

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
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ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	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

Friday, May 6, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

HEALTHY LIVING, YOUTH AND SENIORS

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): On behalf of the Department of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors and on behalf of the nine ministers of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet and their departments in the Healthy Child Manitoba strategy, I am pleased to present to this committee for its consideration the 2011-2012 expenditure estimates for Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors.

It's truly an honour to lead the department dedicated to prevention and promotion across the life course and to work with all departments and communities to prevent the major health and social problems facing our province today.

I'm proud to chair the only standing committee in Canada that's dedicated to improving opportunities and the quality of life for children and youth. As a government, we are continuing our commitment to the Healthy Child Manitoba strategy, which focuses on cross-sectoral prevention and early intervention for children, youth, families and communities.

In 2007, we announced a provincial FASD strategy to strategically build upon important investments we have made since taking office in FASD prevention, intervention and support services and research, and we will continue this.

Manitoba continues to learn from and act upon the latest research evidence on the importance of investing in children across the life course, especially

during their earliest years. That's why in 2011-2012, we are working with our community and government partners to open an early model childhood development centre in Lord Selkirk Park, modelled after the evidence-based abecedarian approach, the new carousel site will provide co-located, integrated and culturally appropriate services with the core components being an enriched early childhood development program and a family resource centre. We look forward to the opening.

Our commitment to supporting families and communities is further demonstrated by the funding we provide to parent-child coalitions. These community coalitions work collaboratively with their local communities to provide developmental and appropriately—sorry, developmentally appropriate learning programs for preschool children and their families. Research shows that starting school is an important development transition in the lives of children, and we'll work with others to continue this programming.

The Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors support are a range of programs and services developed to meet the interests and priorities of youth across Manitoba. Community engagement, school-to-work transitions, career development, employment readiness and work experience are all issues on the minds of young people. Programs such as the Youth Job Corps, Youth Advisory Council, wage subsidy and scholarship programs address these issues and encourage our young people to grow and see a future for themselves in our province.

I am pleased that the 2011-12 Estimates contain expanded programming for youth; in particular, the rollout of the Manitoba Mentors Program is exciting. Manitoba Mentors will connect high school students and youth with mentors from local businesses, labour and non-profit organizations with the aim of helping them make successful transitions from school to work, including career paths into future education training in the workforce. These connections will include a wide range of activities, such as one-to-one mentoring, small group discussions, job shadowing, field trips to area businesses, et cetera. The program will build on outreach efforts and success models already taking place in the province and will provide a structured program through which a broad range of

community members can support and encourage the youth.

This year's Estimates also include expanded programming for youth facing multiple personal barriers to gain employment and life skills in order to enter the job market. Youth will be provided with pre-employment training, be connected to job coach mentorships and receive support during the employment phase. Youth will be referred to this program from justice and child and family service system.

Mr. Chair, we believe everyone has a role to play in promoting wellness. Individual families, communities, organizations and governments can work together to create environments and conditions that support healthy living. We're committed to developing and promoting ways to improve the healthy status of Manitobans and create environments where healthy choices is the easy choice, and we will continue to work with our partners in this endeavour.

Mr. Chair, nutrition is at the heart of healthy wellness. Food is, after all, a basic human necessity and a prerequisite for health. Our government has invested in a number of nutritional and food security initiatives: a school nutrition handbook and school food guidelines; dial-a-dietitian—Dial-a-Dietitian service where Manitobans can call and speak to a registered dietitian about food and nutrition. I am pleased with the Farm to School healthy food choices fundraiser that was just started with Peak of the Market, and support for food initiatives and the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba for breakfast programs.

Mr. Chairperson, I am also pleased that Manitobans enthusiastically embraced the in motion. More than 550 schools, 64 per cent of schools are now registered as Healthy Schools in motion. They're making sure every student is physically active every day. We also have over 400 workplaces in motion and over 142 communities in motion, large and small, in every corner of the province. This has been a wonderful initiative.

Other key initiatives this year include the Healthy Schools initiative, which promotes a physical, emotional and social health of students, their families, school staff and school communities, recognizing that schools are uniquely positioned to positively influence several of the determinants that affect healthy children, adolescent family development; the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative; the Healthy Together Now program.

Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors, is providing \$765,000 in annual funding for chronic disease prevention, and this goes throughout the entire province. I am pleased with this program.

Mr. Chair, we've also taken responsibility to co-ordinate bedbug issues. As the minister, in part, responsible for Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors, I am pleased Manitoba's taking a leadership role in co-ordinating efforts to address the increasing concern of bedbugs and to develop effective solutions. Key to our strategy is education, co-ordination and collaboration. An interdepartmental provincial committee has been established to co-ordinate provincial policies and activities. Additionally, a coalition partnership has been created with other levels of government, relevant associations, community groups and businesses to co-ordinate activities on a much wider scale.

*(10:10)

As part of the strategy, we'll be providing organizations with access to specialized, low-cost materials to help combat bedbugs, and, additionally, there's a small grant program to assist not-for-profit community organizations to address bedbug education management and prevention. A website has been developed. Materials such as brochures, posters and fact sheets are being created to provide single-source information and tips on how to prevent, identify infestations and what steps to be taken. My department is pleased to recognize and move forward on this issue.

We are also delivering the recreation system across the province. As a key leader in health promotion, recreation practitioners and volunteers at the local community level ensure that a wide range of programs and services are available to engage children, families, youth, adults and seniors in opportunities for physical activity, skill development, play and social interaction.

Manitoba will renew its efforts to reduce tobacco use and have three-year strategy that takes place on four goals of prevention, protection, cessation and denormalization. We'll expand the school-based SWAT teams—that's Students Working Against Tobacco—to assist with prevention. We will also increase funding to the Healthy Together Now program to reduce tobacco use projects in communities. We just announced the Quit to Win, which was a great partnership with the Lung

Association, and we'll continue to work with the chronic disease people to expand the program across the province.

Mr. Chairperson, the addictions system—we will continue invest in the addictions services by implementing the five-point strategy, which is Breaking the Chains of Addictions, introduced in 2008. The strategy includes building a better system, improving service access and ability—availability for clients to receive the right service at the right time, increasing residential treatment capacity, increasing community-based treatment capacity and reaching underserved populations, enhancing addiction research.

We've made some investments, including the Behavioural Health Foundation which has opened a new women's treatment centre at Breezy Point, north of Selkirk—we've also worked through a centralized intake and we're working with the federal government to develop a centralized intake which would co-ordinate all the services.

Mr. Chair, we'll continue to work with the prevention-based services, especially in the schools and early intervention activities, and I think that was really, really a positive step.

We also are working with the seniors population to ensure health. Manitoba continues to be a leader in Age-Friendly Initiative led by the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat. It's important that we continue to support older Manitobans to lead active, socially engaged and independent lifestyles. We'll continue to improve the support of environments and communities for all, and I'm pleased to state that 72 communities, or approximately 80 per cent of Manitoba's population, are currently living in communities that are committed to being more age-friendly and have signed up.

We'll also work on seniors or elder abuse, and we will continue to work on other issues that are of importance to all Manitobans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): We have a very limited amount of time, and I have so many questions for the minister, so I'm going to keep my intro very short, just indicating that I'm very

interested in this portfolio, very interested in the work that needs to be and is being done within the province with regard to Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors. And I look forward to the next three to four hours of debate on the expenditures within this department. Thank you.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply.

Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 34.1(a) contained in resolution 34.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance when they arrive.

Mr. Rondeau: I have with me—joining me today is Jan Sanderson, who is the deputy minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors and is also the CEO of the Healthy Child Manitoba Office. I also have Dave Paton, who's the executive director of Administration and Finance. And, as far as the staff, I also have the assistant deputy minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors, is Marcia Thomson; Susan Tessler, who is the director of Policy, Program Development and Implementation, Healthy Child Manitoba office; Jennifer Hibbert, who is the director of Financial Services; and Andrea Ormiston can join us, who's the program and policy analyst.

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

Mrs. Rowat: Global, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. It is agreed, then, that questions before the department will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded. The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Rowat: We'll start with the general housekeeping that happens with each Estimate process. Can the minister indicate to me through a process listing all his staff in his department within the minister's office and the deputy's office—sorry, not the department, within the minister and the deputy's office. That would take up the four hours, wouldn't it. There goes my four hours.

Mr. Rondeau: In my office, the minister's office, we have Marina Portz, who's the appointment secretary.

We have Esther Hiebert, who's my executive assistant. We have my special assistant which is Tiffany Creaghe-Harder, and the administrative secretary is Janean McInnes.

In the deputy minister's office, we have the deputy minister which is Jan Sanderson. The assistant to the deputy minister is Andrea Ormiston. The administrative assistant to the deputy minister is Andre Martine?—Armande Martine, and the correspondence secretary, Daniel Lemay.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister then share with me the name of each political staff person and the name of positions and whether they're full time or part time?

Mr. Rondeau: The political appointees, Mr. Chair, are Esther Hiebert, who's my executive assistant and my special assistant who's Tiffany Creaghe-Harder.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister share with me the names of the staff people that have been hired in 2010 and 2011 including where they're hired and whether they were hired through competition or through appointment?

Mr. Rondeau: Okay, Mr. Chair, I'll start with the orders-in-council and other direct appointment details. We have Andrea Ormiston, who was a direct appointment in the deputy's office. She's career development officer 1, or something; Lisa Murdock, who's career development 1; Marcia Thomson who's an order-in-council appointment who's the assistant deputy minister for the entire department, and then we have Tiffany Creaghe-Harder, who is an order-in-council as my special assistant.

Do we have others? Oh, and I understand that the career development officers are—is the fancy name for the interns that come in and do certain term positions.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister provide for me details of how many and what type of contracts over \$25,000 are being awarded directly and why this is happening and how many of these contracts are going to tender.

* (10:20)

Mr. Rondeau: If it's okay with the member, rather than read them all into the record, which I could—well, why don't we just provide that to you in a reasonable amount of time, and then you'll have it on paper. Is that okay with the member?

Mrs. Rowat: Yes, it is, thank you, Mr. Chair. I would then like to go into the Estimates expenditures booklet and ask some questions with regard to page 6.

And the question is, Mr. Chair: With regard to the reconciliation statement, I'm just wanting to have some clarification with regard to transfers adjustments. Can the minister provide for me information on what the allocation of dollars would be used for in regard to a program, an initiative, and there's any staff attached to this new initiative, that would be also—be seconded or transferred within departments.

The first one would be the transfer of recovery authority from Family Services and Consumer Affairs. And, actually, if we could just go through each of them, that might be easiest. If we wanted to look at the transfer of functions from Advanced Education and Literacy and Health, transfers of functions to Health and health—house and—Housing and Community Development, transfers from Family Services and Consumer Affairs, allocation of funds from Education, and then I'd like clarification on enabling appropriations re: internal services adjustments, if the minister can explain to me what exactly that means, and what those dollars would be tied to. And then the allocation of funds to Innovation, Energy and Mines, if he could explain to me what that transaction entails.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chairperson, I understand the vast majority of the transfers are things that we are now handling with other—for other departments. An example would be the Advanced Education; we're actually handling the Family Literacy for that group. And so a lot of it is just transfers of programs or services or grants that, when we formed the department, we're now operating some of the programs for those departments and we assumed responsibilities for it.

As far as the big ones, which I would assume the line for the recovery from Family Services and Consumer Affairs, these are money that are youth programs that are covered under the federal agreement, and we recover these money from the feds for running youth programs and youth employment and youth-at-risk programs, and so that's the money that, under the labour market agreement, the feds transferred to Family Services and Consumer Affairs, and then we actually manage the programs to employ the youth at risk, do the

transition jobs and all that, and so that's the way that's designed.

And, finally, for the Innovation, Energy and Mines, that's most the technology functions. We pay for certain functions centrally that IEM provides. So that would be our desktop services and technology functions.

Mrs. Rowat: The funds through Family Services and Consumer Affairs is a significant amount. Would the minister be able to provide me with a breakdown of how those funds are allocated? He's indicating that a significant amount of it is from the federal government, but I'd still like a breakdown of that allocation.

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, it is a significant amount of money. I've been told it's all the youth employment programs for students—or youth at risk—so my memory does work from former portfolios—and we will get you a list, if that's okay, because it's rather extensive and, yes, it is \$3.8 million. So we'll get you a list of all the programs that we do with that.

Mrs. Rowat: And the transfer functions to Housing and Community Development, that \$61,000?

Mr. Rondeau: We, originally, on the establishment of the ministry as a separate ministry, had a grant to Volunteer Manitoba, but that's fallen to the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross). So we provided the money to Housing and Community Development because they have that responsibility for volunteers.

Did you want the actual information on that?

Mrs. Rowat: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, I would like a breakdown of each of those, actually, areas and how those dollars are allocated so I better understand the transitions of programs and grants, et cetera.

So I do know, you know, departments are fluid, and what I'm finding are departments are picking up different initiatives from different departments, and it would help me as a critic understand and let caucus know, when we're discussing something, whether it's my area or whether it's another department's—or another critic area. So it would be very useful.

Mr. Rondeau: Part of the whole concept of the Healthy Child Committee and the organization is it's nine departments that are working together collectively to make sure that kids, youth, everything sort of works together. So I agree with the critic. The—what we do do is we work with others, and so everyone works in different systems, and the whole

concept of us is to work together, break down the barriers and collaborate on a bigger picture, and so I agree with you.

So I'd be happy to provide you a list, because it is—get confusing because, you know, Education has certain parts, everyone has a little bit of a responsibility. So I agree with you. We'll provide you that material.

Mrs. Rowat: In the section under appropriation of—under Youth, page 39, there's a significant increase in expenditures. Actually, the budget looks like it's almost doubled, and that's a significant amount of money.

* (10:30)

Can the minister indicate to me if that is all new money or is that money that has been transferred from other departments or is that federal dollars? And I understand, based on a previous answer, that some of that is federal dollars. But I would like to know if the minister can indicate to me, of that \$3 million, if he could indicate to me how that breaks down.

Actually, what I want to know is the allocation of funds more than what the programs are. I don't need details of the programs; we can get that at a later date. I really want to know how—where these dollars are being funnelled to, the title of the program and where those dollars are coming from.

Mr. Rondeau: The grants are \$667,000 for youth at risk, \$145,000 for Manitoba Mentors, \$215,000 for Green Team, \$540,000 for COACH, \$500,000 for Brighter Futures, and then we have some salaries and operating—the position directed to youth program enhancements, with 75 grand. The remainder of all the other adjustments are \$51,000. Operating was, through all of it, was about \$512,000.

Mrs. Rowat: In the subappropriation on page 41, the salaries section, we see a significant increase across the board, all except one area has seen an increase. Managerial has seen an increase of six; professional technology, one; admin support, 96; term, 68,000.

Can the minister indicate to me, you know, I guess, sort of, why there's a significant increase, especially in admin support and term. There seems to be an increase and—is there something that is developing in that area that we need to be aware of?

Mr. Rondeau: Actually, in the Youth appropriation there's still only one manager. They do get a salary

increase, so it's gone from \$89,000 to \$95,000. The professional-technical was six FTEs; it's still six FTEs. The administrative support was 17 people; it is still 17 people, but there was increase on salary. And the Term employees were 99.73, and they're 99.73. And so that is consistent between last year and this year. And so the FTEs have remained absolutely constant from 123.73 to 123.73. And don't ask me why it's seven three.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Yesterday, in this section of the Committee of Supply during the consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, an incorrect dollar amount was accidentally read into the record when resolution 14.2 was passed. The resolution will now need to be put to the committee and adopted again to ensure that the correct dollar amount is passed and that the correct amount of funds are then attributed to that program area.

I thank the committee for their patience with this matter.

Resolution 14.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$48,059,000 for Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Tourism Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Mrs. Rowat: And that's why I am asking where money goes from which department because, obviously, we're even having to incorporate other departments into our Estimates process.

So what I had asked the minister wasn't with regard to the FTEs or the number of staff. What I'm seeing is about \$170,000 increase in expenditures in dollars. So the staffing has remained the same but there's been an increase of about \$170,000 in salaries. So just wanting to know if the minister can explain that.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chairperson, there was a \$75,000 increase in salary and benefits for one full-time equivalent approved to support the youth program enhancements, and then the rest was basically just the increase in pay and benefits.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what that position was within Youth that was \$75,000—I'm understanding an increment increase, and if he could indicate to me who that person was and what their responsibilities are?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chairperson, that program will be through—for MB4Youth. I understand it's going to be filled through competition. It hasn't been filled as of yet and the purpose of the position is to oversee the at-risk and mentorship programs that we have announced, and is in the budget here.

Mrs. Rowat: So for clarification, Mr. Chairperson, can the minister indicate to me then, that was one position that was in place and they're just enhancing the roles and responsibilities of that position, or can they be more clear?

Mr. Rondeau: It's going to be a new position that's established. It's been established in year because what we want to do is we want to move forward these important programs. We have realized that the mentorship program will need additional support and we have moved forward with lots of at-risk programs so we will need further assistance to do that.

Mrs. Rowat: So I'm assuming that this person would be—will be classified under the administrative support area or under the—or am I wrong and is it going to be a term position? Because there's a significant amount of money. Admin support has gone up \$96,000; Term has gone up by \$68,000. I'm wanting to know where these dollars will be allocated for that position.

*(10:40)

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that the position, at present, is in the admin support line. However, it hasn't been classified yet so it could go into the professional-technical line depending on classification and the level of skills that the person needs to do the job. So right now we've identified we need more support. The process of classification is starting to happen now. Right now it is put in the admin support line. It could theoretically move to the professional-technical line or be more attributed to that line should the position be classified accordingly, but right now we just have it under the Admin Support.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister then indicate to me what the increase in \$68,000 for term employees would be?

Mr. Rondeau: We actually have added a Québec exchange program to the program, and these people are considered term employees while they're on that, so that adds \$68,000 to the program.

Mrs. Rowat: So these are additional individuals classified under the term. So there's—they would be part of the increase in staff numbers, is that correct? Like, I guess, can the minister explain to me what exactly the Québec program is, the number of individuals that are involved and I guess the general salary that these individuals would receive for whatever their roles and responsibilities would be in Manitoba.

Mr. Rondeau: We were having an animated discussion about FTEs versus people. I'll tell you how many people participate. There's 10 student employment positions, nine exchange participants who travel to Québec and one Manitoba-based student group leader who assists the incoming Québec exchange participants.

I'm informed that they're at the STEP wages, which is a standardized government of—summer government employment program. I can find out what the STEP wages are, if you want to know, but I assume that they're around 10 bucks an hour or 10 to 15 bucks an hour.

Mrs. Rowat: Okay, and I'd ask the minister if he could share with me a little bit more about that program. Like, is it—was it advertised? How did individuals learn about the program and how long is that program for?

Mr. Rondeau: If that's okay, what I'll do is I'll endeavour to get the materials precisely from the department and get it to you with the package of material following Estimates.

Mrs. Rowat: And thank you to the minister for that.

Under other expenditures, again we're looking at 500,000—or a \$512,000 increase in other expenditures in the Youth area. Can the minister indicate to me what those increases will be in each of the areas: transportation has seen an increase of \$78,000; communications has seen an increase of \$153,000; supplies and services an increase of \$203,000; and other operating, \$78,000.

I'm wanting to know if the minister can indicate to me the reasons why there's been significant increases? Which programs under his Youth subappropriation would be receiving these dollars, and a breakdown of where these dollars are coming from. Are these new dollars? Have they been shared with other departments—from other departments? And, I guess, it looks like there might be something that's being rolled out, if he can indicate to me if there's a program that's following the money.

Mr. Rondeau: We do have the breakdown by the operating—where the money's actually going and we're spending money on—the \$512,000 for the youth enhancements. I am informed that most of this is at the at-risk youth programs, which is, again, the cost-shared program from the feds, et cetera. And the Manitoba Mentors program, which was announced, where we're trying to get a number of—well, actually, we're trying to get all students to have a mentor in Manitoba and provide the benefits of that. And I mentioned that in my opening statement.

Here's the additions: one is we have about \$300,000—no, we have \$300,000 for increased evaluation; we have \$125,000 in consulting and developing the program; the resource development is \$75,000; and the general operating has gone up \$12,000. And so that's the function by which they are increasing.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister share with me who has been hired to do the consulting work for this—these initiatives or is it just going to tender?

Mr. Rondeau: Again, from my past roles, it's the association for sector councils, and they're actually delivering and developing a lot of the programs to create it. The sector councils—we have a number of sector councils, and they are sort of the industry representative and the go-between between education and the industry. And we have contracted with them to sort of develop the mentorship program and work on the delivery of the program.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what the fees are that you'll be paying to the consulting firm?

Mr. Rondeau: We'll get that to the honourable member, Mr. Chair. I want to be absolute precise on it. So we will get that to you.

Mrs. Rowat: And so that I clearly understand what the consulting or consultant is actually going to be doing for the fees, I not only want the fees, but I'd also like to know the terms of the contract, who's leading the initiative through your department, as well as the consultant. And also sort of the framework for that initiative. I'd appreciate that.

With regard to evaluation, can the minister indicate to me what he means by enhanced evaluation? What exactly does that mean?

* (10:50)

Mr. Rondeau: I'll describe to the member a little bit about this whole mentoring program because it—the

Premier's Economic Advisory Council actually suggested that we develop a mentoring program to make sure kids have—kids—youth have support, and an idea of employment and personal support and all that. So we've been following that model. We're working with the sector councils to deliver that model in the first gyration, and the goal is to set up a number of pilot programs and also work with what's already existing in schools and in the community on these mentorship programs, because some are more employment, some are more personal, and so that's what we're doing with the sector advisory councils—sector councils, sorry. And so we're rolling that out this spring. We've also been engaged with a lot of what's going on in the schools and I think that's important.

Now, we have also worked to develop an evaluation to see which is the best, most appropriate, most effective mentorship program out of that initiative. So what we're doing is we're working with the sector councils, coming up with some ideas, coming up with a pilot with a number of schools in different gyrations. And then what we're doing is evaluating that and then we will work with—in the future to roll that out to as many schools as possible and many groups as possible in what's effective.

So the 300—is it \$300,000—for the evaluation money will be utilized to look at these on an ongoing basis this year and then come up with the best practice that we will unroll to other schools and other communities.

Mrs. Rowat: Can you tell me—thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the minister indicate to me what tools he's using in the evaluation?

Mr. Rondeau: We have a whole pile of things on evaluation. We are starting to work with a lot of external agencies on evaluation, whether it's the Family First evaluation, or the home visitor evaluation or Roots of Empathy. What we're doing is we're looking at a number of factors. Now I'll tell you—because we're still working through this program on mentorship I'll talk to you a little bit about just the home—Family First home visitor program. Basically, started in 1988, but we have moved forward on it since then and we basically have visitors going into the houses.

So we had an external review of it. We looked at a number of things. In this case we looked at parents' newborns, increased positive parenting behaviours, parents' well-being, family social support, neighbourhood connectiveness, and then we

released a very, very detailed report in June 2010. It's on the website. And what we tried to do is figure out all the measured outcomes.

On the mentorship program, what we have to do is we have to look at multiple social competencies and outcomes that we want from the kids. That might be increased stay in school. It might be increased idea of where they want to go in the future. Might be whether they have higher marks. So, right now, we're working with evaluators to say what are the outcomes and how are we going to attain the outcomes.

I can inform the member that we haven't finished with the evaluation tool yet and we're still negotiating with the sector councils on the program and how it's rolling out. So, although, we have the initial pilot going, I envision the evaluation to be ongoing for at least the year, and I just gave you a few. The other one might be attendance at school. The other one might be just how many people go on to post-secondary education in the appropriate direction, and that's where we're—I anticipate the evaluation to go so far.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister indicated there's a pilot already in place. Where is that?

Mr. Rondeau: We anticipate it'll envision—or involve about 500 kids. We are still in the process of finalizing the schools that will be involved. We envision that it would be a variety of schools, not just one specific school. Here's the line: Schools will be selected to ensure a balance of urban, rural and northern communities, at least one French francophone school and one high school, and we also want to make sure that the Manitoba demographic—all demographics are involved. So we're working on that within the 500 people, and I can also inform the member we're also working with the sector councils to find the mentors so that we're now working with the companies, we're working with the schools, and we're trying to look at a variety of demographics and at-risk factors and students. So then we find out what we want to accomplish.

This year is meant as a trial year, a pilot, where we try it out. I think it's a great concept. I think everyone deals well with a mentor, regardless of age, so I don't think it's just youth, and I think that by having a good evaluation, we can move forward. And, by the way, Mr. Chair, if the honourable member has any suggestions on things that we should evaluate, I'd be happy to receive her suggestions on the criteria we should evaluate for the

mentorship program because we truly want to make it work.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister had indicated earlier that there was a pilot already in place. So that's not correct. It's a pilot that is coming or is there already something in place?

Mr. Rondeau: There is programs that are mentorship programs and employment programs throughout the province now in small pieces. I know I had worked one in Frontier School Division, but they're small. They're very limited in scope, limited in numbers, et cetera.

This pilot that we're working on now, we're developing it now. It's in process of being developed. The discussions with the sector councils have, basically, finished so that they're now moving forward on their part of it. Discussions with schools are ongoing. So, when I say there's a pilot, it's in development, but it's also taking into consideration what present schools are doing, and so that's always interesting. And there's a whole variety of mentorships, everything from Big Brothers Big Sisters, to school divisions, to individual schools, and so we want to take all the positive factors into account.

Mrs. Rowat: So this pilot will be based on—the comments made by the minister, Mr. Chair, are that this pilot will be in place this spring. The evaluation tools and what—the expectation of what this pilot will do are not complete; that's still fluid. I would hope that you're going to want to know what your target outcomes are before you roll out a significant project such as this.

I have two teenagers, 17 and 15, so I totally get the concept of mentorship and ensuring that, you know, they are focused on their future. So the concept is fine with me. I have no issue, and I think any parent that has children understands that that's an important tool. However, I want to ensure that the programs that are going to be implemented within the province with this amount of money, with this amount of investment, actually are going to be—have positive outcomes, have some benchmarks that are going to be followed.

We have an unbelievable career counsellor in our school. We're blessed within our school. She's amazing, and I do know that that's not, you know, an asset that every school has, you know, and I believe that whatever we can do to encourage and support students to move forward, it's an overwhelming

position to be in as a young person. So I'm interested in this. I'm very interested in making sure that it is successful. I'm a true believer in evaluation and outcomes. The minister would know that based on my past give and take with the minister and the department. So I will be following this very closely and looking for it to be as successful as the minister says.

* (11:00)

With regard to Healthy Child Manitoba office, again, that's in the Estimate books. We'll be going through just some of the line by line there on page 45. With regard to those budget items, there's an increase in expenditures—or other expenditures, \$73,000 in supplies and services and an increase in other operating of approximately \$41,000. Can the minister give me some background on those expenditures in detail, what those supplies and services increases would be and what those operating expenditures would be?

Mr. Rondeau: I'd like to thank the critic, and, by the way, I fully agree in the evaluation and outcomes.

And that's why I gave a suggestion that if you have certain benchmarks that you want to see that are definitely included—I know I have some, which is focus on the future, an actual plan, increased attendance in school, benchmarks on stay-in-school programs and making sure that the retention and focus is better. Those are the things that I want to see.

If you have actual outcomes that—and you want to talk to your career guidance counsellor at your school and feed into the system as the outcomes, I think this is a non-partisan thing that we can agree fully on, that a kid—a young person, sorry, who has a focus on the future is—you can't stop them; they're focused. A kid that doesn't see the future and doesn't see a plan or where they're going is not good.

So I agree with you. I think the mentorship will be a useful tool if we do it right, and if you want to feed in some outcomes, I'm open to that.

As far as the increased money, I can say that it's for FASD programming, but we haven't allocated the actual specific where it's going at the time of the printing of the Estimates.

Mrs. Rowat: So, the other operating—and I always find that interesting because that seems to be just a—almost like a barrel that you just throw things into—other operating, can you indicate to me what

that category, what kind of things would be considered in—under other operating? There's an increase in \$41,000 in there, so I really would like to just have a sense of what that category picks up.

Mr. Rondeau: It's everything from employee training to computer-related costs, insurance costs, the publications. You know, it's the Other category.

I can tell the member, specifically, one of the things we're trying very, very hard to do, which has been a challenge, is on the Healthy Child, Healthy Baby programs, hitting tough-to-reach communities, communities that don't have daily newspapers, communities that are new Canadians. And that's been a challenge to try to engage those, and so I've directed the department to sort of get more out into the community. One of the things that I really wanted to do is make sure that all people who are eligible for the prenatal benefit get it, and that's hard because it's hard to reach in all communities. And so we continue to do that, and also we're trying to work really, really hard on positive parenting programs and communications like that so that we get people to understand the services related and access. And so I can say that I've given direction to the department to get out there and get the message out there especially in the hard-to-reach communities.

Mrs. Rowat: If the minister can indicate to me what the \$41,000 in other operating has been targeted to, if—is it one specific project like FASD, or is it for various initiatives?

Mr. Rondeau: It's disbursed among all those categories. So it could be training. It is also communication. It's a number of things.

Mrs. Rowat: Under the subappropriation, section 34.3, page 37, Seniors and Healthy Aging, we've seen a 2 per cent decrease in the operating budget allocated to Seniors and Healthy Aging. That's about a reduction of 1.4 per cent of expenditures in the department.

You know, that's a concern. We're seeing an increase in elder abuse. We're seeing seniors who are facing safety issues within their homes, within, obviously, personal care homes. We've seen some recent incidences in the media, and I'm just wanting to know where the minister will be focusing his attention within the Seniors and Healthy Aging portfolio.

With a reduced budget in that area, there's going to have to be some very strategic interest in specific areas, and I'm just wanting to know if the minister

can indicate to me where that interest and support will be, and we'll leave it at that. I've got a few more questions in that area.

Mr. Rondeau: I can tell you where we're focusing on. I can say that I'm very, very pleased with where we've gone with the Elder Abuse Strategy. We have increased suites. We've got a 24/7 hour line. We've got a lot of groups that are talking about, lots of people in the field that are more educated so they identify it and then can take action. I am pleased with that.

As far as age-friendly, we have basically about 72—no, 80 per cent of our communities are now moving towards being age-friendly, which is huge because that means that you have the supports and services for people who age in place, and I'm very, very proud of that. And I'm pleased that Manitoba's a Canadian and world leader on age-friendly.

As far as SafetyAid, I'm pleased the Speech from the Throne has talked about SafetyAid and expansions of SafetyAid. When I was first Minister of Healthy Living way back in 2004, we talked—we instituted the SafetyAid program. It basically goes into seniors' homes and does an evaluation, talks about how to prevent injury, and I'm pleased to see that we've had about a thousand to 1,400 people a year dealt with. And this is really prevention at its best and, by the way, for low-income people the SafetyAid people actually make the renovations that are necessary.

We're continuing to move forward on the in motion and—especially with the senior community, where we get seniors active. We're doing lots with ALCOA and trying to expand healthy living and activity for seniors.

And the final thing what we're trying to do is make sure that we have other departments engaged. So we are now talking with Housing and other departments on housing for seniors, which I'm very, very pleased our province is continuing. I'm pleased to continue to look at home care and move forward that, and we're also looking at other services.

Now, the—in response to the decrease in salaries, I'm pleased that Jim Hamilton, the former executive director, is now working in the university, and I saw him the other day; he's happy as heck. But because we did have a new executive director and Jim was at max, the new ED isn't paid the same. There has been other staff that have left for retirement, or left, and

they've been filled at a lower step because they're starting their careers.

And so I've been informed that there's exactly the same full-time equivalent. The staffing level remains at 10 FTEs, and so it was not a decrease in actual service. We continue to expand services for seniors in this department and in others. It was just a change because people started at a lower step or were replaced and people are starting their careers as ED.

And, by the way, I'd to say Patti's doing a fabulous job.

Mrs. Rowat: But we are still seeing a 2 per cent decrease in the operating budget of—allocated towards seniors and a reduction of 1.4 per cent of expenditures in the department, so, based on increase in funding in other departments, we're seeing this one flat-lined and remaining the same.

* (11:10)

And, again, the minister's talked about home care and talked about senior assisted living and talked about personal care homes. All of these have very, very, very—they're at—they're reading—reaching their max in concerns and needs, Mr. Chair. So when the minister speaks about the things that they're doing, there are still a lot of things that need to be done.

We have people that have been waiting for months to get into a personal care home. We have acute care beds being taken up by people who are needing to get into personal care homes. We're seeing families have to travel up to an hour or two hours to visit family in personal care homes in other communities. We're seeing elder abuse increase. We're seeing, in the community of—within Westman itself we've seen, in the media, you know, requests for more supports and more recognition of the need to have a more co-ordinated effort in dealing with elder abuse in the community.

So there are a number of things that need to be done in this area. So, when I see a reduction in expenditures in this department, compared to other areas, I just want to ensure that the minister is aware that there continues to be a number of things that need to be done in this area. And we need to keep it at the forefront with this government.

So I appreciate that the minister is aware that there has been a reduction, but I also know that he is aware that we're—we'll continue to push for the concerns and the well-being of seniors throughout

the province and we'll continue to monitor how things unfold over the next year based on the expenditures that are allocated for this area.

The next area that I'd like to talk about would be addictions. The minister has indicated that there was—or has, I guess, recently announced or announced in 2008, I guess, not recent, a five-point plan with regard to addictions. And we've seen, you know, the AFM act passed, and that seems to be one point in the five-point strategy. I'd like to just talk to the minister a little bit more about the future of this plan and sort of where it's gone to this point and just how he feels it's rolling out and maybe some of the objectives that he has over the next short period.

I understand that Nicole Laping was hired to create the five-point plan, and her contract finished in the fall, I believe. So I'm just wanting to know, you know, the work that's been done and look at how this government is doing with regard to co-ordinating services. Because that's what we're hearing, is that there's services out there. There's obviously some weaknesses with regard to beds for adults, youth, and, you know, but we also need to look at a better co-ordinated effort not only within the Department of Healthy Living but also how they tie into health-care services and support such as mental health and acute and primary care.

So what I am going to ask the minister is if he would be able to provide me with some of the specific projects that he's been planning to implement or has implemented through the five-point plan, and then we'll go from there.

Mr. Rondeau: First, Mr. Chair, I'll respond to the Seniors and Healthy Aging discussion. I'd like to refer the member to page 37 where, actually, the only decrease was from \$729,000 to \$701,000 on the salaries. If you look at it, transportation remains the same, communications remain the same, (e) supplies and services remain the same, other operating remain the same.

And I would refer the member to the other external agencies, and these are agencies that are out in the community that we work with in partnership, things like ALCOA, the Active Living Coalition—I talked about keeping people active; Manitoba Association of Seniors Centres; Creative Retirement; FAFM; Aboriginal Senior Centre; Transportation Working Group, et cetera. All have moved forward.

The SafetyAid program has increased in this budget. Elder abuse, I am pleased to say that we

actually have a strategy. That didn't occur prior to this. In 2003-2004 it started. We now have a phone line 24/7. We actually have contracts with external agencies that talk to community groups, et cetera. We actually have two safe suites and we actually have the supports out in the community.

So, I actually disagree fully with the member when they say there's more elder abuse now. I think what we have done is we've actually identified it. We've have communications with the federal government, we set up a system where we talk about elder abuse, we talk about the supports, we talk about identifying and taking action, we talk about working with other groups and agencies. And, you know what? I'm proud of that. Why? Because I think it's important if you have a problem, you discuss it, you put it out there and you set up the services and supports. So, I believe that it's sad to say that there has been elder abuse. I'm pleased to say that we have the supports, the discussions, the people out there that identify it, take action and we actually have a comprehensive strategy that takes action.

So, I differ with the member opposite, saying we don't believe in this. We have, and in the whole idea of my department, things like SafetyAid are important. I think we—the increase throughout Manitoba is very, very important.

Now, as far as addictions, I'll tell you where we're working right now. As far as co-ordinating services, I actually agree with the member. We do need to co-ordinate the services, so we're actually looking at centralized intake, we're talking about communication services and bringing groups together, we're talking about having an easier way in. I think that we have jewels in the addictions services, I think we have fabulous departments, and I do believe that we do need the co-ordination and we're working on the centralized intake and co-ordination.

The methadone strategy, we talked about it last year as far as expanding it, expanding services not just in one location. We talked about the decrease of prescriptions. We need to do that and we are—that strategy's moving forward.

We also need to enhance certain services. I was really excited to open up the facility in Selkirk, and I invite the member opposite; it's nice and it's good. I think that's very, very positive.

And I think that we have to continue to work on prevention programs. I'm pleased that we have 57 schools participating in the AFM program.

And so, those are the things we have to do, and I'm pleased we also work with other departments to do transitional housing, to do supportive support, and I think we also have to continue to work with external agencies to continue to strengthen the system.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson.

Mrs. Rowat: And, yes, I've been to Selkirk. Actually, I've raised questions in the House to the minister, actually, with regard to the Selkirk facility and encouraging the government to get moving on that facility, and agree that it's amazing facility. And when you drive up the lane and see the trees and the serene environment, what a better place to be than—at a site like that, where you can actually feel the positive environment just from driving into the yard. So I agree that that site is an amazing addition to our province.

But, with regard to a number of other things, there are several goals that were identified by the minister, and I guess what I'm looking for is a timeline on some of those initiatives. The minister has indicated that centralized intake—can the minister indicate to me—I know that's a—that was federal dollars that were allocated to the Province to develop a centralized assessment unit and, you know, good on the feds for doing that, because I think that's a big piece that Manitoba's missing. And it's a—it's an important piece to help unify or co-ordinate the services that are required within our province.

Can the minister indicate to me what the status is of that? Because I believe that the last information I have on it that—was that you were exploring the development of that. We had a briefing; I appreciated the briefing with staff who updated me on some of the things that are going to be laid out with that assessment tool.

So I'm just wanting to know what the status is of that and, I guess, looking at where you're at with regard to provincial standards for the intake and assessment processes for the adult and youth. And then, looking at how the Province is going to be navigating the support intake, province-wide, because it's not going to only be something that's going to be used by Winnipeg or within the Perimeter. It's going to have to be utilized and supported and believed in by residents from all parts of the province. So if the minister can just give me an update on that.

* (11:20)

Mr. Rondeau: I can tell you where we're gone with that. We actually have technology or software package that has been discussed among all the people involved. I think they've actually settled on a technology package which is really pleased. They've been meeting on a regular basis to say how do we do this? How do we communicate between each other? How do we refer? And so those meetings are ongoing.

I think we've settled on a technology package and process on tweaking what they have there. I can tell you that we're now looking at a little bit of a stepped approach. We didn't want to—it becomes difficult to get everybody on board all at once so now they're looking at a stepped approach, and I'm actually pleased that we're looking at moving forward to do this in the very, very near term.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister be a little more specific? Would that be the next three months, one month, six months?

Mr. Rondeau: I would love to be more specific but I can't be because it's not me directing it. What we're trying to do is get 12 external agencies to buy into the system and buy into the timetable. This is one of those things that we want them to work together. So it's not top-down approach, thou shall and here's the timeline. We've asking for co-operation with the 12 agencies, and it's not just 12 agencies in the city. It's all across—and I agree with you—and we also actually have to make sure that the technological thing works everywhere in the province. That means Internet connectivity, making sure that technology's available.

I can tell you that we want to start this process as soon as humanly possible. I'm hoping that it will be sometime soon, but again, what we're dealing with is it's not the department saying thou shalt do this by this time. It's like, let's work together to unroll it in the step process that they have agreed to.

And I would like to publicly say thank you to the feds. I know we don't often do this but I'd like to say publicly, thank you to the feds. The Public Health Agency of Canada did step up. We identified that we have some wonderful programs, amazing programs, in this province, but there was no connectivity and discussion and integration. They stepped up. They provided \$2 million to move this forward, and I'd like to publicly thank them.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister spoke about the technology piece or the tool that will be able to

connect. What I'd like to know now is more about standards. You know, you're creating provincial standards for the intake and assessment process for adults and youth. Can you explain to me what exactly that means and what—how you see that unrolling?

Mr. Rondeau: I'm pleased to say my deputy was able to do that. It's going to have a common triage system so that people answers common questions to deal with the emergency system. It'll have common assessments. It'll have a common track list, and it'll have a communication system between the different parties.

Mrs. Rowat: So that I'm clear, so if somebody will call in, so what we will—what the provincial standards for intake will be is determining what type of issues are being identified, then determine what resources are available and that type of thing. So that's a huge process. But this will also help with tracking and identifying where the needs are within the community. So I'm very interested to know, you know, more about that process and actually, as it unfolds, learning more about that type of system that's going to be developed.

Mr. Rondeau: I would endeavour to give you a briefing on it. The trouble is it's not—we're not going to be able to deal with it on Estimates. If you want a briefing in the future, we can talk about bringing you a briefing as the system unrolls. Again, it's not a partisan event. This is something that I expect all governments will continue in the long term, so maybe four, eight, 10, 12 years, God knows.

Mrs. Rowat: And the minister is saying, you know, a timeline, and we can smile and understand that this is a huge undertaking, but we also have so many families out there that are looking for some leadership on this.

So I'm wanting to just put on the record that the minister knows I get calls, as well as his office, and I want to, you know, or thank staff within his department who work with people—families who are desperate for help. And I know, you know, there are many times where—that we are trying to do our best to make sure that families know that we care, No. 1; No. 2, try to help find the resources that are in place, because there are not—they are not co-ordinated. We have—like you said, great services and supports out there; we often don't know what those are or whether they're available. There are wait times, so we have to figure out a way to address that. We see that in

health care; we see that in mental health; we see that in addictions. So we need to be addressing that.

So I'm very interested in—on behalf of the people that we try to help within the province who are facing addictions, families that are trying to help loved ones move through the process of recovery, so we really need to be looking at this and aggressively moving forward on the needs of this.

With regard to addictions services, still, we're looking at, you know, again residential treatment, and just wanting to know if the minister can give me an update on the River Point Centre. I believe that might now be under Housing, but I know that there's still a tie-in to Healthy Living, and I'd appreciate whatever information the minister can provide for me on this multi-agency treatment facility that is being proposed for Manitoba. And I understand it's 2012. If it is going to be in operation prior to 2012, I'd love to hear that as good news, but, you know, again I'd just like an update on that.

Mr. Rondeau: I can tell the member on the intake process, there will be a triage function. There will also be—we will try to work on the system where there is no wrong door; you can come in any door and get referred to the appropriate surface—service, sorry. I agree it will be able to identify wait times; it'll also help people navigate the system. So those are the basic concepts, and we are in total agreement that we need to do this and it will help all Manitobans to have that program. So I'm very, very excited about it, and I'm very pleased that we've been able to move forward quickly on it. So that's that.

As far as River Point, what's happened is that so far there's been—the roof has been repaired. We've got the architects finalizing the schematic design to make sure that all of it's done out. So we've had communications with the different partners that'll be utilizing River Point Centre. We've got a basic schematic design to make sure that everyone has enough space and they're reasonably happy.

And Housing, right now, is dealing with—and I can't speak for Housing, but I think they're dealing with all the renovations and the physical structure. We're actually—have been working with the different partners who will be there to actually say what are—finalizing the service requirements and the actual design of the space that they will occupy to provide services out of that location.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me: Is his department still responsible for the monthly maintenance of that building?

Mr. Rondeau: No. It's Housing.

I'll tell you—did you want to know the services out of there—that we're anticipating out of there?

Okay. Darn, I had the list.

Mrs. Rowat: So, as for the maintenance and upkeep of the building, you're out of the picture on that, but there's another department that is got that responsibility, and I'm understanding it's Housing.

So the dollars that are allocated in Healthy Living are now actually going to be used for what I believe is what it needs to be used for—is addressing the needs of the clients in the province.

*(11:30)

With regard to FASD, that's goal four within your five-point plan, and you talked briefly about having dollars allocated—and I'm trying to remember where that was, but I believe it was under Youth or, no, it was under Healthy Living or Healthy Child, I believe.

An Honourable Member: Healthy Child.

Mrs. Rowat: Healthy Child.

The minister had indicated that you're going to be rolling out or looking at a program, and I believe that there's going to be a strategy, is what the Province has said there's going to be.

Can you indicate to me where you're at with regard to this strategy because it is—my understanding, based on media reports, is that it's a \$10.5-million-per-year program. Is all \$10.5 million going to be used for the strategy, or is that the budget with the community-based programs as a whole? And how much of that money was actually federal dollars?

Mr. Rondeau: I'll start with the strategy. We've actually rolled out a very comprehensive strategy. It's got Justice and Education, all of us, Health, everyone working together. We have the strategy; it's been done. The \$10.5 million, \$12 million that is the actual programs for FASD is—again, it's very, very cross-departmental. It's not just in the Healthy Living Department. It's in Health; it's in Education; it's in Family Services, in all sorts of different groups.

So I apologize because I can't speak to all of them. I'll go through some of the programs that we're funding and—as our part. Now, I apologize to the critic because it is confusing because each department has a slice of this very comprehensive strategy, and, actually, the ministers who—we have a group of western ministers that meet on FASD. It is a fabulous group. We work together; we co-operate; we're moving it forward.

Here's some of the things we're doing. I'm pleased to see in this department we've got the—it says that we have about \$12 million. It's got diagnostic services. It's got programs like InSight, which is to stop FASD. That one was really exciting. If you ever want to check out that, that's unbelievable.

It's—InSight, it's an evidence-based program. It's an intensive case-management program that provides services to women who are pregnant or recently gave birth, who have had alcohol or drug use. It's currently operating in seven Manitoba communities with the capacity to support 240 women at any given time. It follows for people with—about three years. It's an intensive program and then follows them and supports them. Here's the neat thing: Evaluation results—and I know you're into evaluations—show that upon exiting, 66 per cent of women are either using reliable birth control, are abstinent from alcohol and that 75 per cent of subsequent births are not exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. And, in addition, 59 per cent of targeted children are living with the biological family.

When we gave these results to the Northwest FASD Ministers' committee, they were excited. The other programs—and by the way, I'm very, very excited that we have expanded that drastically. We also have things like Stepping Out on Saturdays, which helps parents that have children with FASD and supports the children. We have the family support for FASD. We have Building Circles of Support which is a eight-week parenting information services offered to parents or caregivers of children with FASD. We have some classrooms, David Livingstone FASD classroom, which I've actually seen. It's absolutely amazing, and we have some research going on to see how we can move forward on this. And, of course, there's more diagnostics. There's support throughout the entire province.

So I'm pleased where we went on this. I know when—back in 2004, it wasn't on the agenda. I can

remember the First Ministers' meeting. I think we've gone a long way.

Mrs. Rowat: And, you know, I agree and I believe that, you know, all members within the House agree that, you know, that catching FASD as early as possible can, you know, reduce so much the expectation, the cost through the school system, through the justice system, et cetera, et cetera. So I'm very interested to know, you know, where these dollars are allocated and how they're making a difference within the province.

I'm wanting to know if the minister would just provide his comments with regard to—Winnipeg FASD physician Albert Chudley talked about a national screening system for fetal alcohol effects as well as screening for the risk of maternal drinking. That was an article in April of this year. You know, I think his thoughts are interesting, and I'm just wanting to know if—where the Province is with regard to his thoughts. Because, you know, ideally, prevention is where we want to be, but we need to be identifying.

So I just wanted to know what the minister thinks with regard to the comments made by Dr. Chudley with regard to a national screening system.

Mr. Rondeau: And, again, it's kind of scary because I agree with the member opposite that FASD is—that the prevention is where we want to hit. And a lot of what we're doing is prevention, prevention, prevention, especially in FASD.

It's interesting because we do have a diagnosis network for FASD. There's a difference between diagnosis and screening.

It's interesting that the feds are finally getting involved more into FASD. I think it is a national issue and it should be a national issue. I have tried to, sort of, engage more than just the northwest. The northwest seems to be very, very, very engaged. And I would hope that the feds, all provinces, everywhere, need to be engaged in this strategy, whether it's prevention, detection, screening, and so—

For me, though, my focus continues to be, as much as possible, the prevention and education. I understand that each RHA is involved in the diagnostic network and we would like to continue to move forward. But for me, focus has been prevention and also on working with people who have been identified through the diagnostic network and their

families to make sure that we improve their standard of life and they can be what they can be.

Mrs. Rowat: Just raised a thought. Can the minister indicate to me if he has statistics on the number of FASD children or individuals who are affected with FASD in Manitoba?

Mr. Rondeau: There's just estimates. The difficulty of FASD and FA—is that it's a spectrum disorder. And so, although there's estimates and there's some huge estimates and lesser estimates, we have been focusing not on specific numbers; we've been focusing on (a) the prevention and (b) those who have been diagnosed through our system, to get supports to the families and to the individuals.

So, we haven't been working on the numbers, and that becomes really, really hard on a spectrum disorder, because you may have the effect or you have a large effect or a small effect, and so it becomes really, really hard to measure. And so, for us, we've looked at things like Stepping Out on Saturdays, which works with the kids and the parents to build the capacity and the ability with the kids and their parents, giving them the support and time for the people who've been affected.

* (11:40)

And then we've been working on the diagnosis network, I understand, from Health. You'd have to get all the details from Health—I'm sorry. But, then, also, what we've been doing is looking at the most at-risk populations. And so, here's an example: When a woman wishes to get addiction treatment and they are at risk, we will get them in the door as quickly as humanly possible. That's why I was so excited about the Selkirk facility. It's not directly related to FASD, but it could be, and so it's a big perspective, and so we've been focusing on the FASD through women's addiction, increased capacity and the InSight program, and they seem to be working. In fact, I've—we've had huge interest from other provinces on InSight, huge.

Mrs. Rowat: If other provinces have an interest in how Manitoba's doing, the minister may have this stat. How many children are diagnosed—or how many children diagnosed with FASD qualify for an education assistance or EA in school? Do you have any idea of how?

Mr. Rondeau: Sorry. Department of Education; I don't know.

Mrs. Rowat: I just thought I would ask, just seeing that there's definitely a keen interest and just wanting to know if we can—if we have that type of statistics available across departments.

With regard to FASD, this, you know, what we're finding are that there are increasing costs, not only on social aspects, but also now within the jail system. And I know that there are lawyers and judges who have indicated that there would—they would like to see a screening process for kids in care, as well as kids who are facing, you know, incarceration, whether it be jail or whether it be in facilities for teens. So we're wanting to know what type of supports the Province is looking at to, you know, automatically look for FASD in these types of situations, if there is a program or if there is a movement towards doing that.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chairperson, I understand that there is a program through Justice, youth justice program, but I don't know exactly about it. Again, that would have to be requested through the Justice Minister. The difficulty with some of these strategies is it's not in Healthy Living. We work with others. So, although we—like Health does the diagnostic tools through RHAs. Justice does the diagnostic tools through the youth justice system. We just co-ordinate the strategy and deliver some of the programs.

Mrs. Rowat: I just thought, based on being the chair of the Healthy Child initiative, that you would actually be able to provide some insight on how other departments are moving forward on some of these things. We all want to see better outcomes. So my questions are relevant to what I'm hearing out there, what families are telling me, what teachers are telling me, what, you know, lawyers and—et cetera are telling me. There's a keen interest from the community at large for a better system than what we have in place within the province to address FASD. So I'm looking forward to seeing how the Province moves forward on that and, again, stating that, we have a lot of families, a lot of people in the community that, at large, who want to see some improvements and, actually, some identification of how to move forward.

With regard to wait times with addictions, if the minister would be—and I'm trying to find my information on stats—can the minister indicate to me what the wait times are across the board with regard to adult youth—or adult men, adult women and youth with regard to wait times? If you could—I would like, actually, a breakdown of, if you have it, from

January, February, March, April. I don't know if you'd have April stats yet.

But if you could provide me with the general wait times in those areas, and then also, with regard to the different sectors, in-patient wait times, transition bed wait times. I know that's something that may have to come through correspondence, which you have in the past, and I appreciate it, because it keeps me up to speed on, you know, the challenges and then helps me identify where I could be pushing the minister to be doing something.

Mr. Rondeau: In response to your discussion on FASD, I agree with you. I think we want to continue with the whole spectrum on FASD, and we will continue to do that.

I'm pleased with where we've gone, and I do have to—I would love to be able to comment on other minister's books, but that's definitely going to get me in troubles. So all I can say is that it is everywhere. And so if you had an opportunity to talk to almost every minister, they would be commenting on what they were doing with FASD. I'm pleased to say that it isn't just us; it's across the board, and I'm pleased to see how it's—the strategy's rolled up. And I agree with the member; I think it's a non-partisan issue. We all want more prevention; we want to move forward on the FASD. And I'm pleased how the northwest strategy works, and if you have contacts with the feds and other provinces—I'd like to see this as a national issue. I think Canada could be a leader.

As far as the wait times on addictions, you're absolutely right. I don't have it on my fingertips. I'll tell you, I really believe that the centralized intake will be a wonderful tool to (a) identify, and (b) make sure that there's not duplication on lists because I can't tell you whether there's duplication on lists. So somebody might be on three lists. So I think the centralized intake will be a tool to better utilize the system, get people to refer it to the proper swat or care or treatment package. And so the frustrating part about addictions is I can't tell you whether one person's on two, three, five lists. And so that's the sad part of the system; we will have that. And that's one of the things that I really am looking forward to. And I will make a commitment to get you the wait lists as they currently exist.

Mrs. Rowat: I agree with the minister with regard to, you know, clients being on two or three lists. When you create a list, people are going to try to find the shortest list possible. So, of course, people are going to look and put their names forward on two or

three lists. So a co-ordinated effort, obviously, is a no-brainer with regard to that, and we need to make that happen, again, saying we need that to be happening sooner rather than later.

One area in addictions, before I move on to another area, is one that's really close to me, and that's addictions and the school-based programs. And I want to know: Have you revisited that, and have you, you know, looked at increasing that program within schools? Because, you know, I come from a rural area. I have family that live in the northern area of Manitoba, and we've had this discussion at the table even about the supports that are needed within communities. If you have a 15-year-old who has either a family member who's having addiction issues or they themselves are having addictions issues, if you don't provide that type of support in the school system, they're pretty limited about where they're going to be able to provide or get access to those types of supports.

So I'm—I and I'm, you know, been talking to a principal in one of the communities in—near Riding Mountain—Erickson—and, you know, talked about the need for a program there. You know, he would love to see additional supports available for his youth. You know, he is doing everything in his power to ensure that kids stay in school, to work with the families if he's identifying a need. You know, he's doing everything he can to ensure that they get the best possible options within the school system and within their families. But he does not have the supports available for him through a school-based program.

So I really would like to see the minister, in his response right away, tell me, yes, we're providing additional supports for school-based programs. Anyways, opening it up to the minister.

Mr. Rondeau: And, again, this has been a focus of mine. I continue to try to figure out how we do this better and more and squeeze the nickel to make it a quarter or whatever.

* (11:50)

The program is delivered generally in co-operation with school divisions. We're in—right currently we're in 21 school divisions across the Manitoba. I'm pleased to tell the member, most recently in January 2011, another school—three schools started on-site AFM services. So we have expanded them. And the annual funding is 1.175—almost \$1.2 million.

I can tell the member that I actually talked to the AFM board and—yesterday—and we started saying, how do we—we, as being everyone, continue to roll out prevention and services to kids. It is a priority of mine and we will continue to see how we can deliver it.

I agree with you. I think that (a) you want to prevent a problem. The second-best scenario is when a problem's developing to get at it quickly. We have been trying to do that and figure out how to get it to all schools and all people and actually, we've been in communications with the school divisions saying, how do we work together? Because I think that that makes sense. So it is \$1.175 million. We want to continue it and it has expanded in three new schools—

An Honourable Member: Which ones? Could you name them?

Mr. Rondeau: Oh, sheez, you had to ask that. I don't know. I'll get back to the member on which schools it is.

I know that we've been in discussions with lots of schools. I believe that, if memory serves me correctly—and I usually shouldn't do this—I think there's 57 schools across the province that we're in. That's a lot of schools because we're not in many elementary schools. What we are in is high schools, generally, and I—by the way, I have actually talked to them about how we can work better and we will be in discussions.

If you give me the number of the—the name of that principal or the school division, we'll try to endeavour to follow up to see if there's a partnership we can work with.

Mrs. Rowat: The teacher is Barry Lee; it's at Erickson School and it's in Rolling River School Division.

With regard to the process to track the progress of students and youth who attend meetings and sessions through the school, is there—are you tracking that information because—[*interjection*] or somebody within the department is, hopefully, tracking the progress of students, because we want to make sure—again, there's my evaluation piece. We want to make sure that the programs actually are providing the needs that they are indicating that they are providing, and we need to make sure that if there is a huge increase in need, then we need to be looking at this a little bit differently.

Mr. Rondeau: I just wanted to give a little bit of historical framework. In 2000, we were in 16 schools around the province and now we're in 57. I know we're not perfect. It is expanding; it will continue to expand, hopefully, and we have really, really increased. And the other stat that's interesting is, since '99, the area—in this area of students, it's increased 115 per cent. So we are interested in doing it.

One of the things that's tough, though, is it isn't a cookie-cutter approach. It's something that you have to work with at the schools. You work with the individuals. So I know I was in Cranberry Portage; I knew what AFM was doing when I was—last visited there, and it's very different than in a residential school setting versus a non-residential school setting.

Mrs. Rowat: I agree. We need to be looking at expanding this program, you know, and it's unfortunate that school divisions are having to pick up the cost. I always feel that school divisions are at a budget deficit in some ways and to off-load this type of a program onto the school divisions has probably been part of a challenge at the schools implementing it, because they don't have the dollars. But it's a Catch-22, you know. You need those dollars to—you need those programs to continue to, you know, ensure that there's less TAs, you know, that type of thing, you know. So it's a Catch-22; you run in circles on this.

It would be great if, you know, the program—and I believe Souris where, is my home community, that program was implemented without the school division having to pay the school—pay for the services. It was run through AFM. But obviously the need is higher. There's more schools that are needing it and obviously for a good reason, so we're wanting to see this program continue and expand through—throughout the province.

I have an article here that actually was from the *Metro* that says, St. James schools suspending more for drug and alcohol use. So the minister's backdoor newspaper, you know, he—it's obviously something that he's aware of and is up to speed on, but, you know, obviously, we're seeing even in his backyard that there's a need for more counsellors and a need for a strengthening of the program throughout the province.

So I'm encouraged to hear that they're looking at this. We need to find ways that we can support school divisions, support the students, support the teachers who are, you know, working really closely

with these kids and wanting to make sure that they get the best out of their education and their life in general, because often these situations aren't just based in school; they're based in social environments as well as in their homes. So I look forward to continuing the dialogue on that aspect.

On another issue with regard to youth, teen pregnancies, I have seen a steady increase from years past over the last five or six years that I've been tracking teen pregnancies. There's an increase from—in 2004 and 2005 we see about 150 more students, young teens, facing, you know, the devastating outcome of a teen pregnancy. We went from 1,852 in that year in the most recent stats that I have, so, if the minister has more current stats, I'd appreciate those. But '08-09 stats show we have hit the 2,000 mark, which is just unacceptable. What this does is—teen mothers often drop out of school as a result of their pregnancies and, once they leave schools, often disengage from the education system—at times, re-engage, thank goodness. But at times it's extremely difficult for them to pick up and carry on where they left off.

In my youth, I had one of my best friends have a baby, and thank goodness for supports in the community, including my mom who made sure that this young woman got the support she needed in Winnipeg and then came back and graduated. But that's not always the success story. She's done very well and moved on into society and carried on. So she is just one statistic that shows a positive, but there are so many other teens that just disengage and are lost.

So I really would like to see what type of strategy this minister is foreseeing with regard to teen pregnancy rates. We're seeing an increase, so we want to see some positive outcomes from this minister. If the minister can just comment on that.

Mr. Rondeau: For the first part of the question on the AFM, I agree we need to do more. I think we've gone a long way since 2000 with—from 16 schools to 57, which is a 300 per cent increase. And I think we need to work in partnership. I think it's one where my ministry continues to work in partnership with everyone, whether it's in schools or school divisions or whatever.

One of the things I've learned is that if you can get a partnership where the schools believe and will utilize the service and they believe in the service, they'll utilize it better. So we will continue to expand schools. We did three more this year. And a 300 per

cent increase, although it's not perfect, it's not bad since 2000. And 115 per cent increase in the money, and the AFM—and I did chat with the board about how we can continue to improve it. Not perfect, but it's moving. And I agree with you because it's not only just the prevention, it's actually the dealing with kids early, and I think that will make a much better future for all the kids. So I agree with the member there.

As far as the teen pregnancy issues, I will endeavour to get you the stats, the current stats, but they're from Health. And the reproductive health and wellness in young people in Manitoba is really important to us. We have implemented some teen clinics. They focus on 13- to 18-year-olds, and we're looking at how we can move that forward. And I think that what we want to do is—we actually are working through partnerships with multiple groups. And I think it's not just us; I think it's Health that has to work with it. So I understand the WRHA, other RHAs are involved. Teen clinics have been out there, and we have expanded teen clinics.

* (12:00)

And we also want to work with Healthy Child Manitoba to make sure that if there is a young mom that is pregnant and is delivering, that we have the best possible outcome. That's why the Healthy Baby program becomes important. That's why the Prenatal Benefit becomes important. That's why Triple P becomes important. That's why all the information sessions out in the community become important. So we want to make sure that it's an integrated approach to teen pregnancies and young children, and so we'll continue on that.

One of the objectives in the department is the whole system on sexuality and making sure that people have healthy sexual practices. And part of that is trying to avoid teen pregnancies and making sure that if that happens, they have a best possible outcome for that child and the mother.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what type of dollar allocation he has within his department towards teen pregnancy initiatives? Do they have an advertising budget? And that type of thing.

Mr. Rondeau: We do have a specific line for teen clinics, which is in my budget, and that's \$300,000.

Mrs. Rowat: What is teen clinics? Is that a—that's that line? That phone line? Or is that—

An Honourable Member: No.

Mrs. Rowat: No. Is that—okay. Can you tell me about it?

Mr. Rondeau: The teen clinic program is a program—Healthy Child Manitoba funds six teen-centred primary health-care services: Elmwood Teen Clinic, managed by WRHA; Access River East; St. John's Teen Clinic, managed by Mount Carmel Clinic; Flin Flon, The Pas and Cranberry Portage Teen Clinic, managed by NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority; Selkirk Teen Clinic, managed by 'internate'—Interlake Regional Health Authority.

Healthy Child Manitoba teen clinics operate on the core principles of confidentiality, accessibility, harm reduction and cultural responsiveness.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm interested to know, you know, what type of strategies are being implemented, because I believe in '08-09 we had close to 900 teen pregnancies identified in Winnipeg alone, so that's almost half of the population. So I'm encouraging the minister. The minister would not have the stats for '09-10?

Mr. Rondeau: I don't have the stats at my fingertips. I don't know whether we maintain them or Health maintains them. I can get back to the member on that.

Mrs. Rowat: Youth suicide, another area that is seeing a disturbing trend of increase again this last year. I'm looking at the graph in the Children's Advocate's annual report from '08-09 and '09-10 and seeing a significant increase.

We saw a huge increase in '04-05. When I was the critic for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, we had a strong dialogue with the minister responsible in that area, because a significant number of the suicides were on-reserve or Aboriginal youth.

What we see is a concern again that in 2009, and I'm quoting right from the report that the office of the children's—OCME, office of the Children's Advocate of Manitoba has reported 21 suicides in 2009, and that is a concern, because I believe that what we're hearing is that there is a strategy, there's discussion with at-risk groups, and there seems to be an increase in suicides of youth. And, obviously, prevention is paramount when we're looking at youth who move to that helpless level of feeling that there's nothing worth living for when they're—what we're finding, at 13 to 15 years of age is an increase in the number—or the age of children taking their own lives. And I believe on record they're as young as eight years old.

So, obviously, this is a very serious concern. If we're seeing an increase in numbers, we need to be addressing it and aggressively. We need to be identifying the root causes and moving forward. So I'm just wanting to ask the minister, you know, if they could provide—if he can provide me with what his department is doing with regard to this very serious issue.

Another point I want to indicate is that we seem to be seeing an increase in women or girls taking their lives over boys and that seems to be a switch in trends. So I'm just wanting to know if the minister can provide me with what exactly he believes is being done to address this, which I feel is a very concerning situation.

Mr. Rondeau: I agree with the member. It's very, very important to deal with. It's, again, another file that we work with multiple partners to deal with.

I'll tell you some of the programs that we're dealing with that hopefully will make a difference in this. The first one is Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy. We didn't cut this program. We continue to support this program very aggressively, and it expands empathy, reduces bullying, understands—builds—in very, very young people it builds the fact that people can look at and understand where the other person's coming at, and that's a fundamental long-term process by which we're going to have people's behavioural change.

Next one is the Triple P program, which is providing families and people support, and that's delivered everywhere in St. James. I know the school division's very, very involved in delivering programs that deal with issues with young people and how to deal with it, communications with teens, et cetera.

Families First program does make a huge difference in suicides because it's again building capacity, the whole recreation and activity program because it's keeping people busy. That makes a difference. Grants to organizations like WASAC, Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre—huge, because kids can shine.

We have lots of programs for employment at Youth at Risk and keeping kids busy and active and engaged. That makes a big difference because then you have people who are there that are supportive. The Boys and Girls Club grant fits into that, the mentoring program fits into that, and I dare say that almost everything we do, even as far as addictions, fits into that by being proactive.

So I think that a lot of what our ministry is about deals with providing the supports for a kid to thrive. I think it provides an opportunity for people to be supported, and I also think it's where people can sit there and shine, where they feel an important part of the community.

And, finally, we're trying to support the individual and the family unit and even going so far as saying, okay, how do we—through this mentorship program or support to Big Brothers, Big Sisters, et cetera, how do we grow that kid so that if the family is needing support, we support the family, we support the kid, we support everyone that we can to build community.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me what—if he has the results from the SOS evaluation that was supposed to be released in 2010? SOS is the Signs of Suicide program. It was developed in the USA and according to the Healthy Child annual report the results were supposed to be released this year. So I'm just wanting to know if that's available.

Mr. Rondeau: I am not exactly sure where that evaluation is. We are part of the Reclaiming Hope strategy, and we are involved with other departments in this. I will see whether we have the evaluation and where it is. I do know that the whole issue of youth suicide is something we address very seriously across all departments.

* (12:10)

Mrs. Rowat: And I believe that we're going back into Estimates on Monday. I'd really—if you can provide me with an update on where that report is, on Monday, that evaluation report, especially with what we're seeing, an uptake in suicides in our province. I think we need to be up to speed and ensure that the evaluations are coming forward.

With regard to the enhanced Telehealth capacity that was announced in 2010, have those evaluations been released? It was stated September, 2010, that there would be an ongoing evaluation, an outcome assessment, to look at the effectiveness of the program. It was reported on in a—the *Lac du Bonnet Leader* article of September, 2010. So, I'm just wanting to know if the minister knows much about the pilot program, Reclaiming Hope initiative, and whether that evaluation, if he's involved, or if he knows where that is at?

Mr. Rondeau: Again, although we're a part of the suicide prevention strategy, the Telehealth evaluation would fall into the Health purview.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Chairperson, we'll keep going here. It's—time is moving. I do want to get into Triple P and talk about that program. The minister's referenced it a couple times, and I would like to just get an update on where you're at on that. I know that Triple P parenting was introduced about six years ago, based on what I've read, and I guess I'm just wondering, overall, how much money has been invested in developing and delivering the program in Manitoba?

On the website, Triple P says it's an effective, practical approach to raising children that emphasizes the positive. Can the minister tell me, after five years of implementation, how the Province is measuring Triple P's effectiveness?

Mr. Rondeau: The Triple P approach is an evidence-based program that's rolled out across the world. So, we're actually not evaluating the program itself, because that's been evidence-based, it's been rolled out through Australia and other places. The actual outcomes of the program have received merit. They've been evaluated in other areas. So what we're doing is measuring the rollout here in Manitoba.

The way we work with it, is we have the—we're training people who work with the families in different disciplines. I can let the member know that, to date, over 1,300 practitioners have been trained and accredited to deliver Triple P throughout the province, in more than 200 partners' agencies. Training continues to be offered to practitioners in all sectors, including health, social services, education, early learning and child care. And this, sort of, fits within the whole healthy babies, addiction prevention, strengthening families, the whole idea about suicide prevention. So it's a comprehensive program, across government, that supports kids and their families.

Mrs. Rowat: But, again, this program has been in place for five years and we're seeing an increase in youth suicides, we're seeing an increase in teen pregnancies, we're seeing an increase in youth smoking and addictions. So, I guess what I'm wanting to know is, how is the Province measuring Triple P's effectiveness locally? It is a program that is used in Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, but what I want to know is, it's a program that's been in place now, in Manitoba, for five years. We've spent a significant amount of money training practitioners. We're seeing a—you know, obviously, the capacity for practitioners is in place. We have gone from, I believe, last year you told me there were 900

or-practitioners based on a recent article on Triple P. There's now 1,200, so obviously the capacity for practitioners is there, but what we need to know is how is this program working in Manitoba. Based on what we've covered earlier today, we're seeing that there's increases in a number of key, critical health issues, social issues within the province. So I guess I'm just again going to ask, how are we determining the effectiveness of this program within our province?

Mr. Rondeau: I think what we have to do is, because it's an evidence-based project and program and it has been measured, the outcomes have been measured, that's where we're going for that. So the program has merit. It does make a difference.

As a former educator, I know that prevention is very, very difficult to measure, because if I prevent you from falls, I know that SafetyAid makes a difference. Why? Because we do a thousand people's-seniors' house, so we make sure that they don't have these scatter mats that they slip and fall and break their hip in the bathroom. We do not have a number of people that we can predict that will fall. So we know that the program makes sense. We know that it's cost effective but we don't have-just because I prevent a certain thing from happening, it's very, very hard to measure.

I do know that the population has increased drastically in Manitoba, by about 20 per cent since '99, so, yes, there are increased numbers. There's increased population. I think what we always want to do is we want to make sure that we have a strategy that does prevention in the broad base and that means that we're working with young people and young families. And, you know, it's very, very tough to say that we have saved or changed certain behaviours with certain number of individuals.

I do know that we have more retention in high schools. I do know that we have some very, very good resilient programs and I do know that in St. James Assiniboia, when I've checked on the Triple P programs when I've seen parents there, they say they're valuable because they're learning and they're learning how to work with their young people, and so I think that's where we go.

I do know that now there's 1,200 people. I do believe that there's good programs out there, and if you want the statistical evidence of the Triple P program from other areas that have evaluated it, I'm sure that we can access the fundamental beliefs of

the program and the evidence-based results of the program in other jurisdictions.

Mrs. Rowat: No offence, Mr. Chair, but we-our jurisdiction is Manitoba. He talked about evidence based- right, evidence based. We're seeing an increase in pregnancies, 150 in the last five years; we've seen suicides increase within the province in the last year significantly again. So what we're saying is if it's evidence based, what I'm seeing, based on the evidence within our province, is that we're seeing an increase in these situations and in these social aspects. So the minister, you know, indicates that it's making a difference, that it is cost effective. I want to know how he can justify that. I need to know how he is justifying that it is making a difference, that it is cost effective, when evidence based, within Manitoba, we're seeing an increase in so many areas of social challenges.

Mr. Rondeau: I look at it this way, Mr. Chair. I know, statistically, a certain amount of seniors will slip and fall in bathrooms and scatter mats. I know that we deal with a thousand houses, over a thousand houses, through SafetyAid program. I know that we removed the scatter mats and we fixed the carpets and we make sure there's deadbolts and all this. I cannot tell you absolutely the number of seniors that we prevent and falling and breaking their hip and knee, but I know that this happens, that we actually have prevented injuries and made places more safe and secure.

* (12:20)

I think that when you do early interventions, the Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy, the program has been in other jurisdictions longer, and I believe that it does decrease the amount of aggressiveness, amount of bullying. It does make a difference. My belief is that if you measure the outcomes in 30, 50, 100 different jurisdictions, I believe that the same results would follow in Manitoba. I don't think that that's that different. I believe that humans do have an effect.

So, whether we're dealing with individuals on a teen clinic or whether we're dealing with activity for in motion, I know that, when we give grants and people start walking more and they're more active, when they're eating better, that it does have an effect on diabetes, These are the things that I believe, and I believe the average Manitoban believes that too. That, if you're eating better, you're exercising better, and you're-the amount of activity you have in the province goes up and you're getting more food

programs and cheaper healthy food out to people, that makes a difference. I cannot measure how long that delays or prevents diabetes.

These programs, Triple P, has been studied in multiple jurisdictions. They do have effects. The difference is that the input on the professional, when they deal with the family, when they deal with the individual, has individual effects, and I know that there's issues. That's why I believe that we need to continue to deal with prevention, and I think that this department's important—I believe that it's important. Our government does believe in prevention, and I'm pleased that I'm back in the ministry because that's what our purpose is.

Mrs. Rowat: And, again, I just don't see the—where the minister can say that this is making a difference and it's cost effective, when evidence-based—like defend that, I guess. If it is happening, if it is making a difference, I really would like to see the evidence-based evaluation on that. We don't have an evaluation. The report that was provided to me last year was based on a practitioner's evaluation from 2008. There's nothing current, unless there's something the minister can share. But I see nothing that is current in showing that the program that has been in place for six years, that has cost a significant amount of money is, actually, making the difference, and I've asked for that type of information and I haven't received it. So I, you know, I'm not saying that the program isn't working. What I am saying is that I don't see anything to prove my concern with the program as being anything other than that.

So, you know, I look forward to the minister providing me with some type of information that he can show me that there is an evaluation process happening, that he can provide me with those results from that process because the program is expanding. Obviously, we're seeing a significant number of people being trained. The capacity in that aspect is transparent. But what we're hearing and seeing are people—programmers—practitioners, who are just not offering that service, where, what I'm hearing is places like Klinik, and that's based on—what I understand is they have trained practitioners. But they're not, to my knowledge, offering the Triple P program out of the clinic, and that's what I'm hearing from people within the industry.

So, if people are being trained to be practitioners, and we see a significant increase in the number of practitioners not offering Triple P, then that is a concern. So, again, what I need to see, if

they're increasing the trainers, we need to know if they're offering that program and in what way they're offering that program. If they are not offering that program, why are they not offering that program and we need to address that.

Because I believe that what we're seeing are a number of people who may have been trained who are just not utilizing the program, and some within, you know, some practitioners that are out there are indicating that you see a lot of advertising, you see a lot of promotion of the program, but not a lot of pickup in people actually accessing this program.

So, Mr. Chair, I need, I guess, from the minister some assurances, some type of, you know, evidence-based—and those are his words—evidence-based outcomes that are showing me that this program is actually making a difference to—for—based on—and, again, his words—in a cost effective way for Manitoba families.

Mr. Rondeau: To give you a—Mr. Chair, to give the honourable member an idea of the use of the program, during the course of an eight-week period, approximately 700 phone calls were received at the Healthy Child office from both members of the public and practitioners, seeking more information about the Triple P program. They desire—they indicated the desire to enrol in the Triple P program. In addition, a significant increase was seen in the number of visits to the Triple P website, and basically it gets about 3,000 visits a month.

I then think that—I don't know that every single hit on the website actually had a huge effect on each individual, but I think the cumulative effect of 700 phone calls and 3,000 visits per month does make a difference, because these are people who say, what are the resources out there? How can I—I need some resources. How can I access the resources? And then those people then can access the resources in their community to help them. And so these are 700 calls in eight weeks, 3,000 visits a month to the website that are accessing information on parenting, parenting skills and issues that they have. And then I would assume that they follow up. I do not track each individual.

But the other thing I have to let the member know is that St. James school division, which delivers some of the Triple P programs, when they're talking about programs on living with your teen or dealing with kids that are out of control—but there's different way they phrased it—parents are there and they're attending those workshops. And when you

have professionals who refer people to the services, that's what we want.

And the interesting thing about Triple P is that they may have general information services. Then they go to specific information services, and there's a hierarchy of services depending on need.

And so each one of those calls get referred to people who then have a system of delivery, of supporting those individuals. And that's what it is; it's a system of supports to individuals and families.

Mrs. Rowat: But we don't have any statistics that show where those people go from that website. They may be just looking at the website for research or whatever. There's no indication, you know, how many parents are utilizing that program. You know, that's the kind of stuff that we really need to see outcomes on—how many parents are actually utilizing this program? The practitioners that are actually offering the program, where are they offering this program 'fum'—from?

We understand that it is a program that you cannot charge for. How many, you know—can you confirm for us that all those 1,200 practitioners are actually offering the program without charging fees? Are you tracking that in any way? You know, there's a number of things that are out there, and I guess we'll explore that further on Monday when we come back into Estimates.

But those are some of the questions that I have with regard to the program. There doesn't seem to be a co-ordinated effort in determining, you know, the capacity for—beyond training practitioners.

Can the minister indicate to me—I guess what I need to know now is recently we've seen—I guess it was a FIPPA that indicated there was \$446,000 spent on Triple P advertising in January, February and March. Can the minister indicate to me, you know, what this will be—what this was used for? I've seen the bus banners, but I'm just really concerned about that amount of money being spent for Triple P, and I'm wanting to know if the minister's actually going to be measuring the impact of that campaign ad. That's a significant amount of money, \$500,000.

Mr. Rondeau: I can endeavour to get the member the amount of hits on the website during that campaign and the phone calls that we received.

One of the things—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

CONSERVATION

* (10:00)

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 Conservation. As has been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Thanks to the honourable minister's colleagues for allowing me to ask questions, and my apologies for being a couple of minutes late. I had two more highways out there that are being cut this morning, so we're dealing with some emergencies on 259 at Virden, and just got off the phone from Mr. Ashton's department, so thanks, Mr. Minister, in regards to that.

I guess, I just wanted to move quickly through a couple of areas if I could here, I guess, in the next little bit. Yes, we've—there's a bit of—some of the area that I want to cover is just—I think we've pretty much covered some of the other areas. The minister was going to get back to me in regards to the ads for Pimachiowin Aki—right—pardon me, Corporation. But I would—I just wondered if he has any numbers on that that he can provide me. Okay.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Minister of Conservation): No. I don't have them as yet, but we will provide them to the member, as I indicated.

Mr. Maguire: The minister's indicated he's got about \$800,000 to put into the moose strategy—

An Honourable Member: That's right.

Mr. Maguire: And he's—appreciate that. Can he just indicate if that's new money or where he's—what part of the budget he's got that from or is it—

Mr. Blaikie: It's new money and it's in the budget that just passed.

Mr. Maguire: And the—I know the minister's announced the five staff, two biologists, a couple of—three, and, so, is that going to be an ongoing expenditure each year then?

Mr. Blaikie: These are permanent positions—have been created.

Mr. Maguire: Part of the department's long-term strategy then, I guess, to address the issues, like the

management of—I've been in the area as well, and to look at some of the roads, and that sort of thing, and the logging roads and different things, Mr. Minister, will this be part of that whole overall strategy of how the \$800,000 will be used for some of the people in that area and—personnel, I should say, in that area? And I guess before I get off or leave that one, I just wonder if he can give me a time frame as to when those five positions will be filled.

Mr. Blaikie: With respect to the positions, the five new positions, we're in the process of recruiting for those positions as we speak. So that's something—we hope to fill those positions as soon as possible.

And with respect to your question about roads, I mean that's all part of the strategy. There's no one element of the strategy that's going to succeed in and of itself. We have to look at everything, questions of access which have to do with roads.

We already closed some roads in the Duck Mountains and we've closed roads on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, Happy Lake Road. We have to do this sometimes in consultation with First Nations communities, but even people who before were against the closing of roads are now for the closing of roads because they realize that access is one of the elements of the decline in the moose population.

So, yes, we—limiting access is part of the moose recovery strategy and people will be—when we actually close a road we have to contract with somebody to close the road. That's not something that the people with the—that fill these five new positions will be actually doing themselves, but they will be doing the work associated with making the decisions that we need to make with respect to access, with respect to predator management, with respect to everything that's part of the package.

*(10:10)

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I've seen some of the results. I didn't see the bulldozers myself, but I saw the results of the bulldozers and some of the closures, and it certainly will impact vehicles getting in. A lot of the locals tell me that there's, you know, a chainsaw and an all-terrain vehicles still get around it and go. And I, you know, I sympathize with that, and it's a difficult thing to do. So I think I appreciate the fact that the NROs are in there and working together. Sometimes it might even be a difficult situation to send one person into a situation like that. I think they'd be better to be working in pairs and appreciate the new personnel to get in and do those things and

give them the authority to be able to, you know, find some of the people that are involved in some of those areas as well, if that's the case.

And I just wondered what kinds of plans that the minister has or the department has in regards to continuing moose surveys in that area of—for not only this year, but over the next four or five years.

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, I mean, part of the \$800,000 is for increased surveys, not just with respect to moose population itself, but also with respect to predator populations. So there's an element of the new money that will be spent on increased aerial surveys, which are expensive for obvious reasons. And it was certainly a felt need to have more information, to have more surveys, and that's part of what the \$800,000 is about.

I might add that in respect of all of these things, we will be working, you know, with the moose advisory committee that we've set up, which has people from all stakeholders from the trappers, to the Wildlife Federation, to the Moose for Tomorrow group in Swan River, and various others, First Nations communities that are on the moose advisory committee.

I think all in all there's about \$190,000 allocated for the new survey work with respect to moose themselves and predators, particularly wolves.

Mr. Maguire: Yeah, before I—I was just going to ask a question on the wolves as well, but the two biologists that are—be in that area, what will their role be and where will they be located?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, one will be located in the—in where—I don't know exactly where they will live, but they will be located in a place where they have easy access to the Duck Mountains and work in the Duck Mountain area, and the other will be on the east side. So one on each. But on the NRO side, we've got two new ones on the west side and one on the east side.

Mr. Maguire: Thanks, Mr. Minister. The wolf population is a problem in some areas, and certainly in those as well, and I wonder if he can provide me with any kind of an update. I know that they did surveys there in January, I believe, this—on the moose and the ducks and the porcupines at least, anyway, and surveys prior to that in the east, from what I understand. And I wonder if he can provide me with information as to—I mean, we've seen some of the results of the moose numbers, but what about the wolf population as well?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, there were surveys—some survey work was—I expect a little was done in the fall and some done just done in the most recent winter, and that data is being compiled and analyzed right now. And it's on the basis of that that I hope to be able to make an announcement very soon as to how we intend to—shall we say, I think the in language these days is to incent people to go out and hunt—not hunt but, rather, trap wolves.

So we are looking at, and I've made it clear on a couple of occasions when I was speaking about this in various venues, that that's part of what we're looking at, is making it worthwhile for trappers to go out and trap wolves. Because right now, I think, they don't get very much for a pelt, with the high cost of fuel and all the other hassles that go with it. And when you consider that often the pelts are actually worthless because, I think, something like 85 per cent of the wolves have mange, if you want trappers to go out and trap wolves, you have to make it worth their while. But we thought that we would be best to operate on the basis of whatever, you know, scientific data we could gather in conjunction with what we're hearing from the people that we're actually working with on the moose advisory committee. There's a lot of anecdotal evidence that there's just a lot more wolves out there, not just in the Ducks or on the east side. There's more—there seems to be reports of more wolves everywhere, or at least in a lot of places.

So the anecdotal evidence is pretty conclusive, but we thought it would be nice to complement that with the—with some survey work we were doing—that's done. I think we should be in a position very soon to announce something. And we do work with wolf exports—not exports—experts, as well. For instance, last—I guess it was last fall, we had a trapping workshop. We brought some guy in from Alberta who's supposed to be one of the best in the business and we invited a lot of young—not just young, but we tried to get a lot of young trappers, because one of the—or people that are possibly interested in trapping, because one of the problems is that trappers are an aging population. It's not something that's being picked up in the way that it used to be.

So one of the things that I did, actually, when I heard that we were having this trapping workshop, and it was one of a community meeting that I was at, actually, that had been organized through the NDP caucus, and somebody came up to me and said, you know, the problem with these trapping workshops,

they're a great idea, but there's a fee, and a lot of young folks don't want to pay the fee. I had the fee cancelled so that there would be no impediment to younger people coming forward and learning about trapping and, hopefully, being able to be part of the solution that trapping represents when it comes to predator management.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks for that, Mr. Minister. Are there—just back to the moose for a moment, are there any surveys that you're doing right now or in the next few months in regards to the level of moose in, I'll say, 13, 14, 18, 26, I believe it is, here on the east side? And maybe the minister could inform me as to what other areas, because those are the only ones that people have come to me to talk about, at least anyway, and I know that they've spoken to you as well. And I just wondered if there are other areas of concern on the moose side that he can elaborate on, any studies and surveys that are presently ongoing?

*(10:20)

Mr. Blaikie: I mean, whatever surveys are to be done in the future will have to be done come the winter, because it's the snow that makes the surveys possible so that you can spot them. But we have, you know, we've had surveys done last year and surveys done, well, most of them done last year, and it was on the basis of that data that we moved to ban the licence hunting in—on the west side and on the east side in Game Hunting Area 26, and in Game Hunting Area 14 on the west side.

So, I mean, we have the data on the moose; we know the moose are low. We know they're particularly low in the Duck Mountains and in the Swan-Pelican. I can never seem to remember that. They're not as low as you might think in the Porcupines, but we are looking at a regional closure, not a—you know, we don't see the point of closing—if you got three areas that are all contiguous with each other, and you just shut down the two, if everybody goes into the Porcupines and hunts moose because they can't hunt them in the other two, we're probably not solving the problem. So the closure that we're contemplating is for the entire region.

Mr. Maguire: Well, thanks, Mr. Minister, and just for clarity, that's exactly what I've announced publicly from what I'd like to see and from our PC caucus would like to see as regional. Because, you know, you're right: you just can't say, well, we'll pick that area, because they're just going to hunt somewhere else.

But it's great to see that the local people—it's great to see the local people in that area supporting it and from all sectors. And I think that's a key, something that—and that's why, I guess, I was calling for a temporary, not a full closure on the whole province, by any stretch of the imagination, because that would still allow First Nations the right to hunt for culture and sustenance in their—you know, in other areas. And I think a big concern there is the—because there was a lot of moose there, people were coming from a lot of other areas into that area to hunt, and so local people of all cultures there want to make sure that there is no hunting, period, for a period of, what they tell me, up to five years. And so that's why we've been calling for a temporary conservation closure on a period of time and not a full one, by any stretch of the imagination.

So I wondered if the minister can—and I'm pleased to hear him—that this—the direction that he's talking. And I wondered if he would still consider, you know, putting something like that in place.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I mean, there might be a confusion with respect to language here because when I say—when I talk about a full conservation closure, I mean a full conservation closure in those areas where we have a full conservation closure. So when I say—and when I say regional, I mean the three—for example, the three areas that I was talking about: on the west side, and on the east side in Game Hunting Area 26. We've not been contemplating a province-wide closure.

The language of interim—we've used the language of interim closure; you're using the language of temporary. Of course, we hope it's interim or temporary, because we hope that it will work, and that, four years from now, or five years from now, or six years from now, or whenever the data is able to sustain a decision to reopen moose hunting, then that will be done. I mean, because it's not a—declare a closure in perpetuity because the purpose of the closure is to recover the moose populations to such an extent that hunting becomes feasible again.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, and thanks for that, Mr. Minister, and I think the, you know, the replacement of the natural resource officers, I mean, some were taken out, not by this minister, but previous times, and I really appreciate the returning of some of the natural resource officers. And so I—that leads me to the only other question that I want to ask in this area, and if the government does these kinds of closures

then, does he feel that the resources will be there to enforce the program that'll be put in place?

And it does make it a little easier if nobody can hunt in those areas, because then anybody caught with a moose in the back of a truck, or coming out of there—out of a park, or something, out of one of these game areas, is in the wrong. And so I just wondered if he feels he's got enough support there to enforce the kinds of rulings that'll be needed to replace the moose population.

Mr. Blaikie: I mean, that was the idea of hiring two new NROs on the west side and one on the east side, so that the—whatever enforcement was associated with whatever decision we made would be more feasible.

Would it be more people on the ground? You know, it still will be—there will still be difficulties associated with it in the sense that if you find somebody in the area, and they don't have—and all they've got is a gun and a hunting licence for something else, you know, actually catching people red-handed, so to speak, or moose-handed, will continue to be something that will be a challenge for our enforcement people.

And, you know—and if—you know, if you have a conservation closure, you're not just going to rely on the people in the area, even if you've added to that complement. I would see us supplementing that—those resources, including the additional resources that we've already put into that area with—you know, we could have an enforcement blitz. We could bring in people from other parts of the province. We've got the canine unit. We've got a special investigations unit. So, you know, we'll be very, very serious about this. People will get the message that there's to be no hunting of moose.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks, and the minister's dealing with the consultations with all parties involved, and the outfitters showed some concern to me in regards to the bulldozing of the roads and that sort of thing, 'cause they still have other customers that come in for bear hunting and other things as well, and so I just ask him to take that into consideration in future concerns as well.

He brought a new program in, as well, announced it here in April, \$400,000, I believe, for the beaver dam program to manage the beaver populations in the province, and I just wondered if—that sort of mid-central western region seems to be

a big problem as well as a lot of the Interlake region. And—is this new money as well?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, just on the last comment with respect to moose and the comment about outfitters, I mean, the outfitters are on the moose advisory committee, so they'll have input in that way. But it just goes to show the complexities of the matter. I, you know, made a decision to close some roads to restrict access which I thought was, you know, a great thing to do for the moose, and the next thing, you know, I was at a meeting where I was being criticized by some of the same folks—why did I close down their road because then they can't get in for bear hunting.

Well, you know, sometimes you can't solve all these problems at once. Trappers were concerned about access, but—so these are all the things that have to be balanced, and that's one of the virtues, I think, of having the advisory committee, so that they can come to some kind of—hopefully some kind of conclusions and recommendations that will be helpful to us.

With respect to the beaver thing, yes, that is new money. When I first became the Minister of Conservation, I think it was \$15 that we were offering to municipalities for removal of problem beavers. We upped that to 20 in the fall, but there was still a feeling that that wasn't sufficient. So we put an extra \$400,000 into the budget to deal with beavers, a hundred thousand for removing dams and another 300,000 because we've upped the compensation, if you like, for the removal of problem beavers from \$20 to \$50.

And this was something the AMM was pushing for, and by all accounts, I haven't heard any complaints about the announcement, I think, except good feedback that this is what was needed and it's been provided.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister just tell me how many have been trapped and how many trappers are actively out trapping problem beavers?

* (10:30)

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I can give the member for Arthur-Virden some historical figures, but it's estimated that we're looking at removing about 8,000 beavers a year through this program, and that's based on a kind of a five-year average. And who knows? Maybe with the added incentive, it might even be a bit higher if there's more in it for people to remove the beavers.

The Problem Beaver Management Program was introduced, actually, in 1993, and to date over \$1.1 million in subsidies has been paid out to municipalities to remove over 75,000 beavers, without seeming to make a dent in the beaver population.

Mr. Maguire: I was going to say, they must be as prolific as rabbits, but anyway.

Deer populations, and just a concern with a number of deer in certain areas of the province as well brought to my attention. And I just wonder if the minister can enlighten me as to the work that he's doing with his department or what kind of work he does with Manitoba Public Insurance in regards to vehicle-wildlife collisions and how they determine, you know, programs and programming for that, and just a bit of an update on any kind of co-operation that they're doing there and any plans and programs that they might have in place for that as well. And programs, I mean surveys or added hunting tags like Killarney, and Killarney was an example, lot of deer in town, and I just wondered if could elaborate on how that program worked as well in January.

Mr. Blaikie: Perhaps I'll start with respect to Killarney. I'm certainly aware of the problem there and actually even consulted with the local MLA on that, and, not surprisingly, you know, reported to me that the community was divided; some people want to do away with the deer, and other people love them and want them around. But in any event, they are and can be a public safety hazard whether people like them or don't like them, and that's why we had a special hunting season, a special deer hunting season around the town in January of this year. And I understand we don't have any numbers, but there were some 200 deer hunters that were—that signed up to help reduce the local deer populations and over 50 deer were actually estimated to be removed. So something was being done on that score.

With respect to working with MPI, we do work with MPI on an ongoing basis to work together to establish, you know, the appropriate signage where people should be looking out for deer crossing the road, things like that, where to locate signs, that sort of thing.

And in terms of where we feel the deer population is too high, we have done things in the past like issue a second tag so that people can take two deer if they like, although we have discontinued that because, actually, the population in some areas is down. And I had a meeting with the Manitoba

Métis Federation not so long ago, and they were explaining to me that their word from the bush, so to speak, is that the populations are down, and that has to do with the nature of the melt, because the snow melts and then it freezes, and when the deer run on top of the frozen, the crispy—they go through, which is great except that the coyotes don't. So they can run on top of the frozen snow like lightning and the deer are vulnerable. And so there's been a lot of deer kill as a result of just the way the spring broke out.

Mr. Maguire: And the coyote populations, as well, have been a big concern to cattlemen. I know it costs—Manitoba wolves as well. And so I just—if we could elaborate on that. I know Saskatchewan had a program of decimation for wolves, if you want to put it there—or coyotes, I guess, last year if you want. Some municipalities in Manitoba have done it on their own again as well. And maybe the minister could just respond on that as well.

But I wanted to ask a question on his department's involvement with respect to the bovine tuberculosis and the impact on wildlife and the livestock sector, and particularly around the size of elk around Riding Mountain National Park, if he can give me any numbers on that.

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, well, the member mentioned the coyote or the bounty program that Saskatchewan had, and, of course, what's also worth noting is that they've put an end to it because it didn't—it cost them a lot of money and it didn't seem to work. So we're not contemplating that.

We are contemplating continuing to work with the producers and others to see if there's other ways that we can address the problem of problem predators, as opposed to just going after the whole population, which can become expensive and not necessarily all that effective.

So with respect to the question about tuberculosis, it's obviously, you know, a very serious concern that's on the—it's been a concern of the government and a concern on the part of producers in the possibly, you know, affected areas. I have some statistics here which may be of interest, and I'll get to them in a minute.

But the—I mean we are working with Parks Canada in terms of the elk population in Riding Mountain. I don't know exactly—I don't have the number here of how many elk are estimated to be in the park, but we're working with the federal government. There was a kind of a glitch there for a

while where the committee that was supposed to be working on this wasn't really up and running. And I think I remember writing a letter or something to the federal minister to say, let's get this thing back up and going. And my understanding is that people are back to the table and back working on it.

But, in the meantime, just perhaps—in 2010-11, inspection of over 325 elk and 875 whitetail deer, mostly harvested by Manitoba hunters, show no signs of the disease. So this is good news. There is some testing still under way. Recent information confirms that one adult female deer, south of Grandview but within the core area, had tested positive for TB, so.

Mr. Maguire: The department used to be involved with things like barrier fencing, and I just wondered if they're still involved with anything like that, Mr. Minister. In—those are good numbers, but I just wondered what other programming and that sort of thing you might be doing and if you're still involved in that one.

* (10:40)

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Chairperson, there was a program that existed to encourage the construction of barrier fences and we wanted to make sure that, in all the relevant areas, that there were these kinds of—there was this kind of fencing, and I think the program was successful in that regard. The thing now is to make sure that the—that fencing is maintained and that it's properly managed, that gates are closed, that forage isn't left in places where it ought not to be. And so we're in constant—not constant but ongoing discussion with producers as to how these issues can be best managed on our side, and on their side, for that matter, so that everybody can have, you know, best practices when it comes to making the kind of infrastructure that we've already put in place or helped to put in place, like barrier fencing, that it actually has the desired affect.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairperson, I guess, just a final question in this area, and there's a number of other questions I have, but I think they can be answered if the minister could just—is it possible to just supply me with the latest copy of the implementation plan for the bovine TB management in Manitoba?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, we could provide you with the current plan, but in the context of also noting that there's a lot of work being done on an updated plan between the province and the federal government, so—but we could certainly provide you with the

current plan and hopefully we'll be able to provide you with the new plan sooner rather than later.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks, Mr. Minister, and just a last question in regards to chronic wasting disease surveillance. Just what's going on in regards to, I guess, how much work in the whole area of surveillance of that and whereabouts are you keying on it?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, I mean, the good news is that we still are a CWD-free jurisdiction, Manitoba. There is chronic wasting disease in Saskatchewan, and for that reason we are monitoring the border. We have some monitoring stations along the border, trying to make sure that we know what's happening along the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border.

And I'm also told that we have measures to make sure that animals that are being—wild animals that are being farmed, like elk, that we don't have them coming in from other jurisdictions, that kind of thing, so—and we have an action plan that's there, should we discover anything in the province, so that we can move quickly to deal with the situation.

Mr. Maguire: The issue of bipole and the environmental issues on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. I just wonder if the minister can provide me with an update on the status of the environmental—The Environment Act proposal for Bipole III.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, we don't have applications yet from Hydro for environmental licensing of the bipole on the west side, but we expect to have those applications, if you like, around the end of June, so—we're not yet seized of the matter, shall we say.

Mr. Maguire: And how long will it take to review those proposals once they're received? How long does the minister expect that to be? What's involved in that process and how many departments or agencies, I guess, are going to participate in it? And I'm assuming that there'll be a role for the Clean Environment Commission in that as well.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, with respect to—I mean, when we finally get the—well, not finally, when we get the applications, it will be the Department of Conservation that is the lead department. We may have occasion to seek information or—from other departments, but it's primarily the Department of Conservation. And beyond that, until we actually see what the—what is asked for in terms of environmental licensing, it's very difficult to say.

Mr. Maguire: Does Manitoba Conservation have any staff doing work solely related to the proposed Bipole III project, I guess, in related to environmental impact statements, or is the work just simply done by departmental staff as required?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, again, I mean, we don't have the applications yet from Hydro, so we'd have—we have no one working on them as yet. But when we get the application, the people that normally work on these kinds of applications will work on them. People in the environmental licensing sector of the department will be seized of this—these applications in the same way that they would be with any other.

* (10:50)

Mr. Maguire: And so, if there is no work going on at the present time from what I hear the minister saying, if they come forward, when does he expect those plans to come forward to his department then, and when would he expect to have the licensing process concluded?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, Mr. Chairperson, as I said, we expect to get the application for environmental licensing from Hydro in around the end of June, assuming that happens. But, whenever we get them, then we would make some judgment then based on what they've actually asked for, as to where we go from there.

Mr. Maguire: And just in respect to the public registry and the documents related to Bipole III project, Mr. Minister, the documents pertaining—I guess, which documents pertaining to the project must be included in the registry and, I just wondered, how's it determined which documents will be included in that public registry as well?

Mr. Blaikie: My understanding is that all the documents will be public, including the technical advisory committee's comments on the licence applications.

Mr. Maguire: And so that would include all reports and correspondence, sort of like from all the provincial departments, but mainly being Conservation, I guess, but of any others as well; it would be included in that as well?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, whatever is normally public in respect of these kinds of processes will be public with respect to that process as well.

Mr. Maguire: Yes. Just wondered if there's some issues around geese populations in urban areas here and the Urban Goose Working Group. And I wonder

if he can just provide me with a status update on that whole area.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, first of all, I've got to do the typically Canadian thing and make it clear that, you know, what's provincial and what's federal. But—so, let the record show that Environment Canada has authority for the management of migratory birds and is the one that would issue permits to property owners to destroy goose eggs and, occasionally, the geese themselves.

Having said that, we have been working with this urban—what's the name of it?—the Urban Goose Working Group, and, you know, we provide advice and assistance and expertise where it's requested, because it is a problem in some areas, particularly where the geese are so frequent and adapted that they're, you know, wandering all over the roads and the exit ramps and other places. I've experienced this myself, particularly around Highway 59 in Concordia, but I'm told that's—where it's been a real serious problem is around Kenaston and around, so there is this Urban Goose Working Group that's been involved in an egg removal program and we've been working with them on that.

Mr. Maguire: A couple of quick—more questions, Mr. Minister.

The mosquito buffer zones—if you can provide me with a discussion, just a quick update on the department's position in reducing the size of mosquito buffer zones.

Mr. Blaikie: Well, our position is that we're waiting to hear from the City of Winnipeg as to what they want to do with respect to the buffer zones. We've made it clear that we're open to possible changes in what the required buffer zone might be, but it's the City that has to seek an amendment to their licence or a change to the rules in this respect, and they, despite being encouraged to do so, I think I wrote very recently to the mayor saying, you know, there were a number of changes that they wanted us to consider in terms of length of notice, in terms of how many mosquitoes had to be in a trap for how many days, exactly that sort of thing. And we were open all those changes, and we—and they have responded in some cases, and we've come to an accommodation with them.

But on the question of the buffer zones themselves and how long they should be, they have actually not yet said what it is they want us to consider. So we await—I'm—and, you know, we would

prefer that we had that information now so that we could have time to consider it, so then we're not considering it in the heat of everyone being—feeling that they're besieged by mosquitoes, because we've had since last summer to have a proposal from the City and we still don't have one.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Minister, the moratorium that was imposed on hog production, Bill 17, a couple of years ago, has it achieved the goals that were desired by the moratorium?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, well, I mean, the purpose of the hog moratorium and Bill 17 was to make sure that there was no more hog barns built in certain areas and it's achieved that.

Mr. Graydon: Can you perhaps explain why you didn't want the hog barns then?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, the hog moratorium was put in place because we felt that to build any more hog barns in those areas, where the moratorium was put into effect through Bill 17, would've been to add an extra nutrient load into the environment that we felt was unacceptable.

Mr. Graydon: Just on that nutrient loading, Mr. Minister, then, is there a testing program checking the nutrient loading coming in at, for example, the US border south of Winnipeg, west of Winnipeg, and north of Winnipeg?

* (11:00)

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, I mean, the questions that the member's asking now are matters that would be under the jurisdiction of Water Stewardship. We wouldn't be conducting that kind of testing ourselves in Conservation, and really, I mean, the question has to do with—it's more of an overall policy dispute between the official opposition and the government on Bill 17 and on the value of the—on the moratorium, you know.

Mr. Graydon: I really—we really appreciate what has taken place as long as we can measure it. We're not opposed to Bill 17 if we have measurements of what's been taking place prior and after. When you say it was—you stopped nutrient loading, but you—I need to know how you stopped it or how much you've stopped. We need to have some comparisons. You had no goal, and you just said, yes, there's nutrient loading or—how did you arrive at the moratorium then?

Mr. Chairperson: Just before recognizing the honourable minister, I do want to remind everyone

this is a discussion of the Estimates for the Department of Conservation. There's not a problem with what you're asking, but it needs to be linked to the Estimates in some way. So I'll give the minister a chance to respond, but just on a go-forward, try to refer to a part of the orange book that you're asking about.

Mr. Blaikie: I mean, if the kind of analysis that the honourable member's looking for in terms of, you know, that he outlined in his question, is the kind of analysis that would be the responsibility of Water Stewardship, so, I mean, I would just direct him to the appropriate minister in that regard and reiterate that this is a larger policy debate, dispute even, between the opposition and the government as to the wisdom of Bill 17 and the moratorium on hog barns. The government—the opposition was opposed to Bill 17 and the government, obviously, was in favour of it.

I don't remember there being any qualifications about, you know, all we need to do is have appropriate measurement and we'd be for it. I think that the official opposition was very much against Bill 17. If they've changed their position, well, then, the honourable member's free to put that on the record.

Mr. Graydon: Changing horses right now, then, and trying to keep in the purview of the minister's responsibility, apparently there was going to be, or there was, an agreement with Parks Canada of doing some elk testing in the northwest and some removal of TB animals in the northwest part of the park. That hasn't proceeded in the past two years. Can you explain why that hasn't taken place?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, well, I did just answer. The honourable member's colleague answered a number—or asked a number of questions about that area of concern, and I did provide some answers in that respect, but with respect to actual removal of animals from the park, I mean, that is a decision that would—that's taken by Parks Canada, not the Province of Manitoba, and it's not something that we have jurisdiction over, for obvious reasons.

Mr. Graydon: One last question. In the southeast there's been an outbreak of liver flukes, and these are related to the deer population and have transferred to the cattle. Been a lot of cattle lost in the southeast, died from these particular parasites. Has there been any discussion in your department on how that can be dealt with?

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, we certainly are aware of the problem that the member from Emerson raises, and there is, I believe, some monitoring going on. But we are talking to other jurisdictions who have this problem as well, and we're trying to see if we can't determine what sort of best practices are as to how to deal with it. Beyond that, I would have to say I'd get back to the member with more information.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairperson, there's a number of areas that we could cover, but we've, I think, run our time. So I would just be prepared to go through line by line.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for that.

Now proceeding with the resolutions for Estimates for the Department of Conservation.

Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$65,555,000, for Conservation, Regional Services and Parks, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$28,016,000, for Conservation, Conservation Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,600,000 for Conservation, Climate Change and Environmental Protection, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,111,000 for Conservation, Minor Capital Projects, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,829,000 for Conservation, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$26,630,000 for Conservation, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Last item for—to be considered for the Estimates of this department is line item 12.1(a) Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 12.1.

Regrettably, we have to ask all the minister's staff to vacate the head table, and we thank them for their time and expertise in this process.

The floor is now open for questions, if any.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, no, not in regards to the minister's salary so much as just once again from our party and myself, the opportunity to thank the staff, most of the minister's staff that's leaving as well and the rest of the staff out in the province. So with that, we can proceed, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for that. Proceeding with our last resolution.

Resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,471,000 for Conservation, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

* (11:10)

This now completes the Estimates for Conservation. For your viewing pleasure, I can inform the committee that the next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

Shall we have a brief recess for staff to assemble? *[Agreed]*

Okay, five minutes. Okay, we will—we reconvene in five minutes. Thank you very much.

The committee recessed at 11:11 a.m.

The committee resumed at 11:18 a.m.

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP, TRAINING
AND TRADE**

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): We'll now reconvene this section of the Committee of Supply. We are now, of course, beginning our consideration

for the Estimates for the Department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Yes, I do, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed, Honourable Minister.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I'm very pleased to present the Estimates of the Department of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, and, with competing priorities and limited resources, my department strives to provide the best possible programming and services to support Manitoba's labour market, businesses and trade development. Global economic recovery is still under way, but Manitoba has fared quite well, enjoying one of the most stable economies in Canada. We have experienced stable and steady growth over the last 10 years. In fact, Manitoba has had the best economic growth of all the provinces over the last five years. The Manitoba Bureau of Statistics preliminary estimates show that Manitoba's real GDP grew by 2.5 per cent in 2010, and the Survey of Major Economic Forecasters projects Manitoba's economy will grow by 2.6 per cent in 2011, matching Canada's growth.

And we continue to have one of the strongest labour markets. In March 2011, our unemployment rate was 5.5, the second lowest among the provinces and significantly less than the 7.7 per cent national average. Last year, we had the second lowest unemployment and youth unemployment rates of all the provinces.

In 2010, Manitoba's population grew by 16,900 persons, the largest gain in 39 years, and a substantial portion of Manitoba's population growth can be attributed to the success of the Provincial Nominee Program. And, according to MBS, the immigration flow of 15,805 persons from January 1st, 2010, to December 31st, 2010, was the best since 1972.

My department places a high priority on developing a workforce capable of meeting the higher and more complex skills requirements of the workforce and adapting to changes in the local and global economy.

And we're pleased to indicate that the 207–2007 election commitment to pay an additional 4,000 apprenticeship seats will be achieved on time in the

2011-12 fiscal year, and in 2011 my department has committed \$4.15 million to support 1,200 additional seats—the largest commitment since '08.

Apprenticeship Manitoba also is proceeding on designating nine new apprenticeable trades; introducing a Capital Projects Tendering Policy to award contracts for capital projects to contractors that are party to an active apprenticeship agreement to provide stable employment opportunities for the growing pool of apprentices; providing vocational-technical education opportunities and initiatives; making several of its services available online to apprentices and employers; partnering with the federal government, the Island Lake First Nations and other interested stakeholders to develop apprenticeship training for First Nations residents for proper water and sewer infrastructure.

Mr. Chairperson, January 18, 2011, Manitoba announced the Tim McLean bursary to support prospective or current Aboriginal apprentices in the trade of motor vehicle mechanic. And by establishing this fund, we honour Tim McLean and hope his—this bursary reflects his aspirations.

*(11:20)

The partnerships between government and provincial sector councils—industry, education and labour—have resulted in the training of over 23,000 people employed—or employed individuals residing in all areas of Manitoba over the past year, an increase of approximately 5,000 from the previous year.

The department is continuing to provide pre-employment and trade-specific training for apprentices and northerners through the Northern Essential Skills Training Initiative and Workplace Essential Skills Training. Together, these initiatives have provided assessment and training for over 5,000 clients and approximately 150 practitioners, a dramatic increase from the 540 workers trained in 2006-07.

Mining industry in Manitoba is projecting sustainable ventures with significant employment needs over the next five years. And the Northern Manitoba Mining Academy is nearing completion and will ensure local access to skills training for these new employment opportunities by providing state-of-the-art training to prepare workers for this challenging work environment.

This past year, the Workforce Development Team assisted over 100 companies with human

resources—resource services. Nearly 1,000 people are or will be taking training as a result.

Employment Manitoba supported nearly 37,000 individuals in 2010-11 to access training and employment supports, though its network—through its network of 16 employment centres located across the province and through partnerships with local community-based organizations.

Mr. Chairperson, Employment Manitoba is also working with stakeholders to better address the specific needs of key client groups, including Aboriginal individuals from Manitoba and new immigrants to Manitoba. In 2010-11 fiscal year, Employment Manitoba delivered services to almost 7,000 immigrant clients and provided approximately \$8.5 million in direct financial support to clients, as well as services delivered through specialized immigrant employment assistance programs located in Winnipeg, Brandon, Steinbach and Winkler.

Our successful PNP for business continues to attract entrepreneurs from all over the world. In 2010-11 there were 67 business investments in Manitoba, with a total initial investment of \$13 million, pushing our total business investments to 404 with \$165 million invested since the program started. As of February 28th, 2011, 234 business immigrants landed with their families in 2010-11.

Small business represents 97 per cent of all businesses in the province and are a key driver of our economy. Mr. Chairperson, in total, there are over 90,000 self-employed entrepreneurs doing business throughout Manitoba, accounting for the creation of approximately one-third of all new jobs in the province. We're committed to supporting small business in Manitoba. With the elimination of both the small business income tax, as well as the general corporation capital tax, Manitoba's even more attractive location for small businesses to set up, expand, create jobs and help grow the economy.

The Business Start Program offers loan guarantees to assist entrepreneurs in establishing new businesses and creating jobs, and since inception the Business Start Program has supported the start up of over 1,100 businesses, creating approximately 2,800 initial jobs and an estimated total investment of \$20 million. Additional support for new business owners is provided by the delivery of a three-day entrepreneurship training workshop to over 750 participants per year throughout the province. To date, over 10,000 participants have attended the three-day entrepreneurial training workshops.

The Canada-Manitoba Business Service Centre, in its 14th year of operation, continues to provide a range of services and supports to all Manitobas–Manitobans via 32 regional offices located across the province and operates the eLearning network, a central video-conferencing unit with 54 external access points located throughout the province, deliver approximately 200 business seminars per year to over 4,500 seminar participants.

Mr. Chairperson, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the total cost of regulation compliance for small business in Manitoba is among the lowest in the country. And building on this, we'll continue to cut red tape, streamline our interactions with businesses and enhance the delivery of existing and new services to private sectors through the Single Window for Business Initiative.

BizPaL, online service that provides information on federal, provincial and municipal regulatory requirements to entrepreneurs who are starting or expanding businesses, has been launched in 56 municipalities, including Winnipeg, Brandon, Dauphin, Steinbach, Portage la Prairie, Thompson, providing access to over 73 per cent of Manitoba's population. In recent months, I've been pleased to attend events launching BizPaL in Manitou, Hadashville, Selkirk, Arborg, Souris, Cartwright, Morris, Thompson, Gillam and Neepawa, and I look forward to visiting more communities in months ahead.

Budget 2011 affirms our commitment to expand the gateway, the Business Gateway, and these are resource centres providing information and referrals for a wide range of businesses. We've established the Manitoba Business Gateways in Brandon, St. Boniface, St-Pierre-Jolys, Notre Dame de Lourdes and St. Vital, and planning is currently under way to establish additional Business Gateways in other locations in the province.

This year, Mr. Chair, we're building on our successful red tape initiatives by–for business by reducing red tape for not-for-profit sector, implementing a single-window approach for funding, creating multi-year funding agreements and looking at ways to pool resources.

Mr. Chairperson, innovation is one of the cornerstones of our five-year economic plan, and new ideas, new products, new processes, new markets and new jobs are the things that build our economy and provide a brighter future for all

Manitobans. And, based on recommendations from the Innovation Council, the Premier's Economic Advisory Council and Manitoba entrepreneurs and business leaders, we're introducing a new five-year, 30-million program–\$30-million program–to support business innovation in Manitoba, the Commercialization Support for Business Program. It will support entrepreneurs and businesses as they move through the process of conceiving, developing and commercializing products and processing and expanding into new markets.

The Province has been an early and significant supporter of the Yes! Winnipeg initiative, and my department has been working closely with the Yes! Winnipeg team in pursuing new business attraction opportunities. We share a strong belief in the value of Winnipeg and its ability to compete with other urban centres, and it is around this fundamental belief that we are able to rally our efforts and to tell the world about the many benefits of locating in Winnipeg and Manitoba.

Expanding our international business is a priority for this government, and we outlined, in both the 2010 Speech from the Throne and the 2011 Budget Address, we need to look beyond our current export destinations to new and emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia, India and China, and through the Council on International Trade, which I co-chair, we're seeking to increase our successful–our success internationally, improving international trade, attracting investment and attracting people as tourists, students and immigrants.

Among provinces, Manitoba ranks well with respect to diversification beyond the US market, with the third lowest dependence on the US market in 2010, with 64.1 per cent of Manitoba's total exports going to the United States. Only British Columbia and Saskatchewan had lower shares of exports going to the US.

In 2010, the Canadian dollar rose sharply against the US dollar, averaging 97 cents US, and this was a significant increase from the 87-cent US level recorded in '09. The pressure of Canadian dollar near par with the US dollar, in conjunction with continuing weakness in key markets, has slowed the recovery of Manitoba exports. In 2010, our exports of goods and services declined by 1.3 per cent after a 4.8 per cent contraction during the global economic shutdown–or slowdown, pardon me, in '09. Manitoba imports increased by 3.9 per cent last year, reflecting the continued growth in the province's economy.

Manitoba continues to work with other jurisdictions to reduce interprovincial barriers to trade and mobility, and we've worked to strengthen the national Agreement on Internal Trade, including an improved dispute resolution chapter, an improved agriculture and agri-food chapter and, most recently, extended coverage of the improved labour mobility chapter to financial services.

We'll continue to work on interprovincial trade barriers this coming year, and my department also continues to work with other governments in the US and other international jurisdictions to foster strong positive relations to advocate in support of Manitoba interests in the global arena. We continue to cultivate close co-operation, communication and co-ordination between departments, the federal government and others involved in international activities.

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

Does the official opposition critic have a few words to put on the record?

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): The opening comments will be, certainly, briefer than the minister's comments. I do—first of all, I should thank the minister for tabling the Estimates book prior to yesterday. It's always nice to be able to have the Estimates book a little bit in advance. So I do thank he and his department for that. It's also obvious that the minister has to put a happy face on a somewhat deteriorating economy here in the province of Manitoba, and I do appreciate the fact that he has to do that as being the minister of the particular department.

But, just as some opening comments, the minister has indicated all of the, what he believes, are the good things happening here in the province. But I should put some things on the record to correct it. He mentioned Winnipeg, certainly, how it's being seen as the economic driving force as of May the 5th of this year, and there's an article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* that says that Saskatchewan and Alberta cities lead the pack in the economic growth leader board, with Winnipeg near the bottom of the city rankings. Winnipeg, actually, of major cities, ranked 12 out of 13 when being compared to cities of its size across the country. It goes on to say, although Winnipeg's manufacturing sector is on the road to recovery due to increasing demand in aerospace industry, construction activity is expected to decline for the second straight year. Just to put that on the record that, in fact, there are some road bumps out

there and some challenges that, perhaps, the minister is putting some rose-coloured glasses to.

* (11:30)

The second article I'd like to quote from is that Manitoba trails on 2010 GDP growth. The minister mentioned GDP growth of some 2.4 to 2.5 per cent. The actual fact is, by Statistics Canada, Manitoba turned in one of the weakest economic performances in the country last year, according to preliminary growth numbers today from Statistics Canada. They posted real gross domestic product, GDP, growth of 1.4 per cent for the province of Manitoba. Now, I do know in the book that they've identified 2.5 per cent as being the GDP. However, that is not the case. It came in at 1.4 per cent, which, I think, the minister should look at and take a serious look at, because, in fact, we are not maintaining the projections that were put into place.

He also mentioned a very, very active mining sector, and I'm sure the minister recognizes that Manitoba's gone from No. 1 place for investment in mining down to No. 9 in the country right now for investment in mining. As a matter of fact, not that long ago, there were 70 junior miners in the province of Manitoba, exploring here in the province of Manitoba. That 70 has been reduced to 39 and going down. So what is happening is there are less junior miners here in the province using exploration dollars to look forward to new developments, new deposits, new mines. That's decreasing quite substantially. They're going to other jurisdictions where it's a more friendly business environment. And the problem is if we can't do the exploration now, then years out, we won't be developing those new mines that are necessary for the economy of Manitoba. And this has been happening on a fairly regular basis under this NDP government.

We also recognize that there are some issues, now, in the agricultural industry. I think everyone recognizes for this fiscal year we've got some issues with water and flooding and perhaps may have as much as two million hectares of crop not being put into place. That is a very serious, serious concern that the minister should have when dealing with not only economy here in the province but trade, which is a very important component of the ag industry.

So, as opening comments, Mr. Chairperson, I can see, as I said, the minister is very happy to wear rose-coloured glasses, but the fact of the matter is that through his department, and certainly the development of entrepreneurship, training and trade

within the province of Manitoba, we haven't been doing very well over the past year, and it certainly doesn't look like that's going to improve over the next year.

So there are a number of questions we would like to ask the minister, and I'm sure he can put some other comments on record that we can refute. Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable opposition critic for those comments as well.

And just for the committee's refresher, a reminder, under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 10.1.(a), contained in resolution 10.1.

And at this time, we would also invite the minister's staff to come join us at the head table, and, perhaps, Minister, once you're settled, you'd be kind enough to provide some introductions.

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chairperson, joined by Deputy Minister Hugh Eliasson and by Craig Halwachs—hope I said that right—executive director of finance and administration.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for that.

One other housekeeping item we need to resolve, and that is how members of the committee would wish to proceed. The usual options: global, chronological.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Chairperson, I do hope the minister will allow a global discussion based on the document that was placed before me with the Estimates for the department. But we do have some global questions that we would like to put to the minister, if he was so inclined.

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chair, global would be fine.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. Thank you to all.

We will now proceed in a global manner with the consideration of the Estimates, and wouldn't you know it, the floor is open for questions.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Chairperson, and I'll try to be brief. We don't have as much time. I will—for the purposes of the staff and the minister, we do have until 12:30 and we will wrap up this Estimates process within that timeline, so I will keep my questions short. If the minister could keep his

answers equally short, we can get through, hopefully, more questions.

First question, obviously, on a global basis, can the minister please tell me the list—or list his political staff within his department of ET and T.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, I have special assistant Tim Smith and executive assistant Cindy Alexander.

Mr. Borotsik: Are those new employees since last year's Estimates?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Smith has recently joined me; I believe it's about six weeks now that he's been in my employ.

Mr. Borotsik: That was Ted Smith, wasn't it, not Scott Smith?

Mr. Bjornson: That would be Tim Smith.

Mr. Borotsik: The full-time equivalents—if you go to page 13 of the Estimates book, we will notice that on page 13 of the Estimates books, there are identified 442.3 FTEs. Last year there were 441.3 FTEs. Can the minister please tell me which department or which section of his department that one employee was increased?

Mr. Bjornson: There was an adjusted vote where an individual who was with federal-provincial Finance moved to International Relations in ETT.

Mr. Borotsik: But it is one additional staff member for ET and T now. Is that correct?

Mr. Bjornson: That is correct with a corresponding reduction in Finance.

Mr. Borotsik: On page 14, just over on 14, you'll notice there's a number of 1,070,000 for staff turnover. It's an adjustment to the salary costs. Is this—it's higher than it was the previous year. Can the minister please tell me how many staff turnovers he's anticipating for 1,070,000, and can he tell me what the vacancy rate currently is of the 442.3 full-time equivalents?

Mr. Bjornson: The staff turnover time is an estimate of the amount of time that a position remains vacant until such time that the position is filled, and the vacancy rate is 11 per cent.

Mr. Borotsik: In going over the *Hansard* from last year, the vacancy rate was running between 5 and 7 per cent. Can the minister explain why there's an 11 per cent vacancy rate in the department at the present time?

Mr. Bjornson: It's primarily because an increased number of people have retired.

Mr. Borotsik: Can the minister tell me what timeline it would be to replace those retirees or, in fact, is there going to be a reduction of FTEs in the department because 11 per cent vacancy rate is fairly high? If you're now operating under that vacancy rate, are you looking at reducing the FTEs within the department?

Mr. Bjornson: We're not planning on reducing positions—the—as you can understand, a number of the skill sets that are required for some of the positions within the department, it can take some time to fill those positions.

Mr. Borotsik: A full 11 per cent—okay, is the vacancy rate currently, as we sit here right now, at 11 per cent?

Mr. Bjornson: As of March 31st, that is the vacancy rate.

* (11:40)

Mr. Borotsik: How many contract employees does the department have?

Mr. Bjornson: We have one contract employee.

Mr. Borotsik: We have 442.3 full-time equivalents, we have a vacancy rate of 11 per cent, and we have one contract employee. Can the minister tell me who that one contract employee is, and can he tell me in which department that contract employee is charged?

Mr. Bjornson: I think the member is very familiar with the contract employee, Mr. Scott Smith. He works out of Policy, Planning and Co-ordination, and he's paid through Financial Services.

Mr. Borotsik: Can the minister identify what page in the Estimates book of—where Mr. Smith is identified?

Mr. Bjornson: If the member refers to page 35, the salary is identified under the salary appropriation on that page.

Mr. Borotsik: And it is identified under salary appropriation? Because I believe it was identified in supplies and services the last time.

Mr. Bjornson: Now it is reflected under the second line, under professional-technical.

Mr. Borotsik: That's been a change from the accounting of last year, so I do appreciate that explanation.

Last year, the minister spent a great deal of time explaining the job function of Mr. Smith as a contract employee. He was to develop a stakeholder communications and information sharing strategy, develop an interdepartmental communications and implemental strategy, redrafting of the Agreement on Internal Trade, chapter 7, labour mobility. He had interjurisdictional work to match Manitoba's occupations to those related in other jurisdictions.

Does the minister have benchmarks as to how that contract is being achieved and the types of successes and progress that that particular contract employee has achieved?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, actually, much of what Mr. Smith was contracted to do on the Agreement on Internal Trade has been achieved, and now Mr. Smith is currently engaged with the recognition of foreign qualifications as one of his primary responsibilities.

Mr. Borotsik: One of his other primary responsibilities as identified last year was that he was undertaking activities related to the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, as you've identified.

Can you please tell me, Mr. Minister, how you would benchmark that and identify the successes within that? Where have we gone with recognition of foreign qualifications? Where are we at currently? Because I do know that there are some difficulties with the recognition of foreign qualifications. In fact, we can probably have a number of anecdotal individuals come forward with their inability to have those recognized, the qualifications. Where is that, at the present time, now that we have a full-time contract employee that's identified as being a specific job function, where are we with that now and how successful it has been and how have those qualifications been recognized?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, as the member can appreciate the complexities of this particular initiative, I know that we went through a very long process under the Agreement on Internal Trade and Labour Mobility to identify—recognize credentials for people trained in different provinces in Canada, and territories as well. And this, of course, is a very complex process, and it is an effort to streamline the process. And there are a number of occupations that have gone through the first cohort, if you will, and they're currently working on a second cohort.

I can tell the member, Mr. Chairperson, that the foreign qualifications recognition framework has identified priority occupations that were identified to achieve the progress by December 31, 2010. And that was architects, engineers, financial auditors, and accountants, medical lab technologists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physiotherapists and registered nurses. And the second for December of 2012, currently under way, includes dentists, engineering technicians, LPNs, medical radiation technologists, physicians and teachers K to 12.

So, there's an effort under way to prepare a national report, but, as the member can appreciate, when you have the 10 provinces, three territories and the federal government at the table, that it is a very complex process indeed.

Mr. Borotsik: So very little has been accomplished over the past year. The—who does Mr. Smith report to?

Mr. Bjornson: He reports to Mr. Alan Barber.

Mr. Borotsik: And can the minister tell me when that contract expires? Is it an annual contract and, if so, at what date?

Mr. Bjornson: December 1, 2011.

Mr. Borotsik: Are there any termination clauses within the contract?

Mr. Bjornson: The standard termination clause, yes.

Mr. Borotsik: Moving on. Can the minister provide a summary of his extraprovincial travel? I know last year we talked about travelling to Brandon and to Thompson. Can the minister tell me where he, and with his department, have travelled extraprovincially, outside of the province and internationally, if possible?

Mr. Bjornson: April 11th to 13th of 2010, the Canadian Provincial Alliance Conference and that was in Biloxi, Mississippi. April 26th to May 2nd, the Futurallia 2010 mission to Poitiers, France. The Forum of Labour Market Ministers meetings—that was in Toronto—and the annual FPT Trade Ministers Meeting in Ottawa.

* (11:50)

Mr. Borotsik: I don't know if the minister has more to add or not.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, sorry, I neglected to mention the Legislators Forum Steering Committee meeting which was held in North Dakota and the annual

meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Internal Trade that was held in Saskatoon. And, as mentioned, I've travelled extensively with BizPaL launches throughout the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Borotsik: Was the Premier (Mr. Selinger) with the minister at any of these destinations?

Mr. Bjornson: No, he was not.

Mr. Borotsik: I have to ask the question: Was Mr. Smith with the minister at all at any of these travels?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Smith, as in Mr. Tim Smith? *[interjection]* No, Mr. Smith did not travel to any of these events.

Mr. Borotsik: Have the wages in the department been frozen? I've looked at the numbers here and obviously the number's the same this year as it was previously, even though there's one extra staff member. Have the wages in the department been frozen, and are there any merit increases for individuals within the department?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chair, there are a number of employees that are eligible for merit increases and that's accounted for, budgeted from within. The net—*[interjection]*

Mr. Borotsik: I appreciate that. And there's a cost-of-living increase that has been frozen, I assume, and I would like that clarification. And there are merit increases. You said there are some of those merit increases that are as according to the collective agreement.

Do we have and can you put a number on those merit increases, both from a staff number as well as a cost?

Mr. Bjornson: We could provide the member with the number of staff who are eligible.

Mr. Borotsik: And the dollar figure attached to the eligibility of those staff members?

Mr. Bjornson: That would be pending performance review.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. I turn it over to my colleague from Carman for a couple of moments.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I would like to ask a few questions about apprenticeships. So if it takes a staff change, I'll speak slowly while the staff is changing and then we can go there.

And my first question would be, I know that there was many announcements about how many

apprenticeship opportunities would be created since 2007. Can the minister tell me how many apprenticeship registrations have indeed been recorded since 2007?

Mr. Bjornson: We are on track to address the number of seats that we had promised to deliver. We are now investing \$11.75 million additional funds since 2008, and our training budget is now over 21 million in order to meet that commitment for 4,000 seats. We are on track to have the additional 4,000 seats.

As far as the number of apprentices, we could provide that number for you, but I don't have it with me right now.

Mr. Pedersen: So you will provide me then with the actual number of registrations since 2007 at a later date, and that's fine. Just as long as you do actually provide that.

So apprenticeship is an ongoing effort. As they go to school, they go out and work and then come back for more training. How many of those positions, since 2007, have completed their apprenticeship program, then gone on to, whether it's journeymen or whatever the status may be within their trade?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, as the member knows, on page 56, it refers to approximately 1,200 certificates of qualification; the previous year there were 1,005. Completion rates vary based on the programs and the individuals.

As the members know, apprenticeship is a combination of academic and practicum experiences, and many individuals that do enrol do complete the programs, but it depends on—the time frame depends on their individual circumstances and a number of variables that would arise in the pursuit of that certification. But as identified by the member himself, on page 56, it mentions 1,200 certificates of qualification and that compares to 1,005 the previous year.

Mr. Pedersen: Is there tracking done on these 1,200—for example, these 1,200 certificates of qualification, is there tracking done as to where those people are working now?

Mr. Bjornson: Once they leave the system, they're in the market and seeking employment as they see fit in whatever trade or profession they would see fit. We don't actually follow that up.

I do understand that some of the training institutions do that on their own, and I would suspect that information is available through those institutions as they assess their programs and the success thereof.

Mr. Pedersen: But you're supplying a great deal of funding for these training. Wouldn't it make sense to at least track these for your—within your own department so that you know where these people are and where they are working or if they are still in the province? Or if—it would—to me it would seem if you track them through your department, and I understand that various trades will be tracking their own people, but you—if you don't know where they're at, why would you continue to throw money in on a training program if you're not getting results?

Mr. Bjornson: When individuals do get a certificate of qualification, they do have a job. They are employed in Manitoba. And, you know, it's an interesting question to ask why we would put the money into training. I think all signs point to the need for skilled trades.

*(12:00)

The sector councils talk to us about their needs and their labour demands and labour market realities. Small businesses say that their biggest challenge is finding qualified employees and we've made that commitment, and we're fulfilling that commitment to increase trade and training opportunities for young Manitobans and actually Manitobans of all ages. I've been to many of the training institutions and seen individuals who had spent 20 years in one career choosing to pursue another.

Recently, at an apprenticeship awards program where one of the apprentices that received highest recognition, the individual that trained him was his son. So this is a very important investment in training in Manitoba and the results, I think, speak for themselves in terms of the number of individuals that are receiving certification. And the results speak for themselves in terms of employment opportunities that we're seeing here in Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: But there is no cost-benefit analysis being done then?

Mr. Bjornson: Our program is responding to the demands of the market. We work very closely with stakeholders to assess those demands in the market and every individual that goes through an apprenticeship program is already involved in an employer-employee relationship, and every

individual that receives the certificates of qualification is working in Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: There are some 60 designated trades and that varies but—and again I'm quoting out of the book—60 designated trades. Is there analysis done on those by your department as to which trades are—there is increasing demand or decreasing demands for apprenticeships, and does that affect your plans—ongoing plans in the coming years?

Mr. Bjornson: There's a lot of input into this particular issue with provincial and—or advisory committees for the trades that provide direct advice to the apprenticeship board. There are 17 sector councils that are engaged in assessments of labour market demand and skill set demands, and there are also national trends and information available to make the determination on what skill sets and trades are going to require attention in the future. So there's a number of different stakeholders who are part of this process to assess labour market needs and how to best meet those labour market needs, and we consult with them on—to that end.

Mr. Pedersen: On page 57 of the Estimates book it says, revise program standards in 10 designated trades. Could you outline which 10 designated trades and if that is indeed happening? Are you revising them? And perhaps—I guess what I would like to know is within those designated trades what type of consultation are you doing with the trades prior to any revision of program standards?

Mr. Bjornson: There were 10 trades that were—as mentioned on page 57, 10 trades that were explicitly identified to undertake this review and revise program standards. The provincial advisory committees are required to consult with stakeholders by statute when it comes to the revision of these programs. And that was the appropriate undertaking, and the recommendations were made by the provincial advisory councils to the apprenticeship board.

Mr. Pedersen: So have these revisions taken place? Are they in the process of taking place? What's the status of them?

Mr. Bjornson: It's part of the plan for the coming year.

Mr. Pedersen: And down towards the bottom of that page, on page 57: Undertake development of new certification exams for designated occupations. Again, it's very much like the first bullet point there.

Is this—has this happened? Is this in the process of happening, and what is the process?

Mr. Bjornson: This is an important undertaking for labour and mobility and what we are—we've been working to achieve under the agreement on internal trade. And the—each jurisdiction undertakes such a process for the development of certification exams for a designated trade as part of and on behalf of the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship. So this is an ongoing process.

Mr. Pedersen: Just back to apprentices, I have one more question on there, and then a couple of other questions. But in terms of apprentices that have come in, whether it's the 1,200 certificates and the 8,200 registered apprentices, what percentage of those would be First Nations?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chair, 2009-2010 there were 1,130 self-declared active apprentices of Aboriginal ancestry in Manitoba. That's approximately 15 per cent of the total number of apprentices in Manitoba, and I would stress that that is self-declared.

Mr. Pedersen: And is there any tracking done for new immigrants coming into Manitoba on—in terms of apprenticeship training?

* (12:10)

Mr. Bjornson: For recent immigrants to Manitoba, we have a special process to identify their skill sets through the trades qualification stream and identify what would be the appropriate pathways for them to achieve their credentials here in Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So, again, if they're, be it self-declared First Nations or recent immigrants into Manitoba, they're—if they go into the apprenticeship program, is there any tracking as to the success rate, the job placement, where they're located in Manitoba?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, in order to qualify as an apprentice, you have to have an employer/employee relationship, so that is the measure in itself.

Mr. Pedersen: But there—I understand that, but there's no ongoing tracking with the employer after that to—after they receive their certificate, to see where they're working as a journeyman or whatever their qualification is, after they're done their apprenticeship.

Mr. Bjornson: Once they are gainfully employed and receive their certifications, they become one of

the record 625,000 people that are currently gainfully employed here in Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: You hope they're gainfully employed in Manitoba, you mean to say.

Page 42, just one different question. About the middle of the page on page 42, you—your department administers the Young Farmer Nominee Program. Could you describe what has happened in the past year on that? Your results?

Mr. Bjornson: I don't have the data available at the table, but we will find that for the member.

Mr. Pedersen: That would be quite fine, rather than spending time here as our time is getting short, but if you would provide me with the qualifications that a person would have to have for Young Farmer Nominee Program, the results from the past couple of years or however long it's been running, and get that in writing, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Bjornson: We'll undertake to do that for the member, yes.

Mr. Borotsik: We—short of time, but a couple of areas I want to talk about.

I wonder if the minister can go to page 75 of the Estimates book; it's International Relations and Trade. As we recognize, trade is very important to the province of Manitoba. About eight—70-80 per cent of our total economy is based on trade, most of that international. But I did notice that in the budget books they've actually had a reduction. It's the only department in—it's the only section of your department that's had a reduction, of 7.2 per cent in budget.

Can the minister tell me why we recognize international trade of such importance that you've actually reduced the budget for international relationship and trade?

Mr. Bjornson: There actually hasn't been a reduction. It's been reprofiled and transferred from International Relations and Trade to Financial Services.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, and that's an explanation, but it has been taken out of this particular department of international relationship and trade. That is a reduction of your budget. If it goes to Financial Services, that's basically general revenues, if you will, for the department. This particular section of your department has had a reduction of 7.2 per cent.

Why International Relations and Trade have that reduction?

Mr. Bjornson: A number of programs have been consolidated and there is no net reduction.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, we could go—I'm sure we could spend an hour on trying to look at the consolidation of those programs, but that brings me into the New West Partnership. I think one of the largest disappointments that we have within this particular government is the fact that we, as Manitoba, have been shut out, if you will, of the New West Partnership. We look at International Relations and Trade having reduced—a reduction in its budget. We recognize that it's necessary to develop international trade.

Can the minister tell me and give me an update as to what efforts have been undertaken, if any, to join the New West Partnership?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, once again, our main focus has been a pan-Canadian Agreement on Internal Trade. We've been very clear on that. There are some ongoing discussions with all ministers across the country with respect to the Agreement on Internal Trade, as the member would know, and some of the things that we've been proposing to find a resolution that would result in a pan-Canadian Agreement on Internal Trade.

We have a very good working relationship with the Province of Saskatchewan. We've held two Cabinet meetings—joint Cabinet meetings—one in Saskatchewan and one in Manitoba and, I believe, in Brandon, as the member knows. And we have ongoing discussions with a number of different provinces, states, and territories with respect to creating trade opportunities in Manitoba, but there are some issues that need to be resolved.

Mr. Borotsik: Yes, and I don't think that quite answered my question, so—but I take it from that answer that we as the Province of Manitoba are not making any overtures to join the New West Partnership, and I must remind the minister that Winnipeg has now been ranked last in growth. The province of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, the cities in those particular jurisdictions, are growing at a substantial increase. Manitoba's GDP has increased only by 1.4 per cent, not 2.4 per cent or 2.5 per cent. The other three jurisdictions have increased quite substantially.

The New West Partnership deals with more than just simply interprovincial trade. It deals

with trade internationally, international co-operation, innovation, and procurement. I again ask the minister, has any member of his department had any contact with any other members of the other three jurisdictions to talk about joining the New West Partnership?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, I'd like to say to the member, we've had ongoing discussions with all 10 provinces and three territories about a pan-Canadian approach. Though there might be some merit in subregional trade relationships, that's not the be-all or end-all, quite frankly. In fact, it's been suggested that subregional trade agreements can be to the detriment of pan-Canadian trade agreements and we would like to work towards that end to achieve, ultimately, a pan-Canadian trade agreement.

* (12:20)

And, you know, when the member was talking about where Winnipeg ranks, per se, I had the—happened to have the radio on last night listening to somebody from the Conference Board of Canada talking about the information that had been brought forward about Winnipeg's growth, and they certainly talked about the diversity of this economy that allows for very—not the boom and the bust type of things that you do see in other jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan and Alberta, where their growth might be more this year, but it certainly had taken a substantial hit with the dependence on commodities and whatnot, and, as such, the boom, per se, is substantial compared to here in Manitoba. But Manitoba did not take the big economic hit, comparatively speaking, as the western—other western provinces had, and, you know, the KPMG released a report talking about our competitive edge here in Manitoba. I think the member should look at some of these other good news indicators: the Manitoba miracle, as identified by *Maclean's* magazine and how we've been able to weather the storm.

But getting back to the New West Partnership Agreement, again, our vision for trade in Canada is an agreement on internal trade that goes coast to coast to coast, and we hope to work with our partners to achieve that end.

Mr. Borotsik: I thank the minister for the lecture, but perhaps he should also look at the 40 per cent equalization and transfer payments that the Province of Manitoba gets from those other jurisdictions that are also generating a substantial amount of the

economy that Manitoba is now being a benefactor for and of.

I wonder if the minister is aware that 80 per cent of the CFIB members in Manitoba are in favour of Manitoba joining the New West Partnership. And has CentrePort ever come to the minister and asked about the New West Partnership?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I don't believe anyone from CentrePort has had that conversation.

Mr. Borotsik: Has the minister and his 442 employees in his department ever approached CentrePort with respect to the New West Partnership?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, CentrePort's mandate is to enhance trade in all directions here in Canada. As the member knows, our geography is an advantage to us for that purpose. And last I checked, when I saw the CentrePort's presentations, they talk as we do in terms of trade: north, east, south and west.

Mr. Borotsik: Speaking of north, east, south and west, what trade missions were undertaken last year from the department, and what trade missions are anticipated going forward for this budget year?

Mr. Bjornson: There were 30 trade missions last year, and in the interests of time, I won't list them for you, but we could certainly provide that information for you, and we do have a website that encourages active participation from individuals who are looking to go on trade missions in particular markets and target markets for their industry. So we are currently working towards developing those trade missions.

Mr. Borotsik: I'd appreciate if the minister could provide that information, the 30, I believe it was, trade missions that went forward. Could they also include who was a part of those trade missions and where they went to? I would really appreciate that information.

Just very quickly, to wrap it up, one other thing in MIOP, page 33, it's identified that as at March 31st there were 20 active loans totalling \$92 million under the management of MIOP. Are there any inactive loans? I guess the question being, had there been any writeoffs this year with respect to MIOP, and are there any of the 20 active loans of \$92 million, can you tell me if there are any of those in arrears?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chair, there is one out of the 20 loans that is in receivership.

Mr. Borotsik: Are the other 19 loans current or are they—any past dues?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chair, yes, they are current.

Mr. Borotsik: Of the MIOP loans, of the 19 that are still there, the—can the minister tell me—and they probably vary, but can they tell me what the average interest rate is on those loans?

Mr. Bjornson: The rate varies, the basis Crown corporation rate, but some have premiums that are attached to the Crown corporation rate.

Mr. Borotsik: And the Crown corporation rate is, I believe, 1 per cent above what the borrowings are from the Province of Manitoba. Is that the same rates that are extended to the MIOP loans?

Mr. Bjornson: The rate is 25 basis point above the costs of capital to the Province plus premiums that are associated with that, and our website actually details all the information in terms of the various levels that can be assessed.

Mr. Borotsik: Just two very quick questions. Writeoffs—were there any writeoffs in the last fiscal year and are there any writeoffs anticipated in this fiscal year?

Mr. Bjornson: No, there are no writeoffs, and, no, we do not anticipate a writeoff this year.

Mr. Borotsik: Then I am confused. If there's one of the 20 loans that is in jeopardy, with a receivership or a bankruptcy, the value of that loan will not be collected. So that has to go somewhere. So that has to be a writeoff.

Mr. Bjornson: That is not a foregone conclusion and, certainly, that is not determined until such time that it's determined there's no ability to collect.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Chairperson, sorry, we should have taken the extra time because there are so many good questions to ask of the minister and not so many good answers forthcoming. But, however, I do thank the minister for his time, and if we can do the line by line, I think it's time. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much all. Hearing no further questions, we'll now proceed with putting the question in the resolutions in record time.

Resolution 10.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$12,898,000 for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, Business Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$110,260,000 for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, Labour Market Skills, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,217,000 for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, Community and Economic Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,456,000 for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, International Relations and Trade, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.6: RESOLVED there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,867,000 for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.7: RESOLVED there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,829,000 for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates is item 10.1.(a) minister's salary, contained in resolution 10.1.

Regrettably, we have to ask the staff to leave and they've already left. The floor's open for questions.

An Honourable Member: None.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing none—

Resolution 10.1: RESOLVED there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,869,000 for Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

And I'm going to be an auctioneer. What is the—the hour being 12:30, the committee rise.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

* (10:00)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

The section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I'm very pleased to bring forward the Estimates for Infrastructure and Transportation and also to bring forward Estimates in terms of EMO.

I want to begin by, obviously, indicating we're right in the middle of the flood season this year. When I say flood season, it's probably a flood season that has every indication that we're going to be seeing high water levels well into the summer. I do want to recognize the staff in my department.

As just a brief update, we do have more extensive flooding than we have seen in recent history. And unlike two—or 1997 or even 2009, we're seeing flooding in multiple locations from The Pas to the US border and from the east to the west. We put a significant emphasis into enhanced flood protection in the pre-flood season, and it's very noticeable that it's making a real difference, particularly on the Assiniboine dike, the—in Brandon, and much of the rapid response equipment that we've put in place, the Tiger Dams, Aqua Dams, or the HESCO barriers.

And I can indicate that we are—continue to work with other departments, particularly Water Stewardship, Conservation. It's been about 700 provincial staff involved and it is very much a noticeable effort. We're putting in any and all resources to protect Manitobans.

I really want to commend the Water Control and Structures, Special Operations, Traffic Engineering, and regional Construction and Maintenance staff. They are key in our provincial response, and we will be dedicating significant resources to priority infrastructure restoration once the flood waters recede. And other factors, such as how fast the ground dries, may also influence how successful our meeting our scheduled projects, so we'll be looking the impact on the construction program. But it's been a very significant challenge.

In the budget, we're continuing our focus on critical infrastructure renewal. Building up our infrastructure has been a key priority over the last number of years. We've dedicated \$1.8 billion to infrastructure and capital assets this year. MIT's role is significant. In 2007 we launched our \$4-billion, 10-year highway infrastructure program. We're in the fifth year of it, and capital this year is \$366 million. To put that in contrast, in 1999 the effective capital budget was around 85 to 90 million dollars. Including other highway works, such as preservation, maintenance, that's over \$520 million of expenditure this year alone. That's above our commitment in our 10-year plan, which is very much the result of the work of the Manitoba 2020 vision. And the chair of that, I want to give particular credit, the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), who worked with stakeholders and MLAs and came up with a clear indication we needed a significant plan.

Some of the road and bridge projects this year, we have about 1,100 kilometres of highway of work that we're dealing with: PTH 3 between 14 and 23; we have sections of PTH north of Brandon; we're rebuilding key sections of Highway 6; we're putting significant work on Highway 11 near Lac du Bonnet; Highway 16 between Binscarth and Foxwarren; 17 north of Poplar Field; 68 near Lake Manitoba Narrows; significant work on 373 near Norway House; PTH south of Winnipeg, including the town of Morris; work on PTH 2 near Sinclair and Reston; the Brandon eastern access; completion of Letellier Bridge over the Red River; and lane improvements to the Emerson border crossing.

We're continue to work on future capital projects such as the interchange of 59 and 101, the twinning of 59 north between PR 500 and PTH 11, and PTH 1 and 16 interchange.

We're continue to make significant progress on CentrePort Canada Way, and that is going to be a very significant project for the province, a \$220-million project.

We have put significant resources into bridge inspections. I know there was a question in the House recently. Just by way of comparison, we were spending in the '90s \$5.6 million on bridges; this year we're close to \$170 million. So we're not only inspecting, we're repairing and investing in new structures.

We have a very significant investment in northern airports. We have committed a level of \$10.935 million in terms of capital, and we have

significant capital investments in the upcoming years. I want to stress that we—I think our capital budget right now for northern airports is about 16 times what it was in the 1990s.

*(10:10)

Water and waste water continues to be a major priority. Under the Building Canada Fund, we've levered over \$203 million for 58 water and waste-water projects around the province. And we're looking at expansion of Steinbach's lagoon, Emerson's lagoon being upgraded, rehabilitation of Norway House's water systems, a new water treatment plant for the community of Nelson House, and new water treatment plant for Flin Flon.

With the Manitoba Water Services Board, it continues to play a key role, and they're working very much on key projects out of the province, including the Cartier regional system, the Yellowhead regional system, the Whitehead-Elton regional system and the southwest regional system in Melita-Waskada. We're also completing the regional waste-water systems that serve the RM at Headingley and two of the correctional facilities in that area.

Policy is an important part of the department. We continue to promote the International Gateway Strategy. We were involved with a very successful Arctic Summit this year, co-sponsored by the Province of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg.

Madam Chairperson, we continue to work on the upgrade of Highway 75 to interstate standards. We're working in partnership on border crossings, and we are promoting not only CentrePort Canada Way, but CentrePort itself.

We've moved significantly to protect bus service in rural Manitoba. We did provide support that has ensured that that's—will continue to March 21—pardon me, March 31st, 2012. Our goal is to come up with a sustainable bus service, but, once again, our department and this government did preserve the bus service that we have.

In terms of our building portfolio, we have a significant portfolio: 7.3 million square feet of owned and 2.1 million square feet of leased spaces. We've continued to expand in priority areas. University College of the North's expansion project in The Pas will begin in 2010, completion in 2012. We just had the groundbreaking for the new campus in Thompson for UCN, which is due for completion

in 2013, and we're very proud of the northern mining—Northern Manitoba Mining Academy operated by UCN in Flin Flon.

MIT is also moving significantly in terms of green buildings. It's a significant activity for us and we have significantly brought up our ratings to meet the various lead standards.

Other developments: We're very excited with the acquisition of the new water bombers, the three new CL-415 water bombers. They couldn't come at a better time, just in time over the next period of time to renew our fleet. And we are also working—I want to acknowledge the work of our staff on meeting requirements of the office of the Auditor General, and we're finalizing a strategic investment planning and programming framework.

In conclusion, I'm very proud of this department, both in terms of MIT. I'm very proud of this department in terms of the current flood-fighting efforts, both with MIT and, of course, with EMO. And I'm particularly proud that we are meeting the challenge of our growing infrastructure. We're a province that's growing again. We're not only matching that growth, we're leading that growth, and I look forward to presenting my Estimates to the Legislature and answering in detail questions on many of the very important initiatives coming out of this very important department.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for these comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Lakeside, have any opening comments?

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Yes, I do have a few comments I want to put on the record.

It's been just a little over a year since I've had the—been the critic for this particular department, and I thank the minister for including me in some of those debates that we were able to take part in over the past year, plus a few months.

And I know that it is the flood season. I know the minister is extremely busy with the staff that's involved there, and my apologies for having to bring his staff in today just to—for the short time that we're here this morning.

But next week we certainly will be able to get together and have a schedule lined up so that we won't have staff that's not necessarily here wasting—not necessarily wasting time but taking time

away from their responsibilities. They can be somewhere else, so—I believe in efficient management of staff, so we'll work with the minister on that.

I do also want to just talk briefly about road maintenance and, of course, the northern airports, motor carriers, the recent agreement between Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and, of course, the minister talked about infrastructure renewal and bridge expansion and inspections on bridges. We know that we've had a number of issues over the past few months in that regard—past year as a matter of fact—and, also, he made reference to the member from Transcona with the consultation there, and I must have missed the invitation when he was doing the consultation with MLAs. Maybe it's in the mail. I'll have to wait for that.

But, also, CentrePort is another issue that is—*[interjection]*

Oh, that was—okay. That's why I never got the invitation. So maybe we need to revisit that.

And the minister talked about water bombers, as well. I know we talked about that last year. You know, it's hard to think about fire whenever we have an abundance of water within the province of Manitoba, but we know that we are a large province and things vary from one part of the province to another, and last year, as a matter of fact, I remember fires up in the northern part of the province and it was significant. So we—we're certainly glad to see that.

Also, something that's very important to rural Manitoba, as the minister talked about in his comments, and that was bus services in Manitoba, and that's a service that a lot of us take for granted. And we know that the government's had a difficult time in trying to work with this, and I know I've met personally with the Grey Goose people and certainly pleased that they were able to reach an agreement with the Province that would be satisfactory for service.

I know it's something that we're going to have to look at in the future and continue to provide those services to people in rural Manitoba. It does bring a large part of our economy together and certainly I know that we need to be cognizant of the fact that this service has to remain. And maybe some changes need to take place in that regard, but we'll get into the debate on that.

And, of course, CentrePort, you know, it's an opportunity, I think, that I know that Manitoba will grow and prosper as a result of and I look forward to getting into the questions in that particular department as well, and also on the renewal of some of the highways and new parts of Manitoba where roads will be built, in particular on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, the east side of the province. So we know there'll be a lot of debate on that as well.

So, with those few short comments, I look forward to the minister bringing his staff in, and we'll get into the Q & A as we move forward in the Estimate process.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic for those comments.

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

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber, and once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

The honourable Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, to introduce his staff.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, both in the Chamber and in the gallery, I have Doug McNeil, Deputy Minister; Paul Rochon, assistant—pardon me—associate deputy minister; Karlene Maharaj, executive director, Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Secretariat; John Spacek, ADM of Transportation Policy, Motor Carrier Division; and Lance Vigfusson, ADM Engineering and Operations; and Lynn Zapshala-Kelln, ADM of Administrative Services.

And I do want to thank the critic for giving me notice that EMO will not be up today. We did have our EMO staff available, but they will be back at the next time that we meet with the EMO critic, the member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese). So, thanks.

* (10:20)

Mr. Eichler: I'm wondering if we should just spend a minute on that, Madam Chairperson, so that the minister's staff—I know it's a crucial time of year—I'm wondering if we should set that for 3 o'clock on Monday, for the EMO staff if that's—if it's a good time. If not, maybe we could finalize that so we could make best use of the time that's available.

Mr. Ashton: That would be fine. I'm wondering, too, if we could set a time for Dick Menon from the Water Services Board. He has to come in from Brandon.

Mr. Eichler: We'll do it Monday at three, then.

Mr. Ashton: Monday afternoon, then, we'll have both of our staff available.

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

Mr. Eichler: I would prefer global, Madam Chairperson.

Mr. Ashton: I always believe in thinking globals, so I would agree.

Madam Chairperson: The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Eichler: Of course, we have our standard list of questions that we go through every year. I guess the first question would be the minister's political staff, name, position, whether they're full-time or part-time.

Mr. Ashton: In the minister's office, I have my Executive Assistant Donna Kildaw, who's based in Thompson; Clif Evans, special advisor, who deals with primarily EMO matters as well as some highway matters; Dale Edmunds, special assistant.

And we also have a list of the Lieutenant-Governor's and policy appointments too—just to perhaps cut ahead to that. Under this department is also Elaine Embury, the administrative assistant for the LG's office; Phyllis Fraser, the EA for the LG; and basically, we also have a number of policy appointments: Tanis Wheeler, Alison Depauw, Shannon Van Raes, Sig Laser, and Charles McDougall. I have the titles if the member's interested. They range from northern Aboriginal issues through to planning and programming and communications.

Mr. Eichler: The next question is to deal with the minister's deputies and staff in those offices. Has there been any major changes to that staff line in the last year?

Mr. Ashton: In the deputy minister's office, Anushya Karthigesu, the administrative secretary. Other than that, the staff is unchanged in the deputy's office.

Mr. Eichler: The number of staff that's currently employed in the department—and has this increased or decreased since the '09-10 physical year?

Mr. Ashton: Madam Chairperson, 1,183.3 staff positions.

Mr. Eichler: Was the minister finished? I'm sorry.

Mr. Ashton: Those are the, you know, the civil service full staff equivalent.

Mr. Eichler: Positions that were reclassified in 2010-2011?

Mr. Ashton: Madam Chairperson, 235.

Mr. Eichler: Does the staffing level identified in departmental budget reflect the full staffing complement or is there a certain percentage of vacancy? What is our vacancy rate, if so?

Mr. Ashton: While we're getting the information, I was going to suggest that some of these I can—while we're just getting a—you know, because this is basically detailed stuff, if the member wishes to ask maybe a series of questions then I, you know, rather than kind of have a big gap in, you know, the answers, then what we—what I can do is I could just, you know, once you, perhaps, if you've asked all of the technical questions in terms of staff years and what not, then what I can do, as we generate them from the detail Estimates book I can then not waste time.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, that would be fine. I guess the next thing I want to talk about is contracts that's being awarded directly without going to tender.

Mr. Ashton: Vacancies 167.95, that's 12.9 per cent. The member asked a direct contract, just to get a clarification.

Mr. Eichler: Typically, I believe the \$25,000 figure has been used as a result of that. Is there any contracts that's been awarded outside of that that has not been tendered?

Mr. Ashton: We can provide a list of that to the member. It'll take some time to track that down. It is a department where there are firmer contracts that have to be—very quickly, given emerging situations. So we'll see if we can get that even by the resumption of Estimates on Monday.

Mr. Eichler: Travel, of course, is always the question we ask as well, and that's for the First Minister delegation led by the First Minister. Was there any charges to your department for a trip or a

delegation led by the First Minister that was charged to your department?

Mr. Ashton: No.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you for that. Travel, of course, by you yourself, Mr. Minister, I know that there's meetings by the ministers around the different provinces. Have we hosted any and have you taken any of those in the past year?

Mr. Ashton: Madam Chair, the member is referring to out-of-province travel generally?

Madam Chairperson: Okay, I—just one more time.

Mr. Ashton: The member is referring to out-of-province travel generally?

Mr. Eichler: That is correct.

Mr. Ashton: This, of course, Madam Chair, is all public information. But I would indicate I attended meetings on flood protection in the Red River Valley. I attended the Westman Transportation Advisory Council, this is the first quarter of April to June, and various meetings in preparation for a delegation we led to Russia. This was meetings with Minister Baird and the Russian Embassy, as well as other meetings related to flood mitigation. I attended NASCO, again, this is in June of 2010.

In terms of the second quarter, meeting officials from the Russian Embassy and Indian Embassy. This, again, was in preparation for the visit to Russia. There were meetings in Russia, August 16th to 21st. Originally these meetings were scheduled in Moscow, but because of the forest fire situation they had to be cancelled. I did proceed to Krasnojarsk. On the return, I also, at the request of the Consulate General from Greece, met with the—I should say it's the minister of Finance, it's actually the deputy foreign minister, I believe, the minister of Finance was originally supposed to be available but was unable. Again, that relates to the promotion of the Port of Churchill.

* (10:30)

In September, I attended the National Executive Forum. I was a guest speaker on issues relating to infrastructure, and also attended—there were meetings with the deputy ambassador to discuss the gateway, particularly, the upcoming summit. The Council of Ministers, September 29th, was in Toronto. Returned to Russia in October. This time, actually, we were able to reschedule the meetings in Moscow but we also were able to go to Murmansk as well.

Murmansk, of course, is the port that we have partnered with Churchill, so it gives opportunity to talk not only about CentrePort and the air connection but also the connection through CentrePort into Churchill. And this year the EMO ministers met in January; I attended that meeting. I also attended a meeting—had a meeting with the British Columbia Minister of Lotteries regarding lotteries issues, March of the fiscal year, or, pardon me, March of the—March, 2001, the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Eichler: Madam Chairperson, I thank the minister for that. Was there other staff or MLAs that attended along with you on any of these meetings that you attended in the past year?

Mr. Ashton: There would have been staff on some. There were—MLAs were involved in some, particularly with Russia. My legislative assistant is the member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), who, I'm sure the member is probably aware, is also fluent in Russian, has actually lived in Russia, so it was a good reminder to the Russians of our diversity in this province. But also he is involved in those files.

And the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) was involved in the—one of the Russian visits in his role. He's the—he works on trade issues; he works with the Minister responsible for Trade, so we—generally speaking, in terms of other meetings, ministerial meetings, the deputy would have been there. But, beyond that, most of the meetings I would have attended I don't tend to take staff along. There may have been staff there concurrently in some of the meetings, like WESTAC, in their own right. But, generally speaking, we basically are working towards that, and WESTAC, actually, the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), I believe, attended one of the meetings as well. The member for Transcona, of course, was the chair of vision 2020 and has been quite involved in transportation-related issues. I think we met in Regina, actually; I think the member for Transcona went there. So there were some MLAs at some of them, staff at some of the others and no staff or MLAs in others as well.

Madam Chairperson: Prior to recognizing the honourable member for Lakeside, I'm going to ask the honourable minister if he could wait to give his answers until I've totally recognized him. Thank you.

Mr. Eichler: Madam Chairperson, just for my own personal knowledge, because I have not been a minister and hope to be one day, but the cost that's incurred for other MLAs that attend with you, does

that come out of their travel budget or does that come out of your budget as a minister?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think the MLAs might have the option, in the case of some types of trips, to take it out of, you know, the member's travel allowance. In others, where it's clearly official business, you know, we would fund it as we would staff as well. So I'm not—quite frankly, I don't have that full information on any of the specifics, but it really is a—it's a combination of both, and I look at, for example, if you have, say, conferences, and the member knows he has the same travel budget that is available as MLAs, and again, it's also a question of what's eligible under our rules, our new rules. So, yes, I think it could—it really depends on the circumstance. But where it was—you know, would be clearly official business on behalf of the Province of Manitoba, that would come through the department.

Mr. Eichler: This is kind of the end of the standard list of questions. I guess the last one would be on regards to advertising that comes out of his particular department. Do we have a ballpark cost on the amount of advertising that comes out of the minister's department?

Mr. Ashton: In 2010-2011, we spent \$681,258.85. I guess that's kind of beyond a ballpark number.

But some of this, Madam Chair, by just by way of explanation, some of this is related to delivery of federal-provincial program agreements to comply with our protocol, which is a, you know, is a single-window delivery. The department provides central agency implementation, administrative and communication support and delivery of inter-governmental and non-governmental infrastructure and economic development funding initiatives. And this is also including public campaigns such as the severe weather warning campaign, that the member's probably aware of, career ads and booth and symposium space.

And I want to stress, by the way, that's an important part of what the department's doing right now; we're recognizing that we have a significant number of staff that are eligible to retire and are retiring. So, Madam Chair, we're actively engaged in encouraging people to seek careers in the many career opportunities that are available in the department.

It also includes general construction tenders as well as general information about numerous other

programs and services offered by the department. The primary media that was used was newspapers.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the minister for that.

You did spike my interest there in regards to that answer in regards to future vacancy. Is that mainly because of the baby-boom era or is it the magic numbers for pension, or is it a combination of both? And how do we look at replacing those staff?

You made mention of your campaign for advertising, trying to recruit new members. And, what numbers are we looking at, percentage-wise?

Mr. Ashton: Well, the member's quite correct. There's a combination of the baby-boom generation but what we're also finding is that, you know, in the '80s, latter part of the '80s and into the 1990s, was very little hiring.

So what we have—I'll just take the engineering side, by the—for example, we have a fair number of senior engineers. Often jokingly say, if there's a bad day in the office, we could be in big trouble because there's a fair number of our staff that could just walk out the door, they're eligible for retirement. Of course, we never had bad days at MIT in the office.

But that's the one end of it. You then had—we have had a challenge right over the last number of years with intermediate engineers because there just wasn't hiring.

We're now very actively involved in hiring engineers in training. We are very aggressively involved in, actually, helping sponsor students with scholarships, through summer jobs, both on the engineering side and the civil tech side. And that's just one obvious example. We're having a fair amount of success with it but one of the challenges is also internal; the mentoring and the experience that's—that is there.

We're also, I think, working quite actively across the board to let young people know what their career opportunities are. One of the difficulties, I think, when you have an entity that hasn't hired a lot of people for, you know, a period of time is, is people don't necessarily even consider it or maybe they assume there aren't the job opportunities.

And, you know, we're, in fact, so active, that my son, he's an engineering grad, he's the instructor with the civil tech program for UCN in Thompson. Every time he phones to place one of his students with MIT, he also gets asked if he wants to work for MIT. So he's still working for UCN, but it shows you the

degree to which our department is actively thinking of recruiting people that have that kind of expertise.

And that's only one area, by the way; same on, you know, accounting, same on many other areas. There's a lot of career opportunities and we're very actively promoting them.

* (10:40)

We're also promoting them, generally, you know, across the province as well. One of our challenges has been often regional, and I'll take my own area, for example. In Thompson and northern Manitoba, where we've had challenges in recruiting techs or engineers, and we're having some considerable success over the last couple of years. And one of the untold stories of what's happened in the last few years is if you take the significant increase in the capital program, it really is the degree to which our staff—and by extension to the consulting engineering staff—have really stepped up to the plate. We're doing triple, probably, in fact probably even more than that, the actual technical work. You know, you see the construction end of it, but there's a lot of work goes into getting it from concept through to design and construction. So we're actively recruiting and we've had some significant success with that.

I could tell you, too, we're also working with some of our more senior staff to urge them to certainly stay with the Province. I won't get into mentioning names, but we have some staff that are well past their retirement eligibility and are absolutely critical staff and are doing a tremendous job. I know the member probably has met with many of them. They have that kind of—sort of sense of the history, as well, of a lot of projects, that experience that's very useful. So, at the same time that we're recruiting, we're trying to make sure that we can keep our staff with us as long as possible.

And I think we've really turned around in the last few years. I mean, I've had the honour of being minister at the beginning of the decade, and, you know, really what's happened with that expansion in the program, we're able to offer career opportunities and challenges that are comparable to any other sector, that any of the staff we're looking at are looking at it. So it'll be an ongoing challenge, but I think we're meeting it.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, it's a very different world than when I believe the minister and I was growing up. I know that most of us had a career for 25 years and then got our gold watch and moved on, but that's

changed. I know the younger generation turns three or four different careers before they—and they have so many opportunities out there. It's a very challenging time. So a lot of those opportunities come about as a result of different issues coming forward.

But coming back to the minister's comments in regards to the engineers, I bring this question up mainly because of CentrePort. Is there a number of engineers that are contracted for specific jobs, not necessarily focusing on CentrePort, but do we have to source out engineers for your department that's not regular staff?

Mr. Ashton: We use a combination. You know, we have our own staff and we have significant expertise in-house, but we also significantly contract with the consulting engineering community. I was just at the awards dinner for the Consulting Engineers of Manitoba, and what was very apparent from that was the significant number of provincial or provincially funded through Infrastructure programs that are basically coming straight from our initiatives, everything from some of the urban transportation projects that we are part of through to CentrePort Canada Way.

If the member is interested, for CentrePort I'll just give the specific on the contracts involved there. Pre-design was by MMM Group, triple M group. It's a design built with SNC-Lavalin which is a well-known company internationally. But the oversight is by MIT engineers, and that's really the relationship on a significant number of the, you know, the projects. We have our engineers through MIT providing oversight during the construction phase, but I can also indicate that much of the initial work is also done by our staff as well, and that includes, by the way, not just on the civil side but also on the hydraulic side.

You know, the member is probably aware of some of the ongoing projects: 75 comes to mind, where there's, you know, some significant engineering challenges, and, actually, I was at the open house in Morris last year where we presented the options. A lot of the work has been done. Our engineers—in fact, Lance was out there. You know, Lance has been very involved with this. So we have a lot of expertise within house, but we also work significantly with, you know, with contracted-out engineering as well. And it varies from project to project, you know, quite frankly, in terms of the kind of expertise that we have.

And we're always looking for getting the best expertise at the best value for money and we—I think we've made a real progress on that. Part of it, by the way, has been by building up our engineering staff—you know, and answers the previous questions, because you do need a critical mass. I mentioned bridges, for example, I mean, we just weren't doing very much on bridges until this last decade. We were \$5.6 million; it's now \$169 million. Well, that's not just a dollar figure; it's also the expertise. And we have a lot of our EITs and—we're not saying new engineers, you know, often young, but also we have engineers, you know, are—have foreign qualifications who are, you know, coming into the Manitoba system. They are often working on bridges, you know, which is, you know, very challenging.

And my sense is we're developing a critical mass that will be absolutely critical over the next number of years because, as the member's probably seen from our commitment to a 10-year capital project that's on the Highways side, we are committed to a long-term investment, and money's key, absolutely. We need the construction capacity, and the Manitoba construction industry has stepped up to the plate. The Heavy Construction Association deserves a lot of credit for being there for us as Manitobans.

But you also need that expertise, and we've been really developing a critical mass of engineering and technical expertise within house. And not just on the MIT side, by the way, you know, or the Transportation side, but also on the other side of the department as well. The—you know, we're involved with major projects. I mentioned the two campuses. We're also involved in a number of corrections facilities. In those cases, once again, you have, you know, architects, and PCL, actually, is the construction company for the two current ones; Akman, I think, was the company, and ACC, the project we just completed.

So it's, you know, there's a lot of outside expertise that's involved on the construction side, including engineering expertise. But we have significant project management and engineering and other technical skills within house without whom we wouldn't be at what we're at right now. It's construction stage on some very major projects.

Mr. Eichler: What is the—you mentioned bridges earlier during your comments, what is the current policy in regards to inspections by—for engineering inspections on a bridge? Is it once a year or what's the current policy?

Mr. Ashton: We do an annual visual on every structure. In terms of a detailed inspection—would be every two years on major structures. Some of the other structures would be a comprehensive inspection every four years.

Mr. Eichler: Just trying to wrap up a little bit on the engineers. The cost—is there a cost share between the City of Winnipeg or City of Brandon on different projects with the engineers, or is it a cost-shared project, or any projects, for that matter, where there's revenue generated back to the Province on a cost-share basis from municipal or any other service?

Mr. Ashton: There's a very different situation in Brandon and Winnipeg. We are not responsible for any of the roads within Winnipeg; they're all City of Winnipeg. So we are involved in terms of the transfers. Actually, this often isn't reported publicly as much as it should, but last year, and I'm speaking more here as a former Intergovernmental Affairs minister, we funded more than 50 per cent of the regional streets and bridges in the city of Winnipeg through transfers to the City.

*(10:50)

Brandon is different because there are several major highways that go through Brandon. And what we would do in Brandon is, if it's a highways project, clearly, we would be responsible for the highways portion of it. But, to give you some idea of other situations, for example, the town of Morris. We are going to have major surfacing through Morris this year on 75. The—one of the reasons it was in such rough shape the last period of time was the town was renewing its underlying support infrastructure. So we often will run into projects that do have an overlap which, you know, partly road, partly municipal infrastructure. So, obviously, the local municipality would be involved on their responsibility, while we are involved in the road construction, and we work very closely with them. Obviously, the two would be interrelated.

But, Madam Chair, Winnipeg is a special case. In Winnipeg—Winnipeg is—the roads are entirely City of Winnipeg jurisdiction, within the city of Winnipeg, and the only caution on that is that we do cost share but we don't—outside of maybe consulting, you know, CentrePort Canada Way. By the way, there were some aspects that involve the city in terms of overlay with areas that were within their jurisdiction. Generally speaking, the City of Winnipeg has its own operation system, its own engineering and construction system, and so it's a

very capable staff. The deputy minister's formerly from the City of Winnipeg, so I have to say that. He's looking at me here. Very true, though.

Mr. Eichler: I guess that could probably go both ways. Do we have any indication of what services we get back from, say, the City of Winnipeg or the City of Brandon or the Town of Morris, that they go ahead and do on their own and then the Province benefit back from them? I'm sure it's got to be a bit of a two-way street. As the minister referred to that, there's a number of projects that the Province of Manitoba does and benefits the city, of course. Is there any that come back to the Province as a result of those cost savings for the Province?

Mr. Ashton: No.

Mr. Eichler: I guess, just then to wrap up, do we have any indication about how much extra money this is, as a benefit for the Province or for the City of Winnipeg and the City of Brandon for those engineer services that are provided free of charge to them, on top of their allocated dollars that they get through negotiation with the Province?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think the key thing here is that the engineering we do within the municipality, with the exception of the city of Winnipeg, is for projects that are essentially our projects, highways, drainage, I mean, you know. You know the list of things that we'd be responsible for. So we do have a very significant benefit. The newly constructed improvements to the bridge in Brandon, highways project, again, paid for by the Province of Manitoba. It's a very significant benefit to Brandon.

You could run through community after community where you'll see, you know, a highway that is also serves as the main street. Member's aware some of the investments we're putting this year in the Interlake: Lundar, Ashern. And he's aware, I'm sure, of some of the similar projects we've had over the last number of years in various communities in the Interlake, you know, and he's aware of that fact. So, you know, we take that responsibility very seriously.

It's interesting because in many cases, because of the growth that's taken place in some communities, we're now—we're seeing, you know, pressure on what essentially are urban-based transportation issues. You know, the growth of Morden-Winkler, Steinbach, many of the communities in southern Manitoba and we're certainly trying to respond to that. We—I used to say a few years ago, we did pave the main street in Winkler. It's true. It's also a

provincial highway. And I know the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) often thanks the department for it, but we just put traffic lights in Steinbach. We're seeing urban traffic challenges in Steinbach and those are—that's the other dimension that's there, but, generally speaking, if it's a provincial highway, we're responsible for it and it does have a significant benefit.

I know in the debate over municipal finance, that's, I think, one element that's often missed. If you compare other jurisdictions, not all of them have what we have, which is either direct transfer, for the case in Winnipeg, or where the highways are strictly the responsibility of the Province.

There might be other areas you could make, you know, comparisons where Manitoba does provide significant additional funding but the member is right; there is a significant benefit to municipalities. And I don't think it's often recognized as much—not by the municipalities themselves; I think they recognize it—but I think the general public doesn't realize just how much of our infrastructure through municipal, you know, areas is actually really provincial, paid for by the—I mean there's only one taxpayer but paid for by the Province of Manitoba, not paid for by the municipalities.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, I thank the minister for that. It certainly helps put on the record exactly what has happened over the past year in that regard. So I know that the cost that the minister's talking about—and I look at the first page, on page 11, the decrease in the Canada-Manitoba agreements has changed significantly, and I'm wondering if the minister could outline his perspective on why that is and the significant amount of money.

Mr. Ashton: Well, in general, of course, the stimulus program. Our programs are winding down this year. There are various components to infrastructure but we had an extension for some projects to October, and that will be a challenge for us, I believe, as provinces. Municipalities certainly recognized the work put on the stimulus side. I think it was a wise investment and the member's seen many of the projects that have been funded under it, many in around the member's area, all areas of the province.

The reality though is—I think it's pretty well unanimous from municipalities, and I would say of provincial-territorial governments, that there's an ongoing challenge in infrastructure, twofold. One is replacing aging infrastructure. There's a lot of

investment in the '60s and '70s that is starting to show its age. In some cases investments go back before then.

I look at, you know, rec facilities. You know, we funded, for example, the new rec facility in Rivers, along with the federal government and the local community. It dated back to the 1940s. And what we found now is, quite frankly, we're meeting a lot of the challenges, but there, I think, has to be serious consideration by the newly re-elected federal government of the degree to which there should be a long-term investment in infrastructure, because, quite frankly, whether it's aging infrastructure or the demands of growth that we're seeing—I mentioned CentrePort, the federal government has a key part of that through various different funding services.

Those kind of projects are going to continue to be there over the next number of years, and we are seeing this as a transition year. And certainly our position as a government will be to take the success of the last couple of years as a model for what we could accomplish in the future with more long-term sustained investment infrastructure.

So what the member's saying is, yes, there is a transition this year and we're winding down the stimulus programs, but having said that, we believe there should be an engagement on long-term commitments to infrastructure.

Mr. Eichler: Could the minister indicate—just to follow up on that—because of the amount of money that's being cut back, how the five-year plan will be changing? I know that the minister and his staff and other MLAs have been working on that for the next five years. Could we get some type of indication of what that picture's going to look like over the next five years?

* (11:00)

Mr. Ashton: You mentioned the five-year plan. I just wanted to, you know, before answering the specific question, indicate that we will be releasing the five-year plan shortly.

Given the major flood season that we're into right now, we are going to be assessing, certainly, in an initial way, if there are flood-related projects that need to be programmed. And I'm separating out, by the way, the significant work that will take place to repair the provincial and, quite frankly, municipal infrastructure. And I say that because in 2009 we saw very significant impacts on our road system. Of the upwards of \$70 million in disaster financial

assistance that has either been paid out or is in the process of being paid out, a significant part of that was the damage to road infrastructure. What we are anticipating is a similar situation this year, so—that, again, though, would be short-term outside of the five-year capital. But we are—I just want to indicate we will be releasing the five-year capital program soon, but we are trying to assess even as we fight the flood if there are any areas on the highway side that we need to 'prioritize' in the five-year plan.

Now, having said that, the five-year plan—I'm not going to pre-empt the actual release of it, but the general approach that we have followed—we made that commitment, as I said before, to a 10-year plan. We have received some significant federal funding this past year, and I can get that information for the member in terms of what the specific cost share is. But what we've done is we've taken the approach that we work with those programs. You know, in some cases we've accelerated projects that would be eligible; it just made sense to get the federal cost share in place. But we have a ongoing provincial commitment.

And one of the things that's very noticeable about our provincial commitment to infrastructure—the member may recall when we brought in The Gas Tax Accountability Act, one of the big concerns that people had—seems to be a concern is when governments collect more in gas tax than they put back in infrastructure. And the federal government has improved its return to the municipalities and, you know, to the provinces through infrastructure funding, but still collects, you know, it's the 10 cents plus GST tax that takes more out of transportation than is put back in. In the Province, we spend significantly above what we collect on the gas tax, and we will continue to be doing that because we recognize that there's got to be a long-term commitment.

The member knows and he's certainly lobbied behalf of roads in his constituency. The member knows that there is no shortage of very good projects that we could be doing, but just like any other government department or any level of government, we have to have some prioritization. We have to work within the budgets that are available. So, even with quadruple the capital budget, virtually since 1999, every dollar we can get from the federal government helps us fund more projects.

And I'd stress that's not just the case with roads; it's the same with issues related to water and waste

water. I know we're going to have the Manitoba Water Services Board here. If you look at the amount of work that's being done to upgrade our water systems across the province, it's quite remarkable.

One of the unwritten stories is the degree to which we have new municipal and, often, regional water and waste-water facilities that have, in just the last few years, taken water supplies that were perhaps adequate in the '50s and '60s to state-of-the-art water supplies. And we're talking about across the province, not just in urban centres where perhaps urban residents are a bit more used to that but in many rural areas. In fact, I would say there are some regions, rurally, that have been—were ahead of even some of our urban centres in upgrading, particularly on the drinking water side, to state-of-the-art. And one of the key things that's been a driver there is the ability to get infrastructure funding in addition to the ongoing support we provide through the Manitoba Water Services Board.

The key issue, though, is similar to highways. We're going to continue our investments, but whenever there's a federal investment, it just allows us to do that much more, both as a Province and, by extension, municipalities working with the Province.

Mr. Eichler: I just want to be clear, and I'm not trying to get into EMO because I want to save that for next week, but you did bring up the fact about the flood and the impact it's going to have on your overall budget. But, just so I'm clear, the EMO dollars that will come from the federal government, as a result of some of the roads in disrepair because of the flood, is there—that should be over and above, is it not, in my understanding, the amount of money that comes from the federal government? Will you not be reimbursed a percentage of that based on the total amount that you will be having to spend on repairs of those?

Mr. Ashton: I'm separating out what work we would do to bring the roads that were damaged back to their existing or the pre-existing condition. That is the key element with Disaster Financial Assistance. It doesn't allow for an enhancement of those roads or other infrastructure. And there's no doubt that this will be into the 90 per cent cost sharing this year given the significant flooding we've seen across the province.

So what we're talking about in the five-year capital program—we particularly want to talk about flood-related issues, would be improvements to the highway system that arise out of flood-related issues. An example, and again this is—it's a bit of a

preliminary stage, PTH 75 at Morris where last year we held an open house. We've narrowed 37 options down to two. We're doing the hydraulic work, and I want to stress this is not a study, you know, we're not just looking at this. It's a solution-oriented hydraulic project, and whatever arises out of that, clearly nothing that would be eligible under DFA, but it's clearly flood related.

In a more general sense, you know, if bridges are impacted other infrastructure, that may be covered under DFA, but we're—could be looking at various issues there. There's a whole series of challenges. And I know, and I'm not going to get into it with question period details but, one thing I did want to put on the record, as well, with bridges, and I know a number of questions were asked a few days ago. One of the challenges there, again is, if a bridge is burnt or is damaged, if we build a new bridge, we have to go through not just redesign, which takes a period of time, but all the environmental approvals.

There was a bridge a few years ago that washed out in Leaf Rapids, and I remember getting briefed, and this is how challenging it is for the department, we could have gone to rebuild the bridge and it would have taken three years to do it, from start to end. Or we could put culverts in and a causeway. Well, we weren't going to spend three years having that corner of the province with no road access.

So those are the kind of challenges we're into when you're dealing with floods, and they often do have a delayed, you know, impact. In a lot of cases, too, if you have a bridge that's impacted by flooding, you've got to make sure you do the design work. That takes some time, because you just can't, you know, if you've got a 1920s, you know, like circa 1920s, 1930s wooden bridge and it's been washed out or it's burnt, you know, there's different design standards in 2011.

So, yes, we're not talking about the two—the capital, the five-year capital program will have some elements strategically that are about flood protection that have nothing to do with whatever we will do to repair existing infrastructure as a result of the flood.

Mr. Eichler: I know it's way too early to even anticipate how much the money's going to be coming out of your regular budget, but does it come out of this capital allocation for projects within the province of Manitoba, or is that come out of a different fund, out of emergency measures fund, or will it impact the five-year plan?

* (11:10)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there is a separate vote, you know, in the section 27. That's how we fund emergency-related issues. I can indicate, in a general way too, by the way, we're still into flood season, but we put a significant investment in this year. Even before the flood we were approaching \$50 million of investment. We're now probably going to be above that. And, just to give the member a very quick example of some of the things that we've been involved with, the Assiniboine dikes from Baie St. Paul to Portage, this—you know, to Southport, we've invested and will have invested probably in the range of \$20 million to build up those dikes. Without that, we wouldn't be able to flow 18,000 cfs through, which is higher than the normal capacity of about 15,000. And we put it in to protect the communities in that area and to maximize the flow. That would be of particular interest to the member as well, because without that that would have meant more water going through Lake Manitoba, which is already at high levels. So the member is more than aware of the pressures in around Lake Manitoba.

So that's just one example. We cost-shared with Brandon on a permanent dike within Brandon. We have invested in equipment throughout the province, whether it be Tiger Dams, Aqua Dams, HESCO cages, as they're called. We put a significant investment into pumps. We have a significant amount of the equipment, now, in trailers so we can move rapidly. We've also bought another Amphibex; we're going to have three of them. I could run through, you know, the list.

And we've also worked with municipalities. We—that doesn't include the work that we've done with the five municipalities north of Winnipeg, which were hardest in 2009. We basically provided funding to them to buy their own equipment. We worked with Peguis First Nation and—to back up their ability to buy similar equipment. Now, we have been advised by the federal government that they will cover the full cost of that. The Prime Minister has written to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) on that.

And, you know, we—I can get—if the member's interested, I'll just give a quick list of the kind of things we're doing—*[interjection]* Yes—is we have, just out of this department: two sandbagging machines; five sandbagging hoppers, conveyor belts and bag tires; 45,000 square metres of granular material fill; 20 new steamers and covered trailers—by the way, the steamers were really important, you

know, coming out of 2009. We often tend to forget spring in Manitoba can be -20 overnight, frozen culverts—24,000 metres of granular fill; 20 rapid deployment flood protection systems; 10 kilometres of rapid deployment systems for community dikes. In many cases, we're using a supportable inflatable dikes, you know, the Tiger Dams, Aqua Dams to actually top up existing dikes for freeboard protection; HESCO containers, 25 kilometres; we've brought improved anchors for flood tubes, much of the Assiniboine dike; erosion protection on the Portage Diversion channel, which has been an issue; a variety of pumps and some large diesel pumps for The Pas and Morris; I mentioned the grants to municipalities; we've put in technical project managers to assist with the preparation; 500,000 sandbags; 10,000 super sandbags; underwater cameras; and that's just page 1.

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I'll just—I know we're short of time, but I think this is fairly interesting to the member. We have agreements for hydraulic expertise for the various departments; structural analysis on the Red River Floodway; we've done—we have additional temporary bridge components so that the—you know, what used to be called Bailey bridges, you know, Acrow bridges; agreements with various engineering service providers; I mentioned more sandbags; work on various bridges; bed station control in the Portage Diversion; again, you know, ensuring its capacity is not compromised; portable generators; we even bought a used sandbag machine. I didn't know there was a market for used sandbag machines. I don't know if there are used sandbag machine sellers or something, but, apparently, we bought one; wave breakers, which are another form of protection; stand-by pumps; and riprap on the Assiniboine and Little Saskatchewan Rivers.

I can also indicate, in addition—this is more sort of equipment based—we've done some significant work on shoring up bridges. One thing we learned out of 2009 with the Pierre Delorme Bridge is the importance of not just our regular inspections, but with high hydraulic flows, the potential impacts on our bridges. So, for example, we invested, I believe, \$1.25 million on 23—you know, to ensure that Morris's access isn't compromised with the bridge. And we have been working elsewhere in the province on that.

So, if you take that—that's just this department. If you add in Water Stewardship, Conservation,

Agriculture, Health, I don't want to leave any other department out. It's huge. And we are—these are—what I've listed, by the way, this is a work in progress. Some of this has been spent. Some of it will be spent. I mentioned going in the flood we were upwards already about \$50 million. We'll be probably at least up around 70; I would say 65-70 by the time you analyze where we're at now, and that's before we're anywhere close to finishing. It doesn't include any repairs through DFA.

But to put it in perspective, just take the Assiniboine dikes. If we didn't have the Assiniboine dikes built up to the level they were and the combination of the Shellmouth and the Portage Diversion, we'd have had four to five feet higher levels on the Assiniboine just in the last couple of days.

Here in the city of Winnipeg, if we hadn't built up the Shellmouth, the Portage Diversion, the Fairford Dam and the floodway, we would have been 11.4 feet higher at crest just a couple of days ago. So, if you just picture, you know, if there was a window that we could look out of, you'd see a very different scenario in place, and that doesn't include any of the—I could talk about the community ring dikes in the Red River Valley.

This is a bigger flood than in 1950; 100,000 people evacuated. Communities like Morris, Emerson, St. Adolphe were inundated. Significant parts of Winnipeg were inundated. We were 48 hours away from a general evacuation of this city; 2009 was a greater flood, one home impacted, with some water damage in the Red River Valley. That's a huge success story that we should really be proud of as Manitobans, and I'm not saying that in a political sense. I'm saying, you know, we've proven investments pay off.

The floodway, latest estimates—and if you were to do in current dollars—minus 665 we spent on the expansion, perhaps the original cost inflated up—just say it was a billion-and-half-dollar expenditure. We've saved an estimate of \$32 billion in damage, which is huge. So, even though it appears these are significant expenditures, the cost-benefit ratio is often, you know, 1 to 20, and that's just on the economic dollar-and-sense side, let alone the other side of the equation, the human side.

Yes, we've had a fair amount of evacuations this year. We peaked—we're still in, you know, progress, but we have—we did peak at one time at about

1,950 evacuations, a bit down from 2009. Most of them were precautionary, related to road access.

Mr. Eichler: You did tweak me there a little bit with—when you were reading off those expenditures and commitments that you've made.

One would lead me to ask the question, then, I guess, on the number of bridges that were eliminated during the floodway expansion. And the first one being, that got caught, I believe, last year with the ice buildup, and I believe that was St. Mary's bridge. Why would we cut the first bridge and where there was other options that were available?

*(11:20)

Mr. Ashton: It would be key to recognize this: What we did on the floodway is we had a target of the hydraulic capacity that we're protecting against a one-in-700-year flood. So, during the design process, we moved more towards the increased capacity of the channel, widening of the channel. And that did mean that some bridges that were being considered were not proceeded with in terms of that. So what happened, the St. Mary's bridge had nothing actually to do with the design on the floodway or the bridges.

We were in a unique situation in '09 with the ice. You know, for the first time ever, we used the floodway with ice conditions, but the key thing here is the bridges initially were one way of improving the hydraulic capacity, but were able to achieve the hydraulic capacity by widening the channel. And the reason we chose widening rather than deepening to any significant extent was not to have other impacts on groundwater, and that was very much a concern of municipalities north of Winnipeg.

So that's the key element there. We did achieve the hydraulic capacity, and, as of today, we have equivalent to one-in-700-year flood protection through the floodway for every home inside the floodway. Some, upwards of 700-800 homes that, you know, for historic reasons, were outside of the primary dikes, they do need supplementary diking, but the bottom line is we achieved it through that enhanced capacity on the hydraulic side by widening rather than the bridges.

It was cost-effective to the point where we were able to build the floodway on time and on budget and achieve its rated capacity to protect people inside the floodway.

Mr. Eichler: Just again for clarification, for my own sense of the decision was made to not change that

bridge. So, basically, what you're saying, then, it was a mistake to open the floodway with ice on it in order to—it wouldn't be able to normally handle that. That wasn't the intention at the time when you decided not to expand that bridge?

Mr. Ashton: I want to stress again that what happened in '09 was unprecedented and unusual. It was the right decision to operate with ice. Whenever you have ice, you do have additional complications. We saw this again north of Winnipeg in this flood season; we saw it in '09 again north of Winnipeg; we saw it with some of the ice-induced flooding on the—or at least increased water levels, which we prevented from flooding, on the Assiniboine. And it's important to note that the intent with the original design with a—what the member is talking about in terms of the bridges was entirely with hydraulic issues and we accomplished that. The circumstance surrounding 2009 was highly unusual, and with any of the bridges you're going to end up with some potential for ice being caught at the bridges. We've had the Redwood Bridge here; you know, we had the Amphibex out a couple of years ago.

So it—virtually any situation with a bridge would've, you know, so it's important not to confuse the original hydraulic-related raising of bridges with, in this particular case, what happened with ice. That's nothing to do with the design of the floodway in and as of itself, and it's something that would occur with any bridge. It's the girders that are the key challenge, that they create buildup, not the bridge per se.

So, you know, I know, yes, there was ice-induced buildup there, but the original plan when we looked at the bridges was not based on any of those kind of scenarios anyway. It was based on strictly hydraulic capacity, because what happens, as the member knows, is, you know, bridges can provide a significant damming effect, you know. And that's one of the key elements, initially, why there was talk of raising them, but, by not raising them, we achieved the hydraulic capacity anyway. I think that's the key thing. That was the goal. We achieved it, and it was more cost-effective to do it.

The member can, you know, understand far more cost-effective to widen an existing channel than to get into the rather expensive business of building and rebuilding bridges. Building and rebuilding bridges is, even outside of the floodway, is a very expensive proposition. And it was quite an accomplishment, by the way, on the Pierre Delorme Bridge, on a related issue, mind you, the work for

\$12 million, we were able to rebuild that in, basically, what, 18 months. That's unheard of, but we recognize the key access. Still not cheap.

Mr. Eichler: Before I leave it, then, just so, again, for clarification, the original budget that was established for the floodway expansion, the number of bridges, were they never in the original estimate to be replaced or raised in those areas?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, they were in the original estimate.

Mr. Eichler: So, if they were in the original estimate to be replaced, there was five bridges, I understand, that was not raised under the floodway the way it was proposed originally. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Four.

Mr. Eichler: So, then, is the long-term plan to replace those four bridges and elevate them then?

Mr. Ashton: No, again, because we've achieved the hydraulic capacity in the floodway, so there would be no reason to raise them. Anything that would happen on the bridge, those bridges would be related to traffic issues, not hydraulic issues. So, I mean, at some point in time you would go through a significant, you know, maintenance on the bridge, reconstruction on the bridge. I wouldn't say 10, 20, 30 years down the line that there may be reconstruction of bridges entirely. But there's a separation here between traffic and hydraulic. We achieved the hydraulic capacity, so there's no reason to raise those bridges. If there's any traffic-related issues with those bridges down the line, that will be dealt with through the normal capital budget.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you for that clarification. I do want to now move on to capital grants, and I notice there's a significant change from 2010 to 2011. I was wondering if you could outline what that's about in your estimate process.

Mr. Ashton: We'll get back to the member on the capital grants, and the one thing I was going to mention too, by the way, on bridges, there were—there's also the two rail bridges. I think maybe that's where the member's thinking of additional—the additional bridges, and the—again, the determination there is the ability to raise those bridges on a temporary basis is far more cost effective than actually replacing them. They're actually very low-volume bridges. You know, they're important to those railroads, but the bridges I was referring to earlier, the highway-related bridges—and we did achieve the hydraulic capacity.

* (11:30)

Mr. Eichler: I believe—I'm coming back to that same illustration the minister gave me on the railway bridges that—just, again, for clarification so that I do have it. I thought all the railway bridges were replaced; is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Four of the six were replaced and the other two that we have—the other two can be removed so as not to create the hydraulic obstacle in a major flood, and it's far more cost-effective to do that, which is a very unlikely occurrence, will, you know, will occur very infrequently, and to actually reconstruct them.

And, again, that is—the key thing we did throughout the whole project—I was minister responsible for part of it; the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) was for other time periods. We did a lot of work on value engineering in the project, as well, so our original scope of design and our final design did shift over time because our goal was flood protection, and the goal, quite apart from that, was to build it on time and on budget. So the reason there was a shift was very much related to what was the most cost-effective way of getting it done. And that was important to our partners, the federal government, also to, you know, the people we represent.

So I wouldn't underestimate, by the way, how much of an accomplish it was in a time of high construction costs to get the job done on time and on budget to the point now that this flood, even though it's a major flood, is minor compared to the improved capacity that we're getting from the floodway.

The new floodway will particularly be noticeable in floods of 170 years, one in 170 years or greater. If you look at the hydraulic flows, it's actually to the point where a one-in-700-year flood—and you would end up with probably 425,000 people inundated in Winnipeg without the floodway expansion. With the floodway expansion, you would end up with a situation very similar to now, which would be very significant flooding outside of the populated area here, but Winnipeg would be protected.

So this year, if this appears like a major flood, it's nothing compared to what this—compared like to what this flood will protect against then. I know the technical people—you know, I love the way they come up with one in a hundred, one in 700 years. You know, it strikes me as we had a major flood in

'09, a major one in 2011. That's what most Manitobans are saying. But there will come a time where someone is going to say, thank goodness they built the floodway expansion. We're certainly saying today, thank goodness they built the floodway.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Minister, I'd like to—questions on agricultural permits for agricultural equipment on the roads. It seems that there's been some change this year. Is there any specific reason for that?

Mr. Ashton: We're not aware of any changes. I don't know if the member has a specific concern.

Mr. Graydon: Well, yes, Mr. Minister, I do have specifics. I've been working with an individual probably—he's probably in the Gilbert Plains area, has phoned in for his permit; he gets a permit every year for his air seeder. He said he was—had some difficulty with the permit; he couldn't get a yearly permit as normal, that he would have to get a daily permit to move from field to field. He—as you can appreciate this year, being a terribly wet year, the opportunities to seed are going to be limited and the days—seeding dates are getting narrower and narrower—their window for seeding.

And so I checked with your department. They said, it's not a problem; just phone in, get your permit, give the height, width and length, and you can get a yearly permit. In a conversation, also, I did say that perhaps this individual might be pulling a Pickett behind his equipment, or a four-wheeler. They said that you can't do that. So, fine, you won't do that. This individual doesn't do it anyway.

He phoned in for his permit, and they told him that it would be a one-time permit. That's all that he could get because of his height of his air seeder. It would be a one-time permit and they needed 48 hours' notice if he was to move to the next field. Mr. Minister, that's quite a deviation from the past.

Mr. Ashton: This may be related—I know there is an issue related to hydro lines—the policy that Hydro has in terms of currents in the hydro lines. I don't know the specifics on this, but that may be one of the factors. The member mentioned heights, and the permits are given out on a case-by-case basis, I'm advised. So this is really just an extension of that. I could—I would suggest we follow up on the details, so I can give the member a specific answer, but I'm advised that's probably the reason why, the hydro lines.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate you're following up on this. I just want to make you aware that the air seeder hasn't changed in the last three years. The fields haven't changed in the last three years. I know I have changed my air seeding equipment this year and what we did was contacted Manitoba Hydro, explained where our fields were. They were very co-operative, and they checked them for us and said we have no problems. You're good to go.

In this situation this is the same equipment as was last year, the same fields, and so I just wondered if there was some change in the status or change in the regulations. We're all concerned about the safety, and hydro lines are definitely an issue.

The other question we have in regards to farm equipment and length, for example, for a number of years now we've—for the last couple of years we've been restricted on the length on hauling round bales. We find that that's—in the agricultural and in the rural of Manitoba we find that that is something that shouldn't have happened.

But we see on the main highways is we see trains being pulled up to 100 and—I think it's 127 feet now. Even up No. 6 Highway, which is a very narrow highway, we see trains moving up there, travelling at 100K-plus, and we in the agricultural field now have semi-trailers that we pull. Although they're homemade, they are certainly a lot better than the four-wheeled trailers that hauled a few round bales and snaked down the road, having wood fall off them with nails and whatever. These trailers are a lot safer with a lot safer load on them, and we're being restricted to only pulling one trailer. And I'm wondering if the minister would want to change that.

Mr. Ashton: My suggestion is—and I don't know if the member wants to, you know, put the specific name on the record. Probably the best way would be outside Estimates, and I'm, you know, I'm not trying to put the individual on the spot or anything at all, but if he could provide the details I'll undertake to follow up in terms of that.

* (11:40)

Mr. Graydon: I'll be more than happy to follow up with the minister or with his staff on that.

There's one other question that I have with regarding the permits. As the minister's well aware, there's—because of the flooding, and I know that he's

aware of it, and I have to commend him for the job that he has done with the amount of pressure he's had from every direction in flooding this year. It's probably one of the times that he would wish that he was probably in Education or some other portfolio. But, at the same time, we do have a situation in rural Manitoba where I've said earlier that the window for seeding is going to be very, very tight. Getting product in and out of areas where it's needed and into the storage facilities that are there is going to be a challenge.

But one of the situations that has arisen in my constituency, a certain dealership had the—had a permit for bringing in loads, A1 loads over a restricted highway for two and half miles, and there was an agreement that they would pay so much a ton for the extra. And the permit has been in place for three years. Unfortunately, when they went to renew the permit this year, they said that it couldn't possibly be done. Over the past three years, there's been no damage to the highway. The two and half miles, the trucks never get up to any speed at all because they make a turn and they have to stop in two and half miles. So they never—it's not an issue where they're travelling at high speeds and pounding out the road.

I'm just wondering if the minister can tell me why this permit would not have been renewed this year.

Mr. Ashton: Again, being a specific circumstance, I think the member's put on the record the general concern, and if we could get the details, I'll make sure that we get a direct response. And if the member could provide that information even right after Estimates, we may be in a position to get a response when we reconvene on Monday.

Madam Chairperson: Prior to recognizing the honourable member, I was just going to encourage the honourable minister to speak a little louder, just to ensure that *Hansard* picks up everything that you have to say.

Mr. Ashton: I get the opposite advice in the House, so that's probably a first.

Mr. Graydon: And I echo the minister's words, and I'm glad that I was here to be a witness that he was asked to speak louder.

And that concludes my question for today, but what I will do is I will supply the minister's staff with the appropriate information either today or first thing Monday morning. Thank you very much.

Mr. Eichler: Madam Chairperson, I notice that there's an increase in funding from Manitoba Public Insurance agreement. Can the minister explain what this covers?

Mr. Ashton: Madam Chairperson, and I will speak louder. Is that better? The grant payments MPI has—hasn't changed since 2004 since the agreement was signed. The grant payment was \$21,197,000 in 2010. The \$6.7-million increase in—to \$27.9 million is intended to cover administrative cost increases resulting from the national identity verification standards, increasing population, with the resultant increase for road testing, more oversight on professional drivers and a more rigorous driver improvement and control program.

Mr. Eichler: Madam Chairperson, the transfer, then, of monies from MPI to your department, then, for administration, these driver's licence and the vehicles for the collection of fees, that falls under The Highway Traffic Act, then? Is that—am I correct on that understanding?

Mr. Ashton: Well, this is part of the change that occurred a number of years ago, which essentially had MPI, in addition to its role, you know, as the insurer, undertake the role of the driver vehicle licensing agency. So what we have jurisdictionally is we are the—we're governed by the drivers and vehicles licensing act and this is a payment to MPI. One of the reasons this was done was it was felt that the combination of the two services was more cost-effective. MPI has its own computer system, has an extensive database. You know, it does have a significant role in insuring vehicles. And what this payment is is really just an extension of that and, again, it's under the driver and vehicles licensing act.

Mr. Eichler: Just so I'm clear, then, so when we merged the two departments together, the idea was to be more financially responsible in order to save some of those costs, but, yet, we really haven't achieved that. Is that's what happened so we had to have more money come out of the agreement, or is this the result of just change and that so that the department can access those dollars through the licensing?

Mr. Ashton: Well, it has saved a significant amount of money, and I'll give the member rather than the most clear dimension on that and that's in terms of computer services. MPI has allowed us to not have to invest in a significant provincial investment in computer systems, so you do have, in this case, the MPI computer investment preventing us from having to spend a pretty significant amount of money.

There are also cost savings that we have, as well, because we're also working with MPI's system now in terms of the issuing of licences and the various other elements, you know, the DVL side, working with local agents, many members of the constituency and others. So, then, again, I wasn't minister at the time of the change, but I can just say, you know, the general perspective caveat was it was felt that was more cost-effective.

So, notwithstanding that there are some additional costs over time, we've forgone significant investments in IT and we have moved to some significant cost savings in the way in which we deliver DVL by having a joint focus. And it—one other area, by the way, is we did commit to pay, you know, like, for full costs and, including in this case, we have the enhanced driver's licence and other, you know, elements that are relatively new, but what I want to stress is this also occurs often.

I'm still involved in this MIT minister. Our department is involved as the statutory authority. So MPI delivers DVL services, but when it comes to licensing, we have various licensing agreements with different, you know, different jurisdictions. We're still involved as the authority under the act. So what we're looking at here is MPI acting on behalf of the statutory authority under the DVL side, and we believe it's proven to be very, very cost-effective.

One of the things that's also happened is we've got now longer-term licensing. And I can tell the member that, a few years ago, having been highways minister at the time, one of the No. 1 things that I got, well, how can—how come we can't have longer term licensing? Why is it on an annual basis? And a lot of it was really tied into, you had—both the license vehicles had Autopac system, and what we've worked out now because of this delivery through MPI is a much better licences. And we have state-of-the-art photo licences, you know, the one piece. We have, as well, the enhanced driver's licence that is available as an option, and it's not done on, you know, an annual basis in terms of the photo and other aspects of it. So the combination of having DVL—have service provided by MPI has led us to those kind of changes on the licensing side that probably saved some money, but also are much more convenient for Manitobans.

* (11:50)

Mr. Eichler: Before I leave that then, you're bringing up an interesting comment in the licensing

itself. Are those still done out-of-province, or are they processed in Manitoba?

Mr. Ashton: Since we have that done by MPI, I would have to get back to the member. That's how much we have basically passed the operation of the system over to MPI. So, notwithstanding, it's, you know, it's—this is not the MPI committee. I'll make sure that we get an answer by Monday, if we can.

Mr. Eichler: I was just curious. So if you could get back to me, that would be fine.

The pages 132 and pages 133, The Canada-Manitoba Agreements, in particular, the provincial government, have you calculated the infrastructure deficit for provincially owned infrastructure; roads, bridges, water control, those types of things? You know, I know we talk about it on a regular basis, but I know it'd be difficult, but have you got any steps that—where we need to go and what we need to do over the next short and long term as far as deficits are concerned?

Mr. Ashton: Well, certainly, we have capital planning that we have in place in that area. I'm not sure how much detailed discussion the member wants to get into, but perhaps I'll maybe ask that question back. I—you know, we've identified various challenges. We do have some significant investments that we're putting in place and we're also going to be looking at, by the way, post-flood, and some of the experience as well, as we do after every flood. So we may be into a broader discussion within the next couple of months on that basis.

But, perhaps I'll maybe throw it back to the member. I'm sure he maybe want to put on the record some specific suggestions, concerns, which we certainly welcome.

Mr. Eichler: I think that's a good suggestion, and we'll maybe try and work on specifics rather than overall general picture. How much money has flowed to Manitoba since the inception of the Building Canada Fund, both through major infrastructure component and, of course, through the communities component. Do we have a dollar amount on that?

Mr. Ashton: What I was going to suggest is that we'll get that detail—we'll get it by the next committee hearing.

Mr. Eichler: On page 132, it states that all of Manitoba's Building Canada plans—some of these programs are fully allocated. Can the minister clarify

whether that this is for the 2011-2012 physical year? Is it for the duration of the programs? Is there a time limit on it?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, that's for the duration of the program, and it's been one of the, I think, indicators, the degree to which we need ongoing infrastructure programs, the degree to which not only did—have we allocated programs such as the Building Canada Fund, but we had significant applications to virtually every infrastructure fund that we do have with the federal government. In many cases, it's a quantum of several dollars' worth of application to what's been approved. What that indicates, to my mind, is the degree to which there is still a need on the infrastructure side. And that's, again, back to my previous comments about the fact that municipalities and provinces have been talking about the need for an ongoing commitment on infrastructure.

Mr. Eichler: Under the gates and border crossing fund, how much is money has flowed in that particular department?

Mr. Ashton: What I can do, I mean, we can get that number in the next couple minutes, but what I was going to suggest is, again, since we're going to be back in session, I'll get the details at the beginning of the next committee hearing on Monday.

Mr. Eichler: Sure, that would be fine, Madam Chairperson. The 'procast' infrastructure projects cost for CentrePort project, do we have kind of an update on the status as far as CentrePort Way. What's the completion time? When are we looking at some of those projects that we're looking at for the short-term completion times?

Mr. Ashton: In general, we're investing \$220 million with the way—in partnership with the federal government. What I can do is, again, because I recognize the Estimates are pretty compressed here, is rather than, you know, we can probably get a detailed list in a couple minutes by the beginning of next committee—meaning, I'll get the latest update. In fact, if there are any other capital issues, highways or other that the member's interested in, you know, we can also provide that information as well in the, you know, remaining 35 minutes.

So, if that's okay with the member, rather than answer it now, we'll have something on Monday.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, that would be just fine.

What's the current updated estimate cost to build a mile of paved highway, two lane?

Mr. Ashton: It's at least a million, and it could be up to a million and a half. It depends on whether you have to, you know regrade. Because there's two components—well, there's several components but the two main components really—obviously the surface and the road structure itself. So that's the general range—at least a million.

Mr. Eichler: So it hasn't changed a whole lot from the previous year. I think I asked that question last year, and I think that cost was about the same. So that's interesting; I thought with the price of oil it might be, you know, significantly higher. But I know this morning it dropped, you know, a fair amount. But I anticipated that it would be quite a bit higher than that, so I'm pleased to hear that it's very close to that.

The RTAC road that was completed in 2010-2011, how many miles of that and what was the cost was involved in completion of those miles?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, well, on the—I might have made a mistake on the oil prices. That may change as we go into construction season. The member has a good point. It is a cost factor, but, of course, it's been fluctuating. We've had years in the past where there's been similarly high prices for oil that can have an impact.

One of the things that has helped us control prices, quite frankly, is our ability to flow more significant funds into large projects. I mean the one thing that the department will always tell you is that if you can get bigger projects, you avoid some of the assembly costs. You know, whenever you have a contract that is a certain percentage of the cost, it really is not an actual cost of materials, it's actually the cost of setting up the asphalt plant, it's, you know, getting the staff in place and doing it.

So one of the benefits of a larger capital program is that it's more cost effective. We've had some very significant projects. I can tell you some of the level of projects we've had right now, it's almost like where you could put another zero on what, you know, what was the case a few years ago. It used to be a \$3-million project was a big project. Add a zero now—so there's a significant element.

In terms of RTAC, in a general sense, we have begun to really significantly turn the corner on the status of RTAC roads. The beginning of '99-2000 we were increasingly looking at more and more roads with restrictions. And quite frankly, with a scale of capital budget, we would have been taking roads off

RTAC. We would have been, in some cases, even potentially having to have paved roads revert to gravel surfaces, in addition to, you know, just the RTAC rating itself.

But what we've been able to do through our capital program and our significant investments is actually get a number of RTAC roads where we remove the spring restrictions or reduce the spring restrictions. And we're also in a position now where we have been able to really look ahead where we can enhance the RTAC network in Manitoba. And we're doing capital planning right now that will be part of our—it's one of the subtexts of our five-year plan that will allow us to look at where strategically we can enhance the RTAC network.

*(12:00)

I don't want to underestimate. The member knows this is coming from a rural riding, the degree to which that is critical to rural economic development and has made a significant difference in our ability to have increased and more efficient freight transfers in rural Manitoba.

I want to also stress, by the way, just on RTAC and just, I don't know, pre-empting the member's question, but we do have, now, an agreement of a consistent RTAC weight with Saskatchewan. It may not sound like a big deal. It is. To go, you know, where you had us with 62,500 and them with sixty two or sixty three, five. Truckers will tell you they have to go to the lowest common denominator, so restricted weights—it's just one of those patchwork quilt regulations that this didn't make sense.

There's other things we've done, and I can provide the member with a list of some of the other elements we're working co-operatively on. We're particularly trying to get more seamless regional approaches to spring restrictions as well because the oil and gas industry, for example, is reactive in Manitoba now and in Saskatchewan, and it's a huge problem for them if they have to have very different trucking regulations between the two provinces.

But I can get a list that can highlight some of the things we are doing on the RTAC system. But I can tell you the No. 1 thing over the next number of years, we will be adding to the RTAC system, and that is a huge shift from a few years ago when we were essentially, through the spring restrictions, taking significant highways off full RTAC, which had a significant cost. Now, are we there yet? No, we're still—it's a work in progress, but you're going to

see significantly more unrestricted RTAC access over the next five, 10 years.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the minister for the answer, Madam Chairperson. Of course, it leads to more and more questions, and I take very seriously the fact about the agreement with Saskatchewan. And, of course, I think the minister understands very clearly where we've been at, you know, in regards to the New West Partnership Agreement, and anything we can do in regards to being in line with those other provinces to the west of us and, of course, to the east of us as well—and I know it's very important to the trucking association, and I compliment the minister and his staff for the job that they did in that regard, to harmonize as much as possible at least the weights that—and the lengths and the widths that we talk about in transportation so those are consistent through the provinces.

And the minister commented, as well, in regards to the rural Manitoba with the number of rail lines that have been abandoned over the past number of years. I have serious concerns about that and that's why I brought the question up in regards to the RTAC roads. I'm very concerned that, you know, rural Manitoba be able to get those goods and services and, of course, the—you know, the weights are very important so I'm very pleased that the minister will get me the information on the RTAC roads that are—that have been built and what are proposed to be built in the past year and, of course, those that would be moving forward.

The other thing that concerns me is also where do we go, you know, for these other communities in the future? So I know that, you know, it's a—there's a deficit out there, of course, some of it not as a result of the roads at all. It's because of the rail line abandonment, but, also, I guess, one of the other concerns that we have not only with the RTAC roads, but is the ditch mowing and weed removal. I know that we had certain challenges last year with regards to getting the roads mowed in a timely manner. I was wondering if the minister and his staff could provide us an update on what's being done to address this issue as well.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's—we're going to have full ditch maintenance which will considerably reduce the number of calls into my office, the MLA's offices and departmental offices. I think it's important to note, too, it was a difficult year, may be a difficult year as well. I mean, there is the ability to actually do

it. If those ditches haven't drained out, it may be a challenge, but there will be full maintenance.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Let me start—since this is the flood season—with maybe you can tell me how long the expectation is that Highway 75 north of Morris will not be useable.

Mr. Ashton: We're currently anticipating that it could reopen as soon as mid-May.

Mr. Gerrard: And I mean there's clearly a need for a long-run solution to this problem, as that road has been unusable for a significant proportion of time in the last few years. When and what will the minister's solution be?

Mr. Ashton: Well, we've taken about 37 potential options and narrowed it down to two conceptual options. We held an open house in Morris last year. I attended along with Lance Vigfusson, from the department, and we, at that time, presented the general options which could involve everything from relocating the bridge, relocating parts of the Morris River and various elements of diking and drainage and highway access.

We indicated at the time there's no simple solutions. And one of the key challenges to it is to ensure that as we move to the goal, which is to reduce the number of days in which it's closed, to meet interstate standards. When I say to meet interstate standards, there are times when the interstate is closed as well. So there would still be times, but to give a comparison—in '09 we were closed 36 days. The goal here is to significantly reduce that. What we're doing right now is the hydraulic work, and I mentioned this earlier but it's not a study in, you know, in a sort of academic sense. It's determining exactly what the current situation is and what the solution is.

The key thing we have to ensure we do, and that was a key message at the open house, is not create other negative consequences in terms of flooding or in terms of boat access in the area. It was very well attended. There were people both from Morris itself, you know, the town, also from the RM. And I think the message that we gave is that this is a significant prairie force as a province. I note the mayor of Morris commented publicly just recently on his view that the Province is significantly engaged and is serious about developing a solution. Whatever solution there is will not be inexpensive, but we recognize that there is a cost to the closure. There's an impact on the community, the surrounding area.

There's also impact on the trucking industry. Currently, trucking does get through to the US, for example, but there is a 64-kilometre detour, which does add time and cost.

So we are committed to coming up with a solution and as I said, there are a couple basic approaches. I'd be quite happy to provide the information to the member as well, too, that was released publicly at the open house, because it gives it a sense of the fact that, not only is there no simple solution, anything we're looking at in terms of solutions is probably a combination of different elements.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for that information, and it clearly is a matter which needs some attention and some action.

I would also like to ask the minister about, since we're dealing with Morris, there's Highway 23 which goes west from Morris. There's one and a half to two kilometres which tend to go underwater, which mean that it's more difficult to get access to Morris from the west.

What—has the minister any plans? I think that's Highway 23 west.

Mr. Ashton: Could the member—is he talking about west or east?

* (12:10)

Mr. Gerrard: There's a section of Highway 23 west which tends to go under water and, you know, the situation could be alleviated by perhaps raising that one and a half to two kilometres. And I'm just wondering whether the minister has any plans with that respect.

Mr. Ashton: That's all connected to the hydraulic study because, again, even raising a road can have hydraulic impacts. So when we're talking about Morris, I want to say, it's not just the bridge. It's about a regional solution that ensures that we improve access on 75, presumably on 23 as well and—but at the same time, not create negative hydraulic impacts.

I do want to mention on 23 while we're on the subject, as well, we did put one and a quarter million dollars into the bridge itself to shore it up, to ensure that it would be there in terms of access during the flood event, you know, recognizing that 75 was clearly going to be closed and that investment certainly has paid off. You know, we have been able to continue to have access, and I should add, by the

way, on 75 there is local access south on 75. When I'm talking about mid-May, I'm talking about the full opening. There will be some ability to have local access on a limited basis over the next number of days. But our goal, obviously, is to get the highway up and running again for full traffic.

Mr. Gerrard: While I'm on southern Manitoba, I wrote to the minister, I think it was last July, about a problem on Highway 12 near Sprague. The ditch right beside the highway which serves as a significant drainage ditch is clogged. Culvert doesn't let that drain very easily, and the farmer who was there who had a wonderful crop, I think it was fall rye, you know, lost his crop completely because the water couldn't drain out because the drain besides Highway 12 drainage ditch was clogged up. And I've not received a reply, so I'm just wondering if the minister could provide an update.

Mr. Ashton: I'll track down the specific details. I appreciate raising the issue and we're going to be sitting in committee again on Monday. I'll undertake to get the details in terms of a response by Monday.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister. One of the things I wanted to ask about is the east-side road which is a major highway development, but I understand that doesn't fall under the minister's purview at all. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: The member's correct. I am responsible for the MIT, the other side of Transportation, for the floodway authority. But the East Side Road Authority comes under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson).

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the next question I had, one of the major issues which has been around, as the minister knows for quite some time, is some long-term solution on Peguis because they've been repeatedly flooded. I think there's still more than 500 people evacuated from Peguis and well, what's the minister's plans in this respect?

Mr. Ashton: I know the member knows Peguis well and I know, obviously, in his current role but as former member of Parliament for the area and certainly know the history of Peguis which is—Peguis is not originally located where it is today. It was relocated from south of Winnipeg into an area that's very flood prone. What we did in 2005—I was minister of Water Stewardship at the time, so this is actually through that department. We entered an agreement with the federal government and with

Peguis that was aimed at doing very much what we did in the Red River Valley post '97, which is do full *[inaudible]* surveying and to determine the specific issues which are very complex in Peguis and, of course, by extension, the potential solutions.

The work that was done also involved some preliminary work on the flood protection side, and what we did identify from the technical work is that there are a number of homes that are chronically flooded. There are problems with crossings and bridge structures. And there are also many homes that are often at risk from overland flooding.

When we negotiated the federal-provincial agreement on mitigation that came out of the post-2009 event—the flood event across the province—we did negotiate an agreement using the federal-provincial resources. We also, though, undertook to work with and on behalf of Peguis, and in response as a parallel to the federal-provincial agreement that was going to do a significant amount of diking north of Winnipeg and other locations around the province. The federal government, Chuck Strahl was the minister at the time, did commit to relocating or moving, perhaps raising up, 70 homes.

They also committed to doing the technical work on the areas that were identified in terms of the long-term flood mitigation. What we also have done, over and above the work on the long-term mitigation, is identify some of the short-term needs. We have worked with Peguis to set up an EOC. They have been very supportive of that. We also undertook, just a couple weeks ago, to underwrite Peguis purchasing flood equipment. This was a parallel to what we did north of Winnipeg with five municipalities where we granted those municipalities funds to purchase their own flood equipment, given their particular situation, which is they will have more permanent flood protection soon. They need short-term protection.

And I mentioned this earlier, but I'll just repeat that the Prime Minister did agree to fund that. So we, in addition to the long-term mitigation, have been working to support Peguis with short-term actions. And my understanding is they've been able to purchase a significant number of trailers, Tiger tubes, I believe some Aqua Dams as well, some pumps, that will give them some rapid deployment ability in the case of the flooding situation.

So we're—and I want to indicate, too, I piloted this as minister responsible for EMO. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) has as well. The member is quite correct in terms of the number of evacuees. At the

height of evacuations this year, where we had about 1,950 evacuees, more than 80 per cent were from First Nations. It's a bit different with Roseau River, which does have the ring dyke protection. But there were concerns the community had about preserving emergency access.

But Peguis has very little, if any, permanent flood protection, and the only way to reduce this very significant impact on Peguis is for flood mitigation. And we're going to continue to work with Peguis and continue to pressure the federal government to be a key player in that. Having said that, they've made some commitments which I believe are moving in the right direction. But there's a significant amount of work that will need to be done for Peguis before we will see any change from the current situation, which is, I'm going to say chronic flooding. There are people of Peguis who have been evacuated, or flooded or affected by water seepage, if not on an annual basis, on a biannual basis, and that is not acceptable to the people of Peguis. I have worked very closely with the chief and council there.

* (12:20)

Are we making progress? Yes. Is the Province working hard to be part of the solution? Yes. And are we doing some work on our own infrastructure in Peguis? We are as well. We have a highway that's there, so we've done some ditch maintenance work. But what Peguis needs is a long-term commitment to flood protection, and we're going to continue to work with Peguis and the federal government because, quite frankly, it's—the time for the studies is really over. We know the work needs to be done. It's time to move to design and construction.

Mr. Gerrard: There's been, at times, some confusion about the roles of minister's department and Water Stewardship in terms of drainage and water retention, and I just offer the minister an opportunity to clarify precisely what his department's responsibilities are in this area.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, just getting back if I could to a previous question on the East Side Road Authority, the money does flow through MIT, but I just want to reiterate that the minister responsible is the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson).

On drainage and retention, again, we work with Water Stewardship. We do have a significant role in the—on the capital side. Capital investments have been increased over the last several years. In a

general sense, you know, in terms of where we're going to be going for the next period of time, I think part of it is we have to learn from history, and one of the reasons we've been able to deal with a very challenging flood season this year, particularly on the Assiniboine, is because of the foresight not just of the floodway but of the Shellmouth Dam, of the Portage Diversion, and other flood-control mechanisms, many of which were built with significant cost-sharing from the federal government, a number of them through the PFRA, which virtually disappeared from sight with the federal budget. There is a line somewhere, but it's a shadow of its former self.

What we're going to be doing post this flood is going to be reviewing all of the experience of the flood. We'll be looking, obviously, at mitigation as well, as a priority. We've already committed a number of areas, including St. Andrews, the member would know, but in terms of general water management, I won't underestimate the challenge that's out there. We have a drainage infrastructure, by the way, that basically is there for agricultural purposes, was obviously designed and built in the '60-'50s, '60s, '70s, when agriculture was in a very different situation.

We also have clear evidence we're into a—I don't even want to know what you call a wet cycle, but I—a wet period. You see that impact throughout the province, and if the member knows, in some parts of the province, like the Interlake, there's ongoing water saturation levels, so to call it flooding is a bit of a misnomer. This is—it's ongoing flooding, you know, if we use that term. It's not the kind of spring flooding that we normally see maybe exacerbated, and one thing we will be looking is are, you know, are there ways in which we can improve water management in the province.

Now, having said that, the reality is drainage itself doesn't necessarily solve the problem in major floods, but we're looking even there whether there's ways of improving drainage outside of the major flood season because one of the key challenges, as the member knows, will be even—post-flood, how quickly in a more controlled way the water flows off, you know, agricultural land and also how people to get in to produce.

Retention is certainly something we're interested in. There's various areas in the province where there's been various discussions about that. The US is looking at that as well. Our neighbours to the south

have a number of potential projects. I mean, I know this year without the Shellmouth, we would have had a very different flood scenario and, quite frankly, without the regulation of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg, again, there would be a very different flood scenario as well. So we're going to look at any and all options.

And I certainly appreciate the member's, you know, concerns and suggestions on that. I know the member has raised issues in the past on areas that he thinks should be looked at, and I certainly welcome any feedback from the member. Clearly, we're, you know, we're going to post-flood deal with the immediate flood situation, but I would underestimate the degree to which water management, and that includes flood control, drainage and everything in between—I wouldn't underestimate the degree to which that is a real challenge for us as a province.

And in the past we've met that challenge. My sense is we can do it again, but it's going to mean perhaps even a bit of a rethink, perhaps even revisiting things like retention that haven't been the same priority in the past. You know, my sense is we're going to have to recognize that we're into a long-term, wet scenario that requires some maybe new or, in some cases, renewed strategies.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, as well as Peguis, there are other communities, Roseau River, Lake St. Martin and so on which need some permanent solutions. I wonder if the minister would talk for a moment about Lake St. Martin and what the planning is there.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, and Roseau River, by the way, was included in a ring dike program post '97, which has made a significant difference to the community, not that there aren't access issues and flood-related issues.

It's a good question about Lake St. Martin. As we speak, the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs is meeting with the affected communities. I want to say the affected communities—the communities in Lake St. Martin, including Lake St. Martin itself and Little Saskatchewan. You also have Dauphin River and Fairford in that area as well. But the two communities on Lake St. Martin, there's really two issues. One has got the overall impact on homes from the saturated water conditions there. The member's, I know, very aware of that community and has visited, I'm sure, many times. But we're also anticipating very high levels this year on Lake St. Martin.

So there's two dimensions: one is the need for temporary protection, enhanced dikes to protect the homes that are in the area. The communities themselves have also raised other issues. There's a concern that some homes can't be practically protected, and would have to be relocated. I know the chiefs have talked about everything from moving homes or in cases, you know, there's been talk about higher ground strategy, eventually getting an alternate location for the community.

There is also another issue as well which is road access, and the road access is both through a provincial highway and also a main market road. It's in poor condition now, not in the best condition at other times, and we are going to be undertaking to significantly upgrade that access into the community.

What we anticipate will happen in the next period of time is, you know, clearly, you know, we're respecting the federal government's relationship that we're into working with the two First Nations, but we've also engaged INAC, and they have engaged INAC. And it really is a parallel of what we're doing in Peguis where some homes potentially would potentially have to be relocated. Some would be—some other homes would be protected by mitigation. The key message though to those communities is we recognize the historic situation that they're dealing with. We recognize some of the challenges they've been dealing even before this flood season. We want to be there not just during the flood season but to get a permanent solution.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I mean the situation in Lake St. Martin is particularly troublesome, because it's been, you know, a major impact on the community itself. And certainly the community deserves some good long-run thinking to make sure that, you know, the situation is much better than it has been over the last number of years. Whatever that requires is—certainly the present situation is pretty intolerable and can't continue. And certainly it needs working with people in the community themselves, and trying to work out what the people in the community would like and how that would work moving forward.

But I think it clearly—I mean, as the minister pointed out, there's a provincial highway there and there's a provincial role in trying to make sure that there's a solution which works for people. I'm glad to hear the minister's interest in it and hope that that will continue.

The situation—

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. For the information of members, the Infrastructure and Transportation Estimates will revert to committee room 255 on Monday.

The hour being 12:30, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Marilyn Brick): The hour being after 12:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 6, 2011

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<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>