent before it even gets to the five years. It depends how quick things change.

So, depending on what the asset is as to how long you can amortize it, but when you talk about the major structures, they're—I would say most of them are close to 40 years.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you. That's very helpful.

Now, just a little more detail in terms of roads. I think you mentioned from seven to 40 years. And, you know, what would be the, sort of, criteria here?

Ms. Wowchuk: Sorry, if the provincial road or trunk highway—if you have microsurfacing, that's amortized over seven years. If you have a thin overlay, which is still a major investment, it's amortized over 10 years. If you have a surfaced road, which is the paved road, I—that's 20 years, and a grade is 40 years.

So the construction of the base is amortized over a longer period of time and then, depending on the quality or the depth of the surface that's being put on it, that would determine how many years it would go. If you're having a thick layer of pavement, that should last 20 years. If you're just doing a microsurfacing, that won't last that long, and it has to be paid off over seven years. But, it's also much cheaper.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm curious about the power transmission lines because Hydro—would it be included in a summary net?

Ms. Wowchuk: Hydro is a separate entity, so all we show in our budget is their net assets, their net income for that particular year. But their dams or their power lines don't show up. They have their own schedule of amortization.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay, but now, in what you told me earlier on, you indicated that there was \$637 million of new capital assets by government, and \$485 million by, I presume, Crown corporations primarily, like Hydro. Is that not correct? Or maybe I misunderstood.

Ms. Wowchuk: That's all of the other capital—other reporting entities. That's not Hydro. Hydro is separate.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay, so that would include schools and hospitals. Is that what we're talking about?

Ms. Wowchuk: That's right, and I'm sorry if I didn't make that clear. The Crowns are separate. All they—all we do is get their bottom line and—in our summary budget, but their budget is separate.

Mr. Gerrard: But their bottom line would amortize the dams and the hydro lines, would it not? Or would it?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, yes, it would.

Mr. Gerrard: So that they would—their amortization of capital assets would show up, but in their budget,

and to the extent that it showed up in their budget, it would then get put into the summary net budget?

Ms. Wowchuk: All that would be reflected in summary budget is their bottom line of what—but it doesn't—they've done all their financial work over here, and then when it comes to doing summary budget they give us their bottom line. They don't give us all of the other things that they're doing within the corporation.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I mean, I think I understand that. But their bottom line would reflect the amortization of capital assets in a similar way, and it wouldn't be their assets which get transferred; it would just be the impact that those assets had on their bottom line.

Ms. Wowchuk: That's right.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay.

Ms. Wowchuk: We got it straight.

* (16:40)

Mr. Gerrard: Just one question, in terms of roads. I mean, in my experience, when I've seen road repairs, for instance, along the Trans-Canada Highway, that there's been some which last a long time and some which don't last very long. And, you know, presumably the numbers which, you know, are down there are reflected in the history of what's happened, but you certainly—well, for instance, on Highway 75, I think, partly because of the floods and the impact of that, that the numbers might not be in the same area as in other highways.

Ms. Wowchuk: I'm not quite sure what the member is asking as a question, but all highways, that construction, they're amortized as—at a rate that applies to the class, and there's different classes of roads. So they're amortized over—based on their class, and that's based on the use of the road, so some will be amortized over a longer period of time—or—and—amortized at the average useful life of the asset.

So, and as I said earlier, if it's a heavier road, it will have—be averaged over a longer period of time. But it's the class of the asset.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay, yes, I think I've got it.

One of the things about the summary net budget approach is that what happens with Manitoba Hydro, where there's a surplus or a loss, is going to have a very significant impact from year to year on the outcome of the summary net budget. And it's in that context that, over, you know, the next little while, because you're concerned about the summary net

budget, that I think all of us are a little bit concerned that the overall revenues and surplus from Manitoba Hydro the last year or two have been lower than we might have hoped for.

And I wonder if the minister has some—can provide some understanding in terms of why it is that Hydro profits are not as large as they were and, you know, what the situation is going to be moving forward.

Ms. Wowchuk: You know, one of the real impacts of Hydro's profits is the US economy. The exports—the US economy is just not using the power that they were using when there was a stronger economy. There's also competing sources of power, and certainly natural gas is at a very low price right now and that's in competition with our power. One of the things that determines Hydro's profits is the water levels, and certainly that should be a positive for Hydro this year.

But, ultimately, we—we're—we hope—and I'm sure the US economy is going to turn around, and as the US economy turns around there is new opportunities for sale. You have heard me say that we are looking for other markets for power. We have—are having serious discussions with Saskatchewan because Saskatchewan produces a lot of coal power and they have identified that they are going to need more clean power, so we're having those discussions.

So all of—but, getting back to the question, is—are we concerned about it? Of course. If a market like the US is in a downturn, it does have an effect on us. They're one of our major trading partners, and they're a major part of our power sales. Other competitions will also affect us.

I think one of the things that does help Manitoba Hydro is the fact that it's a clean energy, and the world markets, like the US, like Saskatchewan, other places, are looking for clean energy and that makes our hydroelectricity very valuable, and, hopefully, those—that—we will see that benefit, see that turnaround and we'll see the profits increase for Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Gerrard: There's been some speculation that the considerable increase in the amount of shale gas becoming available, in the last couple of years in particular, might have an impact, and I wonder if the minister, you know, would indicate whether, in fact, you know, that that may be true and whether that could be a, you know, a longer run concern, because

the production of shale gas seems to be ramping up rather than the reverse.

Ms. Wowchuk: That is one of the concerns that shale gas is a new product on the market and it is coming in at a—quite a cheap price, and that's one thing we have to be concerned about into the future. Again, I will go back to the fact—to look at a cleaner, greener energies that people are looking for to replace some of the other energies, whether it's coal or shale gas, which is not renewable. But, at this point in time, there isn't a good understanding about what the supply of shale gas will be, and, as long as it is in there—is available, then it does have an impact on our markets and we—all of that has to be taken into consideration. But there are still markets for hydroelectricity, both in, as I said, in the US and there are potentials for those kind of sales to the west of us as well. So we have to continue to work on them to try to develop those markets and—for our power.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, I've also heard it said that the way that the subsidies are being provided in the United States to wind energy is not only resulting in, for instance, significant numbers of wind fields in places like North Dakota, but that much of that energy is coming on at a fairly low price because of the way that the US is subsidizing. I wonder if the minister would comment.

Ms. Wowchuk: It is true that the US is subsidizing their wind farm production. I'm not sure how long that subsidy will stay in place. But, as the US economy turns around, there will be room for wind power and there will be room for hydroelectricity. There have been several—as I'm aware—several wind farms built in the US, many I should say. But there are some that are having difficulty as well, and I'm not—I can't recall how long that support that they've got is going to stay in place. But, if they don't have the subsidy, they're not—that's what drives their price down. When the subsidy is removed it then becomes very expensive power as well.

* (16:50)

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. When there's, you know, for example, I should go back to the amortization issue. If the provincial government provides dollars to the City of Winnipeg for sewage capital expenditures and so on, does that get amortized provincially or not? Just for clarification.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, the City is not in our government reporting entities. It's not one of them so it's not in our books.

Mr. Gerrard: I just wanted to be clear.

But one of the issues which I have brought up a number of times in previous years deals with environmental liabilities. And I'm—when I've asked this before, then the issue of—for example, environmental liabilities related to the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg because of the environmental problems with algae are not included or have not been included as environmental liabilities.

I wonder if the minister can tell me if that's still the situation or if that's changed.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, that has not changed.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if the minister could tell me what the—whether the extent of environmental liabilities have changed or not over the last year.

Ms. Wowchuk: Environmental liabilities in 2009 were \$540 million. They have gone down to \$521 million, and that indicates that some of the environmental issues have been—remediation has taken place and there has been improvements.

Mr. Gerrard: Is that specifically related to, you know, oil spills or mine sites, or do you have any—

Ms. Wowchuk: That's a total number of all the environmental liabilities that have been identified that the province has.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, okay. Now, I think that one of the responsibilities that the minister has with the Securities Commission—and just—maybe the minister could provide us a current status of the Crocus Investment Fund windup. Is there still some activities that require winding up. What's the status currently?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, I'm pleased to say that 95 per cent of the court-approved distribution to shareholders representing \$52.1 million has been claimed by Manitobans, and, certainly, as a government, we continue to encourage all shareholders to contact Deloitte and Touche to claim their share of the distribution. Once Crocus has liquidated its assets and proceedings at the Manitoba Securities Commission involving former Crocus directors, once this is finalized—once those proceedings are finalized, the remaining assets will be distributed to Manitoba shareholders. So there is

still some work being done with the directors to arrive at a settlement.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the—have all the assets been liquidated, as it were, or are there still sort of 5 per cent of the assets which still—or the investments which still have to be liquidated?

Ms. Wowchuk: The receiver manager has divested 35 of the 46 investments within the Crocus portfolio. There are 11 investments remaining, with an estimated value of \$10.9 million. Crocus also has another \$19.4 million in other assets.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay, now the situation—maybe the minister could give a little bit of clarity to the situation with the directors in terms of what still has to be resolved.

Ms. Wowchuk: As I indicated to the member earlier, the Manitoba Securities committee—Commission continues to negotiate with the directors to arrive at a settlement, but the Manitoba Securities Commission is at arm's-length agency from government and it is their job to deal with these issues, and I haven't—they are the ones that are working to resolve a settlement with the directors.

Mr. Gerrard: There was, I believe, through what was called a Manitoba Securities Commission investigation. Is the investigation complete and all that is required now is a settlement with the directors, or is still there some investigating to do?

Ms. Wowchuk: The commission continues to work on this to reach a settlement and if there isn't—a settlement cannot be reached, then there will be a hearing to—that will be held by the commission, and evidence will be presented to the commission and the directors, and an independent panel will rule on this. So, again, the Securities Commission is working on this. They're trying to come to a settlement. If they don't come to a settlement, there will be a hearing.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if the minister can provide any information as to what sort of timeline might be worked with.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, I cannot because, as I said, they're an independent body, but if there would be a hearing, there would be notices posted. People would be aware of it, but that will be a decision of the Securities Commission.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay, I thank the minister. I want to just go back to one of the issues which the minister mentioned and that is that the 10-year capital expenditure plan, which I gather the minister has in

place, is that 10-year capital expenditure plan a public document?

Ms. Wowchuk: When we developed the 10-year capital plan, the first five years was announced and there will—those five years have expired, so we're moving into the next five years and there will be an announcement in the near future on the next five years of the capital plan.

Mr. Gerrard: On—the first five years expired at what time point?

Ms. Wowchuk: We're in the fifth year now, so plans have been laid out, so we have to talk what will come in the next years.

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

JUSTICE

*(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 Department of Justice.

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

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Chairperson, I do have some information to follow up from yesterday's questions. I've got six general areas of answers that I can provide.

The first is just to clarify that we had a good discussion yesterday about conditional sentences and what impact that might have on the corrections system, and my staff have reminded me that the conditional sentence provisions of the Criminal Code were last amended by what was then Bill C-9, and the amendment created some additional restrictions on the availability of conditional sentences. And, according to that amendment, a conditional sentence is now prohibited in cases involving, first of all, a serious personal injury offence, as defined in section 752 of the Criminal Code; secondly, a terrorism offence; or third, a criminal organization offence that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years or more.

So the number of individuals that would be convicted of one of those three areas that was

impacted by the Criminal Code provision is relatively modest.

Now, there was another bill that died on the Order Paper in Ottawa. We're expecting that it might just see the light of day again as things get going again in Ottawa, whether that's later on this spring or whether that's into the fall. And I'll certainly be keeping my eye on what comes forward.

So that's the first clarification I wanted to provide.

The second—there was a question about the telephone service that's being provided, and I had provided a blanket answer. But I'd undertaken that if that wasn't quite right for any of the institutions I would clarify. I'm told by a Corrections staff that the population of the Dauphin Correctional Centre is not large enough for that inmate trust account to fully cover the cost of telephones. So right now that's not being fully covered, and we're looking at ways to have that be paid in some way from somewhere other than provincial funds.

Of course, the question would be: Well, why don't you just put in a pay phone? One of the challenges, of course, is that, as we talked about, I think, in good detail yesterday, we do use the phones as a source of intelligence and whatever solution we would come up with would have to be accessible for the purpose of our surveillance and our intelligence.

The third item, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) asked a question about a claim he'd spotted in a order-in-council. I can't get into many details, except to say that the estate of Mr. Holoka filed a statement of claim against the province for wrongful death and the settlement offer was reached based on the legal advice, that it was in the best interests of both the Province and the public to settle that legal action.

As well, Mr. Chairperson, the member for Steinbach had asked about the inquest that resulted. I can advise that the inquest report was completed, and as is the way it works in Manitoba, the Ombudsman followed up on these inquest recommendations, as she does on all recommendations relating to government departments. In March 2010, the Ombudsman wrote to the Honourable Ken Champagne, Chief Judge of the Provincial Court, to advise of the Ombudsman's finding in the Holoka matter, and the Ombudsman concluded that, based on our review of this matter it would appear that Manitoba Justice has given reasonable consideration

to the above-noted recommendations. As such, our file concerning the Christopher Holoka inquest has been closed.

That letter can be found on the Ombudsman's website.

The fourth item relates to some questions that were asked about the National Sex Offender Registry. I've been provided some further information my—by my department and there's a couple of points I think are important to note.

First of all, the Justice Department has no direct involvement in the National Sex Offender Registry. It is a federal system which is operated by the RCMP under the umbrella of national police services. Manitoba Justice, nor any other department of government, has—does not directly control entry into the system, nor does it have direct access to that information.

It's been suggested that if the member has questions regarding the National Sex Offender Registry statistics, should be referred to RCMP headquarters in Ottawa or to the Minister of Public Safety Canada, who, I believe, is an individual known to the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen). And the Province's responsibility is really just the regulation designating the registration locations, and I'm told that regulation was last updated in 2009.

The member also had questions about fine accounts receivable, and it's important to note that the fines do not disappear. They simply remain on the books indefinitely unless they're paid. The fines collections as at March 31, 2011, which is a cumulative total going back decades, is or was \$49,835,000. Fines at collection detail—I'm told that in 2010-2011 an amount of \$15,639,000, give or take a few dollars, was transferred to collections. The amount collected in 2010-2011 was \$10,819,000.

I'm told by my department that the general experience is that for summary convictions offences, which is the bulk if not almost all of the collections, the general rule's that within three years of a block of fines being transferred, about two-thirds will be paid. The majority of the balance will become effectively uncollectible for a number of reasons, primarily being that many individuals that owe fines are judgment proof, meaning that they don't have—there is no easy way to access the money.

As you know, we are taking further steps to do everything we can to collect those fines. I can advise the member that in 2010-2011, we issued

22,221 driver's licence holds, which is a big part of why the amount collected is substantial. We've also given the new legislation that came into effect on August 1st, 2010, we've actually issued 55,953 vehicle registration holds, which is considerable.

We've also made 1,151 garnishment orders. Those garnishing orders can be against banks; they can be against other parties who it is believed owe money to someone who owes money to the Province. Obviously, that requires more work than simply a driver's licence hold or a vehicle registration hold.

And I'm also told that 16 writs of seizure and sale were issued. And I can tell the member, from my experience in practice, there are few ways to make a sheriff quite as happy than to let them go and execute a writ of seizure and sale, if we're aware of a vehicle, a boat, some other property that can be seized and the proceeds used to pay those fines. So I certainly respect the work that our sheriffs do collecting on those writs. And I expect as we go forward, we'll continue to be aggressive on trying to get people to pay their fines. But obviously, if people have died, if they've moved away or in some cases, if they're judgment proof, it's simply not possible to collect all that money.

Now the member had also asked a question about programming that's offered at the various facilities in Manitoba. And I'll just ask, Mr. Chairperson, am I limited by—do I need to stop and start a new answer or what do we do if I go beyond 10 minutes?

Mr. Chairperson: Just for clarification, leave is an option. The standard rule is 10 minutes per—

Mr. Swan: —back and forth?

Mr. Chairperson: So at the moment, you are at 6:15.

Mr. Swan: Okay, I'll provide the information and we can decide when we get there.

I'll start with the Manitoba Youth Centre, which of course, is the youth centre facility here in Winnipeg. There's the Manitoba Youth Centre program's Thinking Awareness Group, or TAG. It's a short-term, about 20-hour program, which is designed to provide participants with an introduction to the concepts of cognitive behavioural theory and teach the basics of relapse prevention using non-offence specific scenarios. TAG provides skills and insights the participants can then apply to their

lives to lay a foundation for other programs and case management one-on-one interventions.

* (15:00)

The next program is called Thinking for a Change, or T4C. It's a 22-session or 44-hour cognitive behavioural program which is designed to change an offender's behaviour by restructuring their thinking so that their behaviour is positively impacted. There's an approach on three different approaches: first, on cognitive self-change for the offender, social skills development and problem solving.

The next one is Coming to Terms. It's a short-term informational program, approximately 20 hours in length. It assists participants to realistically evaluate their alcohol and/or other drug usage and also the effect that their substance use has on their lives and on the lives of those around them. The focus is on self-evaluation. It follows what's called the Stages of Change model, and I understand it's best suited for older youth and adults in a pre-contemplative or contemplative stage, in other words, those who are assessed as being the ones most likely to make changes in their lives.

There is also a substance abuse short-term program, or YSAM. It's a short-term, 22-session, 15-day program that provides participants with information on addictions and harmful substance abuse. This program adopts a harm-reduction approach to encourage better decision making by youth.

There are anger management courses provided. The peaceful choices program is a approximately 40-hour anger management program using a cognitive behavioural approach to address aggressive behaviour. It teaches youth to recognize their warning signs to reduce the risk of violence and abusive behaviour in high-risk situations.

The next is Aggression Replacement Training, or ART. It's a youth custody program designed to alter the behaviour of chronically aggressive youth. It uses cognitive behaviour theory, consists of social skill training to teach a broad curriculum of pro-social behaviour, anger control training and moral reasoning training, in other words, to help motivate youth to employ the skills they've learned in other components.

There is also a partner abuse program. It's a short-term informational program exploring attitudes and values towards women and children, including

family dynamics, socialization, myths and facts, and the influence of positive and negative self-talk.

There's a sexual information program called Teen Talk. It's a one-day information workshop in various subjects relating to human development, sexuality, healthy relationships, interpersonal communications and healthy lifestyles. It's co-ordinated with the Manitoba Education curriculum, so it can be used towards the Manitoba Ed grade 9 health credit.

There's youth education, which is perhaps the most important. It's an accredited year-round schooling program with certified teachers. There is no summer break at the Youth Centre. The school program is offered year-round. Students can take courses up to grade 12. Post-secondary education needs of individual students can also be met. There have been youth who—several youth who've been able to graduate from high school while they've been at the Youth Centre.

There's an employment skills program available not just at the Manitoba Youth Centre but in most correctional centres. Offenders are taught practical skills about how to seek and maintain employment. Topics include finding employment, resumé writing, interview skills, relationships and maintaining a job. And, again, for youth, some of these sessions are co-ordinated with the Manitoba Education curriculum and they can earn their grade 9 health credits. Employment skills are also taught in the community by a number of different agencies.

It's sad to say, but there is a parenting program provided for youth at the Manitoba Youth Centre. They use the Triple P, Positive Parenting Program. It's a five-day informational program that teaches 17 parenting or caregiver skills and how to apply them. Role-play techniques are used to enhance competencies in managing common behaviour problems and developmental issues.

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry to interrupt. We have exceeded the normal 10-minute limit.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wonder maybe if it's not easier for the minister just to have that information tabled to the committee rather than to reading it all into the record. I can see it's there in front of him. If there's a different forum that you'd like to table it in than that, he can certainly do that.

Mr. Swan: Yes, I think—I'm reading through the first of them. There will be some overlap in the others and I will—I'll endeavour to, where's it's being—to not

repeat the information that I'm providing. I'm almost to the end of the youth centre, and I think we can speed through if the member gives me a few more minutes.

Mr. Goertzen: I'll take my chances, then, and I'll offer the member leave to continue on.

Mr. Chairperson: Well, we get a fresh 10 minutes, then, now anyway.

Mr. Swan: Okay, I'll try not to use it. All right.

The next program is life skills information program, Mr. Chairperson. It's a series of one- to two-hour information sessions delivered by line staff on a variety of topics including substance use, anger, supportive relationships, goal setting, problem solving, managing stress, planning for release, and parenting.

Because a number of the youth at the Youth Centre are women, Mr. Chairperson, there's a course called relationship skills for women, 15-day gender-responsive program for females designed to provide participants with an opportunity to become skilled at developing and maintaining healthy relationships. Topics include early trauma, abuse in relationships, healthy cognitions and healthy parenting.

There's also an emotions management for women course, a 15-day program designed to provide female participants with an opportunity to become more skilled at developing and maintaining healthy relationships. Topics include early trauma, abuse in relationships, and healthy cognitions and also, again, sadly but truly, healthy parenting.

Victim awareness is a five-to-eight-day custody program designed to explore the consequences associated with crime from a victim's perspective. The idea is to explore the concept of empathy and how one's actions can impact people in the community.

There's a voices program to address the unique needs of adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 12 and 18, encouraging girls to seek and celebrate their true selves by giving them a safe space, encouragement, structure and support to embrace their important journey of self-discovery. The focus is on issues important in the lives of adolescent girls.

And, in addition, I should mention this programming is facilitated by trained juvenile counsellors and program generalists trained in

various modules including motivational interviewing, mental health, first aid and trauma-informed care. There's spiritual care at Manitoba Youth Centre provided by a chaplain, by an Aboriginal spiritual caregiver and an Aboriginal cultural worker.

The Youth Centre also has a range of programs facilitated by volunteers and community partners including fellowship, AA, student nursing, public health, Teen Talk and a variety of other Aboriginal cultural and spiritual programs.

There's some limited opportunities for work at MYC. Work programs include cafeteria workers and groundskeepers. There is a secure outdoor recreational area. There's also a gym and an Aboriginal culture area. Of course, juvenile counsellors organize and supervise all activities, and the Youth Centre organizes a powwow yearly with a variety of performers and guests.

With respect to Agassiz, there is similar programming being provided, a Thinking Awareness Group, Thinking for a Change, substance abuse, anger management, aggression replacement training, victim awareness, life skills information program, youth education, and the sex offender program.

There are many of the similar interventions provided. There are work programs at Agassiz that don't exist at the Manitoba Youth Centre. Young people can get work experience in the areas of laundry and stores, animal husbandry and gardening, because they do have a substantial property there, and, as well, community service, for example, like cleaning up nearby provincial roads and cleaning up trash in Portage la Prairie. There's winter and summer games, I understand, that happen at the Youth Centre too.

With respect to adult correctional centres, generally the idea is to provide programs that focus on inmates' personal development and growth through education, rehabilitation, vocational training, work experience and individual counselling. All of the adult facilities have a secure outdoor recreational area. There's also a gym where staff can organize and supervise all activities. Again, many of these courses are similar to those being provided, for example, at the Brandon Correctional Centre.

There's the Thinking Awareness Group. There are anger management informational programs and anger management. There's a program called Coming to Terms, a short-term, a 20-hour informational

program assisting participants to realistically evaluate their alcohol and drug usage and the effect on their lives and the lives of those around them. Again, that's similar to what's provided in the youth facilities.

At the Brandon Correctional Centre, there is a sex offender program which is offered one on one. This is a long-term, intensive, cognitive, behavioural-based intervention program. There's also adult education and literacy programs. Correctional centres offer education courses to offenders interested in upgrading their skills, perhaps leading toward the equivalent of high school. Participants may work in a classroom. More often, they're provided with materials tailored to meet their individual need. Adult education, continuing education is offered in the community. Group and individual literacy training or tutoring is offered through the John Howard Society at some correctional centres and in the community.

There are employment skills information programs available in most correctional centres, taught practical skills about how to seek and maintain employment on the outside. There is at Brandon what's called IC3 certification, covering the areas of Internet use, Microsoft Office and Windows XP. To get in you have to enrol in the program. You have to complete self-study assignments and pass exams.

*(15:10)

There are trades programs at BCC. These programs vary from centre to centre. At Brandon, they include carpentry, food services, computer refurbishing, et cetera. Similarly, to the youth centres, there's parenting and a life skills information program in addition to others.

As I look through the other facilities, I'm just going to highlight anything else that I haven't already put into the record. There's a slightly different addictions recovery program in addition to many other types of programs offered at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre. There's also, of course, programs at The Pas Correctional Centre.

Portage Correctional Centre is the women's facility. It has some additional programs in addition to having the addictions self-help group and the IC3 certification, and the life skills information program is a program called Emotions Management for Women and another program called Helping Women Recover, which is addictions programming

specifically targeting the reason women become involved with substance abuse.

The Remand Centre is a little bit different because it's primarily a remand centre. The three major programs offered there are addictions self-help groups, adult education or literacy through the John Howard Society and the Elizabeth Fry Society and the life skills information program that I've already described in some detail.

So I hope that covers off a number of things that we were talking about yesterday, and I will actually let my—the member for Steinbach ask some new questions.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister and his staff for preparing those responses from yesterday.

Just while we're on the topic of programming, what are the sort of things that are available when somebody leaves the institution, like a provincial institution, Headingley, Brandon. What sort of programs are available to them as they sort of reintegrate back into society?

Mr. Swan: Well, individuals, sentenced individuals being released from our correctional facilities fall into two—I guess two categories. First, they're—if they're individuals who are released, they've completed their term, they're not on probation, generally once they're released, there's no way for the justice system to remain in control or in contact with them. The planning that is done is to try and come up with a plan of course dealing with some of the issues that I was discussing in my last answer. If there is substance abuse issues, if there's literacy issues, if there's things that can be done to help somebody's reintegration, every effort's made before they're released to come up with a plan. But because the—because their jail term is complete and there's no probation order, it doesn't actually allow Justice to keep control.

Secondly, for those individuals who are released on probation, of course there is a probation order that dictates the terms of—that they're required to follow. We believe individuals, of course, must follow the terms of the probation order, and it's the goal of probation services to try and make sure individuals are in compliance.

The actual services, the frequency of the services, are based on a number of things. Of course, it's based on the terms of the order. It's based on the risk assessment which is done to try and decide the real needs of the person and the risk that they pose

out in the community. That's always a—I suppose it's always a process that's based on the best information available. And Corrections continues to advance in doing their best to have the most appropriate risk assessment for individuals who have to monitor out in the community.

Mr. Goertzen: We were talking yesterday when we left off about—the issue around warrants, and I think it was in particular relation to the warrant breaches. But I have a question more generally on warrants. We've had this discussion in the past about the number of outstanding warrants that there are, either in the city of Winnipeg or for the province, and in the past the minister has indicated that that information isn't available. Is that still the case that they don't track or unwilling to release the total number of warrants that exist in Winnipeg or the province?

Mr. Swan: You know I think it's important to note that—I mean, warrants are only the by-product of there being outstanding charges. So I think it's fair to say that certainly, if there's warrants that are outstanding, that can be useful, that's fine. If there are underlying charges though, which in the view of Crown attorneys or in the view of police don't really have any lasting impact, steps are taken all the time to deal with some of those outstanding charges.

Mr. Goertzen: I think the minister misunderstood the question. It's more specifically about the actual number of outstanding warrants that there are. Does he have—I know the police have said that there's about 15,000. That's been their estimate. It doesn't seem like an operational issue in terms of concern about releasing the number. The police are talking about it but does the department not have a number—how many outstanding warrants there are?

Mr. Swan: I think it's fair to say that our focus is assisting police to actually be out there enforcing warrants and dealing with individuals who pose the risk to our communities. I mean that's why we've been adding resources for police every year that this government has been in power. That's also why we've announced that we will be creating a provincial warrant enforcement squad that'll work shoulder to shoulder with the police to assist them in going after individuals in the community who do have warrants, who do actually pose a threat to our communities.

So our focus is a proactive, looking forward kind of view at actually dealing with public safety. So the answer is that we're continuing to work with police

and, of course, as a province, to have warrants outstanding actually represent a risk to the community be dealt with.

Mr. Goertzen: I know when the announcement was made about the warrant unit I think it was indicated there'd be six to eight officers in there. When the minister determined how many officers would be in the unit did he not do an analysis about how many outstanding warrants there are and how many officers you'd need then to respond to the number of outstanding warrants? What analysis was done in terms of how many outstanding warrants there are to come up with the number of six to eight?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I think it's important to remember that, of course, the police in Manitoba, as in everywhere else in Canada, have the ongoing responsibility to be enforcing warrants. The intention of the warrant enforcement squad—that was to give some additional assistance to police, and the advice was to make sure that assistance is there across Manitoba to help out police forces.

*(15:20)

So the size of the unit was really based on advice we received from police about what would be an effective size for a unit, given that in some cases it may require surveillance premises. It may require working in tandem with police to properly and safely enforce warrants, and the suggestion was that a unit consisting of a director and six members was a good starting point.

Mr. Goertzen: On the issue of outstanding warrants, there's been some discussion as a result of legislation that our party brought forward last year about preventing individuals with serious outstanding warrants from receiving welfare payments. Has the minister done any analysis in terms of how many individuals were receiving welfare payments or other types of government-supported funding, who also had serious outstanding warrants?

Mr. Swan: Well, I can advise that there's various challenges with gathering that sort of information because of difficulties in obtaining that information, and all the systems do not talk to each other. I can advise the member that's the challenge that's certainly come up in the bill that he copied for presentation to the Legislature. There's some real challenges in having that be an effective way to deal with the issue.

So we've considered a number of different ways to go about dealing with it. We think that giving

more resources to the police is a stronger way to deal with the issue. We think that creating a warrant squad dedicated to tracking down individuals' outstanding warrants is the right way to proceed. And, in many cases, it's no secret that the information that can be provided to police, or in the future the warrant enforcement squad, from various agencies, can actually help the police in doing their job.

Mr. Goertzen: Just so there's no confusion, is the minister indicating that his government is not planning to take any action on the issue of individuals with serious outstanding warrants receiving welfare payments?

Mr. Swan: Yup. I didn't say that. I said that the approach that has been suggested by the opposition is not effective. And as I indicated perhaps in more colourful language in question period a couple of days ago, the experience in another province leads us to believe that it really wouldn't be worthwhile. The main reason for that is that we believe that people who break the law, and people who don't show up for court and have outstanding warrants, are also individuals that we really wouldn't trust to tell the truth.

And there is a province that has done something close to what—exactly as the member is suggesting. They rely on the good faith and good graces of wanted criminals to tell their welfare worker whether, in fact, they have outstanding warrants. And I don't think that we would rely on that information. I don't think police would tell us to rely on that information. I don't think our Crown attorneys would want us to rely on that information. So with all that in place, we're going to find some better ways.

And, again, the best way for us to deal with this and go after individuals that have warrants—those individuals who have warrants and pose a risk to our community—is to add resources, and that's really what the police announcement is all about. That's what the warrant enforcement squad is all about.

Mr. Goertzen: I recognize the minister is a busy guy. It's a tough role being the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice. It's a lot of work and I wouldn't expect him to catch all the different things that I've said regarding our piece of legislation. I know he doesn't follow every word that I utter with closeness nor would I—I'd be worried if he did, actually, because I know he's got a lot of other things that he should be doing.

I suspect, though, if he does have a spare moment in his day and even did a google search or something as simple as that, he'd find out that I made very clear comments with our legislation, that it would not be voluntary reporting, that that was one of the flaws of the BC system and that our expectation would be that there would be a process in place, that departments would be able to talk to each other and that information would come forward where somebody has a warrant and is receiving welfare, is one example.

So I'm not holding the minister responsible for being wrong. I know he's a busy guy and I could certainly provide him with all the different transcripts and those sorts of things when we brought it forward, and it wouldn't be fair of me to say that he made an error on purpose. I would suggest that it's probably just a mistake.

And, with that graciousness that I've offered him, I still ask the question on whether or not there are legislative provisions that he expects to come forward regarding payments for people who have outstanding warrants in this legislative session.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm not going to tip a hand on specific legislation. In our Throne Speech we made it very clear that we'll be taking further steps to reduce benefits and to crack down on those who don't follow the rules of our society. There's already been a number of pieces of legislation introduced and passed with the consent of and agreement of the other parties, and there are other measures that we'll be taking.

I do want to point out, though, given the member's last comment, that I've also taken advice from my department speaking with the police that often the very type of information that's provided by agencies such as Employment and Income Assistance can actually be of assistance to the police and of assistance in the future to the warrant enforcement squad in actually going out and tracking down individuals who are collecting assistance, yet have outstanding warrants. The right place for those individuals is to be brought back before the court to actually deal with the outstanding issues, and if they are a risk to our communities, the right place for them is behind bars.

So we stand with supporting the police and supporting the upcoming warrant enforcement squad to deal with those warrants and have individuals take responsibility and, of course, to go out and get them

when they actually pose a threat and a risk to our society.

Mr. Goertzen: I've also had conversations, following introduction of the legislation, which the minister incorrectly quoted its intention—oh, but I wasn't going to mention that again; I've gotten over that—and the police that I've spoken to are quite supportive of it and publicly said so. So perhaps different police have different opinion, and then perhaps we're talking to different individuals. Not to belabour that point, though, I think that the record's been corrected and we'll see what comes forward from the minister.

Regarding the electronic monitoring program, can the minister give an update in terms of the number of individuals who are being monitored with the ankle bracelet, as its commonly called, program?

Mr. Swan: As the member knows, electronic monitoring has now been around for a couple of years now as a pilot project. The department has extended the electronic monitoring pilot project until March 31, 2012.

I understand—let me take a step back and say that electronic monitoring is one additional tool to assist in monitoring individuals out in the community. It is not a silver bullet to dealing with issues, but we think it can provide, in certain cases, some benefits. There's a cost that goes along with it, which has to be managed. So what happens is that, if there is a request made, a judge can order or make, as part of a probation order, that electronic monitoring can be part of the tools that are used to deal with the individual.

* (15:30)

I understand that up to March 14, 2011, there were 74 cases that were reviewed for the project and a total of 57 youth were outfitted with the devices between April, 2008, and March 14, 2011. There were—of course, there is a gap there of a number of youth—there were two youth, who were in the project who died before they had electronic monitoring put on them. Eleven cases were deemed unsuitable for various reasons, including risk assessment, and there were five other cases where it came as a bit of a surprise there was no consultation or referral received in advance. So youth response has been—I think it's fair to say, youth response has been varied. As I think the member knows, the devices are not foolproof.

As of March 20th, 2011, there were a number of youth who'd been able to tamper with or remove their devices; some on a number of times. It's assisted the police in making further arrests if youths reoffend. It also has excluded individuals because the police are aware they weren't near where a situation occurred. So it's assisted in monitoring youth. But, again, it's not perfect, and I do want to make the comment that electronic monitoring is not a substitute when somebody really poses a risk to our community for being in custody. But, when somebody is released into the community, which, of course, happens with every youth who's sentenced under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, we do the best we can in Corrections to try and monitor them out in the community.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister indicate how many youths have tampered with or cut off their devices? In whatever time frame. It could be the same time frame he provided, in terms of the number who've been monitored between 2008 and 2011, if that's the data that he has.

Mr. Swan: Yes, actually, I do have that information with me today. Of the 57 youth that had been outfitted, 22 youth have tampered with or they've been able to remove their devices. Those 22 youth created 38 instances. So some more than one. I understand there were four youths who were able to remove their devices four times. So, of course, the units aren't manufactured by Corrections; they're purchased by and maintained by a vendor. We do report these incidents, and we hope to work with the vendor to keep making the technology more complete and to try and prevent individuals from removing them.

I should add that, if the device is removed, it does actually send a signal; it just doesn't go dead. And I can also mention that when somebody removes one of their devices, it is considered very serious and does result, in every instance, of an individual being breached, which means that a new Criminal Code charge is laid against that youth for failing to comply with their probation order.

Mr. Goertzen: What is the nature of the technology that it seems that the number are being cut off? And I've talked to different people in different jurisdictions who have electronic monitoring in their arsenal of things that they do and many don't have the same sort of issues with being cut off. They talked about different technology on your tough cuff and different trademarks for different kinds of

EM equipment, and it just seems that we have an unusual problem with that, compared to, at least, some of the jurisdictions I've spoken to. I'm sure there's others who might have the similar experience, but is there—can you speak about the different kinds of technology that exists out there, and do we have one that seems to be more susceptible to being removed?

Mr. Swan: Well, I'd say that it's less a technology issue, and it's really a function of the nature of the population that wears the bracelets. I think the member knows that Manitoba partnered with Nova Scotia in the bringing electronic monitoring forward. There was no political plot; it was actually when there was a different former government in Nova Scotia, but a government there that was equally concerned about auto theft and violent incidents involving young people.

You know, Manitoba is the jurisdiction which uses this as part of a very comprehensive auto theft strategy. Again, we don't necessarily choose who our customers are for probation services, and many times our Crowns will argue for a youth to be kept in custody or to get a custodial sentence. That doesn't always happen, given the law. So we have no choice but to do our best to monitor them, and we see electronic monitoring as being a part of that.

I think it's fair to say that in Manitoba the individuals who wear the bracelets are both the highest risk individuals we could imagine and also highly resistant to the various things that probation services does to try and bring people into compliance. It's also a combination of youth who have poor understanding of consequences, who don't see consequences, coupled with them doing all to defeat technology, and, unfortunately, there's youth who, instead of using their skills to become electricians or carpenters or tradespeople, have been able to use their skills to steal cars. So it's a difficult crew that is being managed using electronic monitoring. So I think it's very difficult to draw a parallel to other jurisdictions.

What I do want to say, though, is that in some American jurisdictions there is much wider use of electronic monitoring. And I want to be blunt about this: that in many places electronic monitoring is seen as an alternative to individuals being in custody. We don't agree with that. If individuals pose a risk, they should be in custody, but if they are thrust back into the community because of the legislation, we do our best to deal with it.

I can also say that, in terms of the actual types of bracelets, there are various companies that have different types of bracelets. My department tells me there's nothing that would lead them to believe that these types of bracelets themselves are more likely or more susceptible to being tampered with. It really is the nature of the population that wears them.

* (15:40)

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the minister for that comment and I certainly agree with the last portion of that, in terms of it's not a replacement for a secure custody sentence. But there are individuals who are getting out who shouldn't for a variety of reasons, or this can be a better option than nothing.

You know, I had some discussions with individuals in the Edmonton police force, and they underwent a testing—or electronic monitoring program. And I know the nature of their offenders was different, but it's not as though they were monitoring soccer moms, and some of these individuals did try to cut off their bracelets and were unsuccessful. And they seemed sort of mystified by some of the issues we're having here, that they said it was—I think the words they used were "virtually impossible" to cut off the bracelets that they were using in Edmonton in—at that stage. It may have changed now, because it was a while ago, but the Edmonton Police Service was funding the program themselves. It wasn't being funded by the provincial government, although, again, that may have changed.

But why would their experience be so much different if they have individuals—again, some of—the nature of their offenders might be different, but they were trying to cut these things off and it wasn't working.

Mr. Swan: You know, without having more information, I'm not really able to comment. I mean, again, I think it's very important to note the nature of the offenders. I mean, if there is some sort of program that was or is being operated by the Edmonton Police Service, I'd be interested to know who is actually receiving the bracelets. Sorry, I really can't comment.

And I can tell you that we do always look to improve the nature of the product that's being provided. Nova Scotia and Manitoba continue to compare notes and to talk about their experiences. And, as I say, we've been working with the vendor to try and deal with various issues, and we don't think there's anything about the bracelets being used in

Manitoba that make them of themselves more susceptible to being tampered with or being removed.

Again, it's the nature of the population. It's level 4, high-risk auto theft youth who have the bracelets here in Manitoba who are a resistant and difficult group of individuals to manage in the community.

Mr. Goertzen: If I remember correctly, the program was announced by the previous minister of Justice, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), prior to the 2007 campaign. Some might say it was rushed, but that'd be editorializing on my part. In any event, he certainly was quite opposed to the program for a very long time and then suddenly had a bit of a change of heart before the campaign. Regardless, the announcement was made that there would be a pilot project in 2007—it would've been the spring of 2007, I suppose.

It's been four years since then and we still don't really have a final decision or even a report that can be examined from the department on the workings of it. Why is it taking so long to come up with some sort of a decision on the future of electronic monitoring?

Mr. Swan: Yes, well, there was an announcement back in the spring of 2007. The idea was to go in lockstep with Nova Scotia. As I said, Nova Scotia also had a major issue with auto theft. There was a commission called the Nunn Commission that was done in Nova Scotia. I remember speaking with their previous attorney general who was really concerned about the issue, and I'm very pleased that Manitoba and Nova Scotia worked together on this.

We knew right from the start that there were potential benefits. Of course, it's managing a difficult group of youth in the community. There is a substantial cost to the electronic monitoring program, and it's always been a matter of balancing any potential benefits with those costs.

Of course, if there is a breach, if somebody removes their device, there is automatic notification to the police. We want to make sure that the police are able to get out there and apprehend the youth. As I've said, if somebody breaches—or if somebody removes their unit or they aren't where they're supposed to be, it's taken very seriously by Probation Services. It's taken very seriously by the police. There is a cost. There certainly is a cost, not just the cost of the units going out to the vendor, it's also the

cost of making sure there is swift—there are swift measures being taken if somebody doesn't comply.

So, as the member knows, we are waiting to see a report that's being done. I wish I had that report in hand. I wish we could go ahead and definitively say what we're going to do. In the interim we've expanded, or extended the program, rather, for another year, until March of 2012. And it's our intention, well in advance of March 31, 2012, to make a more firm decision on what we're doing. My hope is that it will come back in a positive way that will lead us to believe electronic monitoring continues to make sense in Manitoba, but I won't prejudge what that report's going to say.

Mr. Goertzen: Is there a time frame that the minister has been given, or has asked for, in terms of when that report should be provided to his office or to his department for review?

Mr. Swan: Yes. I mean, honestly, I had hoped to have the report months ago, but I'm told it's not ready, and I will have to wait to see what it says before we can move forward.

Mr. Goertzen: A question on intermittent sentences, which isn't my area of expertise, but maybe the minister or his staff can enlighten me a bit on how many people we have that would be serving intermittent sentences in Manitoba and the kind of offenders who get those sort of sentences and where they serve them, just maybe provide a bit of information on that.

Mr. Swan: Yes, I can undertake to get the number of individuals serving intermittent sentences. I understand the number tends to move around a bit, so we'll pick an appropriate snapshot and provide that. In terms of who's eligible for intermittent sentences, first of all there are some absolutes. If it's an individual who receives a minimum sentence they're not eligible for an intermittent sentence. If—they're only eligible for an intermittent sentence if their sentence is 90 days or less.

In addition to there being some limitations on the nature of the sentence, my understanding is that generally it would have to be individuals who can convince the court that it's appropriate for them to serve their sentence on weekends so they can maintain their employment during the course of the week.

Mr. Goertzen: And so where would they report to serve their sentences? Is it at Headingley or some other place, or are they just assigned to one of the

provincial correctional centres and then they report on the weekend?

* (15:50)

Mr. Swan: Yes. I'm advised by my staff that individuals—that intermittent sentences are actually served at all of our adult institutions. Generally, it would be the institution which is close to where the individual lives. So, obviously, someone in Westman would be most likely, then, to have to report to the Brandon Correctional Centre.

I'm also told that there is a contract with an organization called Native Clan, and there are some individuals who can serve their intermittent sentence at that facility.

Mr. Goertzen: Now, with Native Clan, would that be considered like a halfway house, or what sort of facility is that?

Mr. Swan: Okay. The facility which is operated by Native Clan is actually called Regina House. I think it's fair to say that the member and I would both consider it to be a halfway house. It's a facility that holds offenders and monitors them.

Mr. Goertzen: Are any of the individuals sentenced to intermittent sentences allowed to serve their sentence at home—which I know sounds like a bit of a contradictory statement—but are they allowed or given absences to serve their sentence at home and have that time counted?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I understand that there can be situations where individuals can serve some or—some of the time at home, in particular if somebody applies for and receives compassionate leave if something has occurred. They can receive a medical leave if they have a medical condition which, frankly, is difficult to manage in a correctional facility for a short period of time.

Individuals who—to receive approval for this, they must be compliant and they're also required to report to Corrections. Individuals also can apply for a temporary absence if there are particular conditions that arise.

So, yes, it can occur, for those reasons, that some portion of the service—of the period of time can be served at home.

Mr. Goertzen: And maybe when the minister is providing information tomorrow about the number of people who have intermittent sentences, since it's done by application he can tell how many have also

applied for and how many days have been served at home as opposed to one of the correctional institutions.

Since it's done by application anyway, there must be some record of it. If he could provide that, that would be helpful.

Mr. Swan: Okay, well, again, it's done on a case-by-case basis. So I'll—what I'll do is I'll ask my staff to—again, it's a snapshot—to pull together statistics for the past month. I don't expect it will be possible to get that to the member tomorrow or the day after, but I can certainly undertake to provide that.

Mr. Goertzen: Does he have a time frame of how long it might take? There's an election in five months. I don't want to wait forever, you know. Any idea of how long it might take?

Mr. Swan: Well, our Corrections officials will do their best. They are rather busy, as the member knows. It'll involve, of course, contacting each of the correctional facilities, so we will certainly give it appropriate priority.

Mr. Goertzen: A question regarding the task force for murdered and missing women: Can the minister give us any sort of an update about how that particular task force is proceeding?

I know there was some criticism some time back from some of the families of those who believed their loved ones were victims, that there hadn't been contact with them by the police.

Can you indicate whether or not that sort of contact has been happening more rigorously with the family of potential victims and whether or not he's got any more public information to put forward regarding that task force.

* (16:00)

Mr. Swan: Yes, well, the member's right. There was an integrated task force that was set up to review cases involving missing and murdered women. The task force consists of four Winnipeg Police Service members, three RCMP members and two RCMP civilian criminal analysts, and that task force was actually up and running fairly soon after the announcement.

The police are the ones who have contact with families of the victims, or the presumed victims. If certainly my department becomes aware of any individual who claims they're not being given

adequate information or timely information, we forward that on to the appropriate police service and we trust that the police service goes and makes the necessary contact.

Mr. Goertzen: At one point—my memory fails me in terms of when it was, but I remember there was some concern from those who believed their loved ones were murdered or they're certainly missing anyway, and they sort of felt—and I understand they classified themselves as victims, yet they weren't able to access Victim Services because there was no sort of formal charge. That was their concern that they publicly expressed. Is that something—is that issue still a live one, that individuals can't obtain victim services who might fall under that task force because there wasn't a charge involved?

Mr. Swan: And it's important to remember that there's—I think we may be talking about slightly different groups. The missing and murdered women's task force is intended to cover, obviously, families where there has been a murder or where it's expected that the individual has gone missing because of criminal conduct. And the police, in that case, of course, will provide information to family members. There may be some cases where the police are reluctant to give information to certain family members, because the concern may be that they—they're affiliated with someone who may have actually been involved with the crime.

Victim Services serves a much larger population, so I suppose you'd say that the families of the missing and murdered women task force people are a subset of the bigger group of people Victim Services provide. Before charges are laid, generally it's the police who work with victims and who provide some assistance. Certainly, that's the case for Winnipeg Police Service and for the RCMP, because in many cases, the member knows, if somebody's simply reported missing, there is no charge that's been laid, there's no crime that's known at that given time. Certainly, the police take it seriously, and, as you've seen in recent months, the police have determined some new protocols to try and deal with the disappearance of people who may be vulnerable.

So Victim Services is there; it's also the police Victims Services, and then there is the task force which deals with a smaller subset of cases.

Mr. Goertzen: So, just for clarity, then, individuals who have loved ones who might be being investigated, or their whereabouts or their circumstance of their disappearance is being

investigated by the task force, they would be eligible for police support, but they wouldn't be eligible, necessarily, for victim services per se, because there's no formal charge that's been laid. Is that correct?

Mr. Swan: Yes, the member's right. The police provide those services where there is no charge laid. I should add, though, that Budget 2011 will add resources to the Aurora Family Therapy Centre. They're expanding the bereavement project to include therapy to the families of missing persons, which again is a broader subset than just the individuals that the task force works with.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister just give me an update? Yesterday, he informed us that there'd been an individual who'd been accidentally released from—either from—custody, regardless wherever the release happened, on April 18th, I believe it was—it was mid-April, anyway. Has that individual been apprehended in the last 24 hours by chance?

Mr. Swan: I'm sorry, we don't know. We can ask the police; we can undertake to ask them, and if they have any more information, we can provide that to you.

Mr. Goertzen: I'd assume the police would normally, as a routine, of course, tell you, because you'd have on your list of people who are accidentally released, and you want to keep that up to date and ensure that somebody, if they've been recaptured, isn't still on your current list of accidental releases right there. They would inform you if they'd been apprehended, I assume.

Mr. Swan: Well, first, I don't think the member was meaning that I personally would get a call when they pick somebody up. I know the member was referring to the department in general, but, generally speaking, unless it was a particularly high-profile situation, the police wouldn't give any specific notice to Justice. I mean, the notice, I suppose, would be that the individual would be returned to custody and would then have to answer to the charges in court. So there's no specific notification in those cases but, again, if the member wants, I can undertake to ask the police if there's been any update in that situation.

* (16:10)

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister tell me how many probation officers there are in the province and what their current workload would be per officer?

Mr. Swan: Corrections tells me the current actual number of probation officer full-time equivalents is 164.74 FTEs. I'm not sure how we get to a .74 but there we are. As of March 15, 2001, the total probation services caseload was 8,744 offenders. If you simply do a division, the average caseload for probation officer works out to 53. But, of course, different probation officers in different units will have very different caseloads.

Some caseloads are lower because there are specialized units such as GRASP, WATSS, Spotlight, and COHROU. They may only have 10 to 20 cases involving the highest risk clients. Some caseloads may then be higher as those individuals work with individuals who pose a lesser risk to the community.

I'm also told there was a comparison done back to 1999 and 2000. In that year, the total probation services caseload was 8,306, which was being handled by a total of 113 probation officer FTEs, so at that time the average caseload per probation officer was 74. So I'm pleased to say that we've been able to bring that down by a considerable amount, which is actually even more impressive when you consider that there are some very challenging individuals that are being monitored by our probation officers.

Mr. Goertzen: Does the department track the number of breaches on a quarterly or otherwise any kind of basis time-wise?

Mr. Swan: The job of probation officers is to gain the compliance of individuals who are in the community with a probation order. They do their work on a case to case basis. They look at the individual needs of the person in the community. They deal with it on that basis, so the answer is no. We want our probation officers doing their work to both use their positive and negative levers to get individuals to be in compliance.

Mr. Goertzen: Last year, there was an opposition motion brought forward to the House that it—part of it said that the government would report breaches on a quarterly basis. That actually was a motion that passed unanimously. I think it was the first one, in our history anyway, in Manitoba. The minister, the member for Minto, was there. He voted for it, voted for reporting these breaches on a quarterly basis. He seems to be saying a different thing today. What has happened in the last several months that has made him change his mind on the reporting of probation breaches?

Mr. Swan: Well, as the member knows, the resolution was to urge the Attorney General to provide certain information and, obviously, that was taken very seriously by myself and by my department. And even before that resolution came before the Legislature I had asked police and Corrections and Prosecutions to look at the question of probation breach criteria, both to determine whether Manitoba's standards are in line with other provinces, but also to determine if there were other things that could be done to improve the system. And the individuals who prepared this report, the executive summary of which is actually available on the Justice website, considered that question.

And I'll read from page 4 of the report: The committee would also like to note that they believe that providing quarterly reports on the number of charges laid by probation officers for non-compliance with a court order would not provide information to the public that would be an accurate reflection of public safety. The committee has come to this conclusion for the following reasons: (1) a charge is an unproven allegation; the fact that a charge has been laid does not provide information on the outcome of the charge; (2) reporting only the number of charges without providing additional context would make it impossible for the reader to understand what any variability in numbers should be attributed to. For example, the profile of offenders in the community, the conduct of offenders, the creation of specialty units, specialized enforcement projects, et cetera, may all impact the numbers of charges being laid over time; (3) there is no basis to suggest where an acceptable rate of laying charges related to non-compliance should be, as each decision is made on a case-by-case basis; and (4) information provided without an explanation may be interpreted very differently. Should the reported numbers be increasing, decreasing or staying the same over time? It is unclear which result would represent movement in the right direction.

Ms. Erna Braun, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So, certainly this was taken very seriously. I'm going to accept the advice of Manitoba Corrections, the Manitoba Prosecution Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Winnipeg Police Service.

Mr. Goertzen: Of course, the member and all of his caucus members voted for something that would indicate that there would be quarterly reporting of probation breaches. Why wouldn't he have sought

that advice before he made a commitment to the Legislature by virtue of supporting that motion to have those reports available?

Mr. Swan: Well, I think the member should read his own resolution. He drafted it, I didn't. And the nature of the resolution was to urge myself as the Attorney General and the department to consider doing something. I took that very seriously, and as I've said, I actually asked this task force to get together even before the resolution came before the Legislature to deal with it.

I should mention some of the other things that were determined by that committee. They did look at practices across Canada to determine whether Manitoba's criteria were in line with other provinces. I can tell the member that not only were Manitoba's policies considered in line with other provinces, in many ways, Manitoba's policies are tough, and are among the toughest, in terms of limiting some of the discretion of probation officers and in terms of the circumstances under which an individual who doesn't comply with a court order, will be breached. So, to the contrary, we took this very seriously. I'm very pleased to have the advice of police, Crown attorneys and Corrections, and we'll be moving forward on continuing to improve the probation system.

* (16:20)

So, rather than suggesting that I didn't take this seriously, it's the exact contrary. I did take this very seriously, but I thought the best approach was to get the advice from experts, and that's exactly what we've done. And that's the advice that'll be guiding us.

Mr. Goertzen: I think there could be questions about whether or not the member's actions in—compared to what he actually voted for would withstand scrutiny in the House, in terms of what the commitment was. But that's not something I want to prolong or endure the staff here, who are on their valuable time, to a discussion on—perhaps that discussion can happen in the House in a different context.

But on the same topic of commitments that were made that may not have been fulfilled, during the member's brief leadership run for his party, he indicated to the police association that there was value in having a gang database re-established, one that was done away with under his government's watch. Can he indicate the progress on

re-establishing that gang database as per the commitment that he made?

Mr. Swan: Well, you know, the member is partly correct. There was a gang database which was maintained by the Winnipeg Police Service, but the police service decided not to maintain that.

We do listen carefully to what the Winnipeg Police Service and the City of Winnipeg wants to see, in terms of policing. There's been other priorities that have been brought forward by the Winnipeg Police Service, in addition to meeting of—all of our commitments, to adding 100 police officers since 2007. We've also provided annual operating support for the Winnipeg police helicopter. And, of course, we've also cost-shared with the City of Winnipeg the cost of cadets.

So if the Winnipeg Police Service, indeed, wants to make this a priority, we'd be happy to sit down with them and try to make that something that can happen in future. There could be some real benefits from doing that, but the Winnipeg Police Service has come back with other things which they've determined are more important.

Mr. Goertzen: I think the minister actually had those discussions with the police association during his leadership bid, but I won't prolong that. I didn't know—it wasn't ultimately a successful bid, and so perhaps that commitment fell away with the bid itself.

On the issue of Crown prosecutions, can the minister provide the current workload per Crown prosecutor in the department, as per the PRISM tracking system?

Mr. Swan: Okay, but very much as we did with the probation officers, I am able to put on the record the number of positions and, in this case, their average caseloads, and I'll break it down a little bit to give more detail.

For the last fiscal year, 2010-2011, there were 135 Crown attorneys in Manitoba, with 94.3 professional or support positions. That's increased 48 since 1999. As the member knows, we've committed to adding 53 more Crown prosecutors by 2016, and Budget 2011 adds 10 more Crown attorneys and seven professional and support positions.

The average caseload, per level, of Crown is maintained. It's a snapshot in time. It's to be noted that these numbers, as with the probation officers,

can vary greatly between individual Crowns based on the type of work they do, based on the unit they're in, their responsibilities and, in some cases, which region they're in. So it's—you can think of it as being a pyramid. The most junior Crown attorneys actually will carry the most files, on average, because they will have the simpler matters that are dealt with.

The average mean number of cases for Crowns with five years of experience or less is 245 files per lawyer. Crowns with six to 11 years of experience handle many of the more involved cases. Many Crowns in this range work in specialized units such as the gang unit, the High Risk Offender Unit, and Special Prosecutions Unit, to name a few. Although the numbers vary widely by unit, generally speaking, Crowns with six to 11 years of experience carry an average of 196 files.

Our most senior Crowns, LF3s is the categorization, with more than 10 years' experience average 146 files at any given time. These Crowns generally handle the more difficult serious and time-consuming matters.

*(16:30)

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister and staff for that response.

A question regarding courts and how long it takes to get through some of the proceedings: I know in the annual reports—which are sometimes slow in coming but do contain good information—they'll measure the length of time it takes to resolve certain kinds of cases, non-domestic violent cases and other kinds of cases.

I notice Ontario is posting online on their various court locations the number of appearances it takes before a criminal issue is resolved. Is that information that the department tracks, the number of appearances on average or some sort of collated number that it takes before you get to a resolution of criminal cases on average?

Mr. Swan: You know, I note the member's comments about the provincial court report. Of course, my officials don't prepare that report. The Chief Judge provides that to us.

In terms of the Ontario situation, Manitoba's system isn't really set up to provide a number of appearances that takes place in a case. There have been a lot of really good efforts that have been made by courts working with the judiciary, working with Crown attorneys, to move cases along more quickly.

I'll leave it to the member, if you would like me to go through and describe some of those, I'm happy to do it, but if you'd like to move on to something else, that would be fine too.

Mr. Goertzen: So is the only measurement that the department keeps in terms of how quickly or—I shouldn't say the department keeps, but the only measurement in terms of how quickly cases can be moved through the system is the number of months it takes, on average, for a criminal case to be resolved, that you don't look at appearances or any other sort of measurement.

Mr. Swan: Well, yes, the member's right that one of the best measures that we have available to us is the number of months it takes for cases to work their way through the system. And, again, that's generally provided by the chief judge in the Provincial Court report. Of course, there are other levels of court. The Queen's Bench handles more, I suppose, more serious matters, whereas the Provincial Court handles the largest volume of cases.

One other way that I suppose one can measure how efficient the court system is is the trial date availability. And I'm pleased to say that because of some screening courts, because of case conferences and some front-end management, the availability for trial dates has certainly improved in Manitoba. I think that the judges and court staff and Crowns and, frankly, the defence bar are all to be commended for ways to move things ahead more quickly. And, certainly, there's more work to do. We give priority to individuals who are in custody so that they get their trial. But even for those out of custody, we're doing what we can to speed up those trial dates.

Mr. Goertzen: Are there any capital plans around the Dauphin Court House and the situation that is there, in terms of movement. I know there's been lots of concerns about how people who are going into trial, they have to access the Dauphin Court House sort of doing a bit of a perp walk, for lack of a better word, in front of the court house and the space availability for those working in the court house. I don't know that they've had the kind of advocacy that they'd like from their own representative. Has there been—*[interjection]* That was a bit of a side shot. Is there any plans for capital improvement at the Dauphin Court House?

Mr. Swan: Well, the Dauphin Court House is a beautiful and historic building, which, obviously, has some challenges in serving as a court house for modern times. I've had the chance to be there a

couple of times and I know that the space is not optimal for the people that work there. I know that Crown attorneys have an especially cramped area and we are trying to find a solution to give them some more space. If we can come up with a solution for the Crown attorneys, which I'm hoping we can do shortly, that will then free up some other office space for other court personnel.

We also know that security in court houses is important. Dauphin, like other regional court centres, has a security system that can be set up and used whenever the judge or parties believe that it's necessary. There have also been a—there's been a fair amount of work done to try and maximize the use of that facility, because both the Queen's Bench and the Provincial Court sit there.

Again, it's a beautiful building. It's an asset for the city of Dauphin, but it certainly, as an older building, poses some challenges for court staff.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that update. It is a beautiful building. I've been there, and the people who work there, they do good work. And, you know, I think that they certainly need a place to do that work that's probably more respectful of the work that they do. It's been over a decade since—this issue's been going on for a long time and nothing has really happened to help them. But maybe there'll be different opportunities down the road for that issue to be addressed, if it hasn't been addressed under the current government or the member that serves them currently today.

Question regarding the issue of auto thieves receiving benefits from MPI. And I'm not asking this question by virtue of the minister's role in MPI. I'm asking the question by virtue of his role as the Attorney General, and what his feeling is about auto thieves getting certain benefits through MPI if they crash a vehicle, and why it is that he hasn't advocated more strongly and more quickly for this change to come forward when it was first brought to light in 2007?

* (16:40)

I know he wasn't the Attorney General at that point, but certainly in his role in his caucus since 2007 has he been advocating for this and it's just been falling on deaf ears? Does he take the position of the former Attorney General that it's just simply a Conservative meanness to try to eliminate auto theft payments for—or MPI payments for auto thieves?

Mr. Swan: Well, first, I will just respond to a previous comment to mean, but many times the reason why we can't get these responses back quickly enough is that the MLA for Dauphin keeps lobbying me on all the good things we're able to do in his part of the province and we'll keep working together.

In terms of auto theft, there's no question that auto theft became a major problem in Manitoba. It's no secret it became a problem back in 1992-1993 when a relatively small number of youth then brought some unpleasant skills to Manitoba and taught other youth how to steal cars. And I know that the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), who also serves as the MPI critic, wasn't aware there was auto theft in the 1990s. That might have been the problem that those in government at the time didn't realize the level of auto theft and the carnage it was 'causing'—causing across Manitoba.

So our government has taken this issue very seriously, unlike the previous government. We've rolled back auto theft, so it's now at its lowest point in almost two decades. It's down nearly 80 per cent just since 2004. We've led the way in asking the federal government to make auto theft a stand-alone indictable offence as we asked for. I was perhaps a little surprised that the bill that was introduced, that whoever introduced the bill didn't know that Bill S-9 was becoming law mere days after the bill was introduced. That came as a bit of a surprise to me.

Frankly, we also believe auto theft should be declared a violent offence to allow for stricter sentences and tougher bail conditions to keep young people, who, unfortunately, are out of control, off the streets and behind bars where they can't pose a risk to our communities.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

It's also important to note that our government, both with the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) and the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) who precede me in this chair, we've always been very consistent and very loud calling on the federal government to remove provisions of the Youth Criminal Justice Act to create, in our view, some artificial presumptions against locking up dangerous young offenders, those offenders who have demonstrated that they are going to pose a risk to others and to themselves if they're out in the community.

Of course, we've also brought in a very comprehensive program, the Winnipeg Auto Theft

Suppression Strategy, which has brought together police, it's brought together Crown attorneys, it's involved Manitoba Public Insurance, it's used the expert advice of people like Dr. Rick Linden, who's provided very, very valuable advice to that service. It's been recognized by a number of international awards, and I'm frankly very proud of the work that all the different agencies involved have taken on.

So we've been very active on the auto theft file. It has again been reduced to almost four-fifths just since 2004. It's lower in Manitoba than it's been at any time since 1992, and we've continually made the investments. We made investments in policing; we've made investments in prosecutions; of course, MPI has done its part by supporting the immobilizer program which, unfortunately, the members opposite didn't think to seem—didn't think was an important part of the step.

So we have been taking action on a wide and useful range of measures to make sure that Manitobans' cars don't get stolen; we got great results. We're not stopping on that; we're going keep going forward so that auto theft truly is in the rear-view mirror.

Mr. Goertzen: I think I opened myself up to having a bit of a political rant there, and so I'll take some responsibility for that. We hadn't had one for a while. So I know I rarely do, I know.

Although I have to correct the record on the issue of immobilizers, I think what our comments were was simply that all the onus shouldn't fall to the victims. Not that victims can't take some responsibility, but at that point all the onus was falling to the victims. And so we were glad we were able to shame the government into taking other initiatives like electronic monitoring and others.

But moving on from that—I'm not trying to entice another rant from the minister or anybody else at the table. But—

An Honourable Member: Except yourself.

Mr. Goertzen: —questions, specific questions—except myself, and I'm prone to one or two, I understand that. It's an occupational hazard.

Question regarding maintenance enforcement. These are very specific questions that have come to me from individuals who just had questions about the process, and I didn't know the answer.

And it's more recently, so rather than sending a letter and waiting for that process to work its way

through—one individual indicates that they had questions regarding when the payment to them—so they have an order that provides them support on a certain date, and I think it was the 1st and 15th of every month. And they're wondering whether or not the payment has to be at Maintenance Enforcement on those days, or whether they have to receive the payments.

I think their concern was the order said that it had to be the 1st and the 15th that the payment was due, and it was taking a number of days until they actually received the payment.

Maybe the minister can sort of explain the process to me; first of all, the legal implications of not getting it on the date of the order, and then maybe how long it takes to get it from Maintenance Enforcement?

Mr. Swan: Yes, the short answer is that if a court order, for example, says that there's support payable of \$300 on the 1st of the month, it's a requirement that the money be received by the Maintenance Enforcement Program by the 1st of the month. So what happens is that the Maintenance Enforcement Program will receive the cheque, will make the appropriate notation on the file and then immediately forward the cheque out to the recipient. So it does mean that, generally, if it's being paid cheque by cheque, the recipient will have to wait until the mail arrives to receive their cheque.

What I just wanted to check on very briefly is the case of post-dated cheques, and I just want to see if there's anything else I can put on the record with respect to that situation.

What I can add is, at the current time, if a payer gives a series of post-dated cheques, which many payers do, the Maintenance Enforcement Program doesn't hold on to them. They would actually send them out as a batch to the recipient. So if the payer can be enticed to provide those post-dated cheques, that can prevent any wait by the recipient.

Mr. Goertzen: So how long would it normally take to turn around a cheque that's not post-dated, if it gets to Maintenance Enforcement on the right date? Is it sort of out the door that day, typically, or is it—take that much longer?

Mr. Swan: The general objective of the Maintenance Enforcement Program is to turn around cheques within 24 hours, so that if a cheque comes in, it will be mailed out the next business day. And

then, of course, it depends on the mail service, how long it would take to be received.

Mr. Goertzen: Also on maintenance enforcement, I had a question from an employer who was doing garnishment of wages through the Maintenance Enforcement system, and they're indicating that they're sending in the cheques on a fairly timely basis, but the cheques are then being uncashed for a long time by Maintenance Enforcement.

And they're saying this is causing them problems with their own accounting system. Why would that be that it would, according to this employer, it sometimes takes weeks before the cheques get cashed?

* (16:50)

Mr. Swan: Yes, I'd certainly like, perhaps off-line, for the member to give some more information, and we can try to figure out why that would be. That would seem strange, but if there is a company in the member's area or anywhere in the province that's experiencing this, I'd certainly like to know about it. And I'll see if I can get a better answer.

Mr. Goertzen: Sure, I will provide that. I think just looking through the documentation she's sent me, she indicates that she sent, you know, a cheque in—one of them on July 30th, 2010, and as of September 30th, 2010—so this goes back a little bit—it hadn't been cashed. And there's sort of a pattern she's indicating and so she, earlier this year asked, about a month ago, asked me that I look into it. So I will send the specific information. If the minister can respond to me, that would be appreciated.

In terms of the fund for victims assistance, the grants that are provided, is there an update here as to how much money is available or currently in the Victims Assistance Fund that can be used for grants to victims?

Mr. Swan: Just to clarify, if the member for Steinbach can just confirm: Are you asking how much is available in the Victims Assistance Fund to be used for grants?

Mr. Goertzen: That's correct.

Mr. Swan: You know, the—I can say the numbers are still being finalized for 2010-2011. The best forecast that I've seen is that there will be \$573,900 available for grants under the Victims Assistance Fund.

Mr. Goertzen: I think we're ready to proceed to pass the Estimates, as much as I'd like to continue to go

on, I'm limited by others who'd like to speak. I want to thank the staff for their work. I think I've done this for five or six years, longer than anybody should be a critic for anything. But I do appreciate the staff who have often brought forward good information and the work that you do every day in Justice. The minister may be waiting for me to say something kind about him; I made that mistake with the member for Inkster and it ended up in a brochure.

An Honourable Member: So all bets are off.

Mr. Goertzen: All bets are off.

But I do want to say, on a serious note, I know the minister lost his father earlier this year and there are very few people who get to serve as the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice in this province. It's a great honour to have that role. You're one of the few select ones, and I'm sure your father was very proud of you. And I want to extend my condolences to you and your family on behalf of our caucus.

And with that, we're willing to proceed with the Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before doing that, I want to thank all members for a very investigative and civil dialogue. I don't think I had to correct anyone's behaviour. Now proceeding to resolutions.

Resolution 4.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$154,868,000 for Justice, Criminal Justice, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$33,368,000 for Justice, Civil Justice, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$180,889,000 for Justice, Corrections, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$50,970,000 for Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,433,000 for Justice, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,448,000 for Justice, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Last item for consideration of the Estimates of this department is item 4.1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 4.1.

The floor is open for questions, if any?

Seeing none, we will proceed.

Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,215,000 for Justice, Administration, Finance and Justice Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

What is the—this concludes the Estimates for the Department of Justice for this fiscal year. What is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: We'll rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing that, the hour now being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

FAMILY SERVICES AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Consumer Affairs.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 80 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): I just checked *Hansard* to see if my addition to the list of those that are working in my office was complete. I had tried to put on the record Colleen Balsillie, as well, is my

executive assistant. She's not in my office here at the Legislature. But, as an executive assistant she's in the community office.

That would complete the list of those who would be listed under the minister's office employ.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Are there any other political staff located anywhere in the department?

Mr. Mackintosh: What would be classified as political staff would include Felix Meza, Fiona Shiells and Colleen Balsillie, I think, as determined by their method of appointment.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So those are the only people, then, that would be hired through a contract executed by Executive Council?

Mr. Mackintosh: I just want to confirm I can advise the member either later or at the next sitting as to whether the policy analyst Brent Dancy that does work with me works under that cost centre or not or whether it's a separate cost centre, but there may be one other person that's the policy person that would be on the list, but I'll have to confirm that.

Mrs. Mitchelson: In the deputy's office, could the minister indicate to me what the staff complement is and who those people are?

Madam Chairperson: Prior to answering that, if the minister could introduce any new staff who've joined us at the table.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes. I'm pleased to recognize at the table Margaret Ferniuk as well. She is the head of child care. The deputy minister's office has the following employees: of course the Deputy Grant Doak, Jan Doerksen, Cindy Fawley, Krista Byers.

I should just make it clear Jan Doerksen is assistant to the deputy minister; Cindy Fawley is secretary to the deputy; Krista Byers is secretary to the deputy. Kim Stewart is an administrative assistant, and Jessica Natiuk is the policy analyst to the deputy.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Could the minister indicate how many people in senior levels of administration has the department on an acting basis?

* (14:50)

Mr. Mackintosh: Among the senior staff, actually, with the ADMs I know Charlene Paquin was just appointed in the last week. In Policy and Planning,

the executive director is acting—her name is Lissa Donner.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess, we could—if we could just move to Policy and Planning then. How long has Lissa Donner been in that position?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that there was a competition held this fall and she went into that position at that time. The position was formerly occupied by Jan Forster, who has gone on to head up the child protection office—oh, the consumer protection office.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the minister says there was a competition held, but she is there in an acting position, if I understood him correctly? Could you explain that, if she won the competition?

Mr. Mackintosh: It's being explained to me as a bit of a domino situation. Nancy Anderson, the former head of the consumer protection office, has gone on to head up the property registry.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I don't know if it's a point of order, but I'm just having difficulty hearing the minister. I wonder if—I don't know whether we need the sound higher or whether he's not speaking into the microphone, but I'm having difficulty.

Madam Chairperson: If the minister—if there's any way he can get a little closer to the mic, if that's possible.

Mr. Mackintosh: The way it's described to me is the former director of the consumer protection office, Nancy Anderson, has now been appointed head of the property registry. So her replacement, being Jan Forster, is on a secondment basis, and until Jan Forster is permanently appointed, the—her successor must remain in an acting position.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I wasn't going to ask about Consumer Affairs, but then, I guess, is there going to be a competitive process for that position if she—or is there a competition going—ongoing now for the position in Consumer Affairs?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised there hasn't been a final decision made on the permanent filling of that position.

Mrs. Mitchelson: When I look back at the last annual report that we received, and that was 2009-2010, in Policy and Planning there were 18 FTEs, and I see in the Estimates of Expenditure for last year and this year there are 19. Could the

minister explain why there's one increase in staff from 2009-10 to today?

Mr. Mackintosh: There was a policy-oriented position in Administration and Finance. A policy analyst position, I'm advised, was transferred into the Policy and Planning group, that it was deemed by the department to be more appropriate to house that position in that division.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And the—if the position then moved from another area, and I—did you say Administration and Finance?—I guess the question that I would ask is: If this position was moved from another area within the department to Policy and Planning because it fit better there, can the minister show me in the Estimates book where we would see the corresponding reduction in the staff position?

Mr. Mackintosh: Admin and Finance advises that they were—he was referring to the adjusted vote transfer. So we'd better just confirm—we're working off different documents: one's the annual report that the minister—or the member was referring to; the other is the Estimates book. So we'll just clarify; we'll reconcile that for the member.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I would hope that maybe by tomorrow the minister would have that information that he could provide to me.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I'm advised that could be available tomorrow.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I notice also in the last annual report—and we're looking at actuals—the actual amount that was spent in Policy and Planning for 18 staff positions was, okay, I guess \$1.379 million? Am I getting my numbers right? But I see the estimates for this year for 19 staff less than what the actual was for 18 in '09-10. Can the minister explain that difference?

Mr. Mackintosh: I don't want to leave speculation on the record, although they were thinking here that it may be that there was an in-year adjustment, as is relatively common, that may not be reflected, so they advise that they'll let the member know the—of the explanation because I understand she's saying that her review of the annual report for the Policy and Planning line showed an amount that was higher than this year's estimate for that line. So we'll get back to her tomorrow.

* (15:00)

Mrs. Mitchelson: And it—the actual two years ago was higher than the estimate this year, and there is

one more staff person allocated under Salaries and Employee Benefits. So I would like some justification for that.

If I can continue on and ask a question. It says under activity identification that Policy and Planning is responsible and co-leads the ALL Aboard, Manitoba's poverty reduction strategy. Who is the co-chair, I guess, besides—well, who is the co-chair in the Department of Family Services and who would they be co-chairing with? And is there a committee and, if there is, who would that be comprised of?

Mr. Mackintosh: The ALL Aboard strategy is seeing, I think I can say, a fairly significant investment of staff resources, particularly over the last year. There's been some major efforts under way that I can get into. So, indeed, it does support the ALL Aboard strategy.

The administrative support is largely in the Family Services and Consumer Affairs Department in terms of the overall analysis and coordination. There are two organizational efforts that support ALL Aboard. The first one is an inter-departmental working group, and that is comprised of senior officials in several government departments.

The other organization is the ministers committee, ALL Aboard committee, and that is co-chaired by myself and minister—the Minister for Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross). The people who sit on that committee are the ministers that are—well, generally responsible for services that affect low-income Manitobans. It meets, generally, monthly, perhaps not in summer. It may be more difficult to meet in July or August, but I think, generally, it meets or it attempts to meet monthly. And perhaps just to close the circle on the question in terms of the activities over the last year, I want to put on the record I've been so impressed with the work that has happened.

The effort is really targeted at ensuring that we get the best bang for the buck in terms of investments for the benefit of low-income Manitobans, and, as well, to provide a—and research at the inventory of investments across all the departments to look at the best ways to measure enhancements when it comes to poverty and social inclusion, both. And, indeed, that latter topic has been the major activity over the last year where there were draft proposals in terms of the measurements that could adequately best measure progress. And then that was brought back to the community

stakeholders for their vetting, and now there is an analysis as to what those final measures should be.

And I referred to these in my opening comments that these measures are—we intend to be published in the months ahead, assuming that we can reach some agreement with all my colleagues on what they should be. But we are looking at quite a few.

And, just to conclude, the ALL Aboard strategy document had listed about 14, but we think there are some other ones that should be added. But we did listen to Manitobans, and including those living in low income, as to what the measures should best be.

So that has been a major activity over the last year, and I know that has taken a lot of efforts on the part of the people in Policy and Planning. And I'll also say that the work on Let's Make a Better Deal strategy has been relentless and we've been really trying to move ahead on several fronts there. So I think those are the two main policy development areas this year.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chairperson, I also know that under Policy and Planning that there's a responsibility for co-ordinating departmental responses to access to information requests under freedom of information and protection of privacy. Who's the lead in Policy and Planning on that piece?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that the FIPPA requests go to a position in Policy and Planning. The incumbent is Mary Loepp. That position then distributes the requests to the appropriate division within the department and then would follow up with a designate from each of those divisions, I understand.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Would that person then be responsible for insuring timely responses to FIPPA requests? I know that from time to time there are extensions that are granted, and usually those are for legitimate reasons, but would that extension have to be vetted through the person in Policy and Planning and would that person in Policy and Planning have to approve the extension?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that each division is expected to exercise its responsibility for extensions.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So then, Policy and Planning does nothing but receive the applications, send them to the branches that would have responsibility for responding, and they never come back centrally, they're just responded to by the branch, and there's no further role for Policy and Planning to play?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm told the process is the Policy and Planning position would deal—co-ordinate blanket requests that would affect more than one division or may affect a central administrative matter. But it is up to the divisions to respond and deal with extensions.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So then, if a division asks for an extension of 30 days, then that 30-day extension period isn't met and the information isn't forthcoming, and the Ombudsman has to be brought into the situation to try to get the information from the department, it is the responsibility, then, of the division head that that information isn't forthcoming, and that would be who would be held accountable, then, not the person in Policy and Planning.

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that that's correct.

* (15:10)

Mrs. Mitchelson: If we could just move on to Information Technology, and I also noted in the '09-10 annual report that there were the same number of full-time equivalents, 11.5, but the salaries and benefits were over double what they are today.

Could the minister indicate to me what the reasoning for that is? Are there vacancies in that branch of his department or what would explain the discrepancy from \$2,455 down to \$1,034 in this year's Estimates?

Mr. Mackintosh: The department—we're not sure of the exact dates of the—that the documents are referring to, but there—apparently, there was a transfer of staff to another department, business technology and transformation in Energy and Mines, and that would likely explain the reduction.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, thanks, Madam Chair, but I'm not understanding that. If we look at the annual report, the actual amount that was spent on salaries and benefits for 11.5 full-time equivalents in '09-10 was \$2,455,000. We have now Estimates before us that indicate that there are still—where are we—11.5 full-time equivalents, so the same number of staff, and the estimate for salaries and benefits is only \$1,000,091. So we're talking about the same number of staff and we're talking about less than half the expenditure. So my question is: Why the difference? Were staff paid twice as much in '09-10, or have we got some vacancies in the IT area today?

Mr. Mackintosh: This is subject to confirmation by the Minister of Finance, (Ms. Wowchuk), but I'm advised that the resources, as I described earlier,

were moved to ETT this year by adjusted vote, and the costs are billed back to the department. So, presumably, there'll be some accounting process to eventually move the costs as well. Yes, and the FTE, yes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, thanks, Madam Chair, I'm still not understanding. I'm a little confused. Is the minister saying that staff was moved to another department?

Mr. Mackintosh: Just to clarify then, the—there was a—apparently, a two-step process where the staff went over and then the resources, and there was a billing back and now the resources have gone. Yes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So there are not 11 FTEs in the department today?

Mr. Mackintosh: We'll confirm this but an earlier year should have shown a higher FTE count because now the FTEs had been transferred but not the cost. So, in other words, the two steps were: No. 1, the FTEs had gone over, presumably—what, in '07 or '08, and then the costs went over, subsequent.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Again, I wonder if the minister could, for me then, for tomorrow, because I've tried to make some sense of it, I mean, between actuals and estimates, there's some discrepancy, always, and we know that sometimes there's overexpenditure and underexpenditure in certain lines. But if the annual report, which is supposed to be actual and it is actual, as stated, indicates that there were 11 full-time equivalents, 11.5 two years ago, and the expenditures were \$2.455 million for salaries and benefits, how can he—I mean, maybe he could do a chart for me going back a few years in the annual reports back from '09-10.

I suppose I could do that myself tonight, but I think he probably has more resources to be able to pull a chart together for me and show me then, back before this annual report, what happened, what the salaries and benefits were for the last number of years, how many full-time equivalents there were, and those would be actuals according to the annual report, and then what has changed since then.

And maybe he could even—even though the annual report for '10-11 isn't out—maybe indicate to me what that might show in this line. I'm not asking for the whole annual report, but I'm just having great difficulty understanding the discrepancy and I would like to see it in black and white so that—and have the minister explain it to me so that it's understandable. I mean, this is actually playing with numbers, and I'd

like some accountability for what we're seeing in actual expenditures in the annual report versus what the minister is telling me.

Mr. Mackintosh: We'll provide a chart showing the—both the FTEs and the expenditure and when they were moved, what years or what dates they were moved.

* (15:20)

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I'm going to move on to Agency Accountability and Support Unit, then. I know we've had discussion around this area in the past—I just have to find my place here. In the annual report, again, in '09-10, there were 12 staff and, today, in the Estimates, and last year also, we see an increase to 16 staff position that's—are they—are all the positions in this area filled, and why the increase?

Mr. Mackintosh: The unit has been expanded by four, representing a consolidation of similar efforts. There were four positions, I'm advised, that were in Community Service Delivery that had somewhat similar job descriptions or responsibilities, and it was deemed best to consolidate this effort in the unit which has a coordinated and more centralized approach to agency accountability and support.

I'm advised that there're currently four vacancies in the unit. Competitions have been held and letters of offer have been sent for two of those positions. Two of the positions left February 21 and April 8, and I'm advised that the positions are expected to be filled by June 2011 through the competitor process.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I forgot to ask, if we could just go back to IT for a minute, and I just wanted to ask who the—who was in the managerial position in IT—accountability?

Mr. Mackintosh: Brian Thompson is—*[interjection]* Oh, sorry. How do you spell that? Brian Konopski is the head of the Information Technology unit and Denise Koss is the head of the Agency Accountability and Support Unit.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And, certainly, the Agency Accountability unit is there to ensure that agencies that receive funding from the department are operating under clear and effective accountability framework and are doing appropriate financial reporting. Would this be the area—I know that about a year ago, a little over a year ago now, the Auditor General and I went to see the minister's deputy with a serious allegation of forged documents that had

been provided to us from a respite worker in a specialized foster home that alleged that the specialized foster home was claiming a higher salary from the department and being paid a higher salary than she was being paid—a pretty serious allegation. And at that time the deputy indicated that it would be looked into, and I guess I'm wondering whether it would be in this area, the Agency Accountability area, within the department that dealt with that complaint. Who would have conducted the audit?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that the AASU performed an audit of the financial operation of the foster home in question, and that was conducted in July of 2010. The review confirmed the allegation and recommended changes in documentation and process to prevent further occurrences. The matter was, I'm advised, referred to police for criminal investigation, and I'm advised that criminal charges were subsequently laid.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And is the minister sure that charges were laid in this case?

*(15:30)

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that it was the recollection of the director of Child Protection that charges were laid. We'll double-check that and ensure that that occurred and any other information related to that. In terms of the police, it was the Winnipeg Police Service, I understand, that conducted the investigation. So we will just double-check that because she was working from recollection.

Mrs. Mitchelson: This issue has been ongoing for over a year now and I would like the minister to confirm—and he should be able to confirm by tomorrow because I would think that senior staff in his department would be up to speed on this investigation.

Has the investigation been completed and has it been closed?

Mr. Mackintosh: The department will confirm the status of any legal proceedings but I'm advised that the ASU did do the follow up that the Winnipeg Police investigated, and as well, there were follow up responsibilities by the general authority.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister explain what the process is when there is fraudulent activity and taxpayers' dollars are used in an inappropriate fashion? What recourse does the department have to get that money back?

Mr. Mackintosh: The department will make inquiries to find out whether the status of the proceedings and whether there was restitution sought and any outcomes in that regard.

Mrs. Mitchelson: The minister mentioned earlier, maybe I'm just needing some clarification, that there was follow up by the general authority that needed to be done. Is the—and I just need clarification. It's maybe a silly question but is the general authority part of the department? Is the general authority paid out of the department of—it's paid directly, but I'm trying to understand the Winnipeg Child and Family Services versus the general authority because I'm—it's just a little confusing. Winnipeg Child and Family Services is, indeed, a part of the Department of Family Services and they are civil servants. Am I correct in that assumption?

Mr. Mackintosh: Winnipeg CFS is under the umbrella of the general authority and is accountable, of course, for direction—policy direction and so on to the authority. It is administratively overseen by Community Services Delivery.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So then, in fact, I mean, the individuals that work for Winnipeg Child and Family Services are civil servants paid for out of the Department of Family Services?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, that's correct.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chair, and how is the authority paid? Is it by grant from the Department of Family Services?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So, ultimately, staff of Winnipeg Child and Family Services report through the Community Services Division directly to the minister. Am I correct?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, the general authority is—operates with Community Services Delivery in terms of its daily administrative operations. It's accountable in terms of the application of child welfare policies and so on to the authority which, in turn, is accountable to the Province and the minister, specifically.

Mrs. Mitchelson: How are the staff of Winnipeg Child and Family Services hired?

Mr. Mackintosh: The staff would be hired by the senior administration of Winnipeg Child and Family Services.

*(15:40)

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the senior administration of Winnipeg Child and Family Services are civil servants in the minister's department?

Mr. Mackintosh: The staff of Winnipeg CFS are civil servants and they're members of the MGEU, I understand, and so are—I think it's right to call them government employees, yes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So, in fact, they are the minister's employees. They are accountable through the Department of Family Services and the activities that are undertaken by Winnipeg Child and Family Services are, in fact, departmental activities.

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that the best way to describe it is an indirect relationship with the minister, in that there is a administrative relationship to the head of the Community Service Delivery, Mr. Dubiński, but there's also accountability, of course, to the authority in terms of child welfare practices.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But it's the minister's Agency Accountability unit that did an investigation of fraudulent activity on misappropriation of money by Winnipeg Child and Family Services, and it wasn't the authority that did the investigation. There's a direct responsibility for the minister and his department to do the investigation. Am I correct in that assumption?

Mr. Mackintosh: The agency and accountability—Agency Accountability and Support Unit is often called on to do investigations of various organizations of varying independence from the Province, for example, independent non-profits if there are allegations or concerns, or other supports, if necessary. In fact, that is not uncommon but, as well, it was appropriate for the unit to look into the situation here as a result of discussions among senior officials in the department.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But they are employees of the department, so if there's misappropriation or fraudulent activity, it's the minister's department that administers the cheques to licensed foster homes in the Winnipeg agency because they are his employees, his staff that deliver child and family services. So I don't know why the minister is wanting to talk around in circles. Ultimately, it's his departmental staff, civil servants, hired through a civil service process that are delivering child and family services in the Winnipeg agency.

So I want the minister to clarify that because it seems like he's not wanting to accept responsibility

for employees and the accountability for taxpayers' dollars that flow through Winnipeg Child and Family Services because they are his employees.

Will he, today, accept responsibility for the accountability of the dollars that are expended?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that the allegation of fraud was directed against a foster parent in this case and, as a result of the allegation that was raised, there were the available processes put to work to do the investigation and work with the police. And, as I say, we will advise as to the outcome of that.

But, as well, any time that there are concerns raised in—of this sort, it's important for accountability that processes be looked at to determine if different procedures could guard against fraud, recognizing, of course, that the whole idea of—behind a fraudulent activity is to dishonestly and deceptively get monies that a person isn't entitled to.

So, whether it's a change to how requisitions are made or oversights are done, those are always necessary when there is an allegation like this. So I'm advised that that kind of inquiry and different approach was arrived at as a result of the allegation here.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I can get—I'll get into another line of questioning later. But I guess the question for me today is, as the investigation unfolded and as the minister's department worked with the Winnipeg Police Service, is the minister—and could—through his staff—could he be advised and could he advise this House today, or this committee, that all of the records that were needed were obtained by the police so that they could conduct the investigation.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I would expect that the department would not only call in the police if it appeared on the face of an allegation that there was criminality, but would co-operate with the police.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I'm—I don't have any question about the department co-operating with the police in the investigation.

I guess my question to the minister, is he satisfied that there were adequate records within the Department of Family Services that were available so that a full and complete investigation could be done?

Mr. Mackintosh: The adequacy of available records would be determined by what the recordkeeping is for transactions of this kind. And if there were shortcomings in any of the recordkeeping processes I

expect that that would have been addressed and we'll confirm what the improvements were that were brought to bear following the allegation and investigation.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the minister, in fact, is saying that there were some issues and problems with recordkeeping within the department. Could he tell us what those issues were?

*(15:50)

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm not advised of any shortcomings, but if there were, we will look to see if that was part of the findings or not. But I don't have information in the Chamber about the—whether there were shortcomings in terms of any recordkeeping or if there were any needed improvements there. That's—I'll take that under advisement and discover what improvements were pursued.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I find it unbelievable that the minister isn't informed on what the outcome of the investigation was and what some of the issues were. This was brought to his attention on April the 8th last year, over a year ago. He indicated that the Agency Accountability unit within his department did an investigation, called the police in. He believes charges were laid, but he's not quite sure a year later and, in one of his answers, indicated that shortcomings would have been addressed with different recordkeeping processes. But then he can't tell me whether there were shortcomings or not. I mean, this is a year old. We're talking about fraudulent use of taxpayers' dollars, and the minister can't tell us whether there was adequate recordkeeping or not a year ago in his department, and he can't tell me whether there's been anything that's been changed or been fixed to date? I mean, I find this unbelievable. I would hope that the minister would go back tonight and ask some very serious questions and be open and accountable to the taxpayers in Manitoba.

This isn't about me. But this is about the taxpayers of Manitoba that want to see some accountability by government. And, I mean, if we have one case where fraudulent activity occurred because there wasn't adequate recordkeeping, how many more might there be out there and how many dollars might taxpayers be out as a result of the lack of accountability and transparency by this government and this minister?

So I would like to ask him to make the commitment today to go back and check tonight. I

mean, he has bragged and he has talked about how he brought agency accountability back into the Department of Family Services, and a year after allegations of fraudulent activity, he can't even tell me what this unit has done to get to the bottom of the issue and to change or deal with any shortcoming. And it was his comment that raised the question about shortcoming.

So I am hopeful that the minister can answer these questions, and I'm going to be expecting answers to them tomorrow. It's a year, Madam Chair, since this was brought to his attention and he doesn't seem to have any specifics on what's been done to deal with the issue. So I would ask for that commitment from him today.

Mr. Mackintosh: The latest information that we have from the police is that the charges are still outstanding. They expect that there will be a charge in the next several weeks, actually, and one of the ongoing issues—because this is an active investigation and I want to be very careful there—is that there is some further new information from a complainant. And I was also advised that Revenue Canada has been notified in the event that they are impacted.

So we'll pursue any further information as the member requests in terms of any updated information, but, given that the police are still actively investigating that, I would urge the member to be cautious in her criticism in terms of timelines. And I don't want to second-guess what information the police need. It's not an investigation that we would interfere with when it comes to criminal matters and police undertakings. So, if there's information we can share, given the ongoing investigation, we can provide that, but I won't provide details where it could in any way, even on a perception basis, prejudice any investigation here.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I certainly respect those comments from the minister. But I guess the bigger question is, outside of the case specific, is he satisfied that the proper accounting and paper work is in place when providing resources to places like this specialized foster home? Were there deficiencies, and I think that kind of information should be able to be provided because we're not talking about anything external, we're talking about what checks and balances his department has in place to ensure that fraudulent activity isn't occurring on a regular basis. If there are shortcomings, or if there were shortcomings, as a result of any

investigation that was done by the Agency Accountability unit, what were they and what steps have been taken to protect taxpayers' dollars?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, the details aren't with the staff here right now. We'll certainly advise the member of what we can.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I'm just a little disappointed, and I'll have to check back to see what the minister's earlier comments were on this issue. But I think I recall him indicating that the investigation was wrapped up sometime last summer, and if that is the case, there's been a lot of time. And I mean a year certainly is a long time for this kind of investigation to be ongoing. So I would like some clear indication from the minister on what he's done for the taxpayers of Manitoba in trying to prevent this kind of activity from occurring again.

Mr. Mackintosh: I'll look to determine when the matter was referred to the police. I believe my earlier remarks were about the investigation of the department's unit. The timelines for the police is something we would have to confirm with the House.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just want to go back to the questioning I was doing about the relationship of the Winnipeg agency to the authority and to the department because the agency is a part of the department. And I want to know what role the general authority plays with the Winnipeg agency. Does—or is all of the funding that's provided to foster homes, to children in care from the Winnipeg agency provided by cheque from the Department of Family Services or is there any money that goes to direct children's care from the authority?

* (16:00)

Mr. Mackintosh: The agencies, the child-welfare agencies would bill the Child Protection branch and the payment is then made to the agencies.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So is that the case just of the Winnipeg agency or does every agency throughout the province bill the department directly?

Mr. Mackintosh: For agencies providing on reserve federal services they would bill INAC, and for provincial services they would bill the Child Protection branch.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the agencies then are paid directly. They're not given a grant of any sort. They are paid directly for each child, and do they have to account for each child and bill the Province in order

to—does every foster family or specialized foster home bill the department directly? And are they paid directly from the department?

Mr. Mackintosh: The department will reconcile bills from agencies and forward the required funds. But funds to foster parents, or employees for that matter, are done by the agency, whether it's the Winnipeg Child and Family or any other agency.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just—I need some clarification, because I am a little confused, and sometimes I've been still having a little difficulty hearing the minister's answers.

When a foster family in the Winnipeg agency is paid, is it a cheque that's cut directly from the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) to each foster family or who pays those bills?

Mr. Mackintosh: The agencies.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay. So the Winnipeg agency is part of the minister's department. So where or how does it get its money?

Mr. Mackintosh: So all agencies, aside from the relationship with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, have their bills paid by the Child Protection branch for the maintenance of children and then the agencies would pay for any amounts that are due, whether it's to foster parents or other parties.

Just to frame it the same way as the minister had asked, the cheques are not Province of Manitoba Minister of Finance cheques. They would be cheques issued by the child-welfare agencies of Manitoba, including Winnipeg CFS.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chair, so then the cheques that would have gone to this specialized foster home would have come from Winnipeg Child and Family Services Agency, not from the Province of Manitoba?

Mr. Mackintosh: In the case of payments that would be made to a foster parent of—that's a foster parent for Winnipeg Child and Family or any other agencies, the amount would be paid by the agency.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay, I'm still struggling with this a little bit. So there is a grant given to each agency from the Province of Manitoba, or a certain amount of money provided—I'm struggling with this a little bit because I'm a little confused here. The Winnipeg Child and Family Services Agency is basically a part of the Department of Family Services. Am I correct?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, we've just been advised that actually for Winnipeg the cheques would be from the Province because working—they don't get a working capital advance like the other agencies do. There's a different relationship there. It's a cheque to a foster parent from the Province of Manitoba, unlike other agencies, I understand.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I guess my question to the minister would be: Has your Agency Accountability unit ever been involved in any investigation or review of any other agency besides the Winnipeg agency?

Mr. Mackintosh: The Agency Accountability and Support Unit can do investigations of agencies that are either child-welfare agencies or they could do investigations of independent non-profits, for example, or for-profit agencies.

Mrs. Mitchelson: My question was has any other Child and Family Services agency been reviewed or investigated by the Agency Accountability unit.

Mr. Mackintosh: The assistant deputy is not—doesn't recall other—another CFS agency investigated by the Agency Accountability and Support Unit, but we'll double-check on that.

*(16:10)

Mrs. Mitchelson: And certainly there have been allegations of financial abuse in different agencies from time to time, Child and Family Services agencies throughout the province. Would any staff from the Agency Accountability unit be involved in any of the reviews or investigations? Maybe not the lead, but would they have been reviewed? And what monitoring or what checks and balances are put in place by the department when those reviews are ongoing?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm told that the Agency Accountability and Support Unit may, through its budget, support the hiring of independent contractors who have specialization in certain areas, or have investigation skills to look into concerns for the purpose of quality assurance or other financial reviews of CFS agencies, but the recollection is that the direct staff, themselves, of the Agency Accountability and Support Unit haven't been involved in other investigations. So there is that role, nonetheless, for the unit's support of joint efforts for reviews.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I guess the question, then, would be: How often has the Agency Accountability

unit hired a third party reviewer—external reviewer to review Child and Family Services agencies?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, we'd have to look to see what reviews they may have made a contribution to. One recollection was Awasis where they—the unit had made a financial contribution for the review.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I know that the Agency Accountability unit was set up to look at and to try to ensure financial accountability for organizations that are funded from government.

I guess my question would be, since Winnipeg Child and Family is an arm of government, a branch of government, and funds flow directly through the Department of Family Services to those that are served by the Winnipeg agency, why wouldn't an external review have been done? Is it not a little strange to have one arm of the minister's department—or the minister's department investigating itself? If external reviewers are hired to look at other agencies, why, in this case, wouldn't an external reviewer have been contracted by Agency Accountability unit to do the review?

Mr. Mackintosh: It—well, in addition to the AASU's review which, of course, is outside of the Winnipeg Child and Family, the—as we advised earlier, the police also did a review and investigation into the matter.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chairperson, the whole reporting structure and the financial structure of the Winnipeg agency is so very different from any other part of the Child and Family Services system that the minister has created and set up. I'm wondering if he could explain to me how the funding flows from INAC versus how the funding flows from his department to support children in care or receiving services from agencies, and how it's reconciled on who is responsible for what.

Mr. Mackintosh: So while Winnipeg CFS is accountable to the general authority for the practice of child welfare administratively, as we said earlier, it has this relationship with the department, and the funding, I'm advised then, would flow for child maintenance to the agency, which is not unlike what INAC does with the agencies that provide federal on-reserve services where INAC flows dollars directly.

Otherwise, in Manitoba, the funding goes to the authorities that oversee their respective agencies for program dollars.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chairperson, so in every other instance besides Winnipeg Child and Family, does the authority flow money directly to the agencies? So is the money flowed to the authority, and does the authority flow it to through to the agencies from government, or does the department flow it directly to the agencies?

* (16:20)

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, when it comes to child maintenance dollars, the process followed by both the Province and the federal government is similar; that the amounts flow directly—there's a direct financial relationship with the agencies.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So then the authorities are funded for what?

Mr. Mackintosh: The funding for agency operations go through the authorities, as opposed to the funding for child maintenance.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay, so if I can just try to understand this correctly, money flows to the authority, to flow to the agencies for operations? So that would be for salaries and benefits and rent and all of those things. But the money for maintenance of children, so for foster care and prevention and whatever else is done, the money flows directly from the Province to the agencies?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, the amounts that flow to the authorities are for the operations, the management, the salaries, the programs that are delivered by agencies under the umbrella of the respective authorities.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So then the only money that flows directly to the agency is for maintenance of children in care?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, that's right.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So how is that money flow? Does that money flow based on projections? How is it flowed and how often is it flowed to agencies?

Mr. Mackintosh: There are working capital advances that are provided to the agencies for the maintenance, and then there are—oh, the—how the flow of dollars to the agencies is labelled, we'll discover that, but the working capital advance is the right term or technique that is used to flow dollars to the authorities for operations, and I'm advised that's done quarterly.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So that's the money that flows to the authorities for operating. What about the

maintenance dollars directly to agencies, how does that flow? How often and how—what's the accountability process?

Mr. Mackintosh: The agencies provide billings based on expenditures and then the payments would be on a periodic back to the agencies for child maintenance.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And then—just clearly, then, there has to be some sort of working capital because they can't pay for maintenance unless they've got money in the bank to pay. So is there a certain amount paid up front and then—I don't know what the minister would call that, working capital, or whatever? And then how often do they bill, and how often do they receive cheques and those would be cheques directly from the department?

* (16:30)

Mr. Mackintosh: We're just trying to confirm what—if there was an actual term used for the advances, but, yes, there are advances that are provided for agencies to fulfil their financial obligations for child maintenance.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And how do you come to the determination of what the budget is, or the estimated budget is, for the upcoming year that would be in this year's Estimates book?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised there are regular reviews of volume and price to guide the department's expected contributions for child maintenance.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I think we'll come back to Child and Family Services at another time, but I guess I just wanted to ask the minister whether he—and he has provided for me before, a grants listing, and I know that the department used to and, I think, still does prepare a list of grants to external agencies, and that has been tabled in the Estimates process.

The last one—I don't know when the last one was that we got, but I was wondering if the minister might be able to have it available for me. We have the '09-10; if we could get the '10-11—so those would be actual grants that were provided—for tomorrow? That would be great so I'll have an opportunity to ask questions if I need to before we end our Estimates process. Is that a possibility?

Mr. Mackintosh: I recall we provided this last year. I think for two years, and the reason for the timelines on that was the amounts cannot be reconciled and all the final billings processed and tabulated, I

understand, until sometime in the fall. I think that was likely when the document is all put together and it also would involve different divisions. But I can undertake to provide the member with it as soon as it's available and we'll check to determine if what I just said is the reason that it may not be available right now or not yet, that there is a delay of a few months after March 31st to compile that and conclude the amount for each agency.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And, yes, if the minister'd just get back to me tomorrow with some sense of when that might be available, if it's not available just yet. I do recall though, when my days when I was in the minister's office, that I always had a grants list available to table to the opposition, and it was always asked for. So I just don't—and I know it was always asked for and it was available and it was tabled during the Estimates process.

I would like to just to ask a few questions on Employment and Income Assistance. If there's some information the department may have to get back to me with so if I could get it on the record this afternoon and see—the answers may be readily available, but—I just need to get my papers in order here.

Okay, under Employment and Income Assistance, we did a little bit of a chart, back to 2000-2001. And we have—we saw and we're having difficulty explaining why in the annual reports we see an actual expenditure in 2000-2001. I'll just go into the millions. It was—and I'll round it off—\$249 million; '01-02, it was \$252 million; '02-03, it was somewhat similar; and then in 2003-2004 we see a significant decrease in the amount of employment and income assistance provided. It went from 254—\$255 million in '02-03 down to \$141 million, which is over a hundred-million-dollar decrease in the annual report. And, actually, a significant decrease in the Estimates too. And then it continues along on very—until '06-07 to \$135-million actual expenditure and then in '07-08 it hops up to \$277 million.

And I'm just wondering whether the minister can explain why for one, two, three, four years, from 2003-2004, to 2006-2007, there was a dramatic decrease in the recording in the annual report.

Now, I think I've look at the annual reports, and it looks to me like possibly the employment and income assistance for the disabled was taken out of the EIA line in the annual report. And I was having difficulty finding where that money would be, or I couldn't find it anywhere else in the annual report.

So I'm wondering if staff could just review that for me before tomorrow and try to help me understand what happened and where I might find it in the annual reports. And it might just be an oversight, but it's pretty hard to lose a hundred million dollars in the department. So I just need a little help with that because I—we just found it kind of strange.

Mr. Mackintosh: The assistant deputy isn't—doesn't have the history with her, so we'll make the inquiries in an attempt to provide that information tomorrow.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Again, if we go back to the actuals in the annual report of '09-10, which is the last one we have, we have a actual expenditure on employment and income assistance of 296.990 or 296-990,000—\$296,990,000 in employment and income assistance, which is a greater expenditure than was estimated in 2010-2011 and certainly questions the Estimates of expenditure that were put into the budget for 2011-2012.

If I go back to look at the estimates in '09-10, the estimate at that time was only 281,745,000, and it was overexpended by some \$15 million, and that's the result of higher case loads. I guess I'd like to ask the minister why, when they prepared their budget for 2010-2011, they must have had some idea on what the expenditures were the previous year for Employment and Income Assistance, and why they would have estimated a lower than actual expenditure in the Estimates book for 2010-2011?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that there can be variations based on estimates and actual expenditures because of the timelines in getting the, you know, numbers for, completed numbers for the earlier year. But as well, projections are made in terms of what trends might be reasonable in a forthcoming fiscal year and what expenditures or changes to programs, whether it's, you know, work programs or level of benefits.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Chair, but we have—we do have some information that takes us to December of 2010, which would indicate that the number of participants and cases in the Employment and Income Assistance program is continuing to increase and we have more cases, more participants, at the end of December 2010 than we had at the end of March 2010.

I wonder if the minister could at least provide for me the numbers of total cases and participants for

January, February, and March of 2011. Would those figures be available and could he provide them for me tomorrow?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that all those numbers are likely not reconciled yet, but if there is a number for any of that period, we'll make every effort to advise the member.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Could the minister indicate, generally speaking, just from observations of the department whether the numbers are going down or whether they're continuing to rise?

Mr. Mackintosh: We'll make all efforts to advise the member of that tomorrow. I mean, there was some indications, but I think we should just be more certain with what staff have identified as some recent trends.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And, Madam Chair, back in the 2009-2010 annual report, there were certain numbers reported and then we received a correction and new numbers were provided to us on the numbers of family and children receiving EIA and the Manitoba Child Benefit. I wonder if the minister could explain what happened and why the mix up in the numbers and why that would have to be corrected.

* (16:50)

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised there was an administrative error with the Child Benefit in reporting the number, and with regard to the EIA error, there was, I understand, a month from a previous year that had been added in and had to be taken back out.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks for that explanation. I note in the annual report when it comes to the Manitoba Child Benefit, that—just a minute. I just have to find my page. So the Child Benefit payout was only \$3 million when the budget estimate was considerably more. I'm wondering if the minister could explain why there isn't the uptake on the Manitoba Child Benefit that they are anticipating, or have anticipated.

Mr. Mackintosh: When the Child Benefit was designed, it was our hope and expectation that the federal government would join with us so that it could be an integrated benefit. I actually relatively recently raised this with the federal minister, urging that integration and making the pitch that it was a welfare-to-work initiative. It was a welfare-wall initiative, and while there was a recognition of some value to that one, we haven't received a positive

response yet from Ottawa. But I will raise it again because I think that's the best way to have this program delivered.

The other challenge with the Child Benefit, as any program would be of this type, is the promotion of it and the understanding that it's available for families and without the integrated—without the integration; the word about it is disseminated by way of our awareness strategies. And we've tried different strategies, I can tell the member, over the last couple of years, working with agencies and newspaper awareness and so on. If the member has other ideas, we certainly will take them under advisement, but we're going to again look at it as we're looking at the Child Benefit in terms of its potential again. So that accounts for some of the differences on that line.

I would like to see this taken up to a much greater extent. I really—the ultimate end game's got to be for an integrated benefit, and I think at some point, surely the federal government will see that there's a good value to doing that.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I think we had this discussion last year around the Manitoba Child Benefit, and I thought the minister had said that we were very close to some sort of an agreement.

You know, this benefit was to replace the former Child Related Income Support Program, the CRISP program, and it was restructured. And I know that the amount of money that was being spent was very minimal as they—as you moved from the CRISP program, certainly a lot less than what CRISP was paying out, but that the CRISP program was not a federal-provincial program, it was strictly a provincial program at the time, and if this benefit is to support low-income families, why is it dependent on getting federal participation? There was a program available back in the '90s that wasn't dependent on federal support. So I guess my concern would be why does the Manitoba Child Benefit, when it's indicated right in the annual report, that it was to replace the CRISP program, have to be dependent on integration with the federal government?

Mr. Mackintosh: The CRISP initiative, the CRISP program, really had dwindled down to a concerning number, and given that the Manitoba Child Benefit is application based, the take up does depend on knowledge of its existence. But, clearly, if you can integrate it into the tax system, you can significantly enhance its availability for working—low-income working families.

But we—and I was looking here through my documents to see if I had the CRISP numbers, but, as I recall, I think, actually, we talked about this last year and did a comparison of those numbers, or maybe it was two years ago, but the Child Benefit is a better benefit than CRISP was, certainly a bigger take up, and the take up numbers had increased.

I don't have those numbers with me, but that is the reason why. It's not about dependency on the federal government, it's just it's preferable that the program be delivered in that way, and so we'll continue to seek their co-operation. I think that there

is a good and compelling case for the federal government, and we'll continue to advocate for that.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable member for River East—a very short question.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour now being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

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