

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Wellington	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
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McGIFFORD, Diane	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Carman	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
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SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
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STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	Inkster	
<i>Vacant</i>	Lac du Bonnet	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 18, 2011

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 40—The Condominium Act and Amendments
Respecting Condominium Conversions
(Various Acts Amended)**

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 40, The Condominium Act and Amendments Respecting Condominium Conversions (Various Acts Amended), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: This bill introduces new protection for condo owners, buyers, and provides for the regulation of condo conversions.

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

**Bill 300—The Winnipeg Foundation
Amendment Act**

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), that Bill 300, The Winnipeg Foundation Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Brick: Mr. Speaker, this bill moves to amend the number of members that it would take to constitute a board. Thank you.

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

PETITIONS

PTH 5—Reducing Speed Limit

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Concerns continue to be raised about the number of motor vehicle accidents at the intersection of PTH No. 5 and PR No. 276 and at the intersection of PTH 5 and PR 68.

The Rural Municipality of Ste. Rose and the Town of Ste. Rose have both raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about the current speed limits on that portion of PTH No. 5 in the vicinity of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Other stakeholders, including the Ste. Rose General Hospital, Ste. Rose and Laurier fire departments, East Parkland Medical Group and the Ste. Rose and District Community Resource Council, have also suggested that lowering the current 100-kilometre-per-hour speed limit on a portion of PTH No. 5 may help reduce the potential for collisions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by G. Boerchers, A. Shwaykosky, G. Boerchers and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Auto Theft—Court Order Breaches

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by B. Feenstra, C. Grath, S. Lips and thousands of other concerned Manitobans.

Bipole III—Cost to Manitoba Families

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

This will cost each family of four in Manitoba \$11,748 more than an east-side line—*[interjection]* than an east-side route, which is shorter and more reliable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by A. Bennet Waugh, G. Waugh, L. Bennet and many, many more fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flooding and Ice Jams Update

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): The Assiniboine River is expected to see its second crest upstream of the Portage Diversion later tonight at around 52,000 cfs. Due to very favourable weather over the last week, the tributaries have dropped off and we are not expecting to see the worst-case forecast, the 56,000 cfs that was a possibility last week.

This favourable weather has also greatly improved the working conditions around the dikes and helped officials better manage weak spots that were rapidly appearing. Despite this favourable weather, I need to stress that the risks that come along with these extremely high flows remain. Just this morning, crews monitoring the integrity of the Portage Diversion found a new area of concern and are following up accordingly. The diversion is operating at more than 30 per cent above its normal maximum capacity and is under significant strain.

We have been able to minimize the flows out of the controlled release point to date, but this important relief point in the system remains a critical part of the ability to adapt to changing conditions and manage the record flows on the Assiniboine in a safe and controlled manner.

The rising Lake Manitoba levels continue to be an area of provincial focus. Approximately 60 provincial staff have been in St. Laurent assisting efforts to fill sandbags this week. An additional stockpile of 100,000 provincial sandbags has been delivered for use by cottagers and residents over the long weekend, and, actually, I can update that to 356,000 having been provided.

And, I want to indicate that this spring's flood has broken many records, and its scope and scale have presented many new challenges for our flood forecasting team, as well as municipal and provincial flood fighters. As always, we will be using these experiences to help improve our ability to fight future floods and guide improvements to our enviable permanent flood protection infrastructure network.

It is through the lessons that we have learned in the past that we have built the strong floodfighting and emergency management system that we have now, and we will continue to improve it with each and every flood we face together as Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his latest update on the flood situation. Heavy attention continues to be focused on matters such as the deliberate breach in the Assiniboine River dike. We appreciate all efforts that have been undertaken to try and minimize the impact. Special thanks must also go to the military personnel working so diligently along the Assiniboine River dikes to maintain the integrity of this system. Although the soldiers may not be readily visible to the public, the importance of their work cannot be understated.

We continue to receive calls from those impacted by the high levels of Lake Manitoba in places such as Lynchs Point, Big Point, Twin Lakes beaches, The Narrows and many other communities. People around the lake are working to protect their properties, and they certainly appreciate any resources that can be sent their way to assist with that. Ranchers and farmers are working quickly to relocate livestock and equipment away from the rising waters.

We recognize that the effects of this widespread flooding will be felt for some time, be it in the form of evacuations, business disruption, property damage, effects on livestock and crop production and municipal and provincial infrastructure damage. As always, sound communications between government and those affected by the flooding is key. We encourage the government to provide as much information as it can to those affected as quickly as possible, especially when it comes to matters such as the flood forecasting and compensation programs, among other matters. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I want first and foremost today to commend all those who are involved in fighting the flood, from government officials to our Armed Forces to the many, many workers and volunteers who are participating on a daily basis and continuing to support these efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are reports today that there may have been some miscalculations in the extent of the flood along the Assiniboine River, and this may have impacted the decision to make the cut in the Assiniboine River dike. But I think even though we begin to look at what's happened, it's very important that we keep our primary focus on those who are being affected right now and in minimizing further flooding damage and ensuring people are safe and that workers and businesses can get back to their normal activities as soon as possible.

We're certainly thankful for the favourable weather and hope that this continues, in light of the people who are being most impacted right at the moment. Certainly it's those who are evacuated, those who have businesses which cannot operate in places like Brandon and, of course, many, many people along the shores of Lake Manitoba, from the Twin Lakes beaches, St. Laurent, Delta Beach and other communities and, of course, many farmers and ranchers around Lake Manitoba who are being impacted severely, as well as these people along the Fairford River, including the community of Fairford and at Lake St. Martin, including the community of Little Saskatchewan and the community of Lake St. Martin. And these areas will be affected for quite some time to come. In the area—case of Lake St. Martin, the peak there may not be till late June or early July.

So we have a lot yet to do, and we mustn't forget those who are affected last, because they are impacted a great deal.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today, we have the 2011 Legislative Building tour guides. They are Rachèle Bosc, Lauren Schwab, Lauren Roberts and Erica Siddall. They are accompanied by Vanessa Gregg and she is the Visitor Tour Program manager.

And also in the Speaker's Gallery we have the Auditor General, Carol Bellringer, and Daniel Mukuria from the Kenya National Audit Office.

Also in the public gallery we have with us from the North End Sponsorship Team, we have Reverend Annemarie MacIntosh, Reverend John Kunkel and Elisabeth Kunkel, and Jim Mair who are the guests of the honourable member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun).

And also in the public gallery we have from Van Walleghem School, we have 23 grade 8 students under the direction of Ms. Tannis Kyle. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Official Opposition—or the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Lake Manitoba Flooding Mitigation Information for Residents

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): At the outset, again we just want to thank and acknowledge those many volunteers and officials throughout the province of Manitoba who have responded with incredible efforts over the past 10 days or so in connection with the unexpected flooding through the Assiniboine Valley. And, in particular, Mr. Speaker, we are more impressed with every passing day with the incredible efforts of the Canadian Armed Forces who are out there providing information, providing support and providing incredible amounts of effort and labour on those dikes and in various other ways to protect the property and homes of the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, with the very challenging circumstances around Lake Manitoba, in part caused by the added flow going through the Portage Diversion, there are efforts under way by local homeowners and others to protect property up and down the lake. We continue to receive reports of significant areas that as of today still haven't had the level of support they require from the government in terms of the protection of property around the lake.

The major concern, Mr. Speaker, is that any kind of storm with rising waters will inflict very significant damage and it could happen on the east, south or west shores of that lake, many of which remain vulnerable.

Can the government indicate what steps they are taking to ensure that all of those people around the lake who have an interest in that property, who have homes and livelihoods, are going to be protected by this government?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been signalling over the last number of weeks the clear challenge on Lake Manitoba: historic high water levels, the highest since regulation.

We have particularly flagged the particular challenge in terms of wind and wave set-up events. We faced that challenge in the south basin over the last week, and communities in areas such as twin beaches, Delta Beach and St. Laurent were impacted. There's currently a south wind, which means that we are also facing challenges in Meadow Portage, Spence Lake, Benake Point and Woods Creek.

We have been mobilizing significant volunteers there. There was 275 volunteers and there were 60 provincial staff.

And I want to indicate—and I know the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) had raised this concern; I know the member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) has also raised concerns about sandbags. We've had 30–356,000 sandbags delivered and filled over the last 48 hours.

And we are stepping up—stepping in for Lake Manitoba. We know there's a real challenge there and it's going to be a long haul over the summer and into the fall, and we're stepping up our flood protection efforts in the area.

* (13:50)

Assiniboine River Compensation Information for Residents

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister has indicated some of those communities that are facing threats as a result of a south wind, and he is correct about that. And I would add to that list properties along Lunder Beach, as well, which are on the point that goes into the lake, which are quite concerned about south winds, and those along the other shores are concerned about north winds and winds from the northwest.

And I just want to ask the minister: In addition to the protection measures which continue to be required around that lake, there are many, many voices in the province of people who've been impacted by the flood looking for clarity on the issues of compensation. We note that some of the details are now coming out as they make various media comments, and the minister has said that there will be no aggregate limits on claims.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) indicated that he didn't think deductibles were appropriate and also that homeowners, farmers and businesses would be included within the special compensation package.

Can he confirm that these are the parameters of the program, and when can Manitobans expect to get the remaining details?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, I want to stress that our first priority is to protect Manitoba, Manitoba homes and businesses, and we've seen a significant mobilization during this flood period.

And I want to put on the record, as we deal with a historic flood, we have never seen a flood in recorded history equivalent to this on the Assiniboine. The efforts of our provincial—

An Honourable Member: Ninety-seven.

Mr. Ashton: Well, the member does say—says '97. I said about the Assiniboine. There was no flooding in the Assiniboine in 1997; the flood was in the Red River. It was a historic flood in the Red River. This is 1997 in the Assiniboine Valley and then some, and I don't want to underestimate whatever happened in 1997.

I want to put on the record the historic mobilization that we've seen over the last period of time, whether it's in Brandon, whether it's in the RM of Portage, whether it be any of the RMs that are affected in the Assiniboine Valley. I want to thank the military. I want to thank the municipalities and the volunteers.

And, right now, as we are seeing the crest in Brandon and we're seeing the crest move through this, sort of, arm, we're focusing very much on Lake Manitoba. We are assembling any and all available resources. Just as we met the challenge on the Assiniboine, we're going to meet the challenge on Lake Manitoba by working with Manitobans.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that in the government's panic over the last 10 days, that there has been a significant mobilization because they were caught unaware of what was coming, and last Sunday efforts began to take these steps. There have been remarkable efforts taken by the Forces, by volunteers, by officials, by everybody involved, but the fact remains that there are many people who have yet to get the help that they need in terms of protection and many others asking questions about compensation.

The member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) last night in Brandon said that he didn't know when the details would become available in terms of disaster assistance. He said that those concerns

should be taken directly to the provincial government, and so that's what we do today.

When is the provincial government, Mr. Speaker, going to provide some details on the compensation programs for those many Manitobans who are waiting anxiously and trying to plan their lives around what may be coming?

We've had some details come out. We're encouraged by those details. When are they going to confirm them? When are they going to communicate them to the people impacted?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the use of the term "panic" describes in any way, shape or form the response of the people in Brandon, the response of the people in the Assiniboine Valley.

And I want to put on the record that as we've seen in Brandon where the forecast was 1,184 feet, it peaked at 1,182.89 feet. I want to put on the record that that community and the resources and support from the provincial government, from the federal government and from the Armed Forces and in terms of the huge volunteer effort has dealt with a flood that is higher than any recorded in history.

So, you know what the story, Mr. Speaker, of this flood is? This is Manitoba. When it comes to floods, we deal with those challenges. We do it by working together. We don't panic. We get the job done. We focus on flood protection: No. 1 job last week; No. 1 job for Lake Manitoba the next few weeks.

Shoal Lakes Flooding Drain Options

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, the First Minister's decided not to proceed with the proposed Wagon Creek Drain in the Shoal lakes area, a plan presented by nine affected municipalities. So what happens now? The lives, livelihoods of people who live here and near the lakes are being affected by rising waters. These lakes have no outlet, just like Devils Lake. Some of the Shoal lakes water could start going out the Grassmere Drain, which cannot handle a lot, also the Sturgeon Creek Drain, which is in line with CentrePort and St. James.

The people in the immediate vicinity of the Shoal lakes need answers. Those who could be affected by out-flowing waters from the Shoal lakes need to know what their options are.

Mr. Speaker, since the Wagon Creek Drain is off the table, can the First Minister tell those affected by the Shoal lakes flooding how this government intends to manage this very serious issue?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been meeting with citizens and elected officials of the RMs that are affected by the Shoal lakes waters. We have been talking to them about a number of options. We've asked them to come together on an option. We respect that there are lots of different concerns. We respect that there are lots of different issues. We respect that there are upstream concerns, and in the Grassmere, there are downstream concerns. We're also working with the RMs in those areas.

This is not a quick fix, Mr. Speaker, and we have to make sure that we get the right solution for the right people at the right time.

Mr. Eichler: People's lives, properties, communities, land values, businesses and a whole host of other issues are being affected by the rising Shoal lakes. We have said as far back as 2002 that something must be done. The lakes are filled to the brim and water keeps moving, swallowing up homes, thousands of acres of farmland. These waters won't be receding any time soon. People have built their homes in this region years ago, and farmers that have made their living off the land are in harm's way. Who knows how many others could be affected if a breach would occur.

Mr. Speaker, people affected by the Shoal lakes need some answers, and believe you me when I say I need them now. What is the government's action plan?

Ms. Melnick: We also, through this spring high-water event, have been working with people.

I want to thank my colleague, the minister for MAFRI, who met with concerned citizens a couple of weeks ago. There has been a lot of work done by MAFRI with producers, making sure that their livestock is safe, making sure that feed is available, making sure if any livestock needs to be moved, it's moved; it's being moved. And MAFRI is doing this not only in that area, but throughout the province.

We are dealing with a real-time event right now, Mr. Speaker. We were dealing on a long-term plan before this event. We'll continue to work with communities after on a long-term event. Right now, we're dealing with what is happening today, on the ground, in real time.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, this issue has been brought to the government's radar for years. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) has seen the devastation first-hand and I thank him for that.

Promises of a compensation plan for producers were clearly made, but not when or how much. Homeowners, farmers, ranchers, businesses, emergency services, east-west road connections are all affected, as access to schools and hospitals. The problems expand each time the lakes expand. We cannot wait and see any longer. The crisis is now. We need to protect Manitobans, be fair to all those already affected.

Mr. Speaker, aid promises have been made but not delivered. Those in harm's way need to know they will be protected. Will this government, today, finally outline its short- and long-term strategies to address this serious issue, and will they do it today, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're definitely dealing with the short-term concerns.

Again, the Minister of MAFRI has been out dealing with producers. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) was out earlier this week dealing with people. We are looking at the situation in Manitoba. It's not a panic as members opposite might suggest. It's a rapid response to concerns. It's a rapid response to unprecedented waters and we are dealing with all of Manitoba.

Again, we have been working with people in that area on a long-term solution. We don't want to inconvenience someone downstream for the benefit of someone upstream, and people in that area understand that, Mr. Speaker, which is why they're listening to each other. We're working with them.

These are unprecedented high waters throughout our province. We have to make the right decisions not just for today but long into the future.

Cattle Industry Relocation of Herds

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, the people in the Shoal lakes area know who created the issue, and it was this government across the way.

Mr. Speaker, widespread flooding is present in many different regions of the province. This has created some of the most extreme challenges ever faced by ranchers and farmers. For example, one producer around Lake Manitoba, whose buildings are normally one mile from the lake, now finds the lake

is only 300 yards away. Producers, like many others along the lake, are building dikes to protect their homes, buildings, and ranchers are trying to move cattle and equipment at the same time. It's a very serious situation.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister provide this House with an update as to how many head of livestock need to be moved and how many have been relocated to date?

*(14:00)

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter which part of the province the member from Emerson wants to talk about. Our MAFRI officials have been out there on the scene working with the farmers themselves, the ranchers themselves, to make sure we can identify which farmers do need the assistance.

On Lake Manitoba, for example, we have reports today of specific farmers working with our MAFRI people in the area of Lake Winnipegosis. We have farmers out working with our officials at the Lake Manitoba First Nation to help get some cattle off an island that has—and get some feed to the cattle on that island.

We're taking extraordinary measures to help, working very well with producers to make sure cattle get fed.

Mr. Graydon: Producers who need to move livestock need information so that they can develop short- and long-term plans for their animals.

The challenges facing ranchers are many. They have no pasture. Their feed supply has been flooded. Their access roads are flooded or impassable. Some cattle are stranded on brand new islands, and hay lands are flooded, leaving prospects of future feed supplies very poor.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture tell us how many acres of Crown land and other land the Province has lined up for use for livestock producers, and how is this information being shared with producers?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member pretty much answered his own question in talking about the kind of assistance that is needed.

We're talking with farmers directly about that. We're doing it over the phone. We're doing it face to face. We're doing it on a day-to-day basis,

Mr. Speaker. We're doing it through the Manitoba Beef Producers, who have been very co-operative, helping us in determining which of their producers do have their backs against the wall, which of their producers are in the most need, and we've been responding to that.

I do want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've been very impressed with the kind of work farmers themselves have been doing to protect themselves. And in—[interjection] Well, yes, they can play politics if they like, but you know what? The Manitoba rancher, the Manitoba farmer who's out there trying their best, we're hooking up with them to make sure that they get what they need.

You can play politics if you like. We're going to help the Manitoba farmers.

Mr. Graydon: Ranchers and cattlemen are fiercely proud and independent individuals who take pride in caring for their families, their livestock and their land. I've received many calls from producers about the poor level of communications from the provincial government and the overall lack of co-ordination relating to the flooding.

Mr. Speaker, this minister has had ample time to prepare a short-term action plan for flooded, affected producers. When will he share this plan with producers, a plan with facts and not rhetoric as he's been doing?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Emerson had better start doing some homework.

Mr. Speaker, this has been going on day to day to day for weeks and months with my staff being in touch with Manitoba ranchers in the exact areas that the member from Emerson is worried about. It's happening every day as we speak. We've been working every day with the Manitoba Beef Producers to—so that they can tell us which of their producers need to have some assistance get to them. We're going to continue that.

We're going to do that because we've got so many examples of really practical things happening out there to either move feed to cattle or cattle to feed. We've put in place some—we've lifted some restrictions on road conditions. We've lifted—we've incorporated Crown lands that can be used.

We're doing that sort of thing, Mr. Speaker, on a day-to-day basis, whether the member across the way admits it or not.

Souris

Infrastructure Flood Damage Compensation

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Nearly four weeks ago, Souris faced very serious flood challenges. This included flooding into the sewer treatment facility compound. Emergency diking was constructed to prevent river water from completely flooding the facility. The outflow pipe into the Souris River is currently below water level by approximately two metres, resulting in effluent water not being able to flow normally. This has also caused the river water to backflow and rupture existing pipes. The community must replace the existing ruptured piping with an outflow system. This expenditure is estimated at \$250,000 to \$300,000.

Mr. Speaker, what assistance can the Town of Souris expect from this NDP government regarding disaster financial assistance for this event?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that we indicated some time ago that there would be a disaster financial assistance program. It does apply to municipalities. It does apply to damage to property, but I can also indicate, the one thing we have already indicated, in addition to the disaster financial assistance program, is that we'll be identifying any and all areas where we have to work on the flood recovery. So if there are expenditures, whether it be on our highway system or in terms of the infrastructure that the member's talking about that aren't eligible under DFA, if they're required as part of the flood recovery, we will move to that.

And I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, as we still continue to deal with the flooding situation in terms of the flood protection throughout the province, we are already moving on the second stage of the flood recovery stage.

And I want to stress again, we already had said three weeks ago that there would be a disaster financial assistance program.

Mrs. Rowat: For four weeks Souris has been using a rented tractor, rented pumps to deal with the problem created by the flood event. The pumps are running 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and must be checked several times day and night. This comes at a significant financial cost for the Town. The staff monitoring the system can take—are taken away from other duties and are exhausted, Mr. Speaker.

The Town contacted Manitoba Infrastructure on May 6th explaining the challenge. They asked for assistance on how to proceed with costing and purchasing a new lift station and piping, et cetera. To date no one has called them back.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister please tell this House when the Town of Souris can expect a call on this important issue?

Mr. Ashton: You know, Mr. Speaker, we've been dealing with flooding that's unprecedented in scale throughout this province, and I certainly appreciate the call that was made, but if you consider the fact that our MIT staff have been working 24-7 on maintaining the dikes in the Assiniboine Valley, protecting people in that community, protecting people in Brandon, working in emerging situations right around Lake Manitoba, I think the member might understand that our staff is working, in terms of the flood protection side, 24-7. That may mean some delays in responding to some inquiries.

But I want to put on the record that they're working round the clock, Mr. Speaker, and when it comes to a situation as that, as we move from the urgent issues and the emergent issues we're dealing with, we will work on the flood recovery stage with any and all communities throughout the province, but I'd ask the member to show a little bit of understanding of the scale that we're dealing with in this province.

And, by the way, we're not dealing with it through panic, Mr. Speaker. This is Manitoba. We deal with those challenges and we deal with it by standing together.

Mrs. Rowat: But I guess the community wants—is a phone call back, Mr. Speaker. That's the least that this government can do.

Mr. Speaker, the Town of Souris has done everything it can to address this situation. They diked the sewer treatment facility. They implemented a stop-gap measure to deal with the problem. They contacted Manitoba Infrastructure to begin the replacement process and they have begun the process of costing the project.

Mr. Speaker, in conversation with Disaster Financial Assistance, the Town was told that DFA could not comment on funding for this type of project. Can the minister please tell the House when the community of Souris can expect a decision on whether this project will actually qualify for DFA?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is somewhat confused. I thought she said that they hadn't received an answer and then she said someone had called back and said that they weren't eligible.

But I do want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed the member wouldn't do what the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) has done on the situation in St. Laurent. He approached me directly, said there was a problem in terms of a lack of sandbags—and, by the way, we have sandbags in St. Laurent as we speak.

I would just advise the member as well, too, I note it was only a few weeks ago that I think she was criticizing us as a government for having a sandbag machine that was sitting idle.

I want to indicate to the member on the record: Thank goodness that we had the foresight to buy that sandbag machine. It's been working 24-7 protecting Manitoba.

Lake Manitoba Fairford Dam Usage

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of Water Stewardship yesterday if the Fairford outlet at Lake Manitoba was used to capacity in the months leading up to this spring's flood and I was given no answer.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Water Stewardship has now had time to consider the question overnight. Was the Fairford outlet used to capacity in the months leading up to this spring's flood to help draw down Lake Manitoba?

*(14:10)

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm just looking at the answers given yesterday and reading from it. This is *Hansard* from yesterday in response to the member's question: The Fairford control structure has been running for several months. The capacity to draw down, to draw water through the Fairford control structure, depends on whether it is ice covered, depends on whether there is frazil ice, depends on the level of Lake Manitoba. So we have been drawing down at the capacity that the control structure can bear for several months now.

I'll be happy to give him a copy of this that he can keep.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, farmers, ranchers and property owners see their properties and livelihoods

disappearing under the rising water of Lake Manitoba. Ranchers are scrambling to relocate cattle as acres and acres of pasture and hay lands are being swallowed up. Businesses along the lake are being adversely affected. Many people living in the area have come to me with serious questions about the level of Lake Manitoba. They're asking whether more could have been done to prevent the lake from reaching the levels we are seeing today.

The levels at Fairford—on April the 6th the output at Fairford was 9,000 cfs. The capacity is far beyond that.

Mr. Speaker, would the Minister of Water Stewardship explain to the House today why the Fairford outlet wasn't used to capacity to lower Lake Manitoba prior to the spring flooding?

Ms. Melnick: I could read the remainder of my question—of my answer to the same question yesterday, Mr. Speaker, but I'll give it to the member opposite.

I want to inform the House that Fairford is drawing at capacity for the lake level today, which is about 14,000 cfs. If lake levels rise, it can draw more. If lake levels go down, it will be drawing less. But it has been working at capacity, as has Jenpeg, as has the Shellmouth Dam for several months now, Mr. Speaker, as on this side of the House we have been preparing to protect Manitobans and their communities for a long time now.

Mr. Briese: The rising levels of Lake Manitoba have been very—*[interjection]*—very serious consequences for property owners around the lake. People are scrambling to move livestock and protect their properties. People around Lake Manitoba are raising concerns that they do not believe that the Fairford outlet was used as extensively as it might have been.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Water Stewardship explain why she did not take more action to address the level on Lake Manitoba in anticipation of the spring flooding?

Ms. Melnick: There's an interesting line in this questioning, Mr. Speaker. The member is not at all concerned of people upstream on Portage—or Assiniboine; no is he—nor is he concerned about people in the First Nations communities around the Fairford control structure; nor is he concerned about people in Lake St. Martin, and I'm not even sure if he's concerned about all the people around Lake Manitoba. Shame on the member opposite.

We are concerned about all Manitobans. We are balancing the flow of this water, unprecedented, 50 per cent more in the Assiniboine basin than in 1976. We're taking care of Manitobans over here, Mr. Speaker. They're playing politics.

Violent Crime Rate Government Record

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, while we've seen the best of Manitobans over the past few weeks, Manitobans helping their neighbours, helping their friends, helping complete strangers in fact, unfortunately we've been reminded that there are some very serious problems facing our province when it comes to violent crime.

With four murders this past week, the murder rate has doubled from the same time last year. This is the result of 11 years of empty rhetoric from this NDP, this soft-on-crime NDP government: more violence, more victims, more rhetoric by the NDP.

Why has this Manitoba NDP soft-on-crime government allowed the province to become less safe and more violent under their term in office?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Certainly there have been some violent incidents, and I think I speak for all members of this House in offering our sympathy and our condolences to the families of the victims in that situation.

And, indeed, Manitobans have the right to be safe in their homes, in their communities.

Let me say how much we respect the work of the Winnipeg Police Service and the police services. In most of these incidents, arrests have already been made. I think we have confidence in our police that arrests will be made.

But we know, unlike the member opposite, that attacking crime isn't just about riding to the scene after something has happened. It's about pushing for better laws and creating better laws and policies. It's about preventing crime in the first place, as well as supporting our police service.

We've got a balanced view. I know the members opposite do not, and in my next answer I'll give more details of the difference between our approach and the approach opposite.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, instead of condolences, maybe the minister could

give some concrete actions. You know, he's had 11 years.

There were violent beatings of individuals who were just leading their lives, their ordinary lives: a man trying to make a living at a pizza shop, and he was beaten by a 15-year-old; a woman walking down the street, and she was beaten by a 35-year-old; a 70-year-old senior delivering newspapers, violently beaten.

In 1999, this NDP government said that they would make our streets safer. Today, we are the violent crime capital of Canada. How much worse, Mr. Speaker, does it have to get before this NDP government, this soft-on-crime government, will take this seriously?

Mr. Swan: And, you know, I'll take the view of Winnipeg Police Chief Keith McCaskill, who was on CBC radio this morning. In addition to pointing out that, in fact, there are reductions in violent crime since the '90s, he also pointed out—he was also very clear that reducing violent crime requires investments in youth programs and prevention. And Chief McCaskill said we've got to start looking at some initiatives to get young people focused on different things.

Chief McCaskill went on to say you can never police yourself totally out of crime. We can certainly do a lot for visible presence and enforcement, but there's got to be that other strategy, the long-range strategy, to correct the situation.

So, unlike the members opposite, I stand with Chief McCaskill and the Winnipeg Police Service. And we've added more police officers. We know that's not the whole picture. We've added 110 police officers in Winnipeg alone since 1999. And do you know what? The Conservatives have voted against every single one of them.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, a long-range strategy? They've had 12 years. How much more range do they need?

You know, over those 12 years we've seen the reoffence rate go up, up and up. Seventy per cent of adult males who leave Manitoba jails just go and reoffend again within the next two years. This soft-on-crime NDP government is running a revolving door in front of Manitoba jails.

Mr. Speaker, they can blame others, they can regurgitate all the press releases they want, they can go back and say, we've had announcements, cakes,

balloons and candy, but the responsibility for the increase of violent crime leads—sits on this Minister of Justice's desk.

I want to ask him: Mr. Minister, if you're not up to the job, why don't you tell us, and we'll find somebody who is up to the job.

Mr. Swan: I don't apologize for what this government has done to support police across the province, in Winnipeg, in Brandon, for the RCMP and for communities across the province of Manitoba—again, opposed by the member for Steinbach and opposed by every Conservative member of this House.

I don't apologize for giving the police in Winnipeg a police helicopter by providing operational funding. I don't apologize for working with the Winnipeg Police Service and the Winnipeg Police Association to put police cadets on our street for the first time ever. There'll be 50 of them this year. I know when the member for Steinbach voted against the money for that to happen.

I won't apologize for the Manitoba Integrated Organized Crime Task Force, which took down the Zig Zag Crew and is continuing to take on dangerous criminals on our streets. I won't apologize for what our Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit is doing. The Hells Angels rode into town when the Conservatives were in power. We've taken away their clubhouse. We're going to keep going after organized crime.

We're just not good at empty rhetoric like the member opposite usually comes up with.

*(14:20)

NOR-MAN Health Authority Minister's Knowledge of Allegations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, a full week has passed since the Minister of Health's window-dressing transparency amendments, and we still have a full week that's passed where the minister refuses to be transparent about the resignation of the CEO of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Health Minister: When did she know that the CEO appointed his wife to a plum position, and why didn't she do anything about it?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes, Mr. Speaker, and again, we know that there were some concerns raised by citizens in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority, and during those—the

raising of those concerns, it was decided to strike an external review team to go in and look at a variety of issues, issues that were being raised concerning administration, issues being raised concerning finances, issues being raised about patient care, very serious issues, Mr. Speaker. And, indeed, we sent the team in there.

They've done a very thorough review. They've spoken to over a hundred individuals and groups, anyone that wished to come forward in confidence as well. The report is in the final days of being prepared, I am informed, and the outcome of that report will be released to the public.

Mr. Speaker, and the RHA is committed to act on the recommendations on all issues concerning administration, finances, patient care, the things that matter to citizens of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the same woman, the wife of the CEO of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority, was alleged to be involved in one of these financial issues, involved in the nearly \$2 million of exaggerated costs.

Mr. Speaker, when did the NDP Minister of Health know about the CEO's wife's involvement in these alleged cost rigging, and why did the NDP Minister of Health not do anything to stop it?

Ms. Oswald: And when concerns were raised about a variety of issues in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority, we sent in an external review team, and that team, comprised of very competent individuals with experience and insight into the health-care system, has conducted this review. There will be a report coming forward that will deal with a variety of issues that were raised.

Mr. Speaker, it is not the first time that this individual member has raised allegations in the House that have proven later not to be true. I will rely on the information that comes from that review team, the recommendations that come from that to pursue any further investigation.

And, frankly, Mr. Speaker, I raised, yesterday, the troubling pattern from this member of putting misinformation on the record, and, frankly, I think today would likely be no different.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, amid allegations of cost rigging, corruption and bullying, from the front-line staff, by the CEO and others in the NOR-MAN

Regional Health Authority, the NDP Minister of Health has been eerily quiet.

In the spirit of the minister's act, when will the minister be transparent without being a bully and tell Manitobans—when will the minister tell Manitobans what she knew about the corruption in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority, and why did she do nothing about it?

Ms. Oswald: We called for a review. The review is in the process of being completed; the report, thereof, which we're going to release. I reiterated yesterday, and it seems appropriate again, Mr. Speaker, just in the last couple of months we know that the member opposite has stood in this House, misrepresented what Professor Ryan said on the bipole, causing Professor Ryan to send a letter saying this is most regrettable because it is not the case.

We know that the member opposite issued a news release, Mr. Speaker, saying that the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard) condoned youth smoking, which was the most abominable parsing of statements which he later, of course, had to slither away from.

We know that the member opposite also told this Chamber that a citizen had written me a letter, that I hadn't responded, when, in fact, he had been cc'd on a copy of a letter that had a response the very same day.

This is a very troubling pattern with the member. I would caution him about what he says about members of the public, and I will rely on the recommendation of this review team and most certainly not the troubling falsehoods from the member opposite.

Brandon Flooding

Post-Secondary Education Facilities Response

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, many individuals and organizations in the city of Brandon have come together to respond to the needs of their community during the flood.

Can the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy advise the House of measures Brandon post-secondary institutions are taking in response to flooding?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): And I thank the member for the question because I am proud to put on the record the actions of both Brandon University and Assiniboine Community College and how they're partnering with

the City of Brandon and the community to help in—and—in helping in the efforts to reduce the impact of the flood.

I know that at Brandon University, right now, the halls are a little bit louder because there are 450 staff and students from a local Brandon elementary school that is—that could be affected by flooding that are now going to Brandon University. The president of Brandon U tells me that they are loud, but they are great to have around and that many of them have decided they're going to skip high school and just go straight through to university at this point.

Brandon University residents are also on standby should families need to be evacuated and be housed there as well, and the university is providing both flexibility to staff and to students, as well, Mr. Speaker, to allow people to help out where needed.

And the same thing is going on at Assiniboine Community College: flexible hours to let people help work. The sandbags are being stored there, the extra sandbags for the city of Brandon as well, and the gym is also on standby should evacuation needed be for there.

So—and just one more example of how, when the call goes out for help in Manitoba, Manitobans answer loud and strong, Mr. Speaker.

Oak Lake Flooding

Mitigation Infrastructures Inspection

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, Oak Lake is still rising from continued flood waters from the Pipestone Creek, forcing flood-level flows of water towards Souris and the Souris River. The dam and dike supporting the level of Oak Lake itself have required rock and fill this spring to save the structures and alleviate further flooding downstream. Much sandbagging has been done to protect several properties. The precarious nature of these structures has been raised by—with the department for many, many years.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the present flood conditions, can the minister provide an update on the conditions of structures at Oak Lake and the potential of flooding at Souris from a breach occurring as a result of this decrepit infrastructure?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I certainly appreciate the question from the member.

One thing we had not done anytime during the preparation for the flood or during the flood is

underestimate the importance of ensuring the integrity of our structures, our physical structures. We engaged in a very significant review of our physical structures, including our bridges. We did do work in a number of areas to shore up bridges and ensure that structures would function, and I do want to indicate that as we, in some areas, are starting to see relief from the flood, particularly in the Red River Valley, we will also post-flood be inspecting our physical infrastructure as well.

We don't underestimate the impact, and one of the key areas of flood recovery will be making sure that our physical infrastructure is maintained for its integrity, and, where necessary, we'll put repairs in as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to moving on, I'd like to draw attention of honourable members to the loge to my right where we have with us, we have Ms. Marianne Cerilli, who is a former member for Radisson.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Melanie Edel

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour Melanie Edel, a 17-year-old grade 12 student from Morris School who is the epitome of a hard-working and an engaged student. Recently, she was honoured with the Premier's Volunteer Award for youth. The award is given to Manitobans under 25 who have made considerable contributions to their community through volunteer work. These youth serve as role models, encouraging other young people to give of themselves for the betterment of the community. This award couldn't have gone to a more deserving student.

Melanie is an exceptional student, has obtained a 95 per cent average in her final year of high school. She's the student council president and captain of the varsity basketball and volleyball teams. Melanie has also played on her school's track and field, soccer, badminton and cross-country teams, but her participation hasn't stopped there.

Melanie is a Sunday school teacher, a piano teacher and a swimming instructor. She is the lead for organizing a fundraiser called Set to Save a Life,

a 24-hour volleyball tournament to raise funds for the cancer society.

Mr. Speaker, I am especially amazed at Melanie Edel's involvement in an organization that Morris School started five years ago called Kids Caring for Kids. This student group raises awareness for different causes affecting children. In June, Melanie will be leading a team from her school to build a house in Winnipeg through Habitat for Humanity.

So far this year, Melanie has won the Ron Meyer Memorial Leadership Award and the Dale Iwanoczko Memorial Volleyball Scholarship. She was the recipient of the Manitoba School Board Association's citizenship award and has now won the Premier's Volunteer Award.

* (14:30)

The principal of Morris School, Darren Skog, says Melanie is one of the most outstanding students that has gone through this school.

Mr. Speaker, Melanie plans to attend the University of Manitoba in the fall. I know Melanie will continue to strive for excellence and give back to her community as she continues her education. This is a bright, talented young woman with a great future ahead of her, and I wish her every success in her future endeavours. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

North End Sponsorship Team

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate one of the winners of this year's Volunteer Service Awards, the North End Sponsorship Team, NEST. Volunteer Manitoba presents awards each year to individuals, organizations and businesses in recognition of the important contributions volunteers make to every community across the province. We are pleased to have Reverend John Kunkel, Elisabeth Kunkel and Reverend Annemarie MacIntosh, the new NEST chairperson, join us today in the public gallery.

The North End Sponsorship Team is a co-operative ministry involving churches from the North End, West Kildonan and East Kildonan that sponsors refugees from oceans away. It began 25 years ago when Elisabeth and John Kunkel and their friends first saw images of famine and war in Ethiopia. The images they saw left such a strong impression on them that they felt compelled to help.

NEST began in 1986 as a co-operative ministry of three Lutheran churches in Winnipeg's North End: Redeemer, St. John's and Zion. It now consists of six

Lutheran congregations: Christ, Grace, Redeemer, St. John's, St. Luke's-Zion and Trinity, along with two United Church—pardon me, two United congregations: Atlantic-Garden City and Kildonan. So far, this team of dedicated volunteers has sponsored 157 refugees from 18 countries.

NEST is a shining example of what individuals and communities working together can accomplish. By offering hope and support to refugees, these volunteers directly impact the lives of the families in transition as well as the communities they eventually call home.

It is through the selfless contributions and dedication of volunteers that our communities are more caring, compassionate places to live. They are among our society's true unsung heroes. I wish to congratulate the North End Sponsorship Team and thank them for giving so much of their time, effort and energy to making Manitoba such a great place to live. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Carman-Dufferin Safe Communities Designation

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, in a ceremony on April 28th, the Town of Carman and the Rural Municipality of Dufferin became the third designated Safe Community in Manitoba.

Safe Communities Canada is Canada's leading community-driven injury prevention charity. The goals of Safe Communities Canada are to make Canada the safest place in the world to live, learn, work and play.

This designation signifies that the community has demonstrated its commitment to a culture of safety and prevention of personal injury. Through joint partnerships between the private, public and volunteer sectors of the community, specific priorities have been identified to reduce the risk and burden of injury for our children, seniors, friends and co-workers. This process began one year ago and initiatives to bring awareness of safety and injury prevention will be ongoing.

The Carman-Dufferin communities' leadership team consisted of representatives from the town and RM councils, RHA Central, RCMP, local schools, fire departments, businesses, community groups and interested residents. This team was led by co-chairs Lynne Wilkinson and Debbie Iverson. With their leadership and guidance from Safe Communities Canada, this team collected data and identified the safety priorities of the community. Through public

consultation and hard work, they met the designation process.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the Safe Communities committee, the Town of Carman, the Rural Municipality of Dufferin for demonstrating a strong commitment to making our community one of the safest places to live, learn, work and play. They are committed to ongoing participation within the community to enhance the safety and well-being of our homes, farms, workplaces and neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the community for their designation from Safe Communities Canada and encourage more communities within Manitoba to follow suit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Collège Garden City Collegiate 50th Anniversary

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, this May long weekend, alumni and staff will gather to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Collège Garden City Collegiate in Kildonan. Principal Steve Medwick, vice-principal Heather Marks, Tony Kreml, Michelle Jean-Paul, as well as members of the reunion organizing committee, look forward to welcoming former students and their families for what promises to be a fun-filled celebratory weekend.

The reunion will give alumni, staff and their families a chance to celebrate Collège Garden City Collegiate's first 50 years of education excellence. It will also provide organizers with the opportunity to raise \$10,000 to create perpetual scholarships for the school's graduates. The weekend is dedicated to the memory of former teacher and alumnus Howard Sinaisky, who was instrumental in organizing the school's 25th anniversary reunion in 1986.

To celebrate the significant anniversary, the reunion committee has planned an exciting action-packed three days. It will kick off with an open house and barbecue on Friday evening. Class reunion pictures will be taken throughout the evening. On Saturday, alumni can go to the Magical History Tour in the morning, participate in school-day activities in the afternoon, and dance the night away at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. The weekend festivities will wrap up on Sunday morning with a pancake breakfast at the school.

Over the past 50 years, Collège Garden City Collegiate has embraced many opportunities to improve its facilities to better meet the needs of an ever-changing community. This process of renewal continues today, as seen by the extensive renovations

being undertaken at the school. These include a new naturally common—a new, naturally lit commons area, a new gymnasium and fitness facility.

Collège Garden City Collegiate is the only dual-tracks high school in the Seven Oaks School Division, offering programs in both English and French immersion to over 1,300 students by 106 teachers.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really looking forward to the honour of sharing in this celebration of Collège Garden City Collegiate's 50th anniversary. It has proudly served its constituents and the broader community since 1961. May it continue to do so for many years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Northern Manitoba Health Care

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Speaker, today I want to talk about the problems in health-care delivery in northern Manitoba.

There's a review of the NOR-MAN RHA happening, and last week, the CEO of the NOR-MAN RHA and his wife resigned. These matters are drawing daily attention in our province.

In addition, there are major concerns about what's happening in the Burntwood RHA. In the Burntwood RHA, there's been a decrease in the number of physicians from 34 several years ago down to 23 or 24.

As well, there are concerns about the nursing situation. The number of nursing vacancies in the BRHA has gone up from 12 in 2006 to 30 in 2009, or an increase of 250 per cent. The nursing vacancy rate reached 24 per cent in 2009, or more than twice the average of other RHAs. The BRHA has resorted to locum nurses to cover the shortfall. They do it through agency nurses who work on a temporary basis and leave. They cost the taxpayers a fortune. It's not just the fees, but travel, accommodation and so on. Nursing locum costs jumped from \$640,000 in 2005 to \$3.7 million in 2008, a staggering increase of 579 per cent. That's an escalation of \$3 million of our hard-earned taxes.

Health care needs to be managed responsibly from a people perspective and from a cost perspective. Under the NDP, this is not happening.

Among the biggest ongoing concerns in both the NOR-MAN RHA and the Burntwood RHA is the difficulty in accessing a family doctor. Continuity of

care is important to good care. It's important that every Manitoban be able to have a family doctor who will provide ongoing care and who will provide the care which keeps a person healthy as well as care during illness.

The continuing and advancing epidemic of diabetes in Manitoba, and particularly in northern Manitoba, is an example of the NDP's failure to ensure adequate efforts to help people stay healthy.

The continuing problems in the northern RHAs and the ongoing problems in managing health care in the north are a sad legacy of the NDP government.

It's time to change the government and have a Liberal government which can straighten out the problems our health-care system is having under the NDP.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

I'd like to announce that on Thursday, May 19th, the Opposition Day motion currently on the Order Paper will be debated.

Mr. Speaker: On—

An Honourable Member: Tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: —tomorrow, on Thursday, will be Opposition Day motion which is on the Order Paper, okay.

And on further House business, the honourable Government House Leader.

Ms. Howard: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on further House business.

For the information of the House, it's my understanding that Estimates in room 255 will be starting around 3:30 today in order to accommodate the daily flood briefing, and with that I ask you to resolve us into the Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. For room 255, which is Infrastructure and Transportation, we'll be starting around 3:30, and we will now resolve into Committee of Supply. And in the Chamber will be

Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, and room 254 will be Water Stewardship.

So would the Chairs that will be chairing these Committee of Supply please go to the respective rooms that you'll be chairing, please.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

WATER STEWARDSHIP

* (14:50)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Water Stewardship.

We have one resolution remaining.

Resolution 25.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,191,000 for Water Stewardship, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Water Stewardship.

This also concludes our consideration of the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254.

I would like to thank the ministers, critics and all honourable members for their hard work and dedication during this process.

Committee rise.

**INFRASTRUCTURE AND
TRANSPORTATION**

* (15:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

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

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): And, first of all, I'd like to thank the minister and his department for the open house that they had in Dugald. I know that was

not initially part of the plan, and somehow the issue got a life of its own and started to become very contentious. And I think there were a lot of things that people felt they had seen on drawings and, thus, the hard median going through town at one point in time was going to be more than it was on the drawings. Anyway, the department came out, cleared up the entire issue. I don't think there was much concern at all and people left quite happy. There was one property, I think one entrance is going to have to be cut off, but, you know what—we absolutely needed that at that intersection and look forward to that intersection being worked on and the lights going up this summer.

I do want to ask the minister, as I've asked for 12 years of him, and then other ministers, and now him again: Highway 59 and the Perimeter, the overpass which is long overdue, where is it in the global plan of the department?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): We are releasing our new five-year plan soon. We have, to be quite frank, have been looking at our capital plan, again, with a—in light of the flood—not that there'll be dramatic changes to some of the major projects, but we are certainly moving ahead. And I have advice, I believe, in the second week of June there'll be an open house on this particular—which—I know which element he—the member is talking about.

But we are, you know, in terms of the actual capital planning, that should be released shortly. I'd say we'd probably get the capital plan out in the next few weeks, and it is delayed largely because, you know, we're going to obviously have to identify if there are any flood-related issues for future programming. We do have some flexibility. You know, we don't program the entire dollar commitment, but that will be out shortly.

Mr. Schuler: I do have another issue, and that has to do with trains going through East St. Paul. The CEMRR railway, which comes through Birds Hill, there are approximately four places where it crosses a major road, the first one being Highway 59, then Birds Hill Road, then Raleigh, and then Gateway. And the problem for citizens is—and I've got an exact date because I asked this individual, give me an exact date when this happened. Friday, May 6, 2011, around 3:30 a.m., the train came into Birds Hill and left around 5:30 a.m., the problem being that because they are not controlled intersections, they have to give significant amount of warning, and I would say

to the minister that some of these crossings are pretty close to being in people's backyards; 3:30 in the morning is very, very early. And the question is—and this individual posed it—a question comes to mind. Since Esso's not open at 3:30 a.m., what is CEMRR doing? Shunting cars? If so, why? Birds Hill is not a shunting yard. And if perhaps the department could look into that, I think 3:30 in the morning through a residential area is probably a little extreme.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think the member's raised it on the public record. It's not directly within our jurisdiction. Obviously, he has put it on the record, though, and we'll undertake to pass that concern on.

Mr. Schuler: And one further question, it's a bit of a side note. There are boxcars parked between Dr. Hamilton, Robert Andrews School. Would this not be a safety issue, since children would be climbing on them? And this is this individual asking. They do have a controlled walkway between the schools, and I would concur. If this is a temporary issue, that's one thing; however, if it's going to be more permanent, I would suggest that there could be a issue here with safety. I don't know if the minister could give us some comments on that.

Mr. Ashton: Again, I appreciate the member raising the issue, and we are fairly short of time, so I'm trying as much as possible not to eat up too much time. So I will thank the member for raising the concern and certainly make sure that the appropriate people are aware of it.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): We have an awful lot to try and get over. We're going to wrap up today, Mr. Chair, as we talked about earlier.

I do want to come back to a bit on the EMO side of things just to talk about the Red River flood protection and the mitigation that has taken place and will take place in the future. Is there a procedure, or how do municipalities access funding for mitigation for, down the road, on, in particular, the Red River?

Mr. Ashton: I assume the member's talking about the program that we announced that will particularly be targeting north of Winnipeg on the Red, and we have actually received applications on that. So we've not only come to the point of announcing the program but we're also in a position to start implementing.

I do want to stress that part of what we did was also the buyouts which we did immediately, and that was a provincial initiative. The program itself, the Province is solely responsible for the individual

home element. The federal government will not make that an eligible cost. The rest is coming from infrastructure funding, and we have received significant number of applications. And I do know there's been some particularly identified priority areas. I think it was very obvious early on in the flood season the needs in St. Andrews, and, again, we've committed there.

* (16:00)

The issue there already was whether the municipality itself felt it was in a position to actually even ask for that kind of protection. But, hard to believe, it was the same flood season. That was a couple of days into it, you know, a very significant, rapidly developing event.

So we—you—yet we weren't able to get a lot of this up and running outside of buyouts for this flood season but we're anticipating there'll be some significant work done on various elements of flood protection starting this spring.

And I'd also want to just—if I could—just add that we—we'll also be clearly rolling out a program based on our experience of 2011. We've had initial discussions with the federal government and, clearly, again, that's the priority for us, to get them involved because much of what we've done—wing dikes after '97, the floodway expansion, even go back to Shellmouth Dam, Portage Diversion, the original floodway all cost shared with the federal government.

So that will be important and I wouldn't want to underestimate the degree to which we will have a fairly significant mitigation package over and above the current package, which was really based on the experience of 2009. And I do want to particularly identify the needs in and around the Assiniboine Valley watershed including into Lake Manitoba. The member knows the area very well, and Lake St. Martin.

I can't stress strongly enough that, you know, a lot of our experience in '97 led to some very good developments in the Red River Valley south of Winnipeg but the Assiniboine—we've got some very unique situations this year and we're going to deal—both in the flood recovery stage—but we're clearly going to be looking at infrastructure.

And that's not to say in any way, shape or form, that what we have isn't a very significant investment but I've already identified—and I'll just mention it briefly, Shellmouth Dam, you know, there has been

some discussion related to improve its capacity, in terms of storage. Clearly, the Assiniboine dikes we'll be looking at and the Portage Diversion, especially the Assiniboine dikes, and, you know, we've raised them up. A lot of it was done in winter construction so that—you know, even with an extra \$25 million we may be looking at some further improvements there.

Mr. Chairperson, and we will also be, over the next period of time, seeing what the situation's like in Manitoba where folks [*inaudible*] immediate flood protection. But the kind of situation we're seeing now is the new flood of record on that lake. The same thing with Lake St. Martin. So we're going to be assessing that as well.

I know the member talked about Red River north but I want to assure him that we're clearly going to be looking at other areas and, by extension, you know, the Shoal lakes now. The member won't have time to get a, you know, detailed discussion on it but as the member knows there have been some proposed long-term solutions. Well, one in particular, and I think, again, that's going to be a priority for us, you know, the experience of the last few months—the last few years in around the Shoal lakes has certainly indicated that that—it's an unsustainable situation currently.

Mr. Eichler: I was going to go there with my next question so you pre-empted it somewhat. But I know that with the military being there and the technology that they have available to them, does that go far enough or is that where we start with some of the soft spots, so to speak, on the Assiniboia river and the diking that's been built or upgraded this past winter? Is that where the priorities start or how do we determine which projects can move forward in the next year?

Mr. Ashton: Well, there's really a number of elements. The first thing we will do is assess the flood situation that we dealt—had to deal with. I mentioned the Assiniboine Valley. This is the flood of record. I mean it's—start flooding Brandon and very different parts of the Assiniboine Valley but just take the extension of the watershed, and Brandon's very aware of Lake Manitoba, you know, Lake St. Martin. And this is all part of the same overall situation with the watershed.

So clearly we have a new flood of record and clearly that leads to some of the kind of things that I mentioned earlier. What we would do is build on a number of elements. One thing we are doing right now—just our immediate flood response is a

significant survey. We were able to get in with survey crews and survey the entire area of the controlled release in a matter of days, and that's important, as the member knows.

In rural Manitoba, you've got different degrees of surveying. One of the key elements we did—plan mitigation in the Red River area, post-'97, was LiDAR surveying. We've done LiDAR surveying both south and north on the Red River. We also have done LiDAR surveying in the Fisher River and into Peguis First Nation. We do have LiDAR surveying available, I know, on some of our other rivers. It often tends to be, you know, in and around river areas, like, La Salle, I believe we have some LiDAR information available on the immediate impact.

So that would be one of the key elements. And we're doing it for temporary flood protection, but I would assume we'll be looking at some, you know, rather detailed mapping, because what that gives you is the exact height of dikes or other protection systems that you need, whether it's temporary or permanent.

Where—we would then, obviously, be looking at a wide range of potential projects. I mentioned some of them already, but also right down to the degree to which you can dike. It probably more challenging in some areas than others, particularly around Lake Manitoba. I mean, there's a lot of homes that are—there's not a lot of—there's not land in front of them to put a dike on, a permanent dike. So, you know, I don't want to underestimate the challenge, both short term and long term.

But that's generally the scope, and that's what we did very quickly after the '09 flood. We immediately looked at the impact, scoped out what we could do right away, the buyouts, scoped out kind of the general parameters of what would work. And then we went to the municipalities, and we go to homeowners and we're now getting the applications back, because, again, we're working with municipalities. We don't go in and, you know, traditionally, build things without the partnership and co-operation of them and their, you know, their residents.

So that will be the general approach, and I do want to stress, by the way, a lot of our staff right now are still in flood response and will be for quite some time, especially in and around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. So, once things do start to clear from the immediate urgent demands, we'll move into that stage. But I have no doubt, and the Premier

signalled this as well, that we'll have a very significant focus on flood mitigation coming out of this flood. It's, you know, it's a record flood and we'll respond accordingly.

Mr. Eichler: And thank you, Minister. I do want to come back to, again, mitigation, because I think that's, with the weather patterns the way they are and certainly everything we do to try and protect, you know, property, and that's the control of the water and I know that's a very tough job, and, you know, in particular, with Lake Manitoba and the Shoal lakes in particular, we need to get rid of that water, you know, a little bit faster than what it's—coming in. You know, for every day that the diversion's open, it takes about two and a half days to get it out the other end.

So, whether we do that at the Shellmouth side—and I know that the government did open up the Shellmouth and empty it as much as possible—or do we look at other alternatives rather than storing the water on Lake Manitoba? Do we look at other alternatives rather than trying to hold it in Lake Manitoba before it ever gets there?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think it's important to clearly identify what the situation we're dealing with in terms of Lake Manitoba.

We have been using all our flood control systems, including the Fairford outlet, and we've been using it to the maximum extent possible. I mean, my colleague Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) talked about ice conditions. We also are very cognizant of the impact on Lake St. Martin, which has to be factored in; it's not just Lake Manitoba, it's Lake St. Martin. Lake St. Martin is at very, very high levels right now.

And what we've seen this year, I want to stress again, is this—well, without any of the flood controls, there would be record flooding. And it's not to say that we won't sit down again and look at, you know, some of the impacts we might see. I know the member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) was able to track down a report from the Manitoba Water Commission in 1978 which had talked about an outlet on Lake St. Martin. Clearly, there's a natural outlet right there, but there are, you know, there's more limited cfs. But I wouldn't want to underestimate the degree to which, with these kind of water flows, we would be seeing very high flood levels no matter what.

* (16:10)

I mentioned this on the Portage Diversion: The additional flow that we've flowed, you know, they—going from the 25,000 to 34,000, it's going to add about two inches on the lake. And 25,000 has been the, sort of, normal rated capacity. And the whole design of the Lake Manitoba regulation was about, you know, go back to '61, coming out of some of the floods of the '50s on Lake Manitoba, it was based on the inlet and the outlet.

So, you know, what we're dealing with is a very significant natural flood and, yes, true, in the operation of Portage Diversion, that's when the lake levels go up. But for much of the rest of the year, when the Fairford structure is operating, that's when the levels draw down. And, just as we did with the Shellmouth, and as the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) outlined, we have been drawing down Lake Manitoba through the Fairford structure quite significantly.

And I think if you look at some of the exchange in question period, I think what the member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) is missing is the fact that those figures reflect the conditions at the time. And I can't stress strongly enough that we have been operating it to the optimal level we can. And when there's ice you have different flows.

And we also have—you know, we're dealing with Lake St. Martin as well, which is at very, very, very high levels, and the reason I want to state that is not to take away from the impact on Lake Manitoba, we're going to address this as part of the broader impacts, particularly at the Assiniboine River Valley, we are faced with, both in terms of the flood response, you know, the immediate flood protection, both in terms of the flood recovery—and we will be making announcements on that very shortly—and in terms of flood mitigation.

So I want to stress there that this is a overwhelming natural event, and we have been using whatever controls we could to minimize the impacts.

But, clearly, on Lake Manitoba, with these current water levels—I mean, if we didn't have regulation it would have been even worse. I can get the member the numbers, but, believe you me, it would have been far worse than we're currently dealing with now because what's essentially happened is over the last few months, before the operation of Portage Diversion, there's been ability to flow water out of Lake Manitoba, which then goes into Lake St. Martin, which then goes to the Dauphin River and ends up in Lake Winnipeg. And that was

always—it's no different than the Shellmouth. The Shellmouth has an inlet and outlet. Lake Manitoba has an inlet and an outlet. And, you know, we would have—if we didn't have the inlet and the outlet right now, we would have a flood of much higher magnitude, I would say probably at least a foot higher, if not more, by the time the flood was over.

Now, that's not, you know, that's not to take away from any of the impacts. We're going to deal with the real impacts on the ground. But I do know—and people have a right to be, you know, frustrated. Believe you me, this is a situation that is tied into 50 per cent more volume in the Assiniboine River Valley than the flood of 1976. This is a massive flood event of unprecedented proportions and it really has pushed any and all of our flood defences to the limit. But, having said that, we're not giving up on Lake Manitoba by any stretch of the imagination.

And I do want to put on the record, too, I thank the member for raising some of the specific concerns in St. Laurent, which is in his constituency, and some issues of getting sandbags, some of the other logistical areas. The member knows he represents a good part of that area, some of the huge challenges that we collectively are faced with, but we're going to do our best to meet them.

Mr. Eichler: And thank you, Minister, for that. I do need to move on, but I do want to put on the record I want to thank the minister for letting us work with you in suggesting some of the things that we brought to your attention and trying to do it within a timely manner. We know that the staff resources are very limited, and, of course, we've had a bit of that lack of staff at the table here to make some of the decisions and the questions, but we certainly do appreciate all that the minister and your department, of course, the volunteers have stepped forward and so we do appreciate that as well.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk a little bit about the Taxicab Board, and we know that, you know, the minister's been actively involved in that on different occasions going back to when he was previously minister as well.

Could you just give us a update on the current status of that file, and I know the original deadline, if I remember right, to have the shields installed, was, I believe, November of 2010.

Mr. Ashton: Well, what I want to indicate there is the member's talking specifically about the cameras

and shields. Back in—I believe it was in 2002, we dealt with a very difficult situation. A taxi driver had been murdered, Mr. Deol. At that time, actually, I asked the member for Radisson, this is before he was elected, to use his expertise as an engineer to write what became a—I think a report that has become a model in terms of recommendations. It's been used across North America. And what we had come out of that report, a number of recommendations, but one was to proceed to cameras and shields.

The shield that was brought in, the prime shield, was made by a Swedish company. It was used for a number of years. My understanding is the company went bankrupt. And we were seeing some escalation of violence involving taxi drivers, you know, taxi drivers being the victims. And what I did is I asked the board and the industry to prepare a—an updated response to, essentially, the original report.

The recommendations came forward. One was a improvement in the camera. That—those are all included. There were recommendations involving better co-ordination with the police, in terms of dispatch to any scenes involving any criminal activity directed at taxi drivers. I did meet with the chief of police, and I know they are making every effort to make sure that that is a priority for them. I want to indicate, too, that we also did have a recommendation for an enhanced shield.

What happened was that there were various designs that were potentially looked at. But the one shield that was initially recommended for use, and actually was set to be used, would have had a full partition in the front. And I knew from the member for Radisson's original report that there had been significant issues at that time about whether that would be safe in the case of an accident. So to—you know, in the abundance of caution, we brought in an outside consulting engineer. They did a report and they indicated that was indeed the case.

So what we then came up with is a shield that we worked in co-operation with the industry on in terms of design. And I want to thank Unicity, Duffy's, actually all the companies—particularly, I know Gurmail Mangat, the president of Unicity, was very involved in the design. But, you know, I don't want to exclude any of the other people from the industry who were very much a part of the solution.

So that is why the member will see that new shields have been installed. They are safer, and I believe they will go a long way to ensuring a safer industry, but at the same time, recognizing the reality

of taxi drivers often spending long hours needing to be safe, in the case of vehicle accidents. So it did take us a bit longer. The member had mentioned the November deadline. We did give a number of extensions. It, I think, was well worthwhile, and we now have a much improved situation with shields and with a number of safety elements, including cameras.

Mr. Eichler: So was there a formal agreement, then, that was issued between the Taxicab Board and taxicab industry that was agreed to by all parties?

Mr. Ashton: Well, the Taxicab Board does have the jurisdiction in this area. You know, they basically had the ability to require this by regulation, which they did. But we did work with the industry in the end to ensure that there was a joint approach. And I think that's been wise.

*(16:20)

And I do want to credit, by the way, the manufacturer. It was a local manufacturer that is the producer of the current shields, though that doesn't preclude others that meet the safety standards. And I did have a number of discussions with him, so I owe him a visit to a certain type of local establishment, let's put it that way. He really—he stepped to the plate. They produced the shields; they helped make a much safer industry. So we've got—we're very fortunate to have this company locally.

So that the current situation is we basically now have the full implementation of that and in the end, I think the key element was the consultation involvement with the industry. And that's my preferred approach as minister. I think it's our preferred approach as government is, where possible, to have a co-operative approach on taxi issues between the board and the industry.

Mr. Eichler: So, Mr. Chair, there's no formal agreement that—that's with your department. I'm assuming that's correct.

And then, the other thing is: Are all the taxi cabs in compliance now that's within the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Ashton: What—yes, I can't comment on the compliance side; I just know from experience. I take taxis quite a bit that I have seen that the new shields have been installed. The—on the compliance side, by the way, there was flexibility given in terms of timing, you know, it took some time to get the shields in. We also recognize the unique situation

with seasonal taxis as well which only operate, you know, for a short period of time. So we made sure that their supply of that is available.

But, yes, it really is—become a non-issue over the last few months, largely because we now do have much more reflection on what the industry had recommended and no other suggestions, by the way. I mean they had the same interest that the board did, really—maybe a different interpretation of it, but they wanted a safer industry. But they also wanted shields that worked, and we've done a lot to make sure that that's what we have now.

Mr. Eichler: So, again, just on clarity, the shields that were designed and approved and then a particular company went out and built those and was assured that they would be the choice of those shields. What happened to those? Were they compensated for those shields or who compensated them or was there a compensation package?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there were a limited number of taxis that did, you know, had indicated they were going to purchase the other type of shield which the engineering firm had expressed concern about.

And, by the way, I don't want to preclude the fact that the designer couldn't respond to some of the concerns down the line. I'm not saying that the shields were inherently unsafe; that's not what the report said. They—but what they did is they identified that in case of a collision, this might become a, you know, a problem inside the vehicle that might put the—either the passengers or the driver at risk.

So, yes, we did move in terms of that. We wanted to make sure that nobody was out-of-pocket for, you know, having this type of shield actually produced initially, because that was the original direction of the board. And I'm not blaming the board; I'm not blaming anyone. I'm just glad that we brought in the consulting engineer because they identified that there were some issues with the shields as they were designed, and based on that report, we knew what we had to do, which was look for a different type of shield, you know, different design. And we were able to achieve that and we got those shields in place.

And there's a couple of different designs, where now there's a full back shield and a partial side shield. So, you know, there are some options, as well, and that was the other key element that the industry said. And they also wanted the ability to

restrict passengers in the front seat which they have that ability now.

And we have various things. There's a warning light on the top of the vehicle which is similar to a, you know, what you might see on an emergency vehicle, but it's, you know, very identifiable as a taxi if the taxi driver's in dispute. So we have a fairly comprehensive approach, but the shields, yes, we've resolved the shield issue and we now have shields and cameras installed.

Mr. Eichler: So the compensation, then, for the shields that were built but not installed—was there compensation paid by your department or was that paid by the Taxicab Board?

Mr. Ashton: That was our department recognizing that, as Minister of Transportation, I'm responsible for both the MIT and for the taxi board. We just didn't feel it was fair since people—you know, since the board had operated in good faith, everybody operating in good faith, some people had proceeded, you know, when there was an order that had been placed, you know, with the manufacturer. Yes, it turned out there were some concerns with it, but it didn't make sense to basically do anything other than, you know, make sure that no one was out-of-pocket in terms of that.

It was not a, you know, it was not the entire industry. We did not have all, you know, every taxi had those shields installed. So, you know, to my mind, it was well worthwhile.

And we are, by the way, and I mentioned this with seasonal cabs, we have a different arrangement for seasonal cabs. We did—with the new shields, improved shields, we have purchased those shields and we're going to be leasing them out, because, you know, we vary every year on how many seasonal cabs and it just didn't make sense to require people to have a significant upfront expenditure if they're only operating two, three months but, at the same time, they have to have shields. So what we've done is we've moved to make sure that we get the cost recovery, but we do it through a lease arrangement where we purchased it and they will lease it back.

Mr. Eichler: So, then, what was the total cost that you paid out for those shields that they didn't use then? Do you have that, or can you undertake to get that?

Mr. Ashton: I'll get it and there we are. For—I think total cost is \$48,000.

Mr. Eichler: Just before—I don't have much more on this—but legal cost: Was there legal cost involved there as well, that—as a result of the agreement that—where they—they couldn't agree to agree, so to speak, so there must have been some legal cost that was borne by the government as well.

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Chair, actually, the real additional cost would be the engineering report that we did commission, not on the legal side. It didn't end up in court, you know. It was basically, you know, the situation where we brought in this outside engineering consultant who had the experience, you know, in these matters, so there was a cost element there, and I can probably get that cost as well.

Yes, I'm advised it was around \$12,000 for the engineering report, but we can confirm the exact number.

Mr. Eichler: Just to finalize, then: For the \$48,000 for the shields that didn't go in, so they're in storage somewhere. What's the procedure for getting rid of those? Do you try and sell them to another jurisdiction or do we just trash them eventually or recycle them, or is there something—is part of the plans to use those, you know, down the road with another province or state?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'll undertake to get to the member on that. You know, our first concern was to make sure that we did purchase them so they would be out of circulation, based on the concerns the engineering report had. I can track down the status of them.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, ultimately, hundred per cent agree the safety of the drivers and, of course, keep them out of harm's way is ultimately the goal. And I think, you know, I feel satisfied that the minister's got a handle on that, and so, I think that, you know, if you could, you know, as you already agreed to undertake to get back to us on those, I would certainly appreciate that.

Before I move to my next category, the member from Arthur-Virden has a couple of quick questions for you.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I thank the minister for his response to my question today in question period. I very much appreciate that.

And I have two perennial questions: One is Highway 256 in the Cromer area for oil trucks moving up and down that area. They still have to drive around the No. 2, up 83 and back west on that gravel road, 255. I know I've raised it with the

previous minister a number of times and I think the minister's aware of it. And just to remind him of that.

But more importantly, I had an opportunity to meet with a group of reeves in southwest Manitoba the other day, and I just want to bring it to the minister's attention, particularly the condition of Highway 251 between Deloraine and—sorry, 21 highway and 83 highway, cross through the oil area through—Waskada's the community in the middle of it. There's a lot of truck traffic in that area. And I would have to say that it is a growing area, for sure, because of the oil industry and therefore a lot of heavy machinery moving in that area.

Some of the reeves, though, told me that the municipal roads in that area, there will probably be a situation of some of the wider seeders today, when they fold them up, are pretty heavy, and they're indicating that they may even sink out of sight in some of the soft—with the frost boils that are in some of those roads. That's just to make the minister aware of the condition that is prevalent in that area right now.

* (16:30)

And the other one that they brought to my attention was that a semi bogged to a stop in the middle of 21 Highway the other day south of Deloraine, and they had to close the road, I guess, in that area, between there and the Goodlands corner, I believe, was what it was indicated to me, and I think the road is—they indicated to me that it was closed, I didn't see it firsthand, but I just bring that to the minister's attention.

And I just—but the important area there, I guess, is just—and I know there's going to be all kinds of demands on infrastructure. I appreciate the minister's dilemma, but I just wanted to see if there was any indication. I know he's received letters from Mr. Morningstar and others in regards to Highway 251 between Highway 21 and 83, and I just wonder if he could bring me up to date on whether there was any intention to move forward on the shoulder repairs and widening it a little bit on that particular stretch of highway. Some of it would need to be rebased, I'm assuming, as well, but just if he could update me on any kind of work that's planned for that particular piece of highway. Thanks.

Mr. Ashton: First of all, on the broader issue, we're certainly seeing some significant developments in the oil industry in the member's constituency, very

encouraging to see. We are working on the impacts that has on our transportation system in two ways.

One is we've done a lot of work in co-ordinating spring road restrictions with Saskatchewan. We had an initial joint Cabinet meeting. We followed up with a significant move towards having seamless trucking regulations between the two jurisdictions, and there was a very different regime in place for spring restrictions between Saskatchewan and Manitoba that was of real concern to the oil industry.

So, in addition to going to one RTAC level on a—you know, we have a—going to have a consistent standard, because we had, you know, 62.5 here and 63.5 in Saskatchewan. It didn't make sense to truckers, and you know what happens—you know, if you're a trucker going across from Saskatchewan to Manitoba, you go to the lowest common denominator. So I just want to stress that we have identified some of the short-term, you know, issues, co-ordination issues, and certainly we'll factor into our capital planning some of the impacts in and around the area.

I certainly appreciate you've got highways that perhaps a few years ago were mostly limited to local traffic and some agricultural traffic that are now seeing some fairly heavy equipment. And I can tell you, I'm not an expert on the oil patch, but I am advised that a lot of that equipment's pretty heavy, and so trucking, you know, trucking of that nature does have an impact, particularly on roads that are not necessarily, you know, RTAC or even perhaps older roads, even, you know, no matter what their rating are.

I appreciate the comments on specific highways, and what I'll do, again, is I'll undertake to, perhaps through the critic, to just get you a brief response on that, and I'll leave it at, maybe, thank you for raising it on the record.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I'd just like to leave with the minister, as regards to the forthcoming evaluation of flood mitigation and drought proofing of southern Manitoba, not to—well, to include the consideration of the Holland No. 3 dam placement of the—that was the fourth element of the Duff Roblin plan to drought- and flood-proof southern Manitoba. And I will—would like the minister, if he hasn't—has forgotten about it, the report tabled in the House in March of 1988, it was the Assiniboine South Hespeler report, tabled by Eugene Kostyra, that laid out a very comprehensive

plan of the river and adjoining tributaries. So I will leave that with the minister.

Mr. Ashton: I just realizing this, you know, you never know who—what will happen in October, but it may be any one of us that there may be our last Estimates in this department, but it's certainly going to be yours. So I want to say, well, I know you've raised a lot of these issues in the past and, you know, in terms of broader water management issues, and certainly consistently you've raised this. Actually, you raised it time and time again, and I mean that as a compliment.

I know the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) was saying he's raised this highways issues before. You know, sometimes consistency is an element, but I do want to indicate, by the way, that, in a broader sense, one of the key things identified in the beginning of the Estimates is the degree to which a lot of these, you know, scopes of projects were much greater when we had a very significant federal presence. I think it's time to bring back PFRA. I mean, PFRA basically has disappeared off the radar screen, and it's done a lot over the years. I mean, in recent years, before we had—take the Manitoba Water Services Board here. Last time we met it's done a lot for rural water supply. It's disappeared off the radar screen; I'm told that it appears somewhere but it's no longer the PFRA that we knew.

And I really think coming out of this flood there's a golden opportunity, you know, for us to sit down, when I say us, you know, all the stakeholders including the federal government and provincial governments and sort of municipalities and producer to look at, you know, some of the bigger-picture mitigation elements, whether it be retention, whether it be, you know, through upgrading our existing structures. And I know the member's been very consistent about that in terms of Portage Diversion. I never get in a discussion on the Portage Diversion with the member without knowing he knows a heck of a lot more about it than I do, and I know, as minister, a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. So I'm not going to debate the status of the Portage Diversion or various elements of it. But I do want to, you know, seriously put on the record that I appreciate the member's comments and commitments.

And what's interesting about it, if you go back to some of the reports we've had over the years—I mentioned earlier with the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), we were talking about the Lake St. Martin

situation and the potential for an outlet there, the work was done by the then Manitoba Water Commission. So we actually have a lot of stuff on the record. Thank goodness we proceeded with some of the stuff we did. But maybe there are some of the projects that were talked about 20, 30, 40 years ago that maybe some of those reports need to be dusted off. I think the member has a good point.

Mr. Faurschou: I want to thank the minister for his kind words and yes we do. When I was sitting as opposition critic for Transportation, we also worked through the graduated driver's licensing, when both of us had 16-year-old daughters that did not make us very popular at home. Thank you ever so much.

Mr. Ashton: And if I could—I'll only do this one more time and I actually said this to the member for Lakeside earlier. I said I know that I got the member for Portage in big trouble when he was critic one time when I actually said at a public event that he was doing a really good job as critic and I'm sure he got in trouble with his caucus afterwards. But I really meant it in the context of things like the graduated driver's licensing. I don't know if the people realize the degree to which—yes, there's time where they see us, you know, with somewhat different perspectives in question period. But, on that issue, I was minister. We had received a contribution by the member for Transcona, who did a lot of the groundwork, former critic when he was in opposition, and a lot of it really moved ahead because he was critic, you know, with the full support of your caucus, did a pretty significant job.

And, yes, you're right; it was interesting. My nieces at the time, they were grumbling a few years after: Who brought this in?

And, of course, that was me.

But I can tell you one thing, it—we've seen the experience; it was the right thing to do and it's now become just something that people assume has always been that way. So I seriously do want to thank the member for his past contributions. I know he's not gone yet. But I know this is his last Estimates. So thanks again for all your contributions on the Transportation side.

Mr. Eichler: I want to move to the highway transport board and the Highway Traffic Board. In particular, you know, we have a number of issues to address here. One is the Grey Goose contract and I know that, you know, we've put on the record several times that we're very concerned about the future of

that particular bus line and whether or not it's going to be around for many more years to come. So I'd just like the minister to give us an update. I know that they certainly made an agreement with him about a month ago, two months maybe. If you'd update the record for that.

Mr. Ashton: First, I'd just like to update on the engineering contract; it was actually was 25,000 for the taxi shield. So, just a correction on that.

* (16:40)

On Greyhound bus coverage, the member knows the background. We were faced with a situation in 2009 where there was an imminent—a potentially imminent loss of bus service that would've been devastating for many rural and northern communities. We did move very quickly to sit down and work out an interim arrangement with Greyhound. We also, at the same time, recognized that the clear message coming down from Greyhound was that bus service in its current form was not sustainable. They did share their books with us, and, certainly, there are a number of routes where they're certainly not making money; they're losing money. And, perhaps, older models, where you had cross substation would allow that to happen. It wasn't something that we could rely on.

What we also have done is we've moved to look at what other options there might be. And, by the way, when I say other options, it doesn't mean to preclude some significant involvement for Greyhound. I mean, they are a scheduled bus service that has a, you know, qualified drivers. You know, they, I think, have done a, you know, good job across Canada, across North America, in terms of service. And, of course, they're owned by a very significant major company, Laidlaw.

So what we are in now is in a transition period. We have put in place a direct payment to help maintain the service. I want to stress, by the way, that we would have had double or triple the cost if the bus service had been cancelled, in terms of just our own basic costs to government. I'm talking about patient transportation, for example, and many other elements. And what we see happening over the next period of time is, while we have the continuing relationship with them over this year, we're also going to look at whether there's ways of getting local bus providers in.

I do point out, by the way, Greyhound has contracted with—is it Boutin Bus Lines, I think? So

they do have a relationship, you know, already, that involves some subcontracting. But we have had a significant amount of interest. We did consult around the province. We're not precluding any models, and what we might end up with, I think, is something equivalent to what we have with short-line railways, where you have sort of a main-line service, and then there's a discontinuation process, and there's an opportunity for people to get involved on that. So there's also a regulatory dimension, because the member's quite correct: the Motor Transport Board is directly responsible for intercity bus service.

The good news on the bus side is it's starting to recover across the board, in terms of general traffic. And we certainly see there's going to be a continuing need for bus service. Will it be what the same format is right now? Possibly not, but we're, you know, we're committed to working with Greyhound and working with Manitobans as we transition to, you know, a service that recognizes that—when I say this, I mean, I—in the urban areas, we've got for municipalities—they have bus service. A lot of people rely on that bus service in an urban sense. Same thing in rural Manitoba. There's a lot of people, particularly seniors, people who are, you know, aren't able to drive for various reasons that rely on the bus. It's also cost effective. The bus, the government—it's the most cost effective for, you know, for individuals.

So our goal is to work to transition to a sustainable system, and we now have an agreement with Greyhound to operate for a full year, which will buy us significant time to do that.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, I—is there any—when it comes to setting policy and direction for the board, I know that I, along with some of my colleagues, have sent in applications to the board and—but most of them have been turned down for one reason or another, and my colleague from Turtle Mountain, Cliff Cullen, had a constituent that brought a proposal forward, and, again, it was turned down.

What can we do to encourage businesses to come forward? It seems as if there's no real clear guidelines about what you have to do to establish a bus line, or some other type of a business in order to get it approved by the Highway Traffic Board. Like, there seems to be some roadblocks, and it's not clear about the direction they need to be going, rather than just a complete denial.

Mr. Ashton: Well, it is regulated, and there have been, as, you know, is the case with the main bus

company, which deals with scheduled service here, have—they also do regulate in terms of charter buses. And it is arm's length. We—you know, we don't interfere as a department in their day-to-day operations. However, I just want to indicate that one of the areas that we are looking at is the whole regulatory framework. I don't want to prejudge the final conclusion of that, but it will look at various options on what a new kind of bus service would look at, because, clearly, we're looking at having, say, the one main scheduled bus service not being sustainable in its current situation.

But one of the things we will also be looking at is the charter bus service as well, and degree to which we need to look at the regulatory structures there. You know, obviously there bus lines that do currently provide that service and would have different views and maybe some of those, you know, that are applying to get the licences.

A very similar discussion goes on with the taxi board, you know, where there was a report came out and—*[interjection]*—no additional taxi licences, but there's a lot of pressures and different views on some of the increases in the limousine licences there are.

So, this review will be looking at the overall framework. And it's a bit of an opportunity, in a way. I mean, it starts from the premise of trying to maintain as much as possible of a scheduled bus service, but it's an opportunity to review what we have as an overall framework. And I think you can entertain over the next few months—you'll see us moving to a somewhat different system. I don't want to prejudge how different, but, clearly, the current system's not sustainable and we're going to have to come up with one that is.

Mr. Eichler: We certainly appreciate that update and would encourage the government to look at ways of maybe working that agreement a little bit different. And where other businesses can come in and maybe cover off some of those markets that are not profitable at, you know, for a larger company to look at, but maybe the smaller company would be able to work in hand to cover off some of those.

I know in particular—there's one in particular, that I did write the minister about and that's in the city and that had to do with A-List Transportation. And I know the minister did respond to them and it seemed to him, at least, that he was being harassed by a number of departments in trying to run his business. And I'm just wondering if the minister might have some suggestions on how this particular

company might be able to move forward and make their business where it's profitable. It just seems like they just run in one block—roadblock after the other.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I'd rather not comment on a specific company or a specific circumstance. I know the member did write and we have responded, in a general sense. But I don't want to, you know, again, leave any impression that we are not open to looking at some changes in the regulatory system.

But we do have a regulatory system and it's based on certain assumptions and principles and they operate accordingly. We also do have responsibilities on the inspection side and we're involved in that as well. I think one of the key issues of the regulatory side is not just determining how many and what kind of licences are issued, but ensuring that the operators are operating safely.

So, you know, it's the same thing on the taxi side. When we talk about safety, it's not just safety for drivers. It's also making sure that the public—and, you know, when they're getting into cabs—knows that they're getting cabs that have had, you know, inspections and are safe.

So, I don't want to comment on any particular case other than to say that, you know, we'll continue to review elements for our regulatory system, but we still do have a responsibility to the public to ensure that we have, you know, reasonable inspections and that there's compliance. And I know it's not an easy job. A lot of our inspectors—but that's an important part of it as well; we've got to be there for the public interest.

Mr. Eichler: Certainly, I can appreciate that. And I would just ask that the minister, you know, work with the department to ensure that there's not harassment either. Because I know that safety is paramount and I certainly would never, ever want to see anyone in a position where they felt that they were a bit at risk because of lack of inspections. And I certainly want to make that very clear.

But, you know, we do have a number of people that want to move forward. They seem to think that they have a business that's viable, that they would like to move forward.

* (16:50)

So we look forward to those changes, as the departments move forward on those. So there's a number of individuals that do want to help Manitoba become, you know, a little more user-friendly when

it comes to business operations. So, whatever the department can do to assist us in that would certainly be beneficial.

I do want to move to the east-side road, and I just believed there was notice an agreement that was made in regards to the east-side road just recently. Would the minister or his department give us an update on the east-side road as far as when the anticipated completion is and the total cost of the project and the number of miles—or kilometres that's involved?

Mr. Ashton: The minister responsible for the East Side Road Authority is actually the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson). The money does flow through the department on the capital side, but in terms of the specifics, it would be something that really should be directed towards the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. I will undertake, you know, perhaps through this, to pass that on to the East Side Road Authority and to the minister responsible.

Mr. Chair, just a general comment, though, it is a historic undertaking and we're already under way. We've partnered with, you know, community benefits agreements, I think, with pretty well every community; I think it was one remaining, but I think they've agreed to a signing, whether it's been done or not. It's a historic undertaking. It's going to really bring those communities into a situation where we're going to see a very significant improvement in their quality of life and potential for economic development, and we're—we continue to remain open to a federal partnership. We believe that they could have a very significant role. If we're able to get federal funds, we'll be able to accelerate the construction.

And with that—those general comments, as I said, in terms of specifics, I'll undertake to get those questions to the minister responsible, in this case, the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Mr. Eichler: At this point in time I'd like to thank the minister. I know he's had a—you know, we were supposed to be No. 2 on the Estimate process; we ended up being last. And I certainly appreciate what he's gone through the last three weeks when we were trying to get the Estimates wrapped up here.

And, of course, the staff has done a stellar job at trying to be here and provide us with as much information as possible. I know it was a little bit frustrating on my part and your part, but the staff, I'm

sure, had probably a whole lot higher anxiety level than what I had.

But I certainly do want to convey to you, Mr. Minister, and the staff my appreciation for your patience. And I think we did get through a number of the issues even though we didn't really have a direct flow of questions and answers, but I certainly think that we did get something accomplished as a result of all of our patience on this file.

So I just want to put that on record, Mr. Chairperson, and we'll move forward line by line, if you like.

Mr. Ashton: And, briefly, I would also like to thank the critic and the opposition for their flexibility. It's not too often we have Estimates committees sitting waiting for the minister patiently, and it was to accommodate the key work that we were doing on the flood. So I really want to thank the member as critic and the indulgence of the committee as well. And next time we're in Estimates, if I have the honour of doing Estimates, I'm—we'll have to make it up by being on time every time to make up for the flexibility of this time. I'd like to thank you again.

Mr. Chairperson: Thanks to all for mutual co-operation during this process.

Hearing and seeing no further questions, we will now proceed with putting the question on the resolutions. Staff can stay here if they like or begin to vacate, as you may wish. [*interjection*] Minor details.

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$75,058,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Highways and Transportation Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$49,325,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Government Services Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$181,233,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Infrastructure Works, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,104,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Manitoba Water Services Board, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,151,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Canada-Manitoba Agreements, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$274,463,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,404,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Emergency Measures Organization, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$749,022,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

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

At this point in time, regrettably, we do have to ask the minister's staff to leave for a consideration of this final item.

The floor is open for questions, if any.

Seeing none, we'll move to resolution 15.1.

Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,561,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. It also concludes our consideration of the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 255, and we're sorry to see it done. *[interjection]* Why does everyone laugh when I say that? I'd like to thank everyone for their participation.

Committee rise.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 41 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I'd like to just ask the minister a bit of a flood follow-up question. How many livestock have been relocated due to this spring's flood?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Just before I answer that question I have a couple of things to update the member on from questions he had asked previously. One was a list—well, actually, he asked for two lists, and the first one was a list of all of the 613 employees, and I thought about reading it into the record this afternoon; but I thought better of it.

An Honourable Member: I appreciate it.

Mr. Struthers: You're welcome.

The other was a list of 2010-11 agricultural society grants that were paid. I can actually pass this on to the member. It'll be here available to him.

The other question he asked, I think it was yesterday, it was about a mustering fee and some totals there. We tested 18,000 animals, multiplied by \$6 a head, \$108,000 was spent.

In terms of numbers in relation to the question that the member just asked, I know that he has used the figure 100,000 in question period. He's not too far off. He's a little bit high with that, but I guess I

could say he's in the ballpark with that. The number would be about 80,000, that—in the area, consisting of 30,000 cow-calf pairs, for a total of 60,000; 18,000 feeder cattle; and 2,000 sheep and horses and other livestock, for a total of around 80,000.

*(14:50)

And I want to be very clear. That doesn't mean all 80,000 of—head are threatened. Not all of them are impacted by the flood conditions. That's a total that we've worked with the Manitoba Beef Producers to establish. We are—as I said in question period as early as about an hour ago, we have worked with the Manitoba Beef Producers to identify which of those head belonging to ranchers in the area, are, indeed, impacted by flood conditions.

I don't want to minimize that number, because we want an honest number that—so that we can respond on an individual-by-individual basis, which we are doing. Today in question period I did mention a couple of instances that we're working on right today, one up near—one on Lake Winnipegosis, working with a producer there to feed his cattle. And the other one, another—one I referenced earlier at Lake Manitoba First Nations, where we do have a situation there where we've—we worked through the weekend and through this week and, again, getting together tomorrow with the farmer, in that area, to make sure we can find a practical solution to getting to that particular herd.

So those—I think that should give the member an idea of the numbers that are in the area, and—but very cautious in terms of understanding that not every one of those head are impacted, and that we are working with the local people, right on the ground, to identify which of those—which of that livestock is, indeed, threatened and needs some attention.

Mr. Graydon: I thank the minister for that. I do understand that it's—the level of the lake is a moving target and so they—and that's why I had asked how many had been relocated. I appreciate that there's 80,000 that are in the possibility of being relocated. The hundred thousand dollar number, of course, was an announcement by a provincial official, and that's what seems to be out in the media and—so there's no way to verify that number of discredit it, and so that's why I used the number of 100,000.

But have there been any relocated, to date, that you know of, that you have a number for that, and if you can just share that with me?

Mr. Struthers: I'm going to talk fairly general about this and give the—try to impart to the member, kind of, the whole situation. For one thing, this is ongoing and we are nowhere near to the end of this. We—I think we all understand that there's going to be producers, especially in this Lake Manitoba area, who will be putting up with increased lake levels for a long time yet, and I think there will be farmers and our staff scrambling and working together to make sure that we—well into the summer—that we make sure that cattle can either be moved to feed or feed can be moved to cattle.

There's examples—an example is the Ashern Auction Mart is being used right now to house some cattle from the Lake Manitoba area and actually some cattle from the controlled release area—if I have that right. *[interjection]* Oh, I'm sorry, I've misspoke. Those cattle aren't at Ashern. But we are using the Ashern Auction Mart to house some of the cattle at Lake Manitoba—from Lake Manitoba. And I can—I know the member from Emerson can understand, you know, the appreciation that we have for the assistance of auction marts across the province for being available to help in situations like this.

The—to the credit of the Manitoba rancher, much of the work to move cattle and to feed cattle is being done by the Manitoba cattle producer, him or herself. If a cattle producer can make arrangements with neighbours and be successful in protecting his herd or feeding the herd, that's all the better. And we don't have a number that we can accurately reflect as to the number of cattle that farmers themselves have moved quickly on in conjunction with neighbours and that sort of thing.

We have assisted, either through transportation or through getting feed to cattle for several hundred—a few hundred head of cattle. We've been working, as I've said all along, in very practical ways to make sure that those cattle are indeed fed. We are going to, I think—we're working very hard, I think, to make contact with cattle producers in any of the areas that—whether it's Lake Manitoba or the controlled release area, the Shoal lakes area, to make contact with all producers in these areas so that we understand what it is they're up against.

Any producer that has requested assistance we've taken seriously and we've worked with, whether that's us initiating the call with the producer or the producer contacting us. The member made reference the other day to the emergency operation centre that we have out at the university. They have

been working very hard to make that contact with ranchers and with farmers in all of the flood-affected areas to make sure that we're in a position to help and that we're in a position to be very practical and very useful in aid of producers in Manitoba.

Mr. Graydon: I thank the minister for his response. Maybe a couple of things that I should clarify: I didn't make any reference to the emergency response centre at the university. It was the minister that had made that reference, and the reason that he'd made it before I did was because no one knew about it. I checked with a number of commodity groups, and they weren't aware of the number either for there, but I do appreciate the fact that he did set one up and that it was operational. It's—that's what we were looking for. That's what was looked for in the answer—or in the question in question period.

However, to go back to the original question then—and I appreciate how difficult it is to estimate how many animals will be affected. I do know that there are animals in the Ashern Auction Mart, and I know that there's a limited capacity, that those animals will have to find a home. They're probably not going to be able to go back home anytime in the near future, and so it brings me to my next question: How many acres of Crown land or other land has the provincial government lined up to date for livestock producers who need to relocate their herds?

There must be—you must have to have a list, then, because you do have the potential I think you'd want to offset that, and so I'm just wondering if you can give us an update of where that is currently.

* (15:00)

Mr. Struthers: Well, you know, it doesn't matter to me who mentioned the emergency operation centre first. What matters to me is that the people who are working hard there get the kind of respect that I think they should—that they should deserve—and I was not very happy, and I feel I can be honest with the member across the way. I wasn't very happy with the response that he gave in question period, which seemed to denigrate the kind of work that's being done at the emergency operation centre.

I do not apologize for defending the people who are working very hard there. There's a lot of people who know that they're there. There's a lot of people who know the work that they do, one of which is Major Jay Fox, who heads the Manitoba Beef Producers, who, in a conference call today, unprovoked by any of us, said some very flattering

words, respectful words, about the people and the operations out at that emergency operation centre.

So I want the member for Emerson to know that when my staff does good work, I will defend them, and I think he needs to be very careful in times like this, when so many people are coming together in kind of that Manitoba spirit, including those people at the emergency operation centre, I think he has to choose his words very carefully, Madam Chairperson.

There are people out there who've been working long hours, starting early in the morning and well into the evening, and they've done a very good service for individual producers and the agriculture sector across the board. And I know that it's not—in my experience with this member, I don't consider him to be mean and nasty and all that stuff, but I do want to make him very aware that people know about this emergency operation centre, they've shown great leadership in the whole government fight with this flood, and that they deserve to be treated respectfully.

And more to his question, there's a couple of different avenues that we pursue. The—one is the hay and pasture listing service. This involves listing private lands that are available. For example, we're up to—we've got the capability now of supplying for 13,500 cow-calf pairs, which is a, I think, is a pretty substantial amount of co-operation and co-ordination. The other area that we do have available to us is Crown lands, and a number of lessees have volunteered their Crown lands to help out in working with their neighbours. We have—and I have a specific example of this, a producer in the Ste. Rose—the RM of Ste. Rose area who applied for casual grazing permits on Crown land, and we worked with that producer to make sure that he could take advantage of that and have his cattle fed through these tough times.

We are—this is, of course—and the member understands this—this is ongoing, and we are continually looking for areas of land, whatever that Crown land may be. We've declared a livestock emergency together with the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie) so that we can use more than just Ag Crown land in Manitoba. We look for areas that are suitable and closest to the producer who has made a request or who we have come in contact with who has a need.

I do want to also—I also want to say that there is space identified for over a thousand head in PFRA

pastures in Manitoba. We work with the federal government in terms of community pastures. As I said early on, a couple of weeks ago in this House, we're not going to leave any stone unturned in terms of practical ways to help prevent and help protect Manitobans and farmers and their livestock.

And, to our knowledge, there's no situations in the province right now that are emergency problems that aren't being looked at. If members opposite have such examples, we want to know about them so that we can follow up and be helpful. But, to my knowledge right now, the ones that I mentioned earlier are the ones that are the most pressing, and we've got officials from MAFRI assigned to work on those cases.

So I hope that's helpful for the member for Emerson.

Mr. Graydon: And I'll thank the minister for the response. And I will address the preamble to his response. Do I have a mean bone in my body? I probably do have some, but I've never, never said anything about his staff or the staff of MAFRI or the volunteers about their performance.

But what I did say in a question, and it is on record, it is on *Hansard*, asked the minister what preparedness he had done. And he had not told us. He had plenty of opportunity to do that, to tell us that there was a command centre or an emergency response centre, and he hadn't done that. And I had checked immediately after question period, and that Manitoba Beef Producers were not aware of it.

So, Mr. Minister, we just put that on the record to keep it straight. The staff, I think, have done a great job. I've worked with MAFRI staff for a lot more years than the minister has, as a matter of fact; that goes back to the early '70s, and I found them all to be very, very helpful under any circumstances, and more especially under crisis that we see today in the Interlake and in the west. I've went through that in the southeast not once, not twice, but three times, and I've found them to be very professional.

Having said that, I'll go on into the next question, and it has to do with—KAP and other farm organizations are concerned about the impact that flooding and excess moisture on their members. KAP recently issued a press release calling for excess moisture insurance to be increased from 50 to 70 dollars per acre. For those farmers who have bought \$65-an-acre coverage, they would like to see an increase to \$85 an acre.

*(15:10)

Is this something that the provincial government is considering, changes to these programs today?

Mr. Struthers: The—I mean, let's be clear right off the top. I mean, the Keystone Agricultural Producers has given governments over the years very good advice, and in the year and a half that I've been Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives—whatever I do around here—as long as I've been the Minister of MAFRI, Keystone Agricultural Producers have been right upfront with me. They've—when they've had an idea, they've either picked up the phone or they've come to my office. We've met outside of my office, wherever, to listen to what their advice is.

What I've found their advice to be is very useful practical advice. These are folks, whether it be a fellow like Ian Wishart or Doug Chorney or Rob Brunel, who have all been part of the leadership group of KAP since I've been the minister, these are farmers who have some very practical suggestions. And I think one of the advantages they have is they understand what it is that their membership is up against, and I value that kind of information and that kind of advice.

The member is correct. KAP has put out the suggestion of taking a look at the excess moisture insurance coverage and moving to increase that. I want to point out that farmers today can actually already buy up to \$65 an acre as it exists today.

So one of the things that we're doing is very closely monitoring the seeding progress. With the weather the way it is this week, I'm very hopeful that farmers will be very active in parts of Manitoba that are finally experiencing some dry conditions and the soil at temperatures that they can get started with. The member would know that, from experience last year, that we were very quick to announce and then roll out an excess moisture insurance \$30-an-acre top-up that we did along with our partners in Alberta, Saskatchewan and, of course, the federal minister, Gerry Ritz, who I'm pleased to see has been reappointed Agriculture Minister today.

So I will—my commitment has been to make improvements to the programs based on what the experience is out there. I would hesitate to make commitments in the middle of a kind of mid-year, on excess moisture insurance, but I'm not going to rule out of hand any good suggestions that comes along. And I am interested in further conversations with

Keystone Agricultural Producers on something as practical as excess moisture insurance, which is what we're, as a government, very proud that—to have brought in on a permanent basis.

Mr. Graydon: And I thank the minister for that long answer for saying: I'm not sure. But he does appreciate KAP, and we all do. I'm just wondering whether—no, I'll just leave that question. What I'll do is gone on to another one.

It's the Pine River area bison operation and reclassification of Crown lands, Madam Chairperson. The Conservation critic and I have written to the minister a second time regarding some concerns being raised about a large bison operation in Pine River. And a number of the parcels of land involved in this operation also involve Crown land.

Can the minister provide an update on his department's involvement in this file?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, the member refers to the Olson bison ranch, north of Dauphin in that Pine River country. It—there's a lot of people interested in it because it's a very large ranch, and our department has been involved. We've worked with Mr. Olson and have given him—given advice on the establishment of this ranch. We've given him advice in terms of the health of his herd, as we would with any other producer in the province. We've given him advice in terms of a grazing plan, fencing issues that he may have. There are issues that the Department of Conservation, I know, are dealing with in terms of wildlife movement and fencing, that they're working together on.

There is a lot of land involved, and some of it is Crown land, and some of it is private land that he is purchasing. I want to be very clear that all of the rules have been followed in terms of the Crown land, and any of the rules that govern have been adhered to, as would be the case with any other farmer anywhere else in Manitoba.

The—Mr. Olson has been, I think, very forthcoming with us and we—our commitment is to work with him to make sure that the best possible outcome can be arrived at, in terms of this ranch.

* (15:20)

Mr. Graydon: Perhaps the minister can tell me what the overall land allotment for the operation is, and I'm thinking more specifically of the number of acres purchased from Crown land, versus the acres leased from Crown land, and versus the acres of privately

owned land. If we've worked this closely with Mr. Olson, we would have a fairly good handle on that.

Mr. Struthers: My understanding is that he hasn't purchased any Crown land directly. There have been a number of—there's been some land that has—some leased Crown land that have transferred as a result of purchases that have occurred with private landowners. I think I have that—that's accurate. And that number we'll have to then endeavour to get to the member. I think I'll just leave it at that.

Mr. Graydon: The—so, if I understood right, there are no Crown lands that have been purchased. The only purchased land has been from individuals. And that the acres of leased land—that the minister will get back to me with that number of acres.

Mr. Struthers: I believe the member for Emerson has that correct: no acres purchased directly from the Province. If Mr. Olson is purchasing land with a private landowner, there may be some Crown land that has transferred as part of that transaction. And that's the number that we can get back to the member on.

Mr. Graydon: Just so that I'm clear, Mr. Minister, when you say the Crown land that was transferred, this is still leased.

Mr. Struthers: That's right.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you for that. Was the Crown land that is part of this operation advertised for sale or for lease before it was acquired by the current operator?

Mr. Struthers: Decisions that are made in this area are governed by our unit transfer policy, and that states that if you—to explain that the—if Mr. Olson is in conversations with a private landowner to buy a parcel of land, and there's a Crown land lease that is attached to that, Mr. Olson can purchase the private land, and the Crown land is transferred along with the private land, to Mr. Olson. I think I'm accurate in saying that.

And, so, what we have is an opportunity to say no, if we believe there's a reason to not transfer that Crown land, along with the private land that is being bought.

Mr. Graydon: The other part of the question, obviously, there was Crown land that hadn't previously been used or leased. It wasn't leased currently, at the time that Mr. Olson leased it, if I understand right from earlier questioning. And so was this part of that operation or was that part of the

operation advertised for sale or lease prior to—was it ever posted?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I think we—if we will kind of back it up one step.

The land originally would be advertised as a Crown lease. That Crown lease would be dealt with in terms of the policy and if it's picked up by a farmer, that farmer, all the rules apply, that Crown lease is in that farmer's name.

Mr. Olson would come along and he would be interested in buying. He would talk to the farmer. They'd conduct a, I suppose, a business transaction to sell that private land to Mr. Olson. They would apply to have the Crown lease to go with that private land transferred into Mr. Olson's name. At that point, if we had problems with that, we would indicate so and we could turn down that request.

I want to be sure—I meant to include this in my last answer—that that just wouldn't transfer it to Mr. Olson. He would have to pay fair market value for that land.

The other option that would be open to Mr. Olson would be to apply for a Crown land lease that would be—that he would find through advertisements, as per the rules of this unit transfer policy. We'd advertise for those Crown land leases and he'd be able to participate in obtaining them, just as any other farmer would. If he was successful then and obtained a Crown land lease, then all the rules would apply to him in that case as well.

Mr. Graydon: I think I'm getting a better picture.

So the first question that comes to mind then, did Mr. Olson lease any land, any Crown land, that wasn't currently leased?

* (15:30)

Mr. Struthers: In terms of that specific question, we'll need to get back to the member for Emerson on that.

Mr. Graydon: And my apologies, by the way.

Mr. Gregory Dewar, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The next question then is, if I understand right, the Crown land would go with the purchase of private land, and you have the right to say no. Did Mr. Olson have—did he have an assurance before the buy-sell agreement was signed that he would be assigned that particular Crown land? Was that type

of agreement or that type of an approach taken by your department of Crown lands?

Mr. Struthers: The way that would work is the buyer and the seller would negotiate. The deal wouldn't be closed until they got an opinion from us as to whether or not we have any objections to that Crown lease being transferred into the other person's name. So, no, we—that is the process.

Mr. Graydon: Then did you have any prior discussions about any of the process that needed to be followed? Did you have prior discussions with Mr. Olson, then?

Mr. Struthers: We—in terms of explaining what the process would be for Mr. Olson, or for anybody else, for that matter, who's interested in our Crown land in this province, we would explain to him what that process is.

If he's approached us and told us what he's interested in, we would make sure that he knew all the rules. We'd make sure he knew the process by which to become involved in the pursuit of Crown land. It would be very much a bureaucratic discussion about processes and rules, so that Mr. Olson would know what those processes and rules are to begin with.

Mr. Graydon: So during those discussions did you give him any assurances that he would—there would be no opposition to him taking over the Crown lands?

Mr. Struthers: We—if the seller of the land—if the seller of the private land came to us and asked if there was any objections that we had, we would deal with that on an individual case-by-case basis. We wouldn't give blanket assurances to anyone—Mr. Olson or anyone else—other than being very clear about what the rules are and what the process is to—in terms of applications, which is standard and which anyone in pursuit of Crown land would be entitled to.

But we're not about giving blanket statements. We are about making sure people understand what the rules are and the processes, and making sure that those rules and processes are applied fairly to everyone who is interested in Crown land, because Crown land belongs to the people of Manitoba, and they have to be very reassured that our system is credible and that our system is fair and doesn't give anybody a leg up, one over another. But we want to be very sure that everybody understands the rules

and they know how to get involved if they are interested in obtaining Crown land.

Mr. Graydon: Is the operation owned or leased by Mr. Olson?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Olson owns—it's a combination of owning private land and he has some, as we've seen, he has some leased land. So I suppose the answer to the question is, yes, he does have—he does own some private land in that area.

Mr. Graydon: Then the company is privately owned by Mr. Olson.

Mr. Struthers: My understanding is that it's Mr. Olson and his family, and they would be the proprietors.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. When they're looking for the—when we talked about the acres for—the acres that were involved with the land purchases and also the other acres that he has leased, could you just—when you're getting that number for me, can you get the total number of Crown land acres that are involved in the Olson bison operation or the Pine River area bison operation? I would appreciate that.

Mr. Struthers: I will endeavour to do just that.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you. Perhaps one question is, is Mr. Olson a resident or his family a resident of Manitoba?

* (15:40)

Mr. Struthers: What I can tell the member for Emerson is that the corporation is a Manitoba corporation. I—my understanding is that I don't believe Mr. Olson himself is a resident of Manitoba, but that a family member is.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you for that, Mr. Minister, and perhaps you can identify that family member for me—or family member for me.

Mr. Struthers: I don't have that available to me right now, but I'll try to get that to the member.

Mr. Graydon: I look forward to that Mr. Minister, and I need some clarification, perhaps, then. If the owner is—and we're going to say that Mr. Olson is the primary owner, and if he is not a Manitoban, and doesn't live in Manitoba, then all of the Crown land, and he has numerous acres of Crown land leased, is this permitted by the existing legislation covering Crown lands?

Mr. Struthers: If you're from outside of the province, and you are wanting to pursue a new Crown lease, then that would not be permitted. If you are from outside of Manitoba, and you are pursuing a private land—buying private land, and there's a transfer, a unit transfer associated with that, then that is permitted under our Crown land rules.

Mr. Graydon: So, then, the minister is suggesting that the only leased land—leased Crown land that the Pine River Bison Ranch owns, or leases, is stuff that—is land that came with the land that he bought. Is that what the minister's saying to us today?

Mr. Struthers: That's my understanding, but I will endeavour to confirm that for the member as quickly as we can.

Mr. Graydon: The operation is, indeed, a large operation, and if it's as large as the concerned citizens that have written me letters believe, and I have no doubt to—no reason to doubt what they have said, what type of land-use planning process was involved in establishing this particular ranch?

Mr. Struthers: There is due diligence when it comes to our land-use process. It involves the coding of the Crown land that occurs, and this was—the land that we're—that the member is asking about is coded as agricultural.

We have what's known as block management committees, people from MAFRI, a number of other departments, MAFRI plus we've Conservation, Local Government, Water Stewardship convene to talk about the coding of blocks of land, and they might decide it's best suited for forestry. They may decide it's best suited for wildlife. They may decide it's best suited for agriculture, which is the case in this example that we're talking about today.

Mr. Olson would've sat down with our staff—our staff, Crown land staff, with our bison specialist, in this case, to talk about his management plan, his holistic approach to bison at his ranch, and our staff would work with him. As I mentioned earlier, our advice in terms of herd health and grazing and fencing and all the rest of it would've been upfront and centre for Mr. Olson to consider.

My understanding is that that management plan met the department's criteria and that in that area, given the coding of the Crown land as agriculture, that would mean a green light to move forward for Mr. Olson.

Mr. Graydon: I thank the minister for that. He brought up a good point, that all of the MAFRI and all of the players have been involved in the decision making to designate this to be agricultural land, and he also mentioned bison specialist. Could he share with us who the bison specialist is?

Mr. Struthers: We have a very good bison specialist. His name is Ray Salmon. Don't let the name fool you; he is a bison specialist.

Ray has many years of experience in the department and I have found him—whether I have constituency issues over the course of my years in this Legislature or as minister, I've found him to be a very hard-working and dedicated individual with a great deal of knowledge in terms of agriculture but specifically in terms of bison. And I get reports back that he's very well appreciated with bison growers throughout Manitoba, and I think he's been particularly helpful in terms of the issue that we're dealing with here today.

*(15:50)

Mr. Graydon: And so what you indicated before was he was also involved in the discussions about setting up the bison ranch and the viability, the designation of the land that would be suitable land for bison. That's what you had said before. I just want to be clear that he was involved.

Mr. Struthers: That's right. Our—the challenge that we have is to make sure that everybody with the expertise in a certain area are brought to the table to help out in making these decisions. These are important decisions, so we want to have people with the experience and education at the table to help make those decisions.

It wouldn't—Mr. Salmon's role wouldn't just be specific to making decision in terms of the Crown land. He would be available there to help in terms of management plans and troubleshooting and all those sorts of things, whether it's this particular bison ranch or any bison ranch around the province. I understand—when the member for Emerson and I were up at the Vestfold bison ranch just a couple of weeks ago, Mr. Salmon's name came up in a very positive way, working with the owner there. So I have a great deal of respect for the knowledge that Mr. Salmon brings to these operations.

Mr. Graydon: I appreciate the words of the minister, and I'm sure that Mr. Salmon will appreciate them as well.

Going back to the Crown lands, we've been advised that there's a reclassification of Crown lands under way in municipalities in that region. Can you shed any light on that, Mr. Minister?

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Struthers: Madam Chair, I'm not sure I understood completely. Do you mean the region that this ranch is located in or a different region? Or—I'm just not sure what the member was asking.

Mr. Graydon: We've been advised that there's a reclassification of Crown lands under way in municipalities in that region—in that region. It may well be all over the province. You can enlighten me on it. I'm not sure.

Mr. Struthers: First of all, there's not a review going on across the province, as the member kind of went fishing on. In the region that we're talking about, the region that Mr. Olson's ranch is contained, Mr. Olson has made his desires known that he would like to increase the size of his ranch. That is a request that we get—whether it's from Mr. Olson or from anybody else—on the basis of a request that we get like that, we take a look at what the—whether that request can be accommodated or not, and we look at the land in that area.

That's what the rules provide for, so we do that. I want to be clear that no changes have been made on the basis of that request. No changes have been made on the basis of a request in this region—our region. That's just a little north of God's country, Madam Chairperson.

Mr. Graydon: I would let the minister know that all land is north of God's country and Emerson constituency, and I can see the assistant deputy also agrees with me.

However, the reclassification, then, that's going on throughout the province of Manitoba with Crown lands is certainly something—it may need to be done. But I'm just wondering what the objective of it is.

Mr. Struthers: I must say, that was a nice try on the part of the member for Emerson. I very clearly said there wasn't—was not—is not a general reclassification of Crown land across the province.

In this case, there is—we have officials that are considering the request of this particular rancher. And in his request to have land reclassified, it's not the only request that we're dealing with; it's not the first time. I suspect it won't be the last time we get

requests to reconsider reclassifying Ag land—Crown lands as agriculture throughout the province.

Madam Chair, but I want to assure and be very clear with the member for Emerson that those are taken on a case-by-case basis, and there is no general reclassification, province-wide.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, from the comments from the minister today, it's clear that the reclassification that's being requested by Mr. Olson has been taken very, very seriously for the expansion of his particular area.

How will that affect the municipalities and the government departments? And how many are involved in this reclassification request? Because to me it seems that we shouldn't need to be doing a complete review of the region when, if I understood the minister correctly before, that they have a block group that deals with these. And now, all of a sudden, we're doing a review. I'm a bit taken aback by what the minister's putting on the record today.

Mr. Struthers: Well, I'm a little taken aback that the member is taken aback.

I—this is a serious request by a producer. Any producer that makes a serious request to us, to reclassify Crown land as agricultural Crown land, we take seriously, whether it's the biggest ranch in the province or the smallest ranch in the province, biggest—the biggest farm in the province or the smallest one. If there is an opportunity to use agriculture—to use Crown land for agricultural purposes, I see it as our job to take a good, hard look at that.

Does this mean that just because a request is made, we're going to say yes? Absolutely not. It means we're going to investigate. We're going—and it's not even a whole—the whole region that gets looked at by the block management committee, which I consistently said earlier in questions that the member has asked. The block management committee, which is made up of a number of different departments, which I outlined earlier in a previous answer, take a look at the request and they determine whether or not we should move ahead with the request or not.

* (16:00)

The—we obviously reserve the right to say no to a request that can't be substantiated. If there are better purposes for that Crown land, then that block management committee would assign that code

differently than agriculture. And if that's the case, we would turn back to Mr. Olson and say, sorry, we can't accommodate your request.

In another part of the province, maybe even in the member's area, in Emerson, maybe there would be a request somewhere north of Vita that—where there's some Crown land and a farmer makes a request and it makes good sense and the block management committee in that area looks at it and says, that does make sense to be coded agricultural and we grant that and then we bring some land into good agricultural production.

When you're dealing with the people's land, which is what Crown land is, you have to have a set of rules. You have to have a consistency and an implementation of those rules and those rules have to be upfront and very clear to whoever it is who's interested in pursuing Crown lands for whatever purpose, whether it be agriculture or conservation or forestry or wildlife or whatever that purpose may be.

So, essentially, we do treat these seriously and we treat people fairly and evenly and we don't show preference one person to the next.

Mr. Graydon: Is the—this process, this part of this review that's not a review, and a reclassification that's not a reclassification, but it's under the block land management committee and is this process something that we'll see happen across Canada and how often does the Crown land get reclassified in Manitoba?

Mr. Struthers: I think what I want to make sure the member for Emerson understands, is that we, as a government, we take a multi-use approach to Crown land. And Agriculture has a very vital role to play in making sure that the agricultural needs are met through this.

I give a couple of examples to the members. If a forestry company is making a request for some activity on some Crown land, they would come to this block management committee, just like a farmer would have to come to block management committee, and make their best case. And I'm very pleased that we have an Agriculture person at that table to indicate that maybe that land can be better used for agricultural purposes rather than for forestry purposes. If the block management committee agrees with that, then that's what the answer is. Maybe the committee decides, yes, it is a good use to—a good case to be made for forestry quoting on that. Okay, so Agriculture's had its say and the block

management committee has made a different decision. But Agriculture needs to be at that table making sure that productive land is considered for agricultural purposes.

We may get—coming out of this flood situation, we may get farmers coming to us with requests to reclassify a parcel of land as agricultural Crown land, so that it can be used for grazing. I can totally see that possibility, coming out of the flood conditions that we have in our province now.

I will say to the member that we've determined that there are seven requests in the province right now for reclassifications, in different parts of the province. Every one of those requests will be treated seriously and there's no guarantee as to any of those requests, as to how they're going to turn out. Each of those seven, I think, deserve a chance to make their case to the block management committees, put their best case forward, and have it analyzed and treated fairly according to the rules that govern Crown lands in Manitoba. And I can assure the member for Emerson that that will happen.

Mr. Graydon: Has the Pine River Bison Ranch made an offer to purchase the Crown land?

Mr. Struthers: As far as I know, that ranch has not made an offer to purchase any of the land that's for lease.

I also want to make sure that the member knows that I haven't participated in any pan-Canadian discussions on Crown lands. I don't know if he meant to say in his last question—he was asking about—he used the word "Canada" and I wasn't sure if he meant Canada or if he was talking Manitoba, but I'm busy enough with Crown land in Manitoba, let alone the rest of the country.

Mr. Graydon: You mentioned that the Pine River Ranch has asked for a reclassification on certain lands and wants to expand. Can you give us today an approximate size that this particular ranch wants to be?

*(16:10)

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Olson has indicated that, eventually, he'd like to have his bison herd around the 2,000-head mark. Now, if he is unsuccessful in obtaining land to sustain that size of a herd, then, obviously, he'll have to scale back his plans and be content with a smaller herd. We, on the advice of people like Ray Salmon and others, we understand that he—if he's going to look at that size of a herd, he

needs a lot of land, and that may or may not fit into the land use plan for that area. He has to be able to co-ordinate his size of his herd with the amount of land that he can obtain.

Mr. Graydon: Perhaps my information is wrong, but I was under the impression that Mr. Olson brought more animals than 2,000 head to the province already.

Mr. Struthers: The numbers that we have don't bear out the statement that the member for Emerson just put on the record. I mean, I can endeavour to make sure that the member from Emerson is kept up to date on that, but, as I said, the best thing information that I have in—to my memory—is in or around the 2,000 mark.

Mr. Graydon: I thank the minister for that. My information may not be accurate either, so I will patiently await his confirmed information.

Can the minister provide us an update on the Keystone Processors?

Mr. Struthers: Things are moving along very well. We—there has been a lot of project design work that has been completed.

There's a management team that is in place. They're called Astana. I think possibly—I don't know if the member from Emerson has met them or not, but a very experienced team of people. I've met with them on a number of occasions getting updates on the progress of the project, which, by the way, I should point out to be referred to as ProNatur. P-r-o, capital N-a-t-u-r. It had been known as Keystone agricultural—sorry, Keystone beef processors. Lots of Keystones in this province. So the former Keystone beef producers, the name is now ProNatur. The environmental licences are in place for this project. Some site cleanup has taken place.

The only thing that's outstanding right now is the contribution agreement from the federal government. We've been working very steadily with our counterparts at the federal level. In November of—it's November 3rd—November 2nd, 2009, the federal government announced its participation in this project. A good announcement I thought. A \$10-million contribution that they promised—that they committed to. We've been working with them to get a contribution agreement in place for the last year and a half or so. Once that's in place I believe we can put some shovels in the ground and begin construction.

Mr. Graydon: Is there any process currently taking—processing currently taking place in St. Boniface?

Mr. Struthers: No, not since November.

Mr. Graydon: What are the current plans for the existing facility in St. Boniface?

Mr. Struthers: Those buildings will be gone. They are slated for—except for the barn the other buildings will be gone. That is part of the business plan that's been put forward for this whole project. So there hasn't been processing taking place since November and demolition at that site will occur, I'm told shortly, and that will be one of the steps necessary in moving forward with this new project.

Mr. Graydon: How much has the provincial government invested in this facility to date?

* (16:20)

Mr. Struthers: Zero.

Mr. Graydon: How much is the MCEC's current commitment?

Mr. Struthers: The Manitoba Cattle Enhancement corporation—Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council has invested \$3.9 million. That's at the end of December, 2010.

Mr. Graydon: Can the minister further answer to how much the commitment will—is, the current commitment?

Mr. Struthers: Madam Chair, when you add up the land and the construction and the equipment and all of that, the MCEC projected contribution would be \$12.5 million.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chair, this commitment would be for—would include the 3.9 already spent?

Mr. Struthers: That is correct.

Mr. Graydon: So could—under the new management team—and I've done some background search on them, I think they're quite qualified, and I'm sure the minister is in agreement with me, and—or he wouldn't have put this—the words on the record that he has. But what is the current management structure in relation to—and I'll try and use the new name, ProNatur.

Mr. Struthers: The—in the—we have, right now, a short-term management agreement contract with Astana and ProNatur. When there's a green light on this project and everything's in place, then we will be

looking at a—retaining them contractually—ProNatur will—on a more long-term contract.

Mr. Graydon: And perhaps, then, I need to better understand who ProNatur is.

Mr. Struthers: ProNatur is a combination of the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council and the original founders' group that came forward with this concept. MCEC will be the, by far, the largest of that group, and the founders' group will be very much a minority—in a minority position of ProNatur.

Mr. Graydon: Can the minister indicate who the original founders were and the size of their shareholders' stake? Will they have a percentage or—and is this being opened up to the public to buy into it on top of this, or is this just going to be MCEC and the original stakeholders, the original people that started? So, if I could have the percentage of what the original people would own?

Mr. Struthers: As I said, the MCEC will be by far the largest of the partners. The founders' group will be very much a minority. Right now, we're looking at a 90-10 split; 90 on the side of the MCEC, 10 on the side of the original partners—sorry, the original founders' group.

There will be room for other equity partners to come forward, so that could dilute that split, more than what it—than what I've just reported.

* (16:30)

The—any of that, any kind of progress in that area would, of course, be governed by the rules of the Manitoba Securities Commission and, of course, their advice, but that's where that part of this stands just now.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, the founding group will be owning 10 per cent. How much money do they have in the project, or are they just promising money, or is it already in there?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I can at least partially answer that question. I may have to direct the member for Emerson to the founding group itself to get an exact figure. The amount that that group would have put forward would have been expenses; they would have occurred in finding the site in the first place, some development of that site, the concept development at the original—at the origins of this project. That group would have done a lot of work in terms of nailing down licences, which we've talked about earlier. And that group, actually—the founders' group actually

helped in finding the management team that is now working hard on this project.

So it's our thinking that the work that that founders' group did needs to be acknowledged, needs to be recognized, and that it would be—it's reasonable for them to have a 10 per cent split that I had mentioned earlier. It was, again, 90 per cent—a 90-10 split, 90 per cent MCEC and 10 per cent, which would reflect this founders' group's contribution specifically at the outset of this project.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, the—at the onset of MCEC, there was a commitment of three years that they would match the contributions of ranchers and cattle producers to the investment pool by \$2 a head. Is that commitment still there, and for how long?

Mr. Struthers: I'm—I hope I got the question right from the member. I think he was asking if the Province—you—he asserted, correctly so, that we had committed to match for three years and was wondering if we have, indeed, come through with that commitment. He had said they. I wasn't sure if he—just what he meant, but I'm assuming it's the Province he was asking about.

An Honourable Member: And to continue.

Mr. Struthers: Okay.

The answer is, yes. We did make that commitment. Not only have we matched provincial money with producers' money for three years, we've done it for four years. So we've come through on that commitment and we've been clear on that.

Mr. Graydon: And does the minister foresee following through with this for a number of years?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we've met and exceeded our commitment on this particular beef slaughtering project. We have been very clear, as a provincial government, that we are committed to increasing slaughter capacity in Manitoba, whether it be at this project or other projects that make sense. We've been involved in—actually, fairly recently, an announcement was made in the—at Plains Processing in Carman. I think it's good to have the federal government and our Cattle Enhancement Council step up and work together to provide what is really an advantage for the Manitoba beef producer.

There are other sites around the province that I'm hopeful can move forward in terms of slaughter capacity. I—one of the real advantages that we have in the way we've moved forward with slaughter

capacity is that we haven't necessarily thought that we could solve all our problems with one huge slaughter facility. There's a number of slaughter facilities of a smaller nature around the province. Members know of many of them, and we work with those smaller processors to make sure that we increase the amount of slaughter that takes place in our province. I think we can all agree that that is not just a good benefit for the cattle rancher, but also creates employment in many little communities that really do need that kind of support.

I think that one of the advantages of this particular project, and one of the reasons why we'll continue to match provincial dollars with producer dollars, is that in this particular project, it's going after a niche market, the kosher market. What I don't want to end up doing is having a project being developed that is big and grandiose and runs head-to-head with another bigger, more grandiose competitor and simply not get off the ground.

* (16:40)

I think there's a market, and I'm very impressed with the work that Astana, the management team, has done to identify this market and to position ourselves in such a way that we can connect the Manitoba rancher and the rancher's cattle with that market. Do the processing, grow the beef in Manitoba, do the processing in Manitoba, but do it in such a way that you can be solid in a growing market of kosher meat. That, to me, indicates that there's a stable and sustainable future for this project here in Manitoba.

So, yes, we've made a commitment to match producer dollars to increase beef slaughtering capabilities in this province, and we're going to continue to do that.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, and I thank the minister for that. It's—I've long supported value-adding agricultural products and, more especially, beef products in the province of Manitoba. I've been involved in many of the operations that tried to get off the ground and been disappointed more than once, I might add.

So I—what I would like to maybe do is get a—the names of the founding group. Could you do that for me? And, if you don't have them on hand, could you give them to me in writing?

Mr. Struthers: I'll endeavour to get that information for my—for the member for Emerson.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, and so, just to kind of recap on MCEC for my benefit and for the—it's called ProNatur today. We will be—when we're up and running if—in the near future, we will be processing how many head of cattle a day in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Struthers: Madam Chairperson, we're looking at a plant capacity of 62,500 per year. I believe, if my math is correct, that's about 250 a day.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister.

Livestock traceability initiatives, where are we with those?

Mr. Struthers: Madam Chairperson, I think, to begin with, I want to make sure that the—that everybody understands that this—we are participating in a national approach, a national program. And I'm really very pleased with the leadership that our staff has undertaken on a national level.

And, at the national stage, I know earlier in our Estimates, we paid tribute to the retiring Dr. Allan Preston. Allan has really been a leader in this nationally, along with our chief veterinarian, Wayne Lees, at a number of—I think pretty much every FPT meeting that I've been minister at, Allan has made presentations to the—to all of my colleagues from across the country, updating us on progress in terms of a traceability—a livestock traceability program for Canada. And I think, because of the leadership of people like Allan Preston and Wayne Lees, Manitoba can be very proud of its leadership role in terms of actually moving this file along.

For example, we've had very good progress in terms of premise ID. Premise identification is essential to a traceability program. We've got—we've had meetings with all of the livestock groups. We've got some very good numbers in some sectors. We do have some challenges in other sectors. We've met with the Manitoba Beef Producers and, I think of, worked out some of the challenges that they face.

I think there needs to be an understanding that premise ID in one sector means something different in another, but that we have to find ways to move forward. And I really give Major Jay Fox and his staff at the Manitoba Beef Producers a lot of credit for spending a lot of time with our staff and working through some of the challenges that they face. And I really do expect some good results to come out of that as well.

Having said that, I do also want to take one minute to recognize turkey producers in Manitoba. The member will certainly remember last fall when a turkey farm was detected with avian influenza. I was very relieved, as minister, when I realized that 100 per cent of the turkey producers in this province had been premise ID'd. And that, Madam Chairperson, made our job so much easier to very quickly, within three hours, very quickly identify and contain what was happening on that farm.

I would—I've—the member and other members in this Legislature could understand what it would mean if we weren't as quick as we were, working with the federal government, CFIA and with the turkey producer to address that situation quickly. That very much, while it was an unfortunate incident and everybody feels for the farmer involved, it was quite impressive to see how quickly we could react. And lot of it was because the turkey producer himself took it upon himself to participate in our traceability, in our premise ID.

We also have a government and industry team that works to find ways to move this file forward in any of the sectors that are involved. We do think it's an important step that we have to take. And just one last point—I want to—I do want to acknowledge and give credit at the federal level. We've been working with our federal counterparts on AgriFlex proposals and have actually invested in test equipment at auction marts. What we don't want to have happen is, you know, an extraordinary interruption of business at the auction marts. We want to make this as seamless and as easy as we can so that auction marts and others who are participating in a traceability program don't suffer inordinately, economically, because of this project that we're undertaking. So, I'm very—quite—I'm quite proud of the work that the department has done on this.

* (16:50)

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): And our time is running fairly short here, and I have some questions about a recent bankruptcy within the dealers' licence and G & M Livestock. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, if I just read in some questions into the record, could you provide me a written reply back so that we don't spend time on answering these right now?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I will undertake that, Madam Chairperson.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay, so then I'll read in these questions and your department can undertake that, and I'm sure they'll do it in a timely manner, well before June 16th.

This is in regards to G & M Livestock and the bankruptcy under the dealer licence. He—the outfit had a bond, under the Manitoba rules, of \$40,000. I would like to know what the status of the department's investigation is. How many producers were affected, the numbers of cattle, and, obviously, the value of the cattle that have not been paid for. And I'm only talking about in Manitoba, because we know there's also ones in Saskatchewan, which is outside of your jurisdiction, but this is for Manitoba only.

In terms of what is the department thinking in terms of either compensation or mitigation towards resolving this situation, what actions and further prevention that the department is looking at, if they're looking at anything, and that relates back to changes to bonding requirements or self-insurance as other provinces have done. And if the department minister and his department could just provide me with some timely answers to those questions, I would certainly appreciate that.

Mr. Struthers: We will, Madam Chairperson.

Mr. Graydon: I believe we have time for one short question. I believe it only takes us five minutes to wrap this up. Is that true? There is time for one short question.

Mr. Minister, with respect to animal welfare investigations, does the minister believe that the department has enough resources to address the number of complaints that need to be investigated with respect to potential animal welfare issues?

Mr. Struthers: We investigate every complaint that we get. We have very well-qualified staff to do that, and I think we have a system in place that allows us to do that as quickly as we can. We know we have to—we know we have in—when we—in investigating these cases, we know we have to get there quickly so that we can collect evidence, if that's necessary. So we—I'm very confident in the people that we have in order to do that job.

Mr. Graydon: I thank the minister with that, and that concludes my questions.

Madam Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the resolutions? *[Agreed]*

Resolution 3.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$14,339,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Policy and Agri-Environment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$148,199,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Risk Management, Credit and Income Support Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$18,964,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Agri-Industry Development and Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$43,410,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Agri-Food and Rural Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$580,000 for Agriculture—excuse me, not exceeding \$508,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$250,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the minister's salary, contained in resolution 3.1.

At this point we request that the minister's staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions. Seeing no questions:

Resolution 3.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,879,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

The hour being—this concludes the Estimates for this department.

The hour being 5—is it the will of the committee to rise? *[Agreed]*

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour now being 5 p.m., this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 18, 2011

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