

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	Ind.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 14, 2014

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.

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 212—The Child and Family Services
Amendment Act

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce the Bill 212, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act—[*interjection*] I move, seconded by the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat), that Bill 212, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, be now read for the first time.

I got to get this right because you shortened that one the other day. This bill requires—[*interjection*]

Motion presented.

Mr. Wishart: This bill requires the Child and Family Services agency to do the following things: when in the absence of a child protection concern it proposes to remove a child from the care of a caregiver, the agency must prepare a written plan, notify the caregiver in writing about its intentions and explain to him or her its reasons for the proposal and its assessment of the factors relevant to determining how the proposed move may affect the child; once the final decision is made to carry out the proposal, give the caregiver a written decision and give the authority under which the mandated agency operates copies of the notice and decision given to the caregiver.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation would implement recommendation No. 47 of the Gage Guimond report as well as several recommendations in the Phoenix Sinclair report, and it is common-sense approach to

social work to protect the safety and well-being of vulnerable children in care and support the foster families.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—
Effects on Manitoba Economy

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The Premier of Manitoba is on record calling the idea of a hike in the PST ridiculous.

(2) Economists calculate that the PST hike has cost the average family \$437 more in taxes after only six months.

(3) Seventy-five per cent of small businesses in Manitoba agree that provincial taxes are discouraging them from growing their businesses.

(4) The Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association estimates that a 1 per cent increase in the PST will result in a loss to the economy of \$42 million and threatening hundreds of jobs in that sector.

(5) Partly due to the PST, overall taxes on new investment in Manitoba recently stood at 26.3 per cent whereas in Alberta the rate was 16.2 per cent, Ontario rate was 17.9 per cent, according to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce.

(6) The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce are concerned that the PST hike will make an already uncompetitive tax framework even more unattractive to job creators in this province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the job-killing PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to reject or approve any increases to the PST through a referendum.

This petition is submitted on behalf of L. Davidson, J. Emms, A. Jake and many other fine Manitobans.

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

Further petitions?

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Reversal and Referendum Rights

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The budgeted—The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the provincial government broke the law by failing to address the referendum requirement before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoba families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases to the PST.

This petition is signed by E. Kavanu, R. Everett, R. Gillies and many other Manitobans.

Farmland School Tax Rebate—Cap Removal

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to eliminate the education property tax on farmland.

Through Bill 47, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2013, the provincial government has instead decided to retain the education tax on farmland, cap the tax credit at \$5,000 and eliminate the credit for out-of-province landowners.

Education tax on farmland is a heavy burden on Manitoba families, limiting farmers capacities to expand the size of their operations while making them less competitive with neighbouring jurisdictions.

The \$5,000 cap on the rebate imposed by the provincial government does little to ease the burden of high property taxes for Manitoba farm families.

Bill 47 has yet to be approved by the Legislature, and the capping of education tax credits on farmland constitutes yet another broken promise by this provincial government to Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the \$5,000 cap on education tax rebates on farmland out of fairness and respect for Manitoba farmers.

* (13:40)

And this petition is signed by G. Wollman, L. Wollman, W. Waldner and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Effects on Manitoba Economy

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) The Premier of Manitoba is on record calling the idea of a hike in the PST ridiculous.

(2) Economists calculate that the PST hike has cost the average family \$437 more in taxes after only six months.

(3) Seventy-five per cent of small businesses in Manitoba agree that provincial taxes are discouraging them from growing their businesses.

(4) The Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association estimates that a 1 per cent increase in the

PST will result in a loss to the economy of \$42 million and threaten hundreds of jobs in that sector.

(5) Partly due to the PST, overall taxes on new investment in Manitoba recently stood at 26.3 per cent whereas the Alberta rate was 16.2 per cent and the Ontario rate was 17.9 per cent, according to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce.

(6) The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce are concerned that the PST hike will make an already uncompetitive tax framework even more unattractive to job creators in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the job-killing PST increase.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to reject or approve any increases to the PST through a referendum.

And this petition is signed by R. McMillan, J. Bard, C. L'Heureux and many other fine Manitobans.

Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in the northeast region of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that

their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by S. Senkow, H. Kalauz, L. Loster and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions?

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba Hydro was mandated by the provincial government to commence a \$21-billion capital development plan to service uncertain electricity export markets.

In the last five years, competition from alternative energy sources is decreasing the price and the demand for Manitoba hydroelectricity and causing financial viability of this capital plan to be questioned.

The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually for the next 20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro create a competitive and transparent needs-for-and-alternatives-to review of Manitoba Hydro's total capital development plan to ensure the financial viability of Manitoba Hydro.

And this petition is signed by B. Catellier, M. Mellor and C. Nault and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Reversal and Referendum Rights

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the government broke the law failing to address the referendum required before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoba families. Number—

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

(2) To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases to the PST.

This petition is signed by J. Penner, C. Dolynchuk, P. Sonnicken and many more fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Municipal Government): I rise today to table the Manitoba Municipal Government Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2014-2015 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports? Seeing none, ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have today from St. James-Assiniboia International Students Program 30 grade 10 students under the direction of Ms. Alexandra Humphries. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Political Parties Public Financing

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Last year the New Democratic Party accepted a vote tax subsidy, a significant amount of money that was taken from Manitobans who it promised in the last election it would not introduce new taxes to but did, and the vote tax is one of those. The PC Party, of course, refused to accept the subsidy on principle. The NDP did accept it, evidence of a lack of principle.

My question for the Premier is: How much is the amount of the vote tax subsidy that the NDP will be taking from Manitobans this year?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): On this side of the House we support public financing of democracy in the province of Manitoba. That's how we limit the power of big money in democracy; that's exactly what we do. This government—[interjection] I know that gets under their skin. I understand that; it's not a surprise.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first government in the history of the province that has banned corporate and union donations in Manitoba, and we've had an independent commissioner tell us that public financing is the way to make sure that every Manitoban can have a real vote, a real vote and a donation that means something in a democracy.

Members opposite were opposed to the banning of corporate and union donations. Today they could reverse themselves and say they oppose corporate and union donations in democracy in Manitoba and want to limit the power of big money.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Speaker, well, now, far from reducing the power of big money, they're introducing the power of big lazy, because they're not willing to go and earn the money the old-fashioned way by going and asking Manitobans to support them. So they take a million dollars off the kitchen tables of Manitobans they promised they wouldn't introduce new taxes to, and they operate their political party with it.

* (13:50)

They ran on the promise of no new taxes. This is a new tax and their other new taxes combined have introduced \$1,600 of new broken-promise taxes to Manitoba households at the same time they give themselves—while Manitobans have less to spend—a

\$5,000 raise each. There's something wrong with that. But what's really wrong with it is when you hide it.

So I want to ask the Premier again: How much money is he taking from Manitobans' kitchen tables this year in unearned vote tax subsidy?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition opposes the banning of corporate and union donations. We support the banning of corporate and union donations. We support public financing of democracy so that we can limit the power of big money.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite takes the biggest subsidy in the Canadian federation when it comes to election: it's called the Canadian Senate. That's where they get their government subsidies. That's 100 per cent financed by all of us in Canada, and that's where there's the greatest concentration of campaign managers for the PC Party.

Mr. Pallister: Well, with all the other misinformation the Premier likes to put on the record, I do appreciate the fact that he's not lying to me today about the amount of subsidy he's taking. I do thank him for not lying to me today about the amount of the subsidy—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

I'm sure honourable members are—especially the Leader of the Opposition is very skilled in the rules with respect to this Assembly with respect to parliamentary and unparliamentary language. So I'm going to offer a caution here: when choosing his words, please pick and choose them very carefully. I'm sure the honourable member knows that we're not to make reference to whether a person has been honest or dishonest or lying to anyone in particular in this House, especially if it references a particular individual of this Assembly, because we are, in fact, all honourable members, and I want to make sure that we treat each other with respect in this place.

So I'm asking for the co-operation of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, please pick and choose your words very carefully.

Mr. Pallister: Accepted, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw the thanks.

Now, on—in respect to the Premier's comments, I would say this. He is not at all hesitant to go around the province with his colleagues trumpeting spending. They've had over 200 announcements where they make no secret about promising to spend

millions, in fact, billions of dollars of Manitobans' money. Yet when it comes to taking some money from Manitobans and spending it on themselves, they like to cover it up. This cover-up problem they have extends to many other issues as well.

Now, I understand that the Premier may well be embarrassed. I understand he may well be ashamed, in fact, of taking the money from Manitobans that he promised he would not. But that's no excuse for the fact he's not coming clean today with the amount his party is subsidizing itself at Manitobans' expense. That's not an excuse. After all, it's not NDP money; it belongs to Manitobans.

So I'll ask him again: How much money is he taking in vote tax subsidy for his political party without doing anything to earn it?

Mr. Selinger: The contrast is clear. We oppose corporate and union donations to democratic political parties in Manitoba; they support it. We support public financing; they say they don't support public financing.

Yet the Leader of the Opposition when he ran to become a member of this House received \$16,000 of public financing. When he was a member of the federal Parliament he generated \$200,000 of vote subsidy as a member of that—of the Parliament. Did he pay that back? No, he didn't. He's willing to take \$1.3 million to the Conservative Party in public financing. His treasurer says it's a great achievement to get the highest amount in the history of that party. You can't have it both ways.

If he's opposed to public financing, be clear about it. We support it. It limits the power of big money in Manitoba. We think democracy's for all Manitobans.

Phoenix Sinclair Recommendations Public Tendering Process

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, yet again we see this NDP government breaking the rules by not properly tendering a contract worth \$350,000 and then breaking the rules yet again by hiding this contract award from the people of Manitoba.

Last month, the Auditor General raised serious concerns about the enormous number of contracts this NDP government gives away without tendering and the length of time it takes for them to tell Manitobans what they have done.

Mr. Speaker, this government committed to fair tendering process to ensure the best quality of services is—services are captured.

Mr. Speaker, why does this Minister of Family Services believe that the tender to implement 31 recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry does not need to go to a public tendering process?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): The murder of Phoenix Sinclair caused a great number of people to be in despair across this province.

When Ted Hughes was asked—Commissioner Hughes was asked to work on this, on the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, we tasked him with the ability to give us a direction and a road map of what we needed to do. He delivered to us 62 recommendations. And in those 62 recommendations, 31 of them are already under way or in progress.

Thirty-one other recommendations needed the direction and support of a woman that is well known within our province and that will be able to meet with a number of individuals and stakeholders and help us once again develop that road map to finalize those 31 recommendations that will make a difference for the child-welfare system across this province.

Mr. Wishart: This NDP government failed little Phoenix Sinclair back in 2006, and now they fail to properly tender a contract that is supposed to find the best ways to implement half of the recommendations made by—made from the inquiry into her tragic death. Does this mean the NDP are positioning themselves to fail even more Manitoba children?

Mr. Speaker, this minister talks about urgency but yet had the recommendations in her hand and sat on them for nearly two months, plenty of time for a tender process could have been initiated to ensure that Manitoba children are given the best quality of services.

Why does this minister continue to mishandle everything related to the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The Phoenix Sinclair inquiry is going to change the face of child-welfare system as we see it today.

With these 62 recommendations, 31 of them are already in progress, 31 of them will be given in-depth investigation as well as developing partnerships with the many Aboriginal organizations

and the stakeholders and also the families and the children involved in the child-welfare system.

That is vital that as we walk forward that we walk together to strengthen the system, to continue to make the enhancements as we've made since 2006.

Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry Aboriginal Meeting Request

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, during the nearly two-month delay in releasing the report, the minister has had lots of time consult with Aboriginal and Metis leaders who have a critical interest in this area. In fact, the minister hasn't had 'time'—found time, sorry, to meet with them to hear their concerns since she came into this portfolio. This is an urgent need as well.

Will the minister meet with the Metis and Aboriginal leaders over their concern on the Child and Family Services?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): As we work towards strengthening the child-welfare system, it is all of our responsibilities. It is working with the Aboriginal leaders as well as the families and the children within the system.

I have made an attempt to meet with the leadership council. I will continue to make those requests. I look forward to meeting with them as soon as possible. Thank you.

Manitoba Hydro Expansion Plan PUB Recommendations

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to provide for the House a snapshot of what La Capra, an independent consultant contracted by the PUB, says about Manitoba Hydro's proposed multibillion-dollar expansion plan: (1) Manitoba Hydro has not established the need for expanded transmission to the US; (2) Manitoba Hydro does not consider sufficient number of options for development.

We have one chance to get this right. It's taxpayers' money. We need to invest it wisely.

Will this minister, will this government, commit to listening to the PUB?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): This coming from the same side of the House who dissed the PUB not so long ago.

So—but, Mr. Speaker, we know that, looking forward, our province could run out of energy within

10 years. And that would leave us in a position where we'd have to import natural gas. And this province, we sit on a whole lot of water that flows through our province. This side of the House would rather see that water flow over the dams and bring in revenue as opposed to run through our basements and bring on stress.

This side of the House will support the Preferred Development Plan that Manitoba Hydro is putting forward at the NFAT hearings. There's 15 options they're looking at. Seems to me members opposite have narrowly looked at one and only one option, and that's to privatize the company.

* (14:00)

Mr. Eichler: This is the same minister that's going to Americanize Hydro. We're going to save Manitoba Hydro, not run it down the tubes like this government's going to do. *[inaudible]* You can't believe anything that comes out of this minister's mouth. He has trouble focusing, obviously.

Mr. Speaker, this government has mismanaged a number of files, not including just Manitoba Hydro. What they're using is inappropriate metrics suited to support the government's big spending plans. As we know, it's only a cash grab. What they want to do is spend Manitobans' money better than what Manitobans think they're going to.

What I'm asking for, Mr. Speaker, is will this government do its due diligence, listen to the PVP, listen to the people from La Capra, make sure that this is the right investment at the right time for all Manitobans, yes or no?

Mr. Struthers: Isn't that something. They talk about saving Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker—*[interjection]* If that's not—if all that clapping and cheering isn't a sign of a guilty conscience, I don't know what is.

This is the same group of people who said they were going to save MTS, and what did they do? They sold MTS.

What did this same group of people say about home care in Manitoba? This same group of people tried its best to privatize Manitoba home care. If it wasn't for this side of the House and a lot of other people standing up to you folks back then, it would've been privatized.

This is the same group who ran last time—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, he got the first part of his question right. We will save Manitoba Hydro. There is no doubt about that.

What we also know, Mr. Speaker, is the hydro rates are going to double under this government's watch, not only double, they're going to go up 157 per cent. Shame on this government. This minister has no credibility whatsoever.

La Capra and other experts have made it very, very clear there has to be due diligence, and this government is railroading this through. They're letting tenders out without any consultation. They're whitewashing the PUB.

Will they listen to the PUB, or is it just another blunder?

Mr. Struthers: The people across the aisle today have asked us to stop. They've asked us to cancel projects.

Mr. Speaker, that leads to privatization. That leads to rates going up. That leads to us replacing clean, green Manitoba hydro and all the jobs that go with it with importing natural gas from other jurisdictions. That may be good for jobs in Alberta; that's not good for jobs in Manitoba.

Arborg Business Community Highway and Road Conditions

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Talking about jobs in Manitoba, the Minister of Jobs and the Economy has the responsibility to do what it takes to keep jobs in this province and to keep our economy competitive.

The businesses along Okno road near Arborg are at a competitive disadvantage. Their MLA and their Minister of Jobs and the Economy are doing everything they can to push 550 jobs to the United States.

Why are this—why are the Minister of Jobs and Economy and the member for the Interlake letting 550 jobs go to the United States?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): I've had the opportunity to discuss this issue with the member opposite. I thank him for raising it.

Of course, we're very focused on increasing the number of jobs in Manitoba and we're going to ensure that my department works very closely with the industry, the private sector to continue to increase

the number of private sector jobs just as we have over the past some years, some 25,000 or more.

I would say to the member opposite that we are investing in a very important infrastructure program. This, of course, is germane to the issue that he's raising; \$5.5 billion over five years and he voted against it.

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a simple solution to this issue.

Highway 326 is not fit for the growth and expansion that these businesses would like to see. When these businesses approached their MLA, they were told, quote, it's your fault you've built in the wrong place, end quote.

So does the Minister of Jobs and the Economy believe that the businesses along Okno road just built in the wrong place and it's the right place for them in the United States?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, if the member opposite has some documentation of said comments, I'd be happy to refuse them.

And, further, I would simply ask the member, as I referenced earlier, isn't it curious to stand in the House and pose as an advocate for infrastructure and then vote against \$5.5 billion?

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's nice to see the minister stand in this House and brag about \$5.5 million, but 326 is not on the five-year plan.

This government created a portfolio of Jobs and Economy which is apparently charged with watching jobs go to the United States and letting the economy sink to the bottom of the barrel and actually pushing it to the bottom of the barrel.

Five hundred and fifty jobs could be saved in Arborg if this government committed to upgrading the road. The minister seems unwilling to do so. Their MLA believes that these manufacturers should build somewhere else.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government believe that 550 jobs should be somewhere other than Arborg and somewhere other than Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I'll say to the member that we're willing to work with any industry to try to support them.

I would assist him in pointing out, Mr. Speaker, that while, indeed, the rest of Canada was losing good manufacturing jobs, Manitoba saw an increase

in manufacturing jobs, 2013 at 1.1 per cent while it was negative 2.9 in the rest of Canada.

The programs we're putting in place are working in Manitoba. We're seeing an increase where others are seeing a decrease. We're going to continue to work, whether the member opposite will vote for infrastructure or not.

Manitoba Data Security Heartbleed Virus

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, according to her report to the Legislature last year, IT security management practices, the former auditor general stated that Manitoba government's IT structure does not have a culture of security.

Mr. Speaker, we have recently seen the security over 900 individuals compromised on CRA's website through the use of the Heartbleed virus.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister ensure Manitobans that their critical data is safe in Manitoba?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): The House may or may not be aware my department is in charge of the Business Transformation and Technology unit, and I can inform the member that, indeed, the version of OpenSSL, Open Secure Sockets Layer, that was affected by the Heartbleed bug is no longer in use by the Province of Manitoba.

I can let them know that our department has also contacted companies that provide Internet services to government and determined that no major outsourced services pose a security risk to government. The Heartbleed bug, Mr. Speaker, did indirectly affect Manitoba Finance and Companies Office insofar as they communicate with third-party Internet websites such as the CRA, but I can assure the member that this situation has been investigated and the department is satisfied that all is secure.

Mr. Helwer: Well, we did a search this morning and, indeed, we did find a version that was on the government's website, so perhaps she needs to recheck with some of her staff.

Mr. Speaker, the former auditor general was concerned about highly sensitive information. It's critical for the government to properly safe guide—safeguard this information, witness protection records, child abuse records, pre-release budget information, Cabinet minutes and supporting documents, pretrial prosecution, health information.

Mr. Speaker, given that CRA does have a culture of security but the Manitoba government IT department does not, how can the minister ensure Manitobans that their critical data is safe in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I would encourage the member—he suggested that there should be a recheck of that; I would suggest that perhaps it's the member that needs to recheck.

Again, our department, BTT, has confirmed that the version of OpenSSL that was compromised, that was affected by the Heartbleed bug, is no longer in use by the Province of Manitoba.

Certainly, we have to ensure continued vigilance. We know that personal—that individuals' personal information, whether it's information about their finances or information about their personal health, needs to be protected, and we're committed to do just that.

* (14:10)

Mr. Helwer: It's obvious that this NDP government has a culture of secrecy but not a culture of security for sensitive data belonging to Manitobans.

What has this government done to ensure the security of the data with the recent security breaches due to the Heartbleed virus?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we got rid of the program.

Student Financial Aid Information System Request to Table Reviews

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, many post-secondary students in this province rely on student loans to help them through their education.

The government tendered a contract for a new online system in 2009. They have repeatedly missed deadlines and have gone well over their initial budget. Surprise, surprise.

A review of the system has been completed and, Mr. Speaker, a review of the review was also called for by the former minister.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister table the results of both reviews today?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the member that were he to apply to a student loan today, he would be well served by the existing

system and he would be able to go through. He would make an application, he would go on to school, he would go—he would graduate, he would get a good job in here in Manitoba, just like we envision for all students in Manitoba.

Phase 1 of the project has been completed. The second phase is a little bit more complicated. It has taken a little bit more time. Mr. Speaker, on that side of the House they would have us do nothing. We're actually doing our due diligence to do it right.

Timeline and Costs

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, is that phase 1 of the review of the review or the future review?

Mr. Speaker, students going to a post-secondary for the first time in September will be applying for student loans using a system that was introduced before they were born. The NDP government continued to use a system that was introduced in 1995. This new Minister of Education is not taking students' best interests into account if they are using a computer system almost 20 years old.

The new, still-in-the-box, 15-and-a-half-million-dollar student financial aid system is not up and running. When will it be?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I just said to the member, if he goes online and applies for a student loan today, he will be well served by that existing system.

Mr. Speaker, we do so much for students on this side of the House. We've frozen tuition at the rate of inflation. We've made sure that grants and bursaries are available in a way that they were never available in the 1990s when the Leader of the Opposition was at the Cabinet table. We make sure that we continue to fund universities at 2.5 per cent and our colleges at 2 per cent. We're building Manitoba's post-secondary system for the benefit of all students of—across Manitoba, not just for some.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, I feel that I'm in Estimates again with these non-answers.

Mr. Speaker, trust is very important to all Manitobans, as I stated last week. This new Education Minister ran in the last election promising that he and his government were not going to raise taxes. He has now fired at least 11 teachers, spent 15 and a half million dollars on a student financial aid program which isn't working, and he is in charge of our education system, which is close to last in numeracy and literacy.

Mr. Speaker, how can we trust this Education Minister and his government?

Mr. Allum: We're committed to a program around jobs and the economy, a skills agenda and adding 75,000 workers to the labour force by 2020. That means that we need to invest in our education system, and that's exactly what we do. We provided school-funding to schools at the rate of economic growth. We've increased funding to universities by 2.5 per cent. We've increased funding to colleges by 2 per cent.

We are getting the results, Mr. Speaker, that we're looking forward to. When these folks were in power, graduation rates hovered around 70 per cent. I'm pleased today—to say today that graduation rates are over 85 per cent.

Frozen Water Services Impact on City of Winnipeg

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the city of Winnipeg has been facing an emergency in which thousands of people have had frozen water pipes and thousands of people have had no clean running water. It has had a big impact on people's lives, on businesses, some of which have had to close, and it could become a serious health issue.

Nearly two weeks ago the City asked that this be declared a disaster, and now we're still waiting for this NDP government to act.

Why has this Premier and his NDP government deserted the city of Winnipeg in its hour of need?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The member for River Heights knows full well we've said we'd look at it on its merits. We need to get the information provided by the City of Winnipeg.

The DFA—the disaster financial assistance guidelines, as the member knows, are federal guidelines. We will assist the City in applying to the disaster financial assistance program and see if they meet the federal guidelines. That's a commitment made by the Minister for Emergency Measures that's on the public record.

Infrastructure Standards Enforcement

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, this is about so much more than just whether or not it's declared an emergency and disaster. There is so much more that this Province could be doing, but they're sitting on their seats and not acting.

Mr. Speaker, the number of frozen pipes has taken Winnipeggers by surprise. From River Heights to St. Johns, the pipes are, at or near people's homes, affecting their ability to access clean running water for their daily lives. Dealing with this situation now is important. Preventing these problems in the future is also vital.

What has this NDP government done to investigate why pipes are freezing and whether it is possible that we need to address codes and standards? Are they in place? Are they adequate? Are they being enforced?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Selinger: The most important thing we're doing is investing 5 and a half billion dollars in infrastructure. Something the member opposite voted against in that infrastructure, sewer and water projects, Mr. Speaker, sewer and water projects, better roads. And you know what? All of those things are only possible when you have a government that sees the need to address those kinds of issues. Member opposite talks big, votes against infrastructure every single time.

We're still waiting for the federal program to be announced, Mr. Speaker. Mind you, they've announced they're going to announce it several times, but they haven't actually announced it.

We're the only government investing in infrastructure. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the amount that we've increased to the city—given to the City of Winnipeg in provincial funding this year, 295 and a half million dollars.

Mr. Gerrard: This is about so much more than just dollars. It's about the quality of the infrastructure. Are those pipes built well enough that they won't freeze?

Clearly, there've been problems in the past. Whether it's in how they've been put in, with the codes, with the enforcement, we don't know. This government needs to take this seriously and find out.

Where the pipes are in the area close to a home, this government could offer rebates for householders to fix the problem long-term.

Where the pipes are in the City's domain, the Province should be reviewing the building code, which is its responsibility in making sure that the quality work is done. There are pipes put in as

recently as four years ago which are freezing. This is totally unacceptable.

Where the problem is, this Province should find out—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Selinger: We'd be pleased to work with the City and any municipality on addressing their infrastructure concerns. That's why we rolled out the 5-and-a-half-billion-dollar program.

If they want to put the pipes deeper in the ground, we're fine with that. We just want them to get the pipes built, Mr. Speaker. And in order to do that, we need a provincial government that's willing to put some resources on the table to the municipalities and the City to move forward on that. They have the responsibility to look after that infrastructure. We're giving them record transfers to do that.

We're very pleased to work with them on any initiative that will ensure that the water keeps flowing all year round, cleanly, to the city of Winnipeg and any municipality in Manitoba.

New RCMP Positions Increased Provincial Funding

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Manitobans understand the need to invest our money wisely in areas like infrastructure, health care and public safety.

* (14:20)

We know that the RCMP in Manitoba do a fantastic job of keeping our communities safe each and every day. As the front line of policy—or policing in many Manitoban communities, include my own, the RCMP work tirelessly to both prevent crime and to keep the public safe. It is a valuable partnership and I am proud to be a member of this government that believes in investing in our police services rather than slashing their budgets.

I would like to ask the Minister of Justice to please inform the House on the recent commitment our government has undertaken to enhance our partnership with the RCMP.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I thank the member for Flin Flon for the question.

Manitobans, of course, enjoy the benefit of an excellent provincial police force. The RCMP polices 99 per cent of the province. And, Mr. Speaker, even though the opposition doesn't, we believe they do it very well.

I announced on Friday, Mr. Speaker, that as part of Budget 2014, the Manitoba government is funding 10 new RCMP positions as part of our ongoing commitment to improving public safety in the province of Manitoba. And since 2010 alone, the Province has increased its investment for the RCMP by more than \$26 million and we've added 40 more RCMP officers.

The RCMP is a tremendous partner in public safety. Whether it's helping us to schedule the Hells Angels as a criminal organization, working on criminal property forfeiture, supporting the criminal property—the community safety officers program, which can help communities like Flin Flon, or support for communities across Manitoba, we stand with our RCMP in building a safer Manitoba.

Vita and District Health Centre ER Reopening Timeline

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): The emergency room at the Vita hospital has been closed for 544 days. This NDP government has yet to attract the full complement of doctors to the facility and has failed to keep their promise to the people of southeastern Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, ERs in other hospitals in the RHA are open during daytime hours when most accidents occur.

Why will this minister not reopen the ER at the Vita hospital?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question.

We know that families want to see health care closer to home. We know that they need access to emergency health care, and we know that everyone in Manitoba who wants to have a family doctor will have one by 2015. It's a commitment that we've made.

I want to assure the member that we have not removed the funding for the emergency room in Vita. That money—it's for staffing—is still on the table.

But in order to make sure we maintain patient safety, to make sure we're providing a secure and

safe environment for patients and for staff, it is not possible for us to keep it open at times when we don't have enough doctors there to do so. It would not be safe for patients, and we need to make sure that that is our top priority.

But I can tell this member that we will keep recruiting more doctors, as we have done. We have more than 560 net gain doctors working in Manitoba. More than 120 of those doctors are now working in rural Manitoba and—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Smook: It has been 544 days since the ER at the Vita hospital closed. The Minister of Health promised the residents of southeastern Manitoba that the closure would be temporary, but there's no end in sight, and this minister's rhetoric isn't helping.

This government has closed 19 emergency rooms. Patients are being forced to drive hours for medical care. Other ERs are on the chopping block thanks to this minister.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister guarantee that the Vita ER will reopen, yes or no?

Ms. Selby: I can tell this member we have not removed the funding for staffing at that ER, and we are working at both the Vita ER and ERs around the province to make sure they have the full complement of doctors that we know people want to see there.

Mr. Speaker, the way to get more doctors is to make sure you hire more doctors, as we've been doing; to make sure you train more doctors, as we've been doing; to work with the community to recruit more doctors, and I commit that we're going to keep doing that, as we've done in Minnedosa where we've been able to bring in a new doctor and a new practitioner just recently. We're going to do the same for Vita.

And I can assure you that the way to do that isn't by bringing in a two-tier, American health system like his leader's been calling for.

Mr. Smook: All we get from this minister is rhetoric.

It has been 544 days since the ER in Vita closed. The community was ensured that this would be a temporary closure and that the ER would reopen in a few weeks.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) is on record saying, I quote, there is nothing more important than ensuring

your family has the care they need regardless of where they live.

Mr. Speaker, why did this Minister of Health break her promise to the people of Vita? And can she provide the people of southeastern Manitoba a date for reopening of the ER at Vita?

Ms. Selby: Let me be very clear. The Vita health centre is still offering clinical and hospital support. But we are down a few doctors, and that is why we can't provide 24-hour emergency care. It just would not be safe for patients at this time.

But I can tell this member that we will keep working with this community. We will keep looking to bring a doctor to this community. We've seen success in many other communities, and we will keep doing the same. It's why we've got more than 560 net gain new doctors in Manitoba since we came into office.

We want to bring more doctors here. We know that Vita wants to see more doctors, and I can guarantee that the only people that cut funding to rural hospitals sit on that side of the House.

Cottage Service Fees Revenues vs. Services Received

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Unlike members opposite who make it their business to put incorrect information on the record, I'm prepared to correct the record. I understand from the minister's comments and from the author of the original media report that cottage service fees in that article may have been double counted.

The minister, however, did not take issue with the other figures that were published in that article which show, despite the correction, cottagers pay \$1.9 million more in revenues than services received.

I ask the minister: What black hole are these additional \$1.9 million going into?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying, I think he doth protest too much.

I suspect that those incorrect numbers in the opinion editorial were perhaps generated by the member, and we await his retraction.

Completeness of Expenses Audit

Mr. Martin: The minister and his colleagues like to cite the Grant Thornton's qualified audit.

Interestingly, that qualified audit says, and I quote, did not include any testing for completeness of expenses. As such, it is not surprising that the results favoured by government were achieved.

Mr. Speaker, the cottagers' ask is reasonable. Will this minister allow for an auditing of the completeness of expenses, or are they concerned about what may be revealed if they share their methodology?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, first of all, of course, the methodology is all online. It's a new thing. You press a button, it shows up on the screen and you can print it off and they can put it on their Gestetner and use it.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's three points that are important. We are looking at a phasing in of a catch-up so that everyone pays their fair share, and we're looking at a decade for a catch-up. Anyone who has a concern about their rent amount can appeal by providing a certified appraisal and it will be accepted at face value. And third, anyone who feels a hardship as a result of the decade phase-in can defer the payment until the cottage is sold.

Why Conservatives would want to cut public services and then reintroduce heavy taxpayer subsidies to a select group of cottagers, God knows.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It's time for members' statements.

Halli Krzyzaniak

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, in 2013-2014 hockey season was quite a year for Halli Krzyzaniak of Neepawa. Her rise to the top of the hockey world continues, and she has grown into a strong hockey player who we'll no doubt see winning a gold medal for Canada one day.

In 2013, Halli led Team Canada to another under-18 world championship, the first time Canada has won back-to-back titles. In the process, she was named the top defenceman in the tournament. She graduated from the BC Pursuit of Excellence training program and signed on at the University of North Dakota, helping the team to go to the finals of the WCHA tournament, finishing an impressive second to archrivals Minnesota.

Halli was also invited to the under-22 camp for Team Canada and became the youngest player to be invited to Team Canada's main camp where she was

able to skate alongside gold medal winners from the 2014 Sochi games.

Rob Henderson of the Brandon Sun said that Halli is arguably the top player in her age group in the world. To put that in perspective, if she—if there was a female version of the NHL Halli would be in the running for the first overall pick. Brandon Sun named her the recipient of the H.L. Crawford memorial award, naming her the top athlete in Westman for 2013.

Halli has four more years of eligibility left in the University of North Dakota and will be fighting hard for the roster spot for the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea.

* (14:30)

Mr. Speaker, the whole community of Neepawa and the entire region of Westman is proud of Halli and wishes her nothing but the best in the years to come. We can't wait to see her continue to succeed both for the University of North Dakota and for Team Canada, and I can't wait for her to bring home more gold medals. I would ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Halli and wish her nothing but the best in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Exchange District

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): The Exchange District is one of Winnipeg's most distinct cultural hubs. Visitors and locals flock to the area to experience its architectural heritage, retail boutiques and flourishing arts scene.

Mr. Speaker, Winnipeg businesses promote the art and culture of the area with historic walking tours and by conserving architecturally inspiring buildings. The Exchange District has recently redesigned the Old Market Square park to host concerts and festivals. The renovations will help attract not only musicians and tourists but also locals to the downtown core. Organizations such as the Exchange District BIZ work hard to promote activities such as filmmaking and festivals that are good for the local economy and for its unique culture.

The area helps preserve Winnipeg's culture. I hope the Exchange District will continue to inspire future generations with its vibrant arts scene that is truly unrivalled not only in Manitoba but across Canada. Come and visit with us. I live there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hometown Glory

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize a new business in Russell called Hometown Glory, which opened on October 11th, 2013. Hometown Glory is located at 202 Main St. North in Russell and is situated in the front of the building that is also home to Bin 22 Coffee Company.

Hometown Glory is a clothing boutique run by Jessica Keating who is under 30 and has fulfilled her lifelong dream of opening her own business in her hometown. Jessica wanted to carry unique clothing that people in the Prairies could wear to go about their everyday business and she has been successful in doing so. Jessica carries clothing brands such as Alternative Apparel, C'est Moi and Gentle Fawn, jewellery—unique jewellery made by Wolf Circus and Birds of a Feather and vintage-inspired watches as well as sunglasses by Komono. Hometown Glory's fleece-lined leggings from C'est Moi were a huge hit for ladies over the holidays. Many of the brands Jessica carries are handmade and Canadian and she also has a heart for supporting other local businesses such as PipCreek Farm and Studio through the sale of their soaps made on a farm just outside of Inglis by Andrea Gorda.

On November 30th, Jessica turned Hometown Glory into a concert venue when she let local bands Under the Hill and The Gospel Plow fill her store with live music in an effort to raise funds for the Philippines relief effort, benefiting those who have been affected by the recent typhoon.

Hometown Glory can be found on social media websites Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Their Facebook page showcases a look of the day and Jessica often uses social media to feature local women modelling clothing from her boutiques. Jessica's partner Russell made 90 per cent of the very unique furniture in her boutique and her friends made the handsewn pillows.

Hometown Glory has become a very popular destination in the downtown Russell area. I would like all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating Jessica Keating on the opening of Hometown Glory. Congratulations, Jessica. All the best.

Manitoba Seniors' Guide

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): This is to thank Manitoba seniors for their lifetime of hard work which has helped us to build such a vibrant province

today. Seniors' contributions have kept our communities strong and moving forward.

Earlier this month our government released the new and improved Manitoba Seniors' Guide. It serves as a tribute to those men and women who built this province and to those who still contribute their time and efforts to build their communities.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Seniors' Guide is a great source of—for older citizens and their families to find information that can improve their quality of life. It is one the many examples of the work our government is doing to ensure that older Manitobans have access to the programs, services and information they need. This newest edition of the guide includes tear-off information on safety issues, such as fall prevention. This type of information allows our seniors to continue to do the activities they love while they remain independent and safe, possible manner.

I come from a cultural background, Mr. Speaker, where the seniors are given the highest pedestals in one's family. As an example, my late mother, even at the age of 99, was the ceremonial head of our family.

Family values stress showing respect and providing care for the elderly, an ideal that our province—the provincial government shares. Our Aging in Place strategy has been internationally recognized as a model for supporting seniors at home.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba seniors helped to build this province we are all proud to call our home. Our government understands that seniors and their families need a variety of support for their loved ones, and I hope the Manitoba Seniors' Guide will help them to services and support, the programs that will enhance their health, independence and well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Celebration of Excellence in Teaching Awards— Donald Nikkel and Lauren Marshall

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, on April 10th, eight Manitobans received excellence in teaching awards for their dedication, passion and excellence in education. These awards celebrate many of the best teachers in our province; each is recognized for their ability to reach, engage and inspire their students, as well as to make them lifelong learners.

This year, the Interlake is home to two of these award-winning teachers. Donald Nikkel of Lunder School won the Teaching Excellence-Senior Years award for his work developing activities that are challenging, engaging and hands-on for his students. Donald promotes real-world connections to learning. His course, Wilderness Out Tripping, brings students into the natural environment, applying traditional Aboriginal knowledge and leadership skills to create sustainable development projects.

Lauren Marshall, also of Lunder School, won Outstanding New Teacher for her work establishing a growing new music program. By involving her students in the development of Lunder School's music program, the school now boasts band classes for grades 9 to 12. Thanks to her enthusiasm and leadership, 40 per cent of students are enrolled in one of her music classes.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize the teachers who bring exciting and innovative work into our schools. This week is Manitoba's Education Week, and I cannot think of a better way to celebrate than to honour those hard-working teachers who make learning engaging and fun.

Congratulations to Donald Nikkel and Lauren Marshall and to all of this year's award winners. With your dedication to developing innovative ways to learn, our students have an even greater chance at success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): Could you please call Committee of Supply.

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

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

* (14:40)

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

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

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Chair, it's good to be back in the Health Estimates. It brings me back to the time, not so long ago, when I was in this chair and asking this minister's predecessor questions about various issues pertaining to health care in the province. Of course, today, my conversations with her are less encumbered than they were before. I'm asking, of course, on behalf of my constituency of Morden-Winkler. And I wanted to spend just a little time with the minister to ask some questions pertaining to Tabor Home. And I know that the minister and I have been trading correspondence on this issue, and I welcome the opportunity to just converse and perhaps speed up those conversations and get some answers today.

First off, I want to ask the minister, with respect to the construction of the new Tabor Home in the community of Morden, if she can confirm that construction will proceed as indicated in 2014?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): I know the member's eager to start talking about Tabor, and I wonder, though, if he would let me put into the record some of the questions that came in our last Estimates. I have some of the answers that other members were asking, if he would mind if I read some of those answers in and then answered his question.

Mr. Friesen: Perhaps, if she would be so kind, we could deal with Tabor Home first and then perhaps as a transition to other issues, she could offer those answers. And I know that the critic for Health thanks her for supplying that information this afternoon.

Ms. Selby: That would be fine. I think the member knows I had a chance to visit Morden not long ago, before the House was in session. I got to visit the Boundary Trails hospital. I met with the Tabor Home board, had a very quick tour of Tabor Home, but they were in the middle of a bingo game, so one does not want to interrupt that. Wonderful people out in Morden. Had the chance to go a couple of times, and I've always been treated very warmly.

I do want to say that the construction has taken longer than we had hoped. I know there were some redesigns needed at the end of the design stage to keep the project within budget. That take longer—took longer than we would have hoped, and that has mean things were a little bit delayed. And—but I will

tell you that it's on budget, and we're not expecting that to change, so that is good.

We're looking at being able to release the tender, have it ready for approval by the end of this summer. That would mean we could likely have a construction contract issued by end of 2014 or early 2015 at the very latest. And construction can begin, of course, once we have that contract made with the construction company. And we're looking at construction to take place until about mid-2016.

I'm going to do what I can to speed up these timelines. I would like to see this move a little bit. But I didn't want to give a false expectation, and I think these timelines are realistic. But I will do what I can to speed that up if it's possible at all.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that answer. I do want to remind her—I know she's aware as well that there's—there have been a number of different dates announced with respect to this project's timeline. And I know, while she says that the community has been very supportive and welcoming, I can assure her that the community is growing increasingly frustrated about the slow pace in which the project has been proceeding. I know she's in receipt of recent correspondence from the City of Morden looking for confirmations from the minister with respect to their capital construction that is necessary to proceed with the necessary road infrastructure to service the facility. I know they're looking for commitments of the minister to know is this the right time to proceed.

But, with respect to the project's timeline, I know the minister is aware that it was formally announced in November 2010. I was at that announcement. It was before my time as an MLA here. It was before my time as a candidate for the PC Party in my constituency. But I remember attending that announcement. At that point in time, construction was indicated as commencing probably around March 2013. And I know that the minister is aware, because I've included it in the correspondence that I've sent to her office, that there was a period of time following that announcement where the project seemed to go dark. And for a long time there seemed to be no forward momentum.

But in 2012, the previous minister of Health assured me personally that the project was, in fact, not behind schedule. In a news release just months later, in December of 2012, that news release indicated a new—a revised construction target of spring 2014. Now, all the evidence outside our

window of this room would indicate that it is hardly spring today.

* (14:50)

But the calendar tells us it's April and that it is spring. And we are not there yet. And, even as I listen to this minister, she's made very clear we're not at the point where we can proceed to construction. But, in addition to that, the minister, the previous minister, did talk about proceeding to construction in fall of 2014 when it became apparent it would not be spring. It seems to me that the minister is strongly opening the door to the possibility or the probability that construction will not proceed until 2015.

On behalf of the community, I know there's a tremendous sensitivity about that, but the sensitivity is also about the fact that the community wonders if construction can be pushed back as far as 2015, will the minister be coming back to the community in another six months, saying it will be even longer?

Ms. Selby: Well, Mr. Chair, and I certainly know, having met with folks in the community, how passionate they are about it. I know what an important project it's going to be. I'm sure the member's well-aware that the new Tabor Home will be twice the size of the original. It will be much more modern in its design, with more single-resident bedrooms, private washrooms, lots of places for activities, of course.

My understanding is that that—when it got near the end of the design, there needed to be some redesigns in order to keep that project within budget. That, unfortunately, did take more time than we would have liked. I know that the previous minister worked with Tabor folks this last summer to release the design drawings and do a public update on the project, to ensure the project—that there's ongoing progress. It's exactly why I wanted to meet with folks in person a few weeks ago—was just to personally pass along my support for the project and that I would do what I can to make it move along as quickly as possible.

To be fair, we're looking at—the dates that I'm telling the member are, I think, realistic. And I wouldn't want to give false expectations, but if I can push these timelines and do a sod-turning sooner with the community, I would be thrilled to be able to do that. I know how important it is for the community.

But, again, we are looking at being able to tender by the end of this summer, construction by the end of

2014–early 2015 at the latest—but I will keep my sights on end of 2014, of course, to tender that—to be able to reward that contract, which means we can start construction immediately. It will take some time after that point, but I will do what I can to push those timelines. But I want to be realistic with the member that we're looking at late this year or early next year at the very latest to start construction.

Mr. Friesen: The minister is aware that I've written a number of letters, both to her predecessor and then to her, on the subject of Tabor Home. I think there was some confusion earlier this month about a letter I'd written to the minister and whether she had gotten back to me. I sent a second piece of correspondence to ask her where that was, so I'm not exactly sure where that one letter response from the minister had gone missing, but I am now in receipt of her response of March the 26th to a letter I wrote on February the 13th looking for the—some clarifications.

And I do appreciate the minister's clarifications around the capacity of the Tabor Home, about various aspects of the project, but I want to bring her attention to something she indicated in the third paragraph of that letter of March the 26th. Now, in writing, I was seeking clarification around the times at which the community could depend on the minister to drive the project forward from the tendering stage and to the tender for construction stage and into construction. Now, the minister's response says in the third sentence of the third paragraph that the project is currently in the tender documentation stage of development, which is expected to be complete this summer.

Now, I will go back and check later on, but I'm quite clear that I just heard the minister say now, in the context of these proceedings, that that stage would be completed sometime this summer. So, could the minister offer a clarification? Is she saying today that what she had actually put in the letter of March the 26th is not accurate, that the tender documentation stage of development will not complete this spring and it will instead be backed up to summer?

Ms. Selby: I'll just tell the member that we don't have a copy of that letter on us right now and we're just waiting to see if we can get one to confirm what's in it. But I can tell the member that we are looking at being able to release the tender by the end of the summer. That would allow us to issue the construction contract by the end of 2014, early 2015—

that's when construction can start—and that we are responding to the mayor. I understand there's a letter going out to him today.

I'm just looking, Mr. Chair, that the letter apparently says that the tender document stage will be completed this spring and proceed to tender late summer, which is what I've been saying here, that we are expecting to—approval to tender by the end of summer.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that response. I understand she's indicating she doesn't have a copy of that letter on hand, and I can only imagine what staff are all tasked with in terms of bringing documents up to these committee rooms, and so I completely understand that. And so I appreciate her response indicating that the project should proceed to tender for construction, and she's indicating that would be late summer.

Now, I do notice that there's also a slight door left ajar in the wording of this letter that indicates that that may take place in late summer, early fall. That's the wording of the letter response I have from the minister's office. And the sentence goes on to say, with construction beginning soon after the contract is awarded. Now, the minister said just now that that tender for construction would complete in summer. The wording of the letter says late summer, early fall.

Can the minister offer a clarification? Is it late summer? Is it early fall? I want to be clear the reason I ask is because the community is looking for assurances after so many delays, after so many promising of one thing and then getting another. Can she clarify late summer or early fall, because the letter she has supplied does leave the issue somewhat ambiguous.

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I can assure the member, I can assure his community, that we are going to do our best to release that tender by the end of summer. We're going to put our best effort into it, roll up our sleeves and get to work because I would like to see this project move forward. I think it's taken longer than we had hoped, and we'll do what we can to make it move as quickly as we possibly can.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that response. I know that I speak on behalf of the many community stakeholders when I say it is frustrating. I know the minister knows the community, but she knows that this is an area of the province that has grown. As a matter of fact, the city of Morden, according to

Stats Canada, has grown by 21 per cent—or almost 20 per cent in just the last five years. I know that she's aware that in this community over 23 per cent of the population is over the age of 65.

And I know she is also aware that, while this project does not proceed, we continue to have far too many of our seniors who seek or who become in need of personal-care-home services. And far too many of them currently end up residing outside of the community—the community in which they have worked, the community in which they have raised a family, and the community in which they have volunteered and gone to church and done all of these things. And in the moment that they need the system, the system fails them. And having driven those roads—and I know the minister has been there; she understands that. I mean, I just spoke to another senior in my community just this last week, and I was visiting with him at the Salem Home. He was there visiting his wife of probably almost 90 years old, and he indicated how when his wife was panelled and awaiting placement, instead of going from Winkler to a Winkler personal-care home or to Morden, because there was no capacity, she was sent, I believe, in this case, to Crystal City. Now, if you know those roads, that's a very, very difficult task in winter driving conditions for a gentleman who must be getting near 90 years old. I asked if he was able to visit his wife on a regular basis, and he replied, sadly, that he was not. It took months for her to return to the community.

* (15:00)

I know the minister understands that, in many cases, these seniors never return to the community. And I know she understands, as well, that in many cases what happens is when a senior who is in need of personal-care-home services and perhaps exhibiting signs of Alzheimer's disease or confusion, and these people begin to—or are taken outside of their community to a strange place, then those—that facility and the surroundings are unfamiliar. And, as a result, often they don't thrive in that place. And it may be as a result, then, the doctors who is unfamiliar with this patient, this resident will prescribe a drug treatment to alter behaviours, and that's just a very slippery slope.

So I know that the minister is aware of this context, as well as she is aware of the fact that my predecessor, Mr. Peter George Dyck, spent many, many days in this Legislature advocating for this facility. We are not at that stage in the conversation

anymore. We are not at that place where the community is advocating. We are not at that place where the MLA is standing up and reading the names of the petition. This is the place where the government of Manitoba, under this NDP, has committed to build this facility. And by my count, there have been at least four definite dates that have been revised or altered.

And so I ask the minister just to clarify then—I've clearly heard today in the context of our discussion that she says she's going to work very hard, that she's going to give it her best effort to proceed as quickly as possible. But she must understand that that is not something that a construction company or a company who receives the contract can take to the bank.

If we're talking about a fall construction, we're talking about a construction period made more difficult by the fact that the ground will be freezing, that there will have to be equipment brought in on a large-scale capacity to be able to facilitate groundbreaking. If that's the case, then there is going to—that's going to be additional cost.

The minister has committed today that there will not be cost overruns. Can the minister commit to driving this project ahead, even for a construction start in fall of this year? And is she aware of how that decision may involve cost overages? Is she prepared to bear the cost of those cost overages to make sure that this project is not stalled any further?

Ms. Selby: So, a couple of things, and I'll try to remember everything that the member said and answer all his questions.

But I did want to just say, off the top, the project is proceeding. I have personally passed on my support for this project to the community. I know it's going to be a fantastic project for the community. It's going to be twice the size of the current Tabor Home. It's going to be more modern. There was a time that people were sometimes two to four people to a room, and now we try to make it a little bit more private with private washrooms. And I've seen the design of the new Tabor Home, and it looks like a beautiful space with room for family and friends and other gatherings as well. And, absolutely, I will do what I can to move this along, and if we can speed it up, then that would be fantastic.

To be clear, there were some redesigns that were needed at the end of the design stages to keep the project in budget. My understanding is it's on budget and not expected to change in that way. And I'm just

have managed to receive the letter that the member has been referencing, which says the project is currently in their tendered documentation stage of development, which is expected to be completed this spring, and exactly what I was saying that then we are expected to proceed to tender for late summer and construction beginning once that contract has been awarded, which we expect will probably take 'til the end of 2014 or early 2015, but construction can start immediately after that.

I should also point out that I know that Southern RHA works very hard with people when they are looking for a personal-care-home placement. They're very sensitive to this—to the fact that people want to be close to home and want to be close to family. But they also have to balance that with ensuring that there's patient flow at Boundary Trails. And I know that those folks do their best to get somebody into their first choice or into a choice that's close to home, but they do have to also balance the fact that they need to keep a hospital flow going so that should there be an emergency need that they have the beds available for that as well. And I know those folks work very hard to work with the community and with patients and to be sensitive to families and do what they can.

So, again, I will tell the member that this project is moving forward. I look forward to being back in Morden again for a sod-turning. The sooner, the better would be fantastic, but I want to be realistic with the timelines that I'm giving the member. I also want to say that he mentioned Boundary Trails hospital a little bit. When I was out there, I had to commend the people that they found a fantastic way to work together to bring communities—a couple of different communities—together to bring in a very, very robust and modern hospital. Lots of folks there, lots of things going on. And I think it's really a great example of community working together to get a project done, and I look forward to doing that on this project as well.

Mr. Friesen: I wanted to ask the minister one additional question on Tabor Home pertaining to the complement of beds because I know she's aware this is a different kind of a personal-care home that's being developed and there's been a lot of conversation—I know, undoubtedly, in her office and with the department and also the community—with respect to the fact that this one facility will house both personal-care-home beds and supportive-housing beds. And, so I believe the ratio

the minister has confirmed to be 80-20, 80 personal-care-home and 20 supportive-housing units.

At the point in time where this second press release was issued with respect to the personal-care home—not the first one in 2010 but the subsequent one in 2011—the then-minister of Health indicated that same ratio of beds. But it included also a line where it said that this 80-20 ratio of beds would continue or depending on the needs of the community. I'm wondering if the minister would just comment. I believe she's made clear that she will be—at this point in time, the project will proceed as is. But, based on the fact that it is more often the case that, of course, supportive housing happens within a community where the project will be driven by a community, and then the government will help to fund the positions—those supportive-housing positions that will allow—the operating money that will allow the human resources and the professional front-line services that could deliver that.

Is there, in her mind, an understanding that perhaps the 20-bed allocation towards supportive housing in this facility could turn over to personal-care-home beds as the community continues to grow and as we suspect the ratio of community members who are over the age of 65 will continue to grow?

Ms. Selby: Yes, the project is 100 beds, as the member stated. It's one of—one area where we're building—we have a number of beds in the making right now. I think the number is 300 that are currently under development, 100 of them at this project.

It is an 80-20 split to provide a range of housing options. And as the member said, yes, if down the road the community has more need for personal-care-home beds or if they have more need for supportive-housing beds, that ratio can be changed and adjusted to accommodate it. But, right now, it is an 80-20 split—split, rather, for 80 per cent—or 80 personal-care home and 20 supportive housing. I think it's important to recognize the need for supportive housing in the community as well. It is also an important asset for the community to have. But should the needs change, should the numbers change down the road, that ratio can be adjusted one way or the other to accommodate it.

*(15:10)

Mr. Friesen: Just one more issue, then, concerning my constituency, still on the subject of supportive care.

So just further to the east in the city of Winkler, the minister will be aware of the Buhler centre, which was formerly referred to as the H.F. Wiebe Active Living Centre, to be constructed on this site of the former Winkler Senior Centre. And this, of course, is a large-scale capital project. Very exciting to see the community take the lead in addressing the needs for things like affordable seniors housing, looking at assisted-living component to be in that facility. The Winkler Senior Centre will continue to occupy the first floor of that facility and, indeed, there is also Manitoba Housing money that will flow towards that supportive housing award.

One conversation that I was trying hard to drive with this minister's predecessor, as well as other ministers, had to do with the—what has been designed for that facility on the second floor, which would be a floor dedicated to supportive care. And in Winkler this would be exactly one piece of the puzzle that would go a long way towards addressing exactly what the minister and I have spoken about just now with respect to allowing seniors to age in place.

We have growing communities in Winkler and Morden and the RM of Stanley. Combined, according to Stats Canada, these three communities have grown at an average rate of about 25 per cent in just the last five years. So now we have a facility that will be constructed in the next little while. We could really use the minister's commitment to assist when it comes to the supportive care aspect of this facility.

What I want to do is ask the minister if she is aware, further to the east in the town of Altona, of the pilot project that has occurred there, and if she is aware of the—that project, of the objectives of that pilot project and of the outcomes of that pilot project with respect to the government's role in providing the context in which supportive care can take place. Is she aware of that initiative?

Ms. Selby: I just—I wanted to go back just for a moment to Tabor Home until we get to the last question the member had. Just, I think it's important when we're talking about a range of care, whether it's in the case of Tabor Home, supportive housing, also personal-care home, that we make sure that we're providing that range of care, those options so that seniors can live with dignity at whatever point they may be at. And that may be—that may change, and that's why we've allowed for flexibility in those beds.

The member was talking about the Buhler centre active living. We can consult with our colleagues in Housing to get back to the member. It's not—I'm not

personally familiar with the scope of that project. I'd have to look into that.

As well, I wonder if the member could give me a little bit more information of the pilot project in Altona that he's referring to. We don't seem to be familiar with that. Perhaps it's under Housing, or perhaps if he gave us the name of it it might trigger us to figure out which project he's referring to. But we weren't really sure which one he means. If he wants to either give me more information, or perhaps it's under Housing, and we would be able to consult with them.

Mr. Friesen: So just to clarify for the minister—and I'm pleased to hear her speak about these range-of-care options because I think she and I are on—exactly on the same wavelength on this. This is the same idea that the Buhler centre in Winkler will proceed on. It's this idea that the community has a responsibility when it comes to looking at their own community, and looking at their—the demographics and creating the conditions in which the community can be housed appropriately, can thrive, can continue to participate to the fullest extent.

And I know that as the minister learns more about the Buhler centre she's going to be really excited by this project because it's a very ambitious project. But it basically seeks to put all these pieces within one puzzle. I know her colleagues are very familiar with it. But, of course, because a—one award comes from Manitoba Housing. Her—some of her colleagues will be more familiar with it.

The conversation I had been previously trying to kick-start with her predecessor had to do with the extent to which I felt that the Department of Health and the Minister of Health could assist here. Here is, in a nutshell, the project in Altona. At Ebenezer Place, a project was in place there as a pilot project approved by the minister, approved by the CEO of the southern region, that sought to—basically to release home-care support for basically what would be supportive housing in the community. Now the community went ahead and they created the infrastructure. They created the conditions in which the support of housing could take place. The place—point of intersection here with the minister is being able to say and to understand that it is the most efficient financially and it is the most efficient in terms of appropriate accommodations for seniors who are approaching that stage to put one worker on a 24-hour cycle. In other words, providing 24-hour care for individuals in a supportive-care context, and

so I would commit to the minister to get her more information about the Altona pilot project.

I would strongly encourage her to seek out the objectives and the outcomes of that project, and what I would ask from her is a willingness to undertake with my community in Winkler the same conversation to proceed on a basis whereby we know we are providing home care to individuals already at this stage in their own homes. We have a city here who is leading the charge, understanding that they have a role and they are prepared and moving ahead with creating a second floor of this multi-storey facility that would accommodate supportive care. What we need to make this work is a commitment from the minister that simply says, yes, we're—we are providing home care in any case, let's provide it here so that we can have 13 residents in one supportive-care setting being safely and professionally cared for in nighttime hours not just daytime hours.

I would encourage the minister that this would be an excellent value-for-money exercise. I would encourage her that the Altona pilot project bears out the extent to which this is in a community's best interest. It is in the best interest of health care in our province. It is cost efficient and it has been an unqualified success. I can point her to some of the stakeholders who have been instrumental in making this happen in that community, and we would invite a conversation with this minister. As a matter of fact, if she was able to commit to it, I would indicate to her that I could probably have the key stakeholders with respect to the Buhler centre commit to meet with her and to bring her more information about this within a very short span of time. I wonder if the minister could make that commitment today to meet and discuss at length.

Ms. Selby: I would be happy to learn more about this project. The member is obviously very passionate about it, and I am not familiar with it to the degree that he is, so I would be happy to learn more about the project and I would be happy to meet with either himself or with some folks who have some more information to provide.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that commitment, and I will endeavour then to get her information in a very short space of time. As a matter of fact, we are in session, I might be able to even walk over to her seat tomorrow and give her an initial resource guide that would make her more familiar with the project.

Not to belabour the point, but I would just simply say the value here, I think, is to all partners. The city has understood that they have a responsibility and I am so encouraged. As the MLA, I've stayed in close contact with the authors of this project. The interesting thing is it's a very ambitious project. Of course, it involves a component like assisted living. It involves components like supportive housing and it involves a seniors centre on the first floor.

* (15:20)

I've heard this minister speak many times about the importance of seniors being able to age in place. I know both of us have read the documentation, the literature that continues to say, if you can keep people who are approaching that stage where they might be exhibiting the first initial signs of dementia or Alzheimer's, if we can keep them plugged in and if we can keep them active and doing all these things—the minister talked about going to Tabor Home and not wanting to interfere in a round of bingo going on. I've been to the Winkler Senior Centre. Now, of course, it's been razed to the ground, to make room for the new centre, but I can tell you that the—you know, as she has undoubtedly seen in seniors centres across this province, it's wonderful to see seniors taking part in things like the indoor bowling and the bingo and the woodworking in the woodshops and the cooking and all of the—all of these different—these activities that keep them active. It is very exciting to see a project that would locate—that would co-locate all of these things and would allow seniors to move back and forth very, very efficiently indoors, because if this last winter is any indication, wherever possible, we want seniors to have easy access to these kinds of things.

The big question mark or, I should say, the big challenge for the community, with respect to the Buhler centre, has been this second floor—the second floor in which the supportive housing would be located. So any commitment from the minister to be able to learn more about this project is encouraging.

I know that the CEO for the southern region—Santé Sud has shown great interest in this. And I believe it is in the best interest not only of the Department of Health, who is tasked anyway with providing home care for seniors, but because we can get these seniors receiving that home care all in the same space, it's a wonderful opportunity. And I think it could lead to far more projects in the same way across the province, proceeding on the same basis.

So I thank the minister for the commitment. I will get her the information and I hope that together we could work out, I think, a very economical commitment from the Province to proceed cautiously but effectively to help seniors in my constituency age in place with the support of the City of Winkler, with support of the stakeholders who have come to the table already with this project.

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, well, we figured out some confusion that I should let the member know. The project that he's talking about in Altona, Ebenezer Place, is now called Gardens on Tenth. That, we know. We have the contact information for that, and we will look into that a little more.

But I did also just want to put on the record that, while that's certainly important that we're building personal-care-home beds, it's certainly important that we have supportive housing, I just want to make sure that we all recognize that it's important for seniors to have options. And we know that many of them still want to remain in their home, and it's why home care is so important because there are seniors that just don't—and probably with the right support at home—don't have to go into either a personal care home or supportive housing. If they can stay at home, I certainly know that—the seniors in my family—that would be their first choice. But we need options for sometimes when that's just not available.

So thank you, and I'm glad we figured out the confusion on that one. And thank you, member, for the question.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Chair, the minister earlier on had indicated, I believe, that there have been 100 board and executive positions cut. Can the minister provide a list of what those 100 positions were, in terms of board members and executives whose positions were cut?

Ms. Selby: Certainly, we can provide that to the member. We don't have it on us right now. We can't do it today, but we could get back to her.

And, again, if I could just go back, there was a number of questions from last week. I have the answer—not to everything, but to some of them, if the member wanted me to read those into the record.

Mrs. Driedger: That would be helpful. Thank you.

Ms. Selby: So the member was asking about the age of the STARS fleet across Canada. The STARS advises us that they have a range of helicopters in their fleet. The ages range from 27 years old to brand

new helicopters. As we said earlier, the helicopter in Manitoba was just rebuilt. That, of course, does not change the age of the air frame, which was built in 1991. One of the advantages of being with STARS is, of course, that Manitoba benefits from the backup of those 10 other helicopters in their fleet.

I'm glad that the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) is here because I know that he had some questions on critical incidents related to potholes and roads, and I have some answers for him on that.

At the time, as we said in Estimates, critical ambulances are covered by critical incident legislation. We're not aware of critical incidents related to potholes. There was one incident in 2013 where a stretcher tipped over when being moved to an ambulance. Slippery pavement was said to be the reason and it did lead to a displaced clavicle. I know that's not exactly what the member was after, but I felt that it was a response to his question that probably should be disclosed.

As with our critical incidents that are reported online, we would post the degree of the incident reported, the description of that incident, and we also note if it happened at a personal-care home, an acute-care facility, an ER, an ambulance or another setting. But that description does not, however, include the time and date of the incident that took place or the region where it took place. The member asked for this information, but this information is excluded from online disclosures so to protect patient confidentiality.

Also, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) was asking about Manitoba covering newborn screening for sickle cell anemia. The Manitoba newborn screening program is currently in discussion with the local specialist—excuse me—in hemoglobin-related disorders as well as the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Canada. The intent is to analyze the technologies and impact of universal screening for these diseases in Manitoba. Screening for every newborn for rare conditions helps patients, of course, and parents with peace of mind, and the ability to catch those rare conditions as early as possible so that newborns can get the treatment and the care that they need without delay and families can get the support that they need.

Manitoba is a leader in Canada's screening for cystic fibrosis and over 40 other rare conditions. We do more screening than any other province in Canada, and I know there are still some outstanding

answers that the members were looking for, but I will provide those as I get them.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Well, we'll move on to an area again related to Brandon and the Prairie Mountain Health. I'm sure the minister is aware of a condition known as macular degeneration, and, as we have an aging population, we are seeing more and more prevalence of this particular type of condition. And there is, of course, two types: wet and dry. And the wet form can be treated if their patients are seen regularly and in a timely fashion.

Now, currently we have, as I understand, four retina specialists in Winnipeg, and people have to travel to Winnipeg to have this condition treated about 13 times over a two-year period. So every other month, essentially, is what happens. And currently we estimate there are about 60 patients making this trip into Winnipeg on that regular basis. It usually takes less than five minutes, so I can imagine the minister is well aware of conditions of travel to Winnipeg and during winter, and we are talking about elderly patients here.

So the question is whether we could, indeed, do this in Brandon. The Prairie Mountain Health has been involved in discussions, and I know they have a commitment of at least one professional, one retina surgeon that would be willing to come out to Brandon, but the issue seems to be the WRHA and the approval and preparation of the medications and how that would be transported to Brandon, if it could be. Certainly this doesn't need to be done in an operating room; it can be done in an office, and there are facilities that are available to do so.

What would be the next step the minister would suggest in order to make this easier for individuals with this condition in the Brandon and area?

*(15:30)

Ms. Selby: Certainly, we know that if we can do what we can to bring health care closer to home, whether that be more family doctors, that we have a commitment for everyone who wants one to have one by 2015, including bringing more doctors to rural Manitoba. We've got mobile clinics on the road to try to connect people.

Certainly, it wasn't long ago that I was in Brandon and was able to visit the CancerCare centre at the Brandon hospital there. We've got 16 rural hubs that are able to provide chemotherapy to people closer to their communities. We've got 'dialysis'-dialysis in a number of communities in order to help

people. And pointing out that, of course, we've got radiation in Brandon as well so that people don't always have to drive into Winnipeg.

We are always happy to work with Brandon and with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority along with Brandon to see what can be safely provided in care closer to home. But, of course, 'safient'-patient safety would be our top priority when looking at this particular issue or any one that we'd like to be able to offer to people around Manitoba. Certainly have to make sure that if we look into offering a particular service outside of Winnipeg that we can ensure patient safety in doing that.

Mr. Helwer: Well, patient safety is compromised regularly in this regard. I have a mother that travels to Winnipeg quite often for this particular treatment and they've travelled through some conditions that I'm not happy they're travelling through. And I know many of my friends have parents and relatives that are doing the same thing for a five-minute procedure.

When we have the individual that does this procedure in Winnipeg, is willing to come to Brandon to do it and the issue seems to be down to the WRHA and the approval and preparation of the medications. So what can the minister suggest that we do to get over this particular roadblock to enhance patient safety so they're not travelling over our winter—our roads that are put at risk with the winter conditions and various other—I won't talk about the condition of the roads, but certainly the winter is certainly one that is dangerous for those patients.

And this one particular roadblock seems to be the issue that is holding up this treatment, and it's been tried—several avenues—they've tried to get over it, but it only seems to be this one small issue that's preventing better patient care in Prairie Mountain Health.

Ms. Selby: Certainly, we recognize that—the importance of bringing health care closer to home. It's why we've opened cancer hubs around the province. It's why that—we've brought CancerCare radiation treatment to Brandon. I know that people still have to drive into Brandon, but if that's a little bit closer than coming into Winnipeg, well, that certainly is helpful. And why we're bringing more doctors to rural Manitoba and bringing nurse practitioners and getting the mobile clinics up and going because it's important for people to be able to have access to the right care at the right time, and if

we can avoid people having to drive long distances for that, well, then, of course, that's ideal.

We are working with Brandon and Winnipeg to see what we can safely provide in this area as well. But, again, it's important that our medical experts feel that the service can be provided safely because patient safety will, of course, be their top concern and ours as well.

Mr. Helwer: Well, I'm still waiting for the answer, Mr. Chair.

And we have a world-renowned ophthalmologist that's been working on this issue diligently, and we have several medical professionals in Brandon and in Winnipeg that have been working on this issue, but they have not seemed to be able to get over this one little bump of the medication, and they're—I imagine it is just an approval, may even be something that the minister can do. And she talks about cancer care and other issues, and, yes, we're pleased to see those there. But this is a much less expensive procedure than anything that the minister has spoken about in her responses. And it would simplify the lives of many Manitobans and, perhaps, even enhance the ability of western Manitobans to receive that treatment in a timely basis. Because the barrier right now is travelling into Winnipeg every other month and that it is, indeed, a substantial barrier for individuals. So what could we do to move this little issue over the bump?

Ms. Selby: So we are meeting with the two RHAs to work out a process by which to deliver this service closer to folks in Brandon. But, again, we will not dismiss the importance of patient safety and the issues of safety even around—the medicine must be worked out first.

* (15:40)

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister give us a timeline for when this might occur? These patients are not getting any younger, and we want to make sure that other patients that could take this medication would have it made available. What we're dealing with now is not acceptable in Manitoba.

The minister throws out the two-tier health care quite regularly, and this is a fine example of two-tier health care. This treatment would easily be done in other facilities outside of Winnipeg but is not accessible outside of Winnipeg. Everyone else from outside of Winnipeg has to travel in here to get this done, and it is indeed a barrier to treatment. It is not only time-consuming but very expensive for these

individuals to travel into Winnipeg safely in order to get this done.

So I'm looking for a time that the minister can give us and when she might be able to respond to the RHAs' request.

Ms. Selby: As I've said, the department and the RHAs are planning a meeting to be able to work out the process to deliver this service. But we are told that this particular ophthalmologist is out of the country and not back until May.

But I just think it's important that the member not dismiss this as a simple issue. It's an issue of patient safety, and that does need to be the top priority. And it should be a decision made by medical professionals, not by politicians. Patient safety needs to be made by the experts who are medical professionals, the doctors in the field.

Mr. Helwer: Well, the medical professionals have met and dealt with patient safety. But it is the WRHA and the department that seem to be the roadblock here. So I would recommend to the minister that this is a very simple procedure. It is something that would get rid of one form of two-tier medicine that the minister has imposed on Manitobans and encourage her to find an opportunity to make this available to individuals in Prairie Mountain Health.

Ms. Selby: As I said, there is a meeting scheduled for when the doctor returns. He's out of the country until May.

Mr. Helwer: This individual has been advocating for this service for well over a couple of years now, and the minister and her department could've easily had appointments and meetings with that individual long since. He is in Winnipeg a number of times. In fact, he maintains a residence in Winnipeg and has been more than willing to meet with the department and the WRHA. So to blame it on this individual is very condescending of this minister.

Ms. Selby: I think it's important to point out that this isn't a small or simple issue. It is a question of patient safety. This member is quick to dismiss that, but we are going to follow the advice of medical professionals and let them tell us when they feel that this is an issue of safety and the issues of co-ordination have been worked out between the RHAs.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister give us what her understanding is of the safety issues around this?

Ms. Selby: So my understanding, the issue is around transportation and stability of the compound.

Mr. Helwer: Well, somehow this compound is transported to Winnipeg so certainly it can be transported to Brandon, can it not?

Ms. Selby: Well, no, Mr. Chair, the member is wrong. It's actually mixed in Winnipeg. It's compounded in Winnipeg and it is done so—and whenever, of course, we look to bring in a new service to either a region or facility, we think it's important to have proper procedure and protocol in place, and this is decided by the physicians, not by politicians.

Mr. Helwer: So the minister's telling me that there's no ability to compound this product in Brandon?

Ms. Selby: No, Mr. Chair, what I said is that it has not been done in Brandon, and whenever there is a new procedure brought in, our doctors make those decisions on protocol and safety measures that will be needed to ensure patient safety. Of course, that's the top priority, is making sure that the procedures and safety are in place in order to do that.

I think it's important that—it's not a question of blaming anybody in question, certainly not blaming any of the doctors. I think it's important that they do their work to make sure that the protocol and safety measures are in place, and I appreciate that they take that seriously. And as I said, the RHAs are meeting to discuss this matter when the doctor returns in May.

Mr. Helwer: So, then, further on the minister's comments, I might then take it to understand that it is possible to compound this in Brandon.

Ms. Selby: That's for doctors to decide, not for politicians.

Mr. Helwer: Yes, but this is the minister that is asking the doctors and the doctors are responding to this particular minister. So is it possible to do this in Brandon or not?

* (15:50)

Ms. Selby: So as I've explained, the member was asking what the roadblocks are—and if he wants to call it a roadblock, I call it patient safety assurances—that we need to make sure that the pharmacy quality assurance requirements are in place in Brandon to ensure that this can be safely administered in Brandon.

Mr. Helwer: Well, I'm a little mystified here that the pharmacy would be different in Brandon than it would be in Winnipeg for this particular protocol. Is that what the minister is telling me, that the pharmacies are not compliant in Brandon or is there something additional that needs to be done? Can we just find out what the process is in order for this process, this treatment to be available for patients in Brandon so that they don't have to travel to Winnipeg?

Ms. Selby: So, to be clear, the process is moving forward. The two RHAs are meeting to discuss how to proceed safely. But I think it's important for this member to recognize that pharmacy, like medicine, is a very highly complex matter and it's important that medical professionals co-ordinate the solution. They have the expertise to ensure patient safety when doing any new procedure in a new area.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us, when she had indicated that there were 100 board and executive positions cut in the RHA amalgamations, what executive positions exactly did she mean when she said they were cut?

Ms. Selby: We do have that information, but we don't have it on us. So I'd have to get back to the member with those details.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate when she might be able to do that?

Ms. Selby: We will endeavour to have that information for her tomorrow. But I won't commit for sure that we'll have it, but that is our goal.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, and can the minister tell us, with those executive positions that were cut, what happened to the people that were in those positions? Were they reabsorbed into the system somewhere?

Ms. Selby: I can get the member some more details, but I can tell her that we know that some did leave the system while others did go on to different positions such as vacancies.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate, does the list that she's going to give me show what happened as an end result with those positions? Is that something that's included in that list that she's going to provide?

Ms. Selby: Yes.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister indicate how much money was saved from cutting 100 board and executive positions?

Ms. Selby: So we can share with the member that this has been a savings of over \$15 million since amalgamation.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate in what categories the \$15 million was saved? Does she have that broken down into various categories of how much was saved in certain areas?

Ms. Selby: When we get the other information back to the member with more specifics and details, we can provide that as well.

Mrs. Driedger: Was there one area in particular where most of the savings occurred in?

* (16:00)

Ms. Selby: I can get back to the member with more details when we bring her the other information that we committed to getting back, but I can say it's broken down into board positions going from 11 CEOs to five CEOs included. And that would be various executive positions being dropped and probably a number of other things that we'll be able to give her some details on when we get the rest of that information.

Mrs. Driedger: And with the \$15 million that was saved, can the minister provide an itemized breakdown, then, of that \$15 million in savings and where exactly it all came from?

Ms. Selby: Yes, we could do that, but in that case, it will take a little longer than tomorrow. But we can get back to the member with that.

Mrs. Driedger: Okay. I would like an itemized list, so I'm fine to wait a little bit longer for that.

Can the minister indicate what happened to travel costs? As the regions were made bigger, did travel costs actually end up going up?

Ms. Selby: Again, we can check on that, and I would have to get back to the member on that particular, but I should also point out that the new RHA act does require our CEOs to also post online their out-of-province travel costs.

Mrs. Driedger: This would certainly be more than just a CEO travel cost. This would be travel costs that are occurring because a lot of the workers now end up having to travel a larger region. And I had always wondered that once you enlarged the region, what would happen in terms of travel costs and lodging costs of the various professionals that will be, you know, having to go from site to site. So it's well beyond the CEOs.

I know we were, you know, tracking that at one point and travel costs in the other—you know, when they were all smaller regions—was certainly high. I did wonder if the, you know—some of the savings get dwindled because now there are much larger areas to travel, but that may not, in fact, be happening if perhaps Telehealth is, you know, utilized more or something like that.

So, if the minister can provide information on travel costs in the various RHAs, again that would be helpful.

Ms. Selby: Yes. We can give the member this information from our financial reporting system.

Mrs. Driedger: And have there been any savings that have resulted because of nursing shortages throughout rural Manitoba?

Ms. Selby: Of course, well, we wouldn't see nursing shortages as a cost savings. We know that that's bad for patients, bad for health care. What we're doing instead is redirecting those administration costs to the front-line services. So money that is saved through the amalgamations, through board and CEO reductions and various positions of management reduction are being redirected to front-line services so that we can hire more nurses, more doctors, more physicians' assistants, more nurse practitioners.

Mrs. Driedger: On the government website under Health, the document that shows current shortages of nurses hasn't been updated, I think, for about three years. Is there a reason that the minister doesn't have that most current nursing resource document up to date?

Ms. Selby: I can tell the member that we will be updating that very shortly.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us why it hasn't been updated on an annual basis? I understand that those numbers were usually compiled in April of every year, and it doesn't look like it's been updated for a number of years, so it certainly isn't giving any indication of the nursing shortage on a current basis in Manitoba.

Ms. Selby: So I can say that, yes, it has been updated more regularly in the past, and it is not current information at this time but it will be updated shortly.

Mrs. Driedger: But that was my question to the minister. She didn't seem to understand it. Why hasn't it been kept up to date?

* (16:10)

Ms. Selby: I'm sure the member can imagine that amalgamation was a lot of work on the ground for people and we wanted to give them time to do that, to be able to concentrate on amalgamation and work out that. But I can also assure the member that the college of nurses says there are more nurses working now more than ever. I have a document from the college of nurses that shows that. I'd be happy to table it if the member would like.

Mrs. Driedger: I find it that—the answer, actually, a little bit strange. I mean, even though you're amalgamating you still know how many nurses you have in the system. Up until, I believe it was like 2012, annually those nursing shortages were posted online, and in the last number of years that—those nursing numbers are not up to date. In fact, it might have been even 2011 that the last numbers are up there. So I don't see how amalgamation and focusing on amalgamation has anything to do with a government not being able to tell us what the nursing shortage is. That would cause me grave concern if a government can't monitor nursing numbers at the same time as you're amalgamating. That just sounds very odd.

And the minister still isn't answering the question that has—you know, for a number of years it was updated. The nursing shortage numbers, the health-care aide numbers, the number of nurses that are part time and full time was always posted on the website, and for about the last three years the government has decided they didn't want to be transparent about those nursing numbers. And my question to the minister is: Why would the government not be telling the public what those nursing shortages are?

Ms. Selby: Absolutely, we are happy to talk about how many nurses are working in Manitoba. Certainly, when we look at the college of nurses' numbers, there are more nurses working now than at any other time and we're proud of that.

I should point out to the member that amalgamations did impact the financial and payroll systems as we unified administration systems. So there was some change that happened during amalgamation. The WRHA was also updating its system. That is now complete. It's true that they are not current at this time, but we will have that information up shortly, and I think that the member will be pleased to see, just as the college of nurses

shows, that there are more nurses in Manitoba than ever.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister tell us what the nursing vacancy number is at now in Winnipeg and in rural Manitoba and combined?

Ms. Selby: Yes, we can get back to the member with that information.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister not, off the top of her head, have that type of information available? Seems to me that that would be one number that should be readily known by the Minister of Health. I know that the president of MNU has indicated there's a shortage of over 1,200 nurses right now in Manitoba, and I think she was making her comments during the Brian Sinclair inquest. So is Manitoba seeing a nursing shortage of over 1,200 nurses?

Ms. Selby: Yes, we can get back to the member with that information.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm surprised the minister doesn't have it. Does she happen to have the number of nurses that are working full time, like a percentage, full time to part time?

Ms. Selby: We will work to get back to the member with that information, but I can tell the member that there is a net gain of 3,560 more nurses working in Manitoba since 1999, that we have just over 17,000 nurses with our most recent numbers as of 2010, which, of course, is at an all-time high. The last time the numbers—well, I guess they were last year. They've been slowly creeping up, if you look at this chart, since the year 2000. We have seen an increase of nurses every year since the year 2000. But we can get back to the member with a more specific breakdown on what the member's looking for.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the minister aware of how many agency nurses are needed in rural Manitoba because of the serious shortage of nurses in rural Manitoba?

* (16:20)

Ms. Selby: Certainly, we recognize the challenges around of using agency nurses, but, of course, we want to ensure that we are providing continuous care. We know that all nurses—whether they're agency nurses, full time, part time—provide excellent care. I know the member wasn't alleging that they wouldn't.

Certainly, we are working with the Manitoba Nurses Union so that we can provide a strong and stable workforce, but we'd be able to get—we'd be

able to break down for this member that—those numbers, as well, once we compile it.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us how she goes about, then, making day-to-day decisions if she doesn't have a good handle on what her nursing workforce is like in Manitoba? Certainly, in the visits I've been having in rural Manitoba, they are spending in the millions of dollars annually because of a nursing shortage and that yet the minister doesn't seem to have a handle at all on what that is like. How does she make decisions on a day-to-day basis without having that kind of information at her fingertips?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, we certainly know that we've hired more nurses and that we'll continue to doing that. We know that nurses are the backbone of our health-care system, offering our patients, our families quality care and not just in our hospitals but in home care and nursing, in schools and many other places—certainly in our QuickCare clinics and our access clinics, as well, a strong part of our network of primary-care physicians and the primary-care team.

We are still committed to hiring more nurses. We've committed to hiring 2,000 more nurses, including 1,000 to replace the nurses that are expected to retire; our RHAs, of course, keep track of expected retirements coming up, so that we can best be prepared for that. We are also committed to expanding our health-care training with \$24-million investment.

I can tell you that the choices that we've made to, indeed, train and hire more nurses has resulted in a net gain of 3,560 more nurses practising since 1999. So I can tell you that the choices that we've made and the decisions that we've made have taken us from a low of about 14,000 nurses working in 1999, to an all-time high of over 17,000 nurses working in last—the most recent numbers from the College of Registered Nurses is in 2010. I'd be happy to table this graph from the college of nurses, if the member was interested.

I noticed that in 1992 there were just over 15,600 nurses working in Manitoba, but by 1999, according to the college, there were just over 14,000, so we certainly saw a loss of about at least 1,000 nurses in that time. But we have seen a gain of more than three and a half thousand now—3,560 nurses, so certainly our decision to train more nurses and hire more nurses has resulted in a record number of nurses working in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister just doesn't seem to understand that if there are that many, why are we seeing a shortage right now of over 1,200 nurses, according to the MNU? So she can read all the notes she wants, but she's—it's not connecting for the minister that there is a current problem that is going on, but she doesn't seem to grasp that.

Can the minister tell us whether or not there has been a 30 per cent cutback to cataract surgery? I've now heard from a number of patients that have been wanting or needing cataract surgery, and perhaps it's their doctors that have indicated to them that there's been a 30 per cent cutback. These calls I did get back in December, and I wondered if, by the end of December, if the government was starting to cut back on the number of cataract surgeries that were done in order to try to stay within a surgical budget. So was there a cutback of 30 per cent, which is what patients have been telling us?

Ms. Selby: No, there has not been. In fact, there's been an increase in the number of cataract surgeries that were completed. Last year, we did 13,162 cataract surgeries in Manitoba. That was nearly a 20 per cent increase up from two years before that.

Certainly, there are times when a patient may end up with a doctor who has a longer wait-list. However, should those patients chose to, there is often another surgeon available that can get them that time quicker if they chose to, which is partly—it goes towards why we're working on implementing a centralized wait-list that will help reduce times.

We are certainly seeing 68 per cent of our patients are receiving the surgery within the benchmark, which is higher than CIHI that's got it at 61 per cent. So, absolutely not; no, we're doing more surgeries and working to get those wait times down for folks. Certainly, we've had some success from that. The wait-times are 11 weeks, but they were at 22 weeks under the previous government.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, there was just something put out by CIHI, and the minister's comments just made me have a look at this. It said that Manitoba met the benchmark wait-times for cataract surgeries 62 per cent of the time, while across Canada it was accomplished 81 per cent of the time. So, in fact, the minister has nothing to brag about here. We are well below Canadian benchmark, so why does she think that 62 or 68 or whatever she said was better, when across Canada it was 81 per cent of the time that everybody else was able to meet their benchmarks?

We're not doing so well if we look at what CIHI reported, so does the minister understand that?

* (16:30)

And I would point out to the minister that Manitoba has the second longest wait for cataract surgery in Canada. So she may want to do some further checking on that. I don't know if she wants to correct any of her information or how she wants to respond.

Ms. Selby: Certainly, I agree with the member. We want to do better. We know we can do better when we're working to do better. We're doing more cataract surgeries, but we would like to see the wait time to not be as long, absolutely. I think the centralized wait-list will do that, will help us reduce wait times for patients. Certainly, when it came to the life-threatening health issues such as cardiac surgery, radiation therapy, hip fracture repair, Manitoba families can know that we have the best, most prompt care in the country. But, certainly, we'd like to do better and we can do better and we will do better in terms of cataract wait times.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, the minister may want, again, to have a look at CIHI's report on hips and knees and, again, Manitoba fares—again, in fact, were getting worse instead of better. Manitoba being ranked second last among provinces for meeting benchmarks in hip and knee; so, again, nothing to brag about here. In fact, in those areas Manitoba is getting worse instead of better. We aren't seeming to do what other provinces have done, and I would indicate that the benchmark waits were being met 82 per cent of the time for hip replacements across Canada. In Manitoba we were only 68 per cent. Knees were, across Canada, 76 per cent of the time was the benchmark wait, and we were only 58 per cent. So we have really deteriorated. We are almost at the bottom in Canada for these waits. So the minister may want to study her notes a little bit more because we are falling in Manitoba and certainly we are, you know, leaving patients at a real disadvantage here because we aren't even coming close to the Canadian median wait time. So I would urge the minister to pay a little bit more attention to the actual facts on this, and I will be sure to get back to the people that have told me about these cataract—what she's indicated, because they were quite concerned when they called in about this 30 per cent cutback. So I will make sure I get back to them with the minister's comments on that because they were put on some very long waits.

Going forward on another topic with The Regulated Health Professions Act, in June of 2009 the Legislature passed the act and on—January of this year, after four and a half years, the act was finally proclaimed. This year will mark the 10th year of either consultation about or transition to the new model legislation. So it's been a very, very long process, and considering that the government has long said that this was important to do because it would strengthen accountability and that it was going to largely also be related to improving better and safer patient care, can the minister—because those are noble reasons for doing this, you know, bringing forward legislation like this—can the minister tell us why it has taken her government so long to reach this point with this legislation?

Ms. Selby: Just before I answer that question, I do want to go back and just talk a little bit about the CIHI report as well. The member neglected to say that Manitoba ranks No. 1 in the country on radiation therapy and first for hip fracture repair. We also noticed that CIHI recognized the importance of our Cancer Patient Journey strategy, and we are very proud of that. But we do have some more work to do, certainly, in other areas. It's why we're hiring more doctors. It's why we're hiring more nurses for exactly those reasons.

And we are pleased to see that over the last five years our hip and knee numbers have improved. We've still got more work to do, but that work is under way. We are also starting to see the positive results of changes that we made in 2012 to help patients get their surgeries within the benchmark. We think that's going to make a big difference, allowing patients to—a new intake process to allow patients with more choice upfront. We have seen a 45 per cent reduction in the number of patients waiting for hip and knee surgery, and I should note that we do also perform the second most hip and knee surgeries per capita in Canada and twice as many as we did a decade ago. But, certainly, we want to do better. We have brought those wait times down. They were at a high of 44 weeks, but they are down from that. But there's more work to do.

I'd also like to report that we have also reduced the wait-list for cataract surgery by 30 per cent since last year. We are doing more cataract surgeries, actually, not less. Last year we did 12,266 cataract surgeries, which was a 10 per cent increase from the year before. This year we're looking at doing over 12,500, including 200 in Swan River, which certainly makes that easier when we are able to bring

health care closer to home. But, certainly, there is more work to do in those areas. But I think it's important to recognize the good work that has been done particularly in radiation therapy and hip fracture as well.

The member was asking about the regulated health professionals act that was passed in 2009. It will bring professions under one roof and make sure that the same rules apply to regulated health professionals. It will improve consistency, transparency and safety. Manitoba Health is conducting extensive consultations right now on working with existing regulated health professions to bring them under the new legislation. In addition, two applications for self-regulation have also been received and are under review by the independent health professions advisory council. And I should point out that this review process is independent. It's a non-political process which involves extensive consultation with health professionals, patients and other experts to ensure that all the viewpoints are taken into account. And, once those folks have gathered the needed information, the council will send recommendations to minister's office, if and how these professions should be regulated. We are expecting a thorough review of—and recommendation focused on public interest, but, of course, with patient safety being the most important part.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, all the minister is doing is proving she can read. You know, it would be nice if she could focus on what the questions are.

But she did make an interesting statement in there, and that was about the council being totally non-political or non-partisan. Can she indicate if any of those people have ever been involved with the NDP party or attended NDP conventions?

* (16:40)

Ms. Selby: I just want to go back for a moment, talking about bringing in the health professions act and bringing all the 22 regulated health professionals under this legislation. It's extremely complex to replace more than 20 bills; it's important that we get-it right. I do want to note that audiology and speech-language pathology were the first professions to have completed the work necessary to—brought in under the act. They did so just this past January. But the other professions are, of course, actively engaged in the work and are working towards that.

I can tell the member that, regardless of any of folks on the regulated health professionals act,

whether they're previous employment or activities, we do expect a full and independent review. If there's any issue of bias that the member has or is concerned about, we would address those because it's important to—that we get this right and that we take the time to make sure that we have gone through this in a way that is appropriate, and we expect it to be an independent, non-political process.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister may want revisit the appointments to the council and maybe come back tomorrow and be able to answer as to whether or not any of those were actual NDP members being appointed. And she's right; it should be a totally unbiased, non-partisan, arm's-length type of council, and I would totally agree with her on that. But she's not really answered the question as to why this is taking so long. We all know it's complicated. Any of us that have been involved in health care knows that these acts are very, very detailed and it is a big job.

But it seems to be a bigger job here in Manitoba because it's been going on for, you know, a 10th year now, of either consultation or transition. And over the past four and a half years, the minister of Health has always said doctors and nurses would be the first, and then that's not what happened. We've got audiologists and speech-language pathologists being—becoming the first. So that's not been part of the original plan or the comments from the government for almost five years.

So can the minister give us some indication as to why this seems to be dragging? Is there something that is weighing this down and then what happened to the last, you know, the comments that it was going to be doctors and nurses would be the first professions? And, in fact, they weren't. So what happened to those original plans and why does this seem to be dragging?

Ms. Selby: Well, I can tell the member that we think that the Manitobans deserve safe care. We think that they deserve a process that—ensuring that it's transparent, the regulation of health professionals and, of course, with the focus being on protection of the public and patient safety. I can let the member know that staff at Manitoba Health is continuing to work with other regulatory bodies, including the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the College of Registered Nurses, to develop the necessary legislation to transition to regulation under this act.

Manitoba Health has been conducting extensive consultations, working with health professionals, but not just health professionals, also patients, other

experts, making sure that all viewpoints are taken into account. We do expect a thorough review. We do expect those recommendations to be focused in the public interest and patient safety and we want to get this right.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister is right when she talks about Manitobans deserving safe care, and it's interesting because while she says that, she doesn't seem to grasp that that's what this legislation is all about and it's moving towards safer, stronger, better patient care. So I don't think she's grasping what she's saying, versus sort of what is happening here or not happening.

Can she indicate, then, which profession is going to be next to make the transition? Does she know that?

*(16:50)

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I can tell the member that doctors and nurses are up next. It is more complicated, but they are the ones that we will be proceeding with next.

I should also let the member know that I've just met with nurses recently. They've been very happy with the process so far with—department expressed to me that they were happy with the work and the progress that was happening.

But it is complicated, but that is correct that it's—it remains to be the goal to have nurses and doctors brought into the act next.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate how long she anticipates the complete transition of the remaining health professions—how long that will take?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, we're not putting a date on it at this time. We think it's important that we get it right. It's complex. It involves extensive consultations, and we want to make sure that all viewpoints are taken into account.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what resources are needed in order for this whole process to move forward and to be completed? Are there enough resources in place, I guess, at all levels in order to ensure that this all moves along in a timely fashion?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, certainly, we are looking at the work that was done with audiology and speech-language pathology to serve as a model to hopefully be able to provide us a blueprint with how

to do it so that perhaps it will enable us to move along a little quicker once we've got that blueprint in place.

Of course, as we're working on doctors and nurses, that is—both of those are particularly complicated ones, but my understanding is it's going very well—the work with both the college of nurses and as well as with doctors. Talks are going well, and work is moving along.

There are staff within the department who are devoted to supporting the folks at the health professionals advisory council, but it is a big task that we've given people—a lot of consultation and, certainly, want to make sure we take the time to get a thorough review and get it right.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate the projected cost of this transition to the Province of Manitoba once all professions have made the transition? Is there a dollar figure that has actually been identified that it—this might cost?

Ms. Selby: I want to go back a minute, just back a little bit, the member was asking about resources for folks who were working on the regulated health professional act and I should mention that we did start out originally with three people working within the health professional advisory council. We have transitioned that to five now and would resource if they let us know that that was something that was necessary.

It's quite complex to calculate exactly what we would expect the cost to be at the end of the entire exercise. Some professions may do more work; some have less work depending on what it is. Of course, this was not intended as a cost exercise. It was intended, of course, to make sure that we're providing a transparent regulation of health-care professionals focused on protection of the public. It's going to mean that the same rules apply to all regulated health professions. It will improve consistency, transparency and safety as well, and I think those are all really important with all the review expected to be focused on public interest and public safety.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister confirm that Bev Ann Murray was appointed by order-in-council?

Ms. Selby: That is correct.

Mrs. Driedger: And on what date did that occur?

Ms. Selby: I'd have to get back to the member with that information.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us how many times the advisory council had meetings in 2011-12 and then again in 2013?

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

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

* (14:40)

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 Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a truly global manner.

And the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): For an update, does the minister have an update about my seed potato guys?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): Good afternoon to everyone that's in attendant, enjoying this beautiful, spring-like weather we're having today. It's a real joy.

And if I may just kind of echo my comments about the cattle producers that are in a calving season, being in the Swan River area definitely wasn't the most pleasant time to be dealing with calving, because the—generally, the snow and the rain that we experience, generally, does create some other problems for the calving season, the new ones that are there. So I just have to make that known, that I do appreciate their efforts in trying to keep healthy calves. When Mother Nature creates those kind of conditions, that makes it more challenging, so my thoughts are with them.

To answer the question that brought forward, unfortunately, I haven't got an answer back, but I've gotten staff to put a request back to the appropriate staff that were looking into that. And, hopefully, maybe by the end of today, I might be able to address the question that has been brought forward by the member from—the MLA from Midland, regarding the potato scenario.

But I do have a reply to a question that was brought to us—which I believe was Wednesday, if I remember correctly—and that was to deal with the

appeals and how many were successful applicants, and I think there was a dollar attached to that.

So, for the record, there was about 100 appeals where applicants—appellants were successful. The additional dollars that were paid was \$1 million—\$1,060,346, which, doing the calculator, is about \$10,603 average.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay, thank you for that information.

Going back just to the farmland education tax rebate, and this year the rules were changed—this year or last year the rules were changed for March 31st as a deadline.

I have a constituent who has an application in, by his own admission, postmarked April 3rd. Is it—cut-off date hard and fast, or is there any exceptions made?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Based on the legislation that's brought forward, this anniversary day or dates, it is a hard-and-fast rule being March 31st or 30, I don't know exactly, so. April 1 being the cut-off deadline date, yes.

* (14:50)

Mr. Pedersen: Has MASC entered into any contracts in the past year? And I am probably just going to use a \$25,000 cut-off as—contracts greater than \$25,000 in the past year.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I think I've got somewhat of the gist of the question, but I think if the member could somewhat be a little bit more specific, if that would be to his liking.

Mr. Pedersen: What I would like to know is details of how many and what type of contracts have been awarded directly either by tender or non-tendered, and I will use a cut-off value of \$25,000. So, in other words, any contracts greater than \$25,000 and specify whether they were tendered or untendered.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank the member for the question. As discussion with the staff took place, not to their knowledge that they're aware of any tendered or untendered contracts exceeding \$25,000. But I want to assure the member opposite that staff will go back to their offices and go through the ledger or the books to see if there is any contracts that were awarded specific to his question. And we'll gladly, if Estimates are completed today, and we'll gladly provide that information in paper form if so accepted. Okay.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I hope everybody had a good weekend, raring to go. We had a little snow up in our country, and some we weren't really praying for but we got it anyway. We know that things are going to dry up one of these days and we'll be on the land soon, we all hope.

I want to go back to my line of questioning in regards to the Shoal Lake buyouts and those types of questions. My first question was in regards to the Shoal Lake buyout. I believe, if I remember, there was two that were still outstanding. Can we confirm whether or not that was in fact so, and then we'll go from there?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for the question member from Lakeside. First and foremost, I'd like to introduce the two individuals that have joined at the table here. And it's Wray Whitmore from the GO team in Teulon, Manitoba, and, as well, Darren Bond also is the other individual sitting. And I'm sure you know the other two fine ladies who are sitting beside me as well, and that—[interjection] What does that say for me then? But thank you so much.

But, to answer the question brought forward, there is no outstanding buyouts in Shoal Lake program buyouts.

Mr. Eichler: Out of the claims that were successful and the buyouts that were successful, the properties that were purchased, were put up for tender, would you outline the process and the number of houses or properties or assets on those properties disposed of and what process was followed?

Mr. Kostyshyn: So in the nicely drawn chart that describes the process that's—was designed to deal with the buildings in review—so MAFRD reviewed of the buildings, and then it was transferred to CLPA for the disposal process. And I'll elaborate on the disposal process. Then it would go to CLPA who, within house, would tender the buildings. Typically, it would be circulated inside government, first and foremost, and then, depending upon that, then it would be advertised in the Winnipeg Free Press and a number of other papers, and the Winnipeg Free Press being one of many public papers.

And then the process would be to review the tenders, and then we would recommend action. They would recommend action to the MAFRD department of the tenders received at that point in time. And then MAFRD would make the decision to either accept the tender or not accept the tender.

* (15:00)

Mr. Eichler: How many buildings or homes have been disposed of through the tender process?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Of the 25 residencies purchased in the buyout, one is currently being evaluated for mould, 11 of them have been sold via a tender for removal, 11 are slated for demolition in the summer of 2014 and two have been completely demolished simply because, I'm assuming, the mould and whatever else that would've accelerated the decision to demolish the property—the building.

Mr. Eichler: What's the total amount of the monies received as a result of those tenders?

Mr. Kostyshyn: In all due respect of certain charts and calculations, the staff would like—they'll get you an answer to your question, but I think just for the essence of time, if you consider asking me another question, we'll get that question answer to you shortly.

Mr. Eichler: Okay. We'll maybe go into the policy side of things.

In regards to the Shoal Lake farmers that are still there, ranchers and so on, we know that it has put a bit of a bind on those that did not take the buyout. Some of them took a partial buyout whereby they do not have enough land to sustain the number of cattle that's still left there, so would the department care to outline the process for those producers that are left to access some of that pasture land that is still viable in and around the Shoal Lake area?

And I guess part two of that question would be in regards to the fencing arrangements. We know that the lake is down substantial from where it was and, of course, once we know that those waters go down, that creates another problem even though it's good for the pasture land for it to go down, but the fences have to be extended. So would the department care to bring us up to speed on that?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The long-term dispositions of the land acquired and available for agriculture use are scheduled to be advertised in the fall of two—or in the fall of 2014 as Ag Crown lands. Of that 32,613 acres or on 243 parcels purchased through Shoal lakes of purchase land, 22,861 acres on 163 parcels are currently leased to causal permits.

So, just reinforcing the thought that staff is working with the previous Crown land leasees and trying to accommodate their opportunity to somewhat enhance the pasture land that, you know,

was subject to the flooding and now has somewhat receded, much to your commentary, and, by all means, I know the staff were working very hard to make it less cost to the local producers to take the opportunity to use whatever land was affected.

And I just want to add another commentary here; 9,752 acres on 80 parcels of land are currently not leased as they are either too wet or the flooding made these parcels not desirable to lease.

So that may mean a lot, but just for the record, you know, it's kind of a long process. And when we talk about the infrastructure such as the fences you refer to, you know, our staff are well aware of the importance and the desire for—to the cattle industry to minimize costs and take advantage of the prices we have today. And, well, I know very well, personally speaking, where we've gone through the BSE and the flooding scenario over the last number of years, this is the opportune time to kind of backfill some of the challenges the beef industries have suffered in the last number of years.

So I want to assure the member opposite, our staff are trying to work as fast as they can and make it less confrontational as far as the opportunity to lease the land if it—the ground conditions and whatever is appropriate.

Mr. Eichler: Just to follow up on the fencing, and we know, typically, you know, when we look at returns on investment and especially those that are renting Crown lands, fencing is a very expensive process now, as we all know. That land that will become available and fencing has to be replaced or upgraded on that—what assurances is the department planning on putting into place to ensure some of that cost will be recouped by those that are going to be putting that fencing in because one day it may be under water. The next year it may be out of the water, and, of course, we know what water does to fences.

So this is a very important issue for those producers, and they need some assurances on those capital costs. We know they're writeoffs, but if you don't have any money, writeoffs are no good. And we know, and the minister very well knows, the dire straits that the livestock business has been in, in particular the cattle industry.

*(15:10)

So I'd like the department to outline for us that policy that's going to be in place for those producers

wishing to be—to acquire some of the pasture land around the Shoal lakes.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Mr. Chair, I can echo the comments, again, about the unusual amount of rainfall, and I think the other thing that's considered, given the Shoal lakes' topographic and geographic location is quite challenging, where you—it kind of doesn't have a natural outlet in the circumstances where the rainfall and everything else had built up over the years. This is not only one year; it's been over a number of years that was segregated in the destruction in that area.

So I just want to make a comment, offered—as we all know, and I'm sure the MLA knows, as well, that it was a voluntary program for the buyout. Staff worked as fast as they could to get a usable land into the hands of producers. And we continue to work with the producers.

And, when we talk about the land being Crown land, you know, the fact is that based on any other Crown land, there is the costs of infrastructure, such as fences. And moving forward, those are still a legitimate way that we talk about buying or leasing Crown land. There is a component to do the necessary infrastructure, such as fences to—as part as an agreement based on other Crown land. And this really doesn't change the situation such as the Shoal lakes program is still deemed as Crown land and, as producers apply for it, with the understanding that there is a cost to have that leased Crown land and do the necessary work in order to facilitate their operations as far as fencing.

Mr. Eichler: I thank you, Mr. Chair, for the comments from the minister.

My concern here is that if we're going to get that land where it's, in fact, going to be useful, it is going to take considerable cost for the producer to get that into shape. And my question for the department is: Is—what is the department prepared to do to entice those producers to rent that land? Rather than it be a liability, we want it to be an asset. So, in order to do that, they're going to have to do an awful lot of fencing, which now that becomes part of the asset which is Crown lands.

So how are we going to encourage those producers to rent that land in and around Shoal Lake in order for them to make it viable? Because if they have to pay the total cost, and that becomes the asset of the Province, what incentives are—is the government or the department planning on putting in

place in order to make that happen? Because it won't happen without some type of 'incentive,' and then we're going to have another major problem, whereby that land won't be used and we're going to have weeds and other things that are going to become a serious problem for us or the land producers surrounded by that.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Before my staff was able to give me some information—but I kind of want to do a comparison as what the member opposite is kind of bringing forward, is that I live in area where there's been a number of acres that hasn't been used for a number of years simply because it wasn't attractive enough for producers to move in there and fence it. And I know my neighbour, very much so, took on 21 quarters of Crown land that basically was never ever been fenced. And he took the initiative—they took the initiative, him and his wife, took that initiative. And this wasn't a Shoal Lake scenario. This was an area north of Highway 269 between Fork River and Ethelbert, Manitoba, where 21 quarters of land was leased with the understanding is that he and she were putting up a fence, a four-strand barbwire treated fencepost-wire. We didn't have a Shoal Lake scenario, so to speak, but we had adverse weather conditions. We've had a lot of rain and the challenge is that sometimes you get into areas that, you know, have challenges because of the topographics of it, and then occasionally you have the things called beavers that make it somewhat challenging and I'm sure there's some up in your area in there.

So my comparison is why I bring this up to the MLA, is that, when you take on Crown land and you get it at the price you get it and you want to set up infrastructure, there is a risk, regardless not in—not to intentionally blame anybody. It's just a fact that Mother Nature sometimes has a tendency to make it more challenging whether you're grain farming or any other—Mother Nature plays into it. No different than setting up a fence and setting up land traditionally has its challenges because of the topographics of it.

So the question I wanted to bring forward in my commentaries—we're comparing, historically, there was fences there before. We went through a weather event that's very unexpectable and now we're into an area back again. So I guess the question is to the MLA, is that do we feel that the government's responsible for the adverse weather conditions that happened there and do we see that we should be

helping out to have that fence put up by some form of assistance through the provincial government.

I do—I personally know that we went through some tough struggles in the beef industry and where it is. But at what point in time the long-term investment of putting up a four-strand barbwire fence for 25 to 30 years is a traditional life-span of that, and things that happened in—beyond our control as agriculture producers is one of the struggles. And I do feel for the producers out there, but I don't know the treatment of paying for the fences is appropriate way. I would suspect there's an avenue of going through MASC and getting a low-interest-rate loan. As you would know, the opportunity is that when they, the lessee chooses to surrender the package of land, there is a value that they get money back of their investment in that time frame based on the appraised value of the fence that was put up five years or 10 years ago.

But, if the MLA is patient enough, I've got a couple of more notes that I'll share with you as well.

*(15:20)

Just to add to my commentary earlier, when we compare the Shoal lakes or any other area that's, I guess, subject to adverse weather conditions, topographic survey, it's really ironic to the MLA that the land that we're talking about today was in demand and still is in demand as far as production, and every available parcel of land at that time was leased and is still being leased so it—obviously, the demand is still quite high.

You know, the land is considered an important part of their business and, obviously, as farmers they're wanting that land, and I think there is the necessary business plan that comes with a financial component. And the financial component is it's a long-term investment—and we can go back on the Shoal Lake scenario, we do have, given the topographic, it's subject to flooding—but I think it's a long-term investment plan that is well worth it. I also want to make note of the—one of the backgrounds of the Shoal lakes program was the transitional assistance component of that to the MLA.

Producers that participated in the voluntary buyout were provided with one additional year, being 2012, in the assistance for the loss-of-production component. So there was basically a grace period of one year when we talk about from the 2011 flood. The producers that were affected also took out a dollar amount of \$816,933 in payments

for the transitional assistance with the applicants involved in the voluntary buyout. So basically meaning there was consideration of historical lessees and, I guess, damage that was to some of their infrastructure. So there was a recognition of dollar allocations and also the fact that there was a one-year exception to the rule that the government tried to work with these producers that were affected by the unusual Mother Nature events.

Mr. Eichler: What was the total cost that was expended by the department in regards to maintaining the properties that were bought out? I know there was security, there was mould checks, there was several things that were going on. What was the dollar amount that was used to maintain those properties?

Mr. Jim Rondeau, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Kostyshyn: Net revenue of all buildings—and this is approximately, and I don't think we're too far out, but \$270,000 is the dollar figure that we have that's been calculated, and you can see by the number of sheets of paper the staff had to go through, but we'll confirm that with you to give you a better idea.

And we still need to kind of work out the other costs, but more specifically to the question you just brought forward is that staff is still summarizing the overall cost as far as maintaining of the buildings and getting back to them, so examples being property taxes and hydro and security and stuff. If it's okay with the member, can we get that back to you in a day or two, or whatever time frame?

Mr. Eichler: Yes, that'll be fine. Mr. Chair, I do want to thank the staff from coming in from Teulon. That's my—extent of my questions in regards to the Shoal lakes.

I want to move back to a comment that was made by you last week when we were getting ready to wrap up. And that was on the Lake Manitoba flood claims. And you had stated that there was a million-dollar variance, in fact, \$1,600,000, in regards to the appeal mechanism. Would you care to 'elaboblate'—elaborate on that and tell us whether or not that was either an increase in the appeal or a decrease in those appeals or how that was determined?

Mr. Kostyshyn: That is correct. For the record, it is an additional million dollars based on the 'appealants' of 100 numbers. So they basically got about \$10,000 more based on the appeals—

An Honourable Member: Each.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Each.

Mr. Pedersen: Question to the minister and through him, then, to the staff of MASC. Have they reviewed the Auditor General's—chapter 5—report that was just issued in March 2014?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, they have.

Mr. Pedersen: So would the minister care to make any general comments about it?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Much to the comments of—the Auditor General made, and I think it really resonates to the fact of the historical event that took place in 2011 and the challenges that putting a program together to deal with the number of people affected by the flood, and judging by the documentation that has been put forward, she truly recognized the template that was—a new template that's trying to be developed in dealing with these issues on an ongoing basis. And sometimes there are decisions or questions that are always brought forward after the fact and continues to be discussed.

And, you know, when we talk about a flood event of 2011 and its 1.3–\$1.2 billion in the various parts of the province and, well, Lake Manitoba, Shoal lakes and everyone else—Hoop and Holler—it truly resonates that this will never, ever be forgotten of the flood event, and I'm sure we'll gladly share some of that template if another province is—ever goes through this and continues to be.

* (15:30)

But, you know, I think, based on her commentary, which was very straightforward on the fact that this is truly a challenging scenario—and we know that we continue to work. And I think the positive—the many positives that staff and departments that worked on is that it wasn't a situation where they were domineering in their opinions. That is why the appeal process was brought in and—to provide some 'transparency' and some understanding of the people affected. And from the staff side of it is that this is what they see, but they—the neutral grounds and the understanding is that that's the why the 'appealant' was brought in, or the—pardon me, the auditor would bring in and he would have—an appeal process would be in place to deal with the circumstances that have developed.

And I do want to just make a couple other comments regarding that Auditor General's report audit. The auditor's results were generally positive, reporting a few errors and confirming that most issues were dealt with appropriately. Most of the report's recommendations are general in nature and are very appropriate for future provincial disaster programming. The top priority for the administration was to ensure programs and payments were delivered in a timely fashion in an order to minimize financial and human stress on program applicants.

So I think those are very key components that as the government was dealing with the stress level that people were faced with. And by somewhat providing financial opportunities of advancement of dollars was one of the key components as the Auditor General identified. And that was, I think, quite noticeably delivered in the programs—or one of the many programs that were brought forward in the flood of 2011 and thereafter.

So I think I'll conclude my commentary at this point in time.

Mr. Pedersen: So the program—the flooding program was run by—administered by the EMO, but it was MASC who had to operate the program or put the—make the program work. And in reviewing through the Auditor General's report, there's a number of recommendations, some 21 recommendations all together.

So is there—and yes, acknowledgement that there was mistakes made, there was stress of the situation, it was changing all time. I accept all that and everybody accepts that. Has MASC, as a result of the Auditor General's report—has MASC then gone back and written any sort of recommendations back to EMO as to how to alleviate problems that showed up, or is this just a report that's going to go through the Public Accounts Committee and that's where it will stay?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess I'm going to be somewhat repetitious to the member for Midland. And I think the Auditor General's report very clearly states this report is not to a particular department. It's a report to the government, and the government, I guess, at that point in time, deals with EMO and the appropriate allocations of responsibility or subcontracting of the flooding of the issues and what is the appropriate mechanism.

I guess that is a stepping stone as we sit here and discuss this issue. And I know that the member for

Midland, you know, openly admits that it was a challenging time for anybody, regardless who was there at the table, to try and facilitate the importance of moving this ahead during the flood of—a 700-year flood, theoretically.

So I just want to reinforce the fact that the Auditor General's report was strictly to the provincial government. The provincial government, at the end of the day, tends to make the appropriate decision, in consultation with other departments, who would be the more appropriate department that can facilitate and deal with one-to-one claims and individuals. And, I guess, with MASC and maybe being more in a geographical area—in those areas may have been the department to consider.

If there was another event of a flood, I want to ensure the member opposite that we'll definitely have some good information, good knowledge of how we worked with the flood of 2011. Will there be some changes if there was ever a flood like that? Heaven forbid if seven years down—700 years down the road, maybe that's—may not be the—not—

An Honourable Member: It's not going to work.

Mr. Kostyshyn: So it's not going to happen. But, definitely—I know the member from Portage is saying it's not going to work—but I think I should be standing here very proud and acknowledging the staff that have been involved in it. And I want to continue congratulating all the hard work they did because I'm sure if the member opposite was given a task, I think there's a lot of time where you go through a discovery stage. And I think it's a—I'm going to conclude my commentary by thanking the staff that were involved in the flood, and I continue to support their positive and their quick reaction because it definitely was not an easy situation. In fact, almost to the point where you go to Alberta, and I think everybody knows where the city of Calgary went through a major flood last year, and, in fact, they were calling our department and asking what—how we can do with some of these situations that happened in the province of Manitoba.

So I think there's appropriate benchmarking or template that should recognize the importance of our staff that were very helpful to the people that were flooded. And when you have the likes of Alberta and High River, their experiences really doesn't make Manitoba not only—the only province to experience some weather conditions beyond our control. And I keep saying that the—it's not the wishes of the government. It's not the wishes of the population of

Manitoba for this to happen. The reality is that weather conditions are changing. The movement of water's changing. The watershed things are changing.

So, in conclusion, let's be realistic. It's a situation that nobody wanted but we have to be creative to put together programs and deal with the people that allegedly had to deal with the circumstances of being flooded, and we will continue to support them. But last but not least, again, I thank all the staff that were involved of putting together the program. Nothing's perfect, but darn it, it's close enough.

Thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: Crop insurance levels have been set for this year. Is that correct?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, they have.

Mr. Pedersen: Have the commodity values been set, and if they have, do you have details on them?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just to—for the record, member opposite for Midland is quite familiar with, you know, the discussion that happens with the federal and provincial government when crop insurance prices are set.

*(15:40)

So insured prices for most majority crops are set by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in consultation with the provincial commodity analysts. The insured prices for minor crops are calculated by MASC. The methodology used to calculate these prices must conform with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada requirements. Compared to 2013 prices, insured prices for 2014 have decreased by an average of 13 per cent.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you for that answer, and I'm going to move to some other general information now. I believe that's all the questions I have for MASC right now. Don't run away. I may need you later but—*[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Jim Rondeau): Okay, the member for Midland still has the floor.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Great Western Harness Racing Circuit has—have they—do they know if they are getting a grant from your department, and, if so, how much? And, if you know that, when will it be paid?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Kostyshyn: We've recently been notified and understand, even through the parimutuel levies

collected have declined, the government has provided a grant of \$462,000 this year for 2014 for the rural harness raking—or racing grant support for the Manitoba Great West Harness Racing Circuit. To give you more of a breakdown, they will be receiving \$400,000 and then \$62,000 for the associated administration cost that falls with that.

This funding keeps in mind the primary purpose of the Manitoba Horse Racing Commission, which is a regulatory—regulated with industry, protected by better public and ensured safety of the horses and participants, as well, administrative efficiencies in the line with government efficiency act.

Mr. Pedersen: Has it been paid out yet?

Mr. Kostyshyn: To my knowledge, according to staff, it has not been paid out, but I'm anticipating it may be soon.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, anticipating soon is fairly vague. Can you be a little more definite as to when it will be paid out? There is a definite season coming so—and last year, they ran two or three meets before they got paid from the department, so will that be the case again this year?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, I appreciate the importance of the dollars going out, and I know that the horse racing circuit probably is not going to be starting next week based on what we see out on the ground there and stuff. But I do recognize the importance of the dollars being provided to the horse racing, and I want to put on the record that we feel fairly comfortable that dollars will be available to the Manitoba horse racing association prior to them starting the circuit. And I have already had a conversation with the appropriate person to assure them that the money has been approved and in due time will be accessible to them shortly.

Mr. Pedersen: Under Growing Forward 2, are rural water pipelines—construction of rural water pipelines included under—in any part of Growing Forward 2?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The importance of Growing Forward 2 in a number of factions is truly recognized, as members opposite and our department are quite familiar about the importance of Growing Forward 2 in a number of components. And when we talk about the use of waterlines in the program, Growing Forward 2, Growing Adaptation Program will provide funding for rural mainline water pipelines, multiple uses of water storage and well projects and the water studies to enable Manitoba agriculture sector to secure a stable supply of water,

advance water management strategies in an order to capture market opportunities and access.

So if I can put this in somewhat of a similar context, you know, we've been working with the AMM organization for some time on the rural waterline issue. We've worked with water services as well and we've worked with Conservation on this as well. And it was a very clear message that, when we were in consultation with the federal government, the program had some stipulations that were clearly defined to access the dollars for water pipeline establishment or infrastructure.

*(15:50)

And one of the key components, I think, is somewhat always challenging in a discussion piece is that the Growing Forward 2 dollars are allocated to enhance agriculture production such as the end point of where the distribution of the waterline is going. And that is an indication why when we have this discussion—Growing Forward, Growing Adaptation Program—yes, has certain criteria that are somewhat challenging in other users of a rural water line. But I want to echo the comments again is that there are certain stipulations that need to be mentioned as far as providing stable water to an area that are a challenge that will enhance agriculture production of a particularly commodity or particular industry.

Mr. Pedersen: So I'm trying to sort through what the minister just said. A rural water pipeline, then, under Growing Forward 2 would only be eligible for funding through GF2 if it's to a further processing operation but not to—for domestic use in rural homes. Is that—did I understand him correctly?

Mr. Kostyshyn: To set the record straight, that's—you know, I'll maybe simplify my explanation. The intent of the program that's in place today is to strictly provide water services to enhance agriculture production such as a cattle operation as far as a processing plant. It is strictly structured to accommodate value in expanding industrial development linked to agriculture.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay, that clears it up. It's not for rural pipelines as per residential use.

Now, I would like the minister to confirm that they will be closing eight GO offices this fiscal year.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess for the record the member opposite indicated that eight offices—I guess we're referring to last year's office closures and—are we blending it into this year's announcement? I guess

I need clarification by the comment that the member for Midland just made.

Mr. Pedersen: It's very simple. Will the minister confirm that he's closing eight GO offices, GO centres, this fiscal year?

Mr. Kostyshyn: In 2013 MAFRD closed seven GO offices that included the communities of Boissevain, Treherne, Neepawa, Stonewall, in Dugald and Shoal Lake and Thompson. All staff were offered comparable positions in other MAFRD offices and are working in these other office locations with the exception of one staff member in 2013 that chose not to accept the offer and had a voluntary resignation from the government. MAFRD has 31 remaining rural GO team offices located in communities throughout the province of Manitoba.

An Honourable Member: Good political answer.

Mr. Kostyshyn: That's what it's all about

Mr. Pedersen: Now, I am—can't seem to find in my notes, but I believe you said it was something like a 13 per cent vacancy rate in positions. Now, that was both in the department and in the GO offices, GO centres. Can the minister provide me with a list of those positions that are vacant currently?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Of the importance of time, I would gladly, if acceptable for the member opposite, that we could provide that to you in a later date. Are you okay with that?

Mr. Pedersen: That would be good. I—you supply me with that list when it's—when you have it available, and I am assuming that will be this fiscal year. So that will be good.

On page 11 of the Estimates book, you are projecting to spend \$2 million—almost \$3 million less, which is a 1.4 per cent reduction in overall department spending. Now, on page 11 there is approximately \$1 million less in Other Expenditures and approximately \$2 million less in Capital Grants. Now, can the minister be somewhat more specific as to how he's going to reduce his budget in his department by 1.4 per cent?

*(16:00)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Based on the mathematical—I'll basically share, majority of the components that do the mathematical equation here—to the member from Midland—and there's a number of other small components. But I think the three or four that I will

present to you will probably adjust or indicate the difference will be.

Through Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation, the variance of about \$1.4 million is mainly due to increases of loan provisions, okay.

Young Farmer Rebates and costs related to exploring new insurance option have assist to produce—to manage these risks, so there is a cost in that perspective reduction.

And also I think the one that's quite noticeable is the AgriInsurance, the variance of about nine point—or not nine but 1.6 is primarily the result of normal adjustment, including on the average decrease of 13 per cent on, okay, on the Ag insurance, right? Yes. Nine point six mill, right? Yes, 9.6 mill, right, okay. And the one previous was 1.4.

And the other one that is a noticeable targeted amount is also the Agri-Environment component. And the decrease of—is 2.079, reflects the reduction in the federal contribution towards manure management financial assistant program, resulting in the ending of the three-year ag flex, okay, which ended March 31st.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, that was very good because I already had another question for MASC, but you've answered it, so that's good.

Now, on our page 37, under agency, boards and commissions, the ABCs—page 37 and page 51—your government introduced legislation last year to reduce agency, boards and commissions, but now you've increased it by \$36 million within your department. Why is that? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: You still have the floor.

Mr. Pedersen: Pardon me, Mr. Chair, that was my mistake of reading. That's \$36,000, not million.

Mr. Kostyshyn: For the record, what this basically refers to, these—the—is the normal salary adjustments for regular positions. It's really not related to the boards and commission dollars.

Mr. Pedersen: That concludes my questions for now.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we'll move to consideration of the resolutions for this department.

Resolution 3.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to—*[interjection]* That's the wrong one. Thank you.

Resolution 3.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,102,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Policy and Agri-Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$137,592,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Risk Management, Credit and Income Support Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,753,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Agri-Industry Development and Advancement, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$39,225,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Agri-Food and Rural Economic Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$356,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

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

At this point, we will thank the staff for their wonderful service, and they can leave the head table for consideration of this last item.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, Mr. Chairman, it's not really a question. I guess it's more of a comment, and—last week I asked the minister and his staff a number of questions about the local food producers, the issues that they were having, be it their websites, be it their transportation of their goods. And I sent the Hansard out to a number of those producers and I just got the

reply back from them just this morning. And, basically, what they are saying is that they're quite frustrated. And the political games that we play in here is certainly not helpful to them in their situation. So I just want the minister to know that they are frustrated. They hear—what they're hearing from reading the Hansard is that there is confusion between interpreting the regulations and enforcing the regulations, and you did not address that and they're frustrated that that continues to not be addressed. They also expressed concerns about the minister talking about consulting food processors, but there was no mention of consulting the farm gate producers and they're feeling left out of this.

*(16:10)

And as much as we all want to promote local food production, local food consumption, your responses in this Estimates period just did not even come close to addressing that. So it's something that you need to take seriously. You need to consult with these producers. You need to work through the regulations. You need to get your inspectors working together in harmony. Whether it's between interpreting and enforcing these regulations, this is not working. And these people are working on low margins. This is not national chains that can absorb a loss here and move on somewhere else. We have an excellent opportunity for these producers to make an income, but you need to work with them. And that—they definitely did not get that idea that you would be working with them, reading your responses in this Hansard.

So, Mr. Minister, I would just certainly encourage you to go out there and talk to these farm-gate producers and help them. We're all—we all want safe food, but we also want them to be able to make a living because none of them want to produce a product that's not safe. And that's paramount for them, is food safety. But on top of food safety, so is making a living. That's a priority also.

So, Mr. Minister, I would just encourage you to do that.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, for an opportunity to make a commentary based on the comments were made from the member from Midland. And I want to ensure the member opposite that if Hansard didn't quite have the answers to the people that are farm gate or—and farmers' market, but I do want to share some interesting comments with the member opposite.

It's quite interesting you bringing up the topic, but I—you know, just to show you a sign how proactive our department is, we met with a number of people this morning that I think you—we met with the food processors, but we also met with a number of chefs that, you know, have had some discussion with us. And I've had some discussions. So I think I want to put this imagery aside that as an Agriculture Minister or as a department that we're not serious. I want to assure the member opposite this government is very serious. We are working with them.

But let's be realistic. We are not in a position to sacrifice food safety, because when people buy a product and they take it home and it's put on the kitchen table, and should—should—a young individual get sick because of the food that's taken at the family supper, I think that's a responsibility that we as a government need to—we need to somewhat review legislation, the policies that are in place. I totally respect that. But I advance it to the point that we are going to be even more proactive. We're going to get a number of industry members sitting around the table because our sign of seriousness does exist; it will exist. There is nothing better than to have added value of the food we produce in the province of Manitoba and provide an opportunity for communities to get additional businesses started up. This department, the Health Department, have no issues with that whatsoever. But we need to have a round-table discussion. We need to understand the regulations that are before us and where there could be.

But I want to ensure the member opposite we've become more active than ever before, and the sign is, as of today, we've made meetings happen between the food processors. We're going to make meetings happens with other agencies. And we're going to have that round-table discussion because the other day, if we have an opportunity to share information and explain where there are certain things that we need to cover, I appreciate the opportunity that's been brought forward. And we will continue with that discussion with the added value of an opportunity for businesses to develop and provide food in another manner.

So that would be my closing commentary. And thank you to the MLA for bringing up the comments. I'm glad to share what we're doing and what we're going to succeed in having these discussions.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, is the committee ready for the resolution? *[Agreed]*

Here it is.

Resolution 3.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,007,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship.

What is the will of the committee? Shall we briefly recess to enable the new critics and ministers to arrive? *[Agreed]*

We are in recess.

The committee recessed at 4:15 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:23 p.m.

CONSERVATION AND WATER STEWARDSHIP

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to some semblance of order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Mr. Mackintosh: The deputy—our new deputy minister, Grant Doak, is here in the room today and will be joining me at the table after introductory remarks. And tomorrow we'll be introducing the other senior officials of the department, and I'll thank them at that time, as well, for their tremendous efforts.

But, first, I just wanted to acknowledge the tremendous engagement of departmental staff as we address the many initiatives set out in TomorrowNow-Manitoba's Green Plan and, of course, as well, for the challenge of addressing the mandate of finding cost savings where that can be

achieved, while at the same time enhancing services to the public.

The Estimates and the budgeting process, not only this year, but last year, has certainly been an opportunity for the department to find efficiencies to perform our work. This year, the budget is basically flat when you consider that \$1.7 million was removed from the appropriation for the new Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Fund, which will now be funded as a trust fund outside of the appropriation.

So, while the bottom line is essentially flat, we nonetheless have to make adjustments because of increased amortization and interest charges on our capital projects. That really requires looking for better service delivery models without impacting direct services to the public.

I think we have been successful in rising to that challenge, whether it's with regard to our beautiful parks and campgrounds or ensuring environmental regulations are in place for a healthy place to live and visit and, of course, ensuring top quality of our water.

Some of the highlights I wanted to reference in this year's budget include the green plan that I referenced minutes ago. It's the government's eight-year strategic plan for protecting the environment while ensuring that we build a strong, prosperous, green economy here in Manitoba, and I hope that we can visit some of the initiatives in TomorrowNow through the Estimates process.

There are five key pillars on which the plan is based, and we will, in the months ahead, be enunciating for the public some improvements as a result of public consultations and emerging issues for that strategy.

The Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Fund that was passed unanimously in the House this summer has \$1.7 million allocated to it, and I will say that it really is, I think, a great step forward in recognizing and empowering the fishers and hunters and trappers of Manitoba. They're on the land. They know intimately where investments can be made that can make a difference to ensure wildlife and fish population health. So it is about government giving away some power, and I think that is a very good thing.

Of course, the Wildlife Federation, amongst others, have been asking for the establishment of this fund, so what lies ahead now is the membership of

the two committees and the chair and then letting the investments go to work for Mother Nature's bounty.

The park strategy was released about one year ago and contained about 60 initiatives, and as a result of extensive feedback and consultation, a revised version of that as well will be announced this coming summer. The essence of the strategy is an eight-year commitment to invest \$100 million to modernize or upgrade, expand park infrastructure, recognizing that we really need a refresh in our parks. That is a message that has come through loud and clear from Manitobans and from the visitors and residents in our parks.

Another key initiative is the development of the Lake Friendly Accord, which will engage stakeholders in the greater protection of Lake Winnipeg, but not only that, but also the waters throughout the Lake Winnipeg basin. So, in March, the federal Minister of the Environment and, as well, the south basin mayors and reeves became the first signatories to the accord, which will now allow for the accord to be shopped to other stakeholders.

* (16:30)

Of course, critical to getting the accord adopted is making it clear to stakeholders that the Province of Manitoba is providing strong leadership and innovation when it comes to protection of Lake Winnipeg. And so, for the first time in Manitoba history, a lake-friendly alliance has been created. They've had four meetings now, and that has brought together over 60 stakeholders so that people are rowing together in the same direction. And they have established several working groups, and the outcome of that, as well as the commitments in accord annexes will comprise the new level lake-friendly action plan.

When it comes to parking—or camping in parks, the Parks Reservation Service just recently opened for booking reservations, and there was a huge uptake once again of those who were looking to reserve a campsite or a yurt or a cabin or group-use sites. And so Manitobans continue to have great confidence in our parks. But with the one caveat, as I said earlier, they do expect and deserve that we continue to modernize our amenities, that we continue to make investments in parks that make them so attractive, and, as well, we expand and create new parks for ecosystem protection.

There is continued work on a variety of regulations designed to improve the environment,

and that includes, among other things, the petroleum coke and coal heating ban that is being phased in. And I want to, at this time, thank several stakeholders that provided their feedback and, as well, members of the House that have provided advice on how that could be most effectively introduced. That is all part of what will be the next generation, Climate Change Action Plan for Manitoba to—in new ways cut down on greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change.

The Assiniboine Park Conservancy is another area that I think we should touch on. The Province has contributed \$34 million in grants and capital to both the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre and the Journey to Churchill exhibit at Assiniboine Park Zoo. The Journey to Churchill will be opening soon, and that will be a great destination and attraction that I think that will bring visitors from around the world to Winnipeg and Manitoba.

So there are many initiatives that are under way and, indeed, the majority of initiatives set out in TomorrowNow are in various stages of development. And everyone in the department and, as well, many engaged stakeholders are working very hard to move the conservation and green economy agenda forward.

So I look forward to answering any questions and providing any additional information for members of the committee.

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

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement he'd like to make?

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Well, I appreciate the minister's opening comments. I look forward to a good discussion. I'll apologize in advance for any mispronunciations I have during the course of the conversations and any, I guess, lack of cohesion that might appear. As being new to the process, I'll do my very best, though, to try to ensure that my questions reflect the staff that the minister has in attendance.

It's been quite something since being named critic for Conservative and Water Stewardship. I've been exposed to a number of areas, I'll be honest, I've just haven't been exposed before. And if you made me minister or critic of, you know, artillery shells and German troops in Manitoba, I'd—you know, or small business or something or—I'd be okay. But mainly it's been really quite fascinating. One of the nice things about this position, I'm sure all of our colleagues agree, is that opportunity to learn, to learn

and be exposed to information and individuals that you simply wouldn't encounter before. So I mean, the opportunities I've had to learn about, you know, fisheries and trappings and big game hunting—and, obviously, the minister and I have had some conversations in the House and we'll have some conversations here about the impact of the park strategy on cottagers. I've also had a number of interesting conversations from interested Manitobans about trail usage and ATVs and the role of the government in that.

You know, peat moss harvesting, I mean, it's not something, again, a conversation I would normally expect to have in the course of my day, but now I'm sure these are the conversations that the minister has on a fairly regular basis.

I was very fortunate to recently attend the Manitoba Wildlife Federation AGM, which was a—and the minister had a number of his staff there that provided some terrific information to the AGM and to the participants, and so I'll be asking some questions related to invasive species and the government's plans related to those. I do know that they did provide an overview but it'd be good to get an update on that. And then obviously—I'm not sure if spring will come—but obviously water retention, Surface Water Management Strategy will obviously be a component of interest as well.

So, with those opening comments, again, I appreciate the minister's time and I appreciate the minister's staff time, and I guess we'll try to make use of the next few minutes before we continue on with Estimates throughout the week.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the opposition for those remarks, and let me just welcome him to his first official Estimates process.

Right, under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 12.1.(a) contained in resolution 12.1.

At this time, we'll invite the minister's staff to join us at the table—won't take long to introduce them—but minister, if you could do that when he sits down.

Mr. Mackintosh: That was Grant Doak, deputy minister.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for that.

Last question for the committee's consideration before we get into the details of the Estimates is would the committee like to proceed chronologically or to have a global discussion?

Mr. Martin: I'd appreciate the opportunity to pursue this in a global fashion.

Mr. Chairperson: Global approach has been suggested. Honourable Minister, is that acceptable?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, it always is. It's welcomed. I think it's important that the critic choose the method of inquiry. But there is a caveat in that if there's detail required of certain areas, it may be that the—all the responsible people aren't in the room at once, so we do the best to try and get answers as soon as possible back to the committee before it rises, and otherwise, there's follow-up after. But with that sort of warning, if you will, we'll certainly endeavour to answer all his questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Excellent. Just to be clear then, and for the record, it is agreed that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

Wouldn't you know it, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Martin: Well, we'll start with the standard list, and so it should be no surprise to the minister, if the minister would be so kind to provide me a list of all Cabinet committees that he may sit on as a member?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I sit on the Treasury Board, on the Planning and Priorities Committee, on the Aboriginal Issues Committee of Cabinet.

Mr. Martin: As well—

An Honourable Member: Something tells me there was something more.

Mr. Martin: I'm sure you could come back to that and correct the—or add to the record, sorry.

A list of all political staff, including name, position and FTE status as well?

Mr. Mackintosh: First, in the constituency, I have an executive assistant, Paul Worster, and he's been in that position for some time, no change. Felix Meza is special adviser, been in that position for some time. And Chris Sanderson is a recent arrival, and he's the special assistant in the minister's office. If there's any change to that, I'll advise the member.

Mr. Martin: As well as a list of staff in the minister—in the deputy minister's office, as well?

Mr. Mackintosh: We can bring that back tomorrow for the member.

Mr. Martin: The number of staff currently employed in the department of Conservation and Water Stewardship?

* (16:40)

Mr. Mackintosh: When the member asks how many are employed, I—the usual way of characterizing employment numbers is by way of FTEs, which may mean that there's more than one in a position. But page 10 of the Estimates, the supplementary Estimates indicate 1,164.2 FTEs in the department. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Just a moment—honourable minister still has the floor.

Mr. Mackintosh: It will bring back—actually, just going back to the list of political staff, it looks like staff in the front office are listed as political staff, even though they're not, you know, in the sense of—*[interjection]*

Yes, and we will just confirm if there's any change. I think the member was asking what are the political appointments, but we'll just clarify that.

Mr. Martin: As well, I—to that, though, the—sorry. If the minister can provide, if any staff years, what the currently—vacancy rate is in his department.

Mr. Mackintosh: The monthly vacancy report I have as at February 21, 2014, indicates vacancies at 14.46 per cent. That includes, of course, both efforts to find efficiencies. I'm aware of one, for example, where an administrative secretary position was able to remain vacant because we could share resources with another division, but that also includes, of course, the natural turnover in public service staff.

Mr. Martin: So this—we'll round it out and say the 15 per cent vacancy rate, is that—would that be a standard vacancy that the department has had over the last number of years, or has it increased as a result of the efforts to find efficiencies that the minister noted?

Mr. Mackintosh: It's 14.46 per cent—is really a result of not only the natural turnover, but there have been efforts to try and discover cost savings, and so the answer is it is both. And I think the number, as I recall, is slightly higher than it was in the last—what, a couple years ago or something. *[interjection]*

Yes, likely—likely higher, as a result of last year and this year's budget exercises.

Mr. Martin: And does the minister have an idea how long he anticipates maintaining this vacancy rate? I mean, I notice the minister had indicated that there were some positions where—administrative position—they were able to share the role, but would there be positions within this vacancy that, I guess from the minister's perspective, would be a more critical nature and it's just a matter of coincidence that, as of February of 2014, that they happen to be vacant and just had not been filled as of that date, adding to that vacancy rate?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, the department and, not infrequently, with the minister's office involvement, always has to keep an eye on public safety, first and foremost, on firefighting, on, for example, the NROs. We have, over the last two years, despite looking hard for vacancies and FTE reductions, we been—maintained our complement of NROs at 119, for example. That was a commitment that I made to the association and, I think, is important in terms of law enforcement.

Also, when it comes to drinking water and other front-line services, we always would prioritize a filling of those vacancies.

There are other examples where it's a back office function where there can be an amalgamation of functions and savings reaped. So it's an ongoing effort in that regard, but those priorities are important ones. Sometimes there may be a concern from a member of the public, and we would look, then, if there's a position that perhaps hasn't been filled on a timely basis that might be behind the complaint, and so we do that analysis on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Martin: Would the minister will be able to provide a listing of all the vacant positions that comprise the 14.6?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes.

Mr. Martin: And I don't know if the minister—and it obviously will come with that information, but would the minister will be advised at this time—he talked about back room functions being a component, but would he be able to give the committee a better idea as to, I guess, a ratio, for lack of a better word, will comprise—how much the back room functions would comprise out of that current 14.6 ratio?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, we'll certainly make an effort to provide a definition of what is a back office versus a, you know, front office position. And, of course, it'll be important to recognize that vacancies at any given time are temporary and could be filled—in fact, it could be filled by the time the paper—the—or—you know, is produced. But with that caveat in mind, we'll certainly attempt to put that description with our documentation.

Mr. Martin: Would the minister be able to identify any impacts that the vacancy rate has had on the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship, maybe, I mean, more specifically in terms of any particular projects that may have been—had their start date delayed or what not? Anything along those lines?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I'm advised that there haven't been any patterns of complaint as a result of vacancies at all; we've kept a focus on front-line services.

The only pattern of complaint we had from members—for example, based on some community concerns as a result of the budget last year—was around grass mowing in provincial parks. And the minister—or the department listened carefully to those concerns; they were from certain communities. And I'll just summarize what was behind that. It—while we're always looking for efficiencies and the best use of staff time in—for people who perform that function, it was a request that the department look to see how we could reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide leadership in our parks and do that on a pilot basis last year. And I had hoped that we could find reductions in grass cutting of about, what, 15 to 25 per cent or so? I think we arrived at a certain percentage, and best efforts were made locally to attempt to reduce the grass cutting accordingly.

We discovered through that effort that there were some local sensibilities that I think were long—you know, had been in place for a long time in terms of having an urban aesthetic, perhaps more so than a wilderness or a—you know, park way out in the bush. And so, for example, at Winnipeg Beach we had ongoing discussions that had become more frequent lately, where Winnipeg Beach park does have sort of an urban feel to it rather than some park that is in the backcountry, so we're adjusting our practice accordingly as we actually implement permanently a mowing strategy.

* (16:50)

But, you know, the reduced mowing was not only about showing leadership in greenhouse gas emissions but also for use of staff time and, as well, for naturalization efforts and restoring to natural turf areas of the park that otherwise had been cut.

Wildflowers can come back, and I saw that first-hand at Rushing River when I stopped in to see the Ontario exercise in this regard. Where once they had mowed the park like crazy around the river, now there are wildflowers blooming there, and I thought it was extraordinary.

The City of Winnipeg has also made an effort at naturalization, and they put up signs everywhere to tell everyone that it wasn't about negligence. It was a concerted effort, and their effort wasn't around greenhouse gas emission so much as, I think, just getting back to more natural areas.

So I think that what we learned, too, is it's very important that there be a communications exercise with that. But I'm sort of riffing off what would be an example of where we were able to attain multiple benefits from rethinking some of our practices in the department.

Mr. Martin: I don't want clarify and I don't want to derail the conversation too much, but you indicated you were hoping to find a 15 to 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gases as a result of the reduction in mowing.

Would that be as a result of the department or the parks' cutting equipment would be primarily gas-powered as opposed to renewable energy, battery or otherwise electric?

Mr. Mackintosh: The effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in parks comprises, in part, this effort to reduce lawn mowing. The—first of all, the percentage was the amount of land that we were trying to reduce. And, as a result of the pilot phase, we have one of our district supervisors crunching the numbers to determine how much we've reduced in greenhouse gas emissions, and we hope to be able to report on that publicly soon. An initial estimate was quite substantial and, I think, heartening.

In terms of the vehicles used, that is a longer-term objective, and one of the plans is to begin to pilot an electric vehicle. And we think that there can be some use in some of the campgrounds, for example, of that kind of a vehicle.

But we're also looking at other energy savings in our parks, and without me going into it in detail here,

I think the member will see the objectives and the plans set out in TomorrowNow when it comes to energy savings in greenhouse gas emissions and parks.

But one of the new—one of the changes to the park strategy—the revised park strategy will include explicitly the grass-mowing piece of it because I think we can say, coming out of last year's pilot, that it was successful recognizing that in some particular locales, it was important to maintain cutting. And whether we can go beyond 20 per cent, the department is advising that that would be rather difficult.

Like, I went, for example, to one park this last summer, and no one, not a single person had commented on the reduced grass cutting alongside of the road. But then we had other issues where, whether it was a Red River parkway or Winnipeg Beach, where people really noticed the difference. We noticed, too, that after staff met with the town council of Winnipeg Beach and explained fully what we were doing, I think they really understood what the effort was all about.

So, again, a really good lesson learned. It was the first time we'd ever tried that. I didn't know where it was going to end up. That's why we did it quietly under the radar as a pilot. But, yes, lessons learned, and, again, communicating with the public, I think, is always the best lesson that you can take away, and so we'll see what we can do as we implement this on a full-time basis.

But the approach took in 20 parks in last year's operating season, and, so far, it looks like there—the fuel saved is very significant. And the department has been crunching some numbers to determine how the reduction in fuel use corresponds into the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

So, yes, we hope that we can report publicly on that one and so everyone knows what we're doing. And I think it's important to have a public announcement because we really don't want to put more signs up, you know. There's a lot of signs in parks. There's going to be even more with some of the initiatives that are under way, and I would rather us not have to go and—go to the expense of putting up the signs and putting up something that, again, might detract from the natural environment.

Mr. Martin: The minister mentioned a pilot project for electric vehicles in parks. Does he have a date in

terms of the start and whether and which parks he's looking at?

Mr. Mackintosh: I just want to introduce the staff that have joined us. The assistant deputy minister, Bruce Bremner. We've changed the names of divisions, so the member doesn't—isn't alone in catching up on all the language of the—*[interjection]*—but Bruce, his title is changed now, but he's ADM of Parks and Regional Services.

And, as well, we have Matt Wiebe with us today. Actually, we've got two Matt Wiebes. I think this is an extraordinary event. Do you get each other's mail, is the question the minister has.

An Honourable Member: Unfortunately, yes, we do.

Mr. Mackintosh: We do.

I knew that former MLA Len Derkach knew a lot about what was going on in Justice because there was also a Len Derkach in Justice.

So Matt Wiebe is acting assistant deputy minister of Administration and Finance, and also joining us today—where's your title here? *[interjection]* Mike Gilbertson is the director of Parks and Protected Spaces.

So, in answer to the question, I'm advised that Birds Hill Park will see the deployment of an electric vehicle this summer, and so we're going to see how that goes. That could open up some greater opportunities down the road. It's time to get going on this.

Again, I can't say strongly enough that Conservation should be leading by example when it comes to these efforts. I can tell you, when I went into my office the first day, I could see that there were some gotchas there if somebody asked the right questions. So we went to work to make sure that we were redesigning the office around state-of-the-art thinking when it comes to energy efficiency and so on. We put in the new bulbs and got the asbestos out of there and low-flush toilet and ENERGY STAR appliances, and the deputy now is also introducing a very aggressive strategy for the department.

But, as well, the MLA for Wolseley's been involved in a greening of the Legislature initiative that has been addressing challenges in this building. Even though it's old, it's not a clunker. It can be upgraded, and that's being expanded now to greening of other government initiatives.

But, when it comes to parks in particular, I think there's a compelling case that we have to look for leadership there, and so you'll see in the parks strategy a number of examples of where we hope to provide that leadership.

Mr. Martin: What about in terms of pilot projects? Electric cutters, whipper snippers and as well, whether or not—I mean, my family and I enjoy the provincial parks, and we were one of the families that were in the queue online the other day, along with many other Manitobans, and were very fortunate to access the sites that we wanted for summertime enjoyment. But in my travels to provincial parks, and, hopefully it's just a coincidence, however, but it seems in all the buildings that I've gone to, especially the—you know, as I take my children to the restrooms, it's all incandescent light bulbs, and so I'm wondering if there's a longer term plan or initiative to—you talked about the, you know, the greening initiative.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, there's a—we've been having a comprehensive look at the footprint of parks, and that includes everything from lighting to water use and the movement to different kinds of showers. We are—we've got a list of efforts that are under way recognizing that when it comes to what is in our parks, we really see, as I've said publicly, the '60s and '70s out there. And so we're trying to prioritize where we can make investments to put in place more environmentally friendly approaches.

Mr. Chairperson: Regrettably, the hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

EDUCATION AND ADVANCED LEARNING

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Order, please. The Committee of Supply will come to order.

Chairperson's Ruling

Mr. Chairperson: When this section of the committee last sat on April the 9th, 2014, a point of order had been raised by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) shortly before the adjournment hour regarding the length of time taken by the honourable minister of education and advanced literacy to reply to questions and repeat information such as previous announcements. The honourable Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) had been speaking to the point of order when this section of the Committee of Supply had to rise

due to the adjournment hour, meaning that the point of order carried over until today.

I've had the opportunity to review the contributions made to the point of order and I feel I have had enough advice to make a decision. I will now render my ruling on the point of order.

With the greatest of respect to the honourable member for Steinbach, he did not have a point of order. He may have had an important point that he wished to raise with the honourable minister, but it was not a point of order.

I would also like to remind all members on both sides of the House that the purpose of a point of order is to draw the attention of the presiding officer to a breach of the rules and practices of the House and that points of order should not be used as vehicles for debate.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: With that matter taken care of, we will now continue with the questioning in the Department of Education and Advanced Learning.

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

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

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Chair, say a welcome to the deputy today. He's in the chair, so I'm looking forward to some precise answers today as we move on into the Estimates process here.

So to the minister, I was looking through Hansard, of course, from last week, and he mentioned that the system for the student financial aid system which was originally tendered in 1994 and it was launched in 1995, is actually the one that we're still using today. I'm asking the minister if he feels that the 15-and-a-half-million-dollar expenditure on the new financial aid system is working, also, is that a great expenditure and when he feels the new system is actually going to be up and running. As I mentioned today in question period, I would really appreciate the review that was done in 2012. I would really appreciate a copy. So I'm asking the minister today if I could get a copy of that—of the review that was done in 2012.

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I thank the member for a question. As I said last week, this is an important

conversation that we need to have, that's for sure, and I'm quite happy to have it.

* (14:50)

I am not able to release the report as he requests at this point simply because—as he would know—there are sensitive commercial information, proprietary information contained in contracts that we have currently with the existing vendor, and consequently it would be—serve no interest at this stage to be able to provide him with that information.

Now, I can say with respect to the Student Financial Aid Information System project in general, that, as he says, it is an important to serve students well, and we've tried to do that. The existing system is up and running, as I've made clear to him, so that he would be able to use it if he so desired. He also needs to remember that the banking phase of that particular project was completed, and quite some time ago, as I recall, and that there is as yet a second phase still under way. It has proven quite right—it's no secret to him or to anybody else—proven quite right to be a complex issue. IT programs and IT upgrades, as I think we've all experienced, are by nature exceedingly complicated; they are exceedingly technical. And, in order to serve students properly, we want to be in a position to make sure that we have the proper solution ready when we're ready to go online.

Now, he says that it's \$15 million, and what I want to say to him is that at least \$3 million of that, approximately, dealt with the first phase around banking, so he needs to remember that that's part of the calculation that we're talking about here. The additional dollars that we're talking about at this stage, then, is significantly less than he's talking about. And what we're trying to do is make sure that we do the proper due diligence. We're in the midst of a dialogue and conversation with the contractor. At this stage we're working quite diligently to determine what the proper path forward should be, because at the end of the day we want to serve students well, we want to serve them to the best of our ability, want to make sure the system is running—up and running to the satisfaction of ourselves and to students using it. And so at this stage we're trying to do the due diligence necessary and we're undertaking every possible conversation that we can have in order to make sure that that gets done in an expeditious manner.

Mr. Ewasko: What seems to be interesting to me is that something must have happened over the

weekend because—it might be the fact that the deputy is sitting in the Chair today—but the number I stated and put on the record in regards to the 15 and a half million dollars—you know, I would love to be able to take total ownership of that number, but back on July 4th, 2013, the past minister for Advanced Education and Literacy, the member from Southdale, had put on the record that the budgeted amount for this student aid financial system was actually \$15.3 million. And back in 2007, if they go back, the estimated figure to cover all the phases was going to be \$6 million, and now we're probably—you know, once we start to drill down maybe a little bit deeper into this situation, we could be probably looking at about \$20 million in total. But the 15.3, 15.5, plus you factor in all the government staffers' wages, computer programs, computer software, computer usage, absolutely everything across the board, I think the minister, as he cautioned me last week, should take some of his own words and make sure he's putting the correct information on the record.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to then—the review—as the minister had said that he would not be able to table it—I've seen many documents that have been redacted through the FIPPA process and that. I'm not sure why him and his staff could not go through the document, the review, redact what they need to and table it this week before Estimates are over.

And so I'm asking again if he'd please table those documents, as the critic before me and the critic before, the member from Agassiz, which was myself again and the critic from Morris had asked for that as well. So it'd be great if we could get that document this week.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Allum: Yes, well, I appreciate the question from the member. I really was only trying to point out in my first answer that when he's—when numbers are—when we're talking about certain numbers related to the student financial aid system that some of the budget that we were talking about went toward phase 1 which has been successfully completed, and just was to trying to reiterate that point.

With respect to his second question, and it's a—it's—I'll answer it the same way that I answered it the first time. This is a contract that we have with a vendor currently. It includes sensitive information, sensitive commercial and proprietary information that would not serve anybody well as we go forward in trying to determine what—it's release would not

serve anyone well as we go forward trying to determine the best pass–best path forward to serve students to make sure they get the kind of support that they need. So I know that he could appreciate the sensitivity of private information in a contractual manner for that; that's why I've given the answer that I have.

Mr. Ewasko: I thank the minister for his answer. I would just wish that we would put some facts on the record, and I'll just straightforwardly ask him: Has the project since 2012, since the review came out and then the past minister had asked for another review of that review—has the project been suspended in the last two years? Yes or no?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Chair, I guess the thing is is that this is a project admittedly that's taken some time to get up and running, and I'll be the first to say as much. There have been—it's a complex undertaking, as he knows. He knows that there are either IT systems whether here in Manitoba or across the country that have—they have taken off. You think you're ready to go and then you encounter unexpected complications, and so we have decided, as best we can, to be extra cautious in making sure that we choose the right path and get the proper kind of value for money that I know that the member is concerned about.

As I said, conversations are happening with the parties involved. We know that significant time has occurred, but we're trying to do the proper due diligence. And at the end of the day—and I know he agrees with me on this—we want to make sure that we get it right before you roll out and you go live. And so we're currently in discussions with the parties to do that and—but I guess it's worth pointing out parenthetically that the system as it currently is is working fine. We want to be sure, however, that doing nothing was not an option. We are in the second decade of the 21st century. Systems do need to be upgraded and we've started down that path toward doing it. Admittedly, there's been a few delays, but at the end of the day we're looking at the best option in order to serve Manitoba students well.

Mr. Ewasko: I guess just a quick comment is that the Bomber stadium was—cost quite a considerable amount of more money and it was built even though—as we're finding out this past week, it has some deficiencies in it as well. But it was built far quicker than this program which, again, Mr. Chair, was tendered in 2009, awarded in 2010 and was supposed to actually be launched in June of 2011, which, to

date, the minister is unwilling to put on the record that it—the whole project has been suspended.

* (15:00)

And what worries me, Mr. Chair, is that we are talk—we're not talking about, you know, chump change. You know, we're talking about 15 and a half million dollars of hard-working Manitobans' money and basically there's nothing to show for it. There is a review, which the minister has had now for two years, and he's unwilling to share it with myself, or the public for that matter, and so I think Manitobans have a right to know. And so I'll leave that for now, so he can take a deep breath, as far as the student financial aid program goes, for now, and I'd like to move on.

As I was looking back in Estimates from a couple of years ago when I was—had the pleasure of asking the then-minister for Advanced Education and learning—or Literacy, I should say—about the various problems they had with the financial system of the student aid financial program—back—it was the eFax–Equifax problem, and there was a possible—1,000-plus students that had their credit rating and information was being compromised. And I want to know today, since again the deputy is sitting in the Chair, as well, that whether all those students since 2012 had all been contacted and that problem, as far as their information, had been fixed.

Mr. Allum: Mr. Chair, to our knowledge, the matters to which the member refers to have been corrected and addressed. And, additionally, students, when anything happens to happen in that regard, regardless of the issue, students were—are routinely contacted, made sure that—to understand what the nature of the issue was, how it's been corrected and then—and to assure students that things are now secure and in place.

So I'll seek additional information for the member on that, Mr. Chair, to make sure, but at—in answering at this stage, on the nature of that question anyways, we're addressing it or it has been addressed and, you know, we do make sure that we're in contact with students, in the event of those situations occurring.

Mr. Ewasko: And I thank the minister for that. I know he can appreciate the fact that the reason why I'm asking that question is due to the new information in the media now with Heartbleed and the 900-plus social insurance numbers that have been compromised.

And I know that, since right now, student financial aid system is, you know, coming up to 20 years old, I'm just wondering if there has been anything compromised, you know, besides the Equifax information which he's going to get me. But if there's been anything more recently since this Heartbleed information has come out as far as any type of information of students through student loans or anything, that has been compromised, whether it's contact information, social insurance numbers, you know, emails, anything along those lines, and if he could possibly provide that information.

Mr. Allum: I just wanted to say to the member, I'm aware of one other incident that occurred January 30th, and emails were sent from Manitoba Student Aid to a number of students inviting them to participate in a survey about student financial assistance. The email was sent from the senior economic research analyst account, and a result of a human oversight on the computer the email addresses were not placed in the blind carbon copy box of the email. And, unfortunately, all of the recipients were able to see the email addresses of others. The error was identified within an hour. An attempt to recall the emails was made. I don't know about him, but I've been tempted a few—tempted to recall a few emails in my time for one reason or another, and it doesn't always seem to work, and in this case was not possible to recall all the email messages.

Within two hours, an apology email was sent from the executive director of Manitoba Student Aid to all students who were affected. And we want to make sure, of course, that these kinds of mistakes, which are human error and quite—folks are quite capable of, including myself, of making errors and we're all human. But aside from the email addresses, Mr. Chair, I want to assure the member that there was no other identifying information included in the email other than the actual email addresses. Of course, we're going to do everything possible to make sure that those kinds of errors are not done in the future. But I would say that's the one incident that I'm aware of and we're going to do all that we can to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

I guess it's worth pointing out, too, Mr. Chair, that the students were apprised of their right to file a complaint with the Manitoba Ombudsman or contact the manager of policy and planning if they wished to discuss the matter further. So students were also advised of additional steps they could take to address their concerns.

Mr. Ewasko: So, to the minister, how many emails are we talking about? How many students?

Mr. Allum: To my knowledge, 739.

* (15:10)

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Chair, 739 exact emails were sent out. Instead of being blind carboned, they were just open to the public to see. That's interesting that you're able to pinpoint it to 739.

You know, we're looking at a 20-year-old system here, and I'm just wondering, between the Equifax blunder on the compromising students' information—and, of course, you know, in turn damaging some of their credit ratings—and now the 739 students who had their emails shown—and, according to the minister, no other information was shown on that—there could possibly be thousands and thousands of students' information in the last 20 years that has either some sort of information in one shape or form, Mr. Chair, that has been put out there in the World Wide Web, and the minister is saying that this is the only one that he's aware of besides, of course, now the Equifax one, which I reminded the deputy to bring to the minister's attention.

So does he not have a concern that by not upgrading this system quickly that more of these type of instances can occur? What type of assurances can he give Manitoba students that their information is going to be safe when they're going online to apply for these—for funding?

Mr. Allum: Well, I guess the thing that needs to be remembered when we're talking about the two incidents that we've raised—are discussing here today, that neither of them are system-related. Both were human error, and so those are the kinds of things that are bound to happen from time to time. I'm certainly human, after all, and can concede that I can make an error, and I think that in both the matters that we were talking about today, that's precisely what happened.

I think he would want to know that they were immediately addressed as quickly as humanly possible, and action was taken and the matter was resolved. And we're certainly—our department communicates very well with one another, and so when issues of these—like these come up from time to time—and I think of two and they're quite a number of years apart—that they're addressed immediately. We communicate directly with the students affected and

we make sure that their concerns are properly addressed.

My feeling about the system currently is that I'm confident in it as it's currently operating, and I invite him to go and check it out and use it if he needs to.

But we have endeavoured to make progress. We have completed the banking phase of the project. The second phase is proving to be more complicated and it's taken a few—taken some time to try to get it to a position where it's working to the satisfaction—our satisfaction so that it's serving students well when it does go live and online. And, as we've discussed today on a few occasions already, we're in conversations with the existing contractor and we're charting a path forward to make sure that students are well served by the student financial aid system going well into the future.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again the minister's not putting on the record that, indeed, the whole process has been actually suspended. But we'll keep moving along and, hopefully, eventually, he'll decide—you know, it might be another week or a week and a half or so for him to put—to set the record straight, Mr. Chair, and put the facts on the record that, indeed, the 15-and-a-half-million-dollar system is hit a roadblock.

I know that from—as he knows—I think I mentioned it to him; I know I mentioned it to the previous minister—that I've had quite a few dealings with the system and I find that the old system for dealing with online applications seems to be working fairly well. I know that one of the initial reasons for developing a new system was to get rid of the paper applications, but the problem is with the online system, the way it sits today—and I know that the minister has said, and I quote, any student can go onto the website and apply for a student loan without a problem. I'm not sure if the minister has actually taken the time and gone online and tried this system out, but that statement is actually false.

The point is, Mr. Chair, we have quite a few students that are full-time working parents trying to enrol in post-secondary, and they're limiting availability for school. The option to attend post-secondary classes part-time has become increasingly important to our citizens here in Manitoba; however, none of the many part-time students can apply online. Part-time students must still fill out that dreaded paper application, yet he made it sound like that his government has eliminated the paper application entirely. Why must part-time students

still fill out the paper applications and suffer the extended wait times for funding?

* (15:20)

Mr. Allum: It's right to say that part-time students must apply on paper, but it's the program that we administer on behalf of the federal government and we have no part-time program ourselves. We, being the Province, have been pushing to the feds to create an online part-time application, and I know the member is familiar with those folks in the federal government, and so, if we could together, arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, to urge our federal counterparts to create an online part-time application, I think that would be a terrific outcome.

Mr. Ewasko: Well, I wanted to go a little bit different line of questioning there, Mr. Chair, but since the minister brought up the federal government and, as usual, you know, instead of giving credit where credit is due, he decides that he wants to throw some dirt or sand in their faces. So last time, when we were speaking last week he also boasted about the provincial NDP increasing students' vehicle exemption when we're talking about student loans. The fact is that he merely increased it to \$10,000 while the federal Conservative government eliminated vehicles as a consideration in their assessment process.

This was also identified in the federal Conservative government's new action plan. Many other jurisdictions will likely be following suit, and students in other provinces will not have their vehicles considered during the assessment process for their student loans while students in Manitoba will be penalized for having a vehicle worth more than \$10,000. Why is this government not affording Manitoba students with fair and equal assessments for their student loans?

The sad fact of the matter is, with his government's illegal increase to the provincial sales tax, beat-up, 10- to 15-year-old vehicles can easily surpass a \$10,000 price tag. Yet you would choose to penalize students for having a newer, more reliable vehicle by reducing their student loan eligibility. You claim to want the best of your children, for our children, yet you would prefer to see young Manitoba students commuting on our deplorable roadways in beat-up old vehicles in order to attain their education. He's the one who brought the feds into this. So I'd like him to answer that question.

Mr. Allum: I'm going to ask the member just if he could clarify specifically what it is in that that he wanted me to answer. I would appreciate that.

Mr. Ewasko: Well, basically, stop throwing sand in the feds' faces and stop bragging about what his government is doing when you look at taking, again, \$400 out of the backs of—back pockets of each and every hard-working Manitoban here in the province. And he's mentioning the fact that the student loan process, he's got—the vehicles have been exempt from the assessment process at the federal level, so why he chose to not follow suit at the provincial standard. Why cap it at—why exempt up to \$10,000 when other provinces are surely going to go ahead and follow suit with what the federal government is doing as well?

Mr. Allum: I really—ask me why we had paper-based applications for part-time students, and so I was simply advising the member in answer to his question that that was the federal component of the program, and that's why I raised it—the federal government at all, is simply to provide as precise an answer as I could to the member.

As for his observation, well, the federal government has exempted vehicles, if that's a accurate representation. We've doubled it as of August 1st, 2013, from \$5,000 to \$10,000. But he should know that when it comes to our support for students, that's just one among many resources available to them to support students going through our post-secondary institutions. I don't need to remind him, I'm sure, that we have among the lowest tuition rates in Canada, at both the university and college level. Since we were—came into office, you know, grants and bursaries total almost \$240 million now to help support students with bursaries and grants that really were quite different than it was the decade earlier.

We have the Manitoba tuition rebate program that rebates upwards—up to 60 per cent of tuition for students who stay and work in Manitoba. And so there are many arrows of support for students in our student aid quiver, and we—I guess it's probably worth pointing out to him, as well, that we've lowered the interest rate on student loans to prime.

So a variety of methods are used to ensure that access to public post-secondary education in Manitoba is affordable for students, and that's why we continue to invest in post-secondary institutions, both on the operating side and on the capital side. That's why we have a comprehensive

student assistance program, and that's why we continue to work with our partners in the post-secondary sector, to make sure that we provide quality, accessible, affordable education to students here in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: I'd just like to ask how many students in the province of Manitoba in the public school system received special needs funding.

* (15:30)

Mr. Allum: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for that question as well.

As of September 2013, the number of students receiving level 2 or 3 funding was approximately 6,500. I think that answers his question.

Mr. Ewasko: So 6,500 students in the public school system are funded under level 2 and 3 funding. Can he break that down into how many level 2 and how many level 3, and also if he can also check to see how many school divisions throughout the province get a block funding for their special needs programs and how many actually—how many school divisions actually have to do the applications for the level 2 and the level 3?

Mr. Allum: I'll answer the questions in reverse order. No school divisions have block funding at this point, so that's pretty clear. As for the number of students receiving level 2 or 3 funding, I'm going to have to take that under advisement and deliver you the information as soon as possible.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank the minister for the answer—6,500 level 2 and 3 funded. What's—how does that look within the last five years as far as the numbers of level 2 and level 3 funded students?

Mr. Allum: So trying to take the member back, if I start at two six, 2'06-07, then we would find—and, sorry, I'm doing some math here, so I'm just going to give you approximates, and if you want—if the member requires—*[interjection]* Okay, so 2'06-2'07, approximately 6,000, level 2 and 3. Oh, sorry. Sorry. I'll repeat that.

Approximately 6,000 in 2'06-2'07; about 6,700 in 2'07-2'08; approximately the same, about 6,800, in 2'08-2'09, or 2'08 and 2'09; almost 7,000, a little bit under 7,000 in 2'09-2'10; 6,800 in '10-11; and then '11-12, about 6,500, maybe 6,600.

But if—certainly, if you need specific precision and not my quick addition here, that—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

* (15:40)

Mr. Ewasko: Thank the minister for the answers. You know what? As far as specific for level 2 and level 3, if he could get the department to split those up, would be greatly appreciated. And if I can get that, you know, hopefully, before the end of Estimates, would be, again, greatly appreciated.

Looking at—or I guess I should start off—has the minister had a chance to look through the Lobdell report?

Mr. Allum: Yes.

Mr. Ewasko: There has been many recommendations to address some of the concerns up at University College of the North, and I was just wondering, it seems so far that UCN, COPSE, the department—nobody has taken any steps to address any of the recommendations. I'm wondering where his department, where he is at with that.

Ms. Melanie Wight, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Allum: Yes, the Lobdell report was interesting for a number of reasons, as the member knows, because one of his reactions to evaluating the status of UCN was to say it's amazing how far they've come in such a short period of time, but he also acknowledged—and the member has seen the recommendations—that there was additional work that needed to be done in terms of capacity building. Of course, they wanted to make sure that the mission and mandate of the institution met with the intended mission and mandate of when it was first established. So, you know, some of the recommendations to date have been implemented, others are, of course, subject to ongoing implementation.

I personally took heart from the Lobdell report in terms of his characterization of how well things have gone to date in setting up a brand new institution designed to serve northern Manitobans and, in particular, designed to serve northern Manitoba First Nations, as well. Certainly, it goes without saying that any new post-secondary institution has certain growing pains, but I think, on balance, it's fair to say that coming forward from the Lobdell report was a kind of a vindication of the work that had been done to date, but notwithstanding that additional work on governance, on planning, on capacity building, as he knows Lobdell pointed to us that needed to continue to work on.

The department provides significant support to UCN in terms of trying to be a helpful assister in making sure that they're serving their students well and their people well, and we'll continue to work in partnership with UCN and with the Governing Council and the Council of Elders in order to ensure that it is a successful institution that serves northern Manitoba well, and serves northern First Nations well, as well.

We certainly believe, as an article of faith, on this side of the House, that the UCN initiative is something that's worth doing, worth encountering some growing pains with. We're impressed with the degree of progress made to date, and we continue to work in partnership with the University College of the North to strengthen it—strengthen the institution as best we can, in order that it can serve northern Manitobans and Manitoba First Nations very well.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister, for the statement.

When we're talking about the college—the University College of the North, we are seeing that its mandate, to bring post-secondary opportunities closer to northern residents, and I think nobody on this side of the House argues with increasing opportunities for people in the North. What is very interesting to me is when you talk about accessibility and the ability for those northern residents to access post-secondary institutions, definitely including the University College of the North, it's interesting that they ended up having to close accessibility services to the University College of the North—cut it, done. So now what?

So we've got a mandate to increase accessibility to northern residents to post-secondary institutions, and what have they done? The government has gone and cut disability services to their—to the University College of the North's campuses. I'd like to know how the minister is going to, moving forward, bring back that sense of confidence of those northern residents.

Mr. Allum: Madam Acting Chair, yes, I guess I would want to respond to the member by saying that he's given—I think he used the word cut—and that would not be a fair characterization of the circumstance.

There was a reallocation of dollars, undertaken, I might add, by the institution itself. It's not as if government makes these kind of calls—a reallocation of resources within the institution itself, in order to

ensure that disability services are provided at both campuses, so at The Pas and in Thompson, as well. So rather than characterizing it as a cut, as I think the member said that, or in some manner that it was—or his characterization that this may, in some way, be less service. In fact, arguably this is an enhanced service being provided to both of the very important campuses at UCN.

* (15:50)

And, in addition, the institution itself is currently conducting a comprehensive review of its student support services, and as he would know, that's in keeping with the Lobdell review as well. So, really, I think what we have is the institution reallocating resources here, serving both campuses to the very best of its ability and, in fact, quite arguably, at an enhanced level of service.

Mr. Ewasko: So, when we're looking at those funds that obviously UCN or the department or COPSE decided to have those conversations with UCN around the fact that they were going to be cutting or discontinuing, for a softer word, but really, in the big picture, it is a cut to disability services, accessibility services. They say that it was due to underfunding and policies, yet the NDP government went ahead and pumped \$82 million into the Thompson campus which to date is not fully operational yet. I believe that they're still working in the old campus.

They constantly stress accessibility to the northern residents, to post-secondary institutions, and here, these cuts which affect accessibility services right at the front lines to students in the North, are cut, wiped out. So how can the minister stand today and on one hand say that they're improving access, yet on the other hand those services are being cut? I'd like him to respond to that.

Mr. Allum: Again, I—this is just, I guess, the two of us disagreeing on how to characterize the facts of the matter. He wants to characterize it as a cut and he wants to characterize it as a direct government cut, and frankly in neither instance would that be an accurate characterization of the circumstance.

The institution, as I understand it, had allocated a position for accessibility. They reallocated resources and essentially split the job in two; one for the campus in The Pas and, again, half-time, I guess, at the position at Thompson. So, notwithstanding the member's characterization of the issue, I think the fact of the matter is that UCN reallocated

resources to make sure that both campuses that constitute the UCN were well served in this regard.

And I might say that we're going to be having a grand opening of the Thompson campus in the not-too-distant future, and, of course, love it if the member came up and enjoyed it with us.

Mr. Ewasko: Well, I appreciate the minister for those statements and I also see that I guess I'll be waiting by my mailbox for—or my email addresses for the invite to the grand opening.

It is a little ironic that, also, the building of the Oscar Lathlin memorial library, yet UCN again was forced to cut back on library acquisitions due to the money that just was not flowing towards the UCN campus. I'd like him to comment on that as well.

Mr. Clarence Pettersen, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Allum: Well, the Lathlin library, to—kind of like some of the conversation we had last week, I think, is an outstanding facility, outstanding asset to UCN and to the community at large. It's twice as big as what was previously there. It has a number of services that it now provides to students that wasn't possible not so long ago in a different era. Those online sources, online journals, which in my time as a prof would have been as—in reserved reading somewhere up in some library, are now online and available to students in a much more efficient and effective manner for serving students.

So, in all of those circumstances, it's a new facility, it is spectacular in its—in how it looks and as an asset to the institution as well as to the community. It's double the size of what was there previously, and it includes 21st century tools for learning like online resources.

So, you know, I think something pretty special has been done there and I hope that the member would agree with me on that.

Mr. Ewasko: And, again, yes, to carry on a little bit of the conversation that we had last week about architectural—fantastic architecture here in our great province of ours, I know that the minister is quite star-struck when he's looking at architecture and sometimes fails to see the—some of the details within. But, yes, it is going to be a fantastically—fantastic-looking facility once it opens. And, again, I wait for the email and more than a two-hour notice on the opening of the facility, so—and a week would be nice, but I digress.

* (16:00)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

When we're talking about UCN again, can he—you know, I know that the member from—Mr. Kwazneitzen has joined us again from COPSE, and wondering if he can share with us which programs UCN has decided to collapse or to not offer for the 2014-2015 school year.

Mr. Allum: Mr. Chair, if I understand the question, I think the member's interested in a specific number of programs. I mean, if he's asking me all of the programs that the institution may or may not—that I can't—I mean, that's—have to go look at the calendar and see what's being offered next year and what isn't. So I think he's referring to a specific circumstance, and so I'll take him through that, and then if there's additional questions related to other things, then I'd be glad to try to answer that.

There were, I believe, nine programs that UCN had identified as not proceeding with next year. We—they, of course, are required to go to the Council on Post-Secondary Education, and they went—the institution went through that process. And I think, as a result of that, some really good things occurred, so that in some cases, of those eight programs, some were given a one-year extension to support revitalization of the program. Some programs were amalgamated in order to be more cutting edge, in how they were structured, and to be more relevant to students. Some were suspended. Of those—of the eight that I'm talking about—eight or nine that I was talking about, some were suspended but to be replaced at a later date, again with a higher level, more relevant level of programming than the ones that were currently on the academic calendar for UCN. And then, in one case, there was a minor redesign to the program, and it'll be starting in September, 2014. In fact, that would've—that's true, actually in two cases.

So, of the nine, it's—just to be clear—one was given a one-year extension and then will come back in a year's time. Three more were amalgamated, as I said. Three more were suspended. So one, given an extension, three amalgamated, three suspended but to come back at sometime later—that brings us to seven. And then, of the other two, there were minor redesigns with both of those and then they'll be back up and expected to start programming, one in September 2014 and one expected to start in September 2015.

Mr. Ewasko: Which was the one that was extended and the two that—and the two, I guess, that got extensions, or not necessarily extensions, but are going to carry on in 2014-2015?

Mr. Allum: Okay, so the one that was given the one-year extension, I think that's the one you asked, was the Civil/CAD Technology (Co-op) certificate, and the two that were going through a minor redesign was the preparation—the first was the Preparation for Technology Certificate, and that's expected to be back up and running in September 2014, and the other, again, with the status of minor redesign was the health career transition certificate.

Mr. Ewasko: Now, the program that was extended, the Civil/CAD, was that—how long was that one operating before this review and then went before COPSE, and I also must apologize to Mr. Karasevich for butchering his name in the first go, but I'll get back to my question. How long was the Civil/CAD in operation at UCN and now has received an extension?

Mr. Allum: We'll take how long it was in place under advisement. It's just not easily at our fingertips for that, but we'll get the information the member needs.

Mr. Ewasko: Who's the instructor of that course?

Mr. Allum: Just one point of clarification. Was the member looking for the names of all of the staff associated with these programs that we're talking about? I just wanted clarity.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister, for the clarifying question. No, we're just talking about the one extension on the Civil/CAD course.

Mr. Allum: My understanding that that is taught by Alexander Ashton.

Mr. Ewasko: Alexander Ashton seems to be quite a familiar name. What were some of the circumstances, and I know that because Mr. Karasevich is at the table as well, what were some of the circumstances that led to the extension of the Civil/CAD program being offered again?

* (16:10)

Mr. Allum: Well, I'm glad the member asked because, you know, we're committed, on this side of the House, to add 75,000 new workers to the workforce, and we certainly want those workers to be working in northern Manitoba as we do in southern Manitoba.

And so, with respect to the Civil/CAD Technology certificate, this—the decision on whether to keep—you know, give it a year's extension, was really a product of industry feedback. There is a high demand for students with the skills associated with that particular program. So industry feedback suggested an ongoing need for this skill set in northern Manitoba. And so the institution is taking the '14-15 academic year to implement a comprehensive work plan for the program which will explore means to increase program uptake and make sure that students enrolled in that program are being served with the best quality possible that we can provide in order to ensure that they can go on and find those good jobs in northern Manitoba that we want all Manitobans to have.

Mr. Ewasko: So my next question is going to be two parts. So the first part is that that program which is taught by Alexander Ashton, which the minister put on the record, the extension given has nothing to do with the fact that he is related to the minister from—the member from Thompson, is my first question.

And then my second part of the question is: Did that funding come from COPSE? Did it come through the regular funding avenues of UCN or did that come from a different pot of money?

Mr. Allum: With respect to the members, part A of his question, of course, these programs are reviewed in the most objective sense possible. We listened to what industry tells us about labour market needs. The industry was quite clear in saying that there was a high demand for the particular skill set associated with the Civil/CAD Technology certificate. And so the decision was made, therefore, to extend the program for a year, and then with respect to—or provided a one-year extension so that we could get it back up and running to the degree that is important for students in northern Manitoba.

With respect to part 2 of his program, the money associated with program stayed with—the money was part of the extension to not only revitalize the project, but to—beginning to undertake further recruitment for the program so that we can provide the very good kind of jobs that are required in order to not only help develop northern Manitoba economically, but to create good jobs for our young northern Manitobans so they'll stay there and continue to live and thrive in what is clearly just a beautiful part of our province.

Mr. Ewasko: That was a very interesting part A and part B answer to the minister. And I will take that

answer for a little bit, and then we'll see how the rest of Estimates plays out as far as whether I come back to that topic or not right away.

We on this side of the House feel that UCN provides a very important educational opportunity for northerners and that UCN also plays an important role in building northern education. It's very important for Aboriginal northerners. We're seeing on this side of the House that, in the last eight, nine years, the amount of students that are being accepted into those programs and how many are—and the amount that are coming out are quite interesting.

We take a look at total number of registrations. Let's say The Pas campus; this is—this'll be found in the UCN report. The Pas campus—I'm not going to go through them all—but The Pas campus: 6,002 were registered between 2004-05 year to 2009-10; 691 graduates.

Thompson campus: 3,351 total registrations; 279 graduates.

It's interesting that The Pas, that's a shade over 10 per cent and Thompson, that's under 10 per cent. I'd like to know what types of things, besides giving extensions to programs that are apparently—the department has done a review on, is exactly what industry is screaming for. When I start—when I see the communities looking for more trades-based today type of employees in jobs, and I find that I feel that today's government is not walking the talk, getting it done. It's clearly not.

So I'd like the minister to comment on how is he going to improve those graduation rates.

* (16:20)

Mr. Allum: Well, I thank the member for the question. It is true that all members of the House, I'm sure, want UCN to succeed, and no side of the House has a monopoly on wanting that institution to have success because we know it means success for northern Manitobans. We know it means success for First Nations and Metis folks in the North and those coming from Nunavut as well, and our Inuit friends. So we know that the success of the institution is critically important to the people in the North. And so it's an ongoing effort on the part of the department to provide the kind of support that's required to UCN to be successful.

As I said earlier, we have—we in the department provide that direct kind of support to the institution on a daily basis so that the lines of communication

are open; there's an ongoing dialogue. Both the deputy and myself, as well as the secretary to COPSE, have an excellent relationship with President Jonasson, who was just installed just after I was named to Cabinet. I know that he shares that same conviction of wanting UCN to be successful.

And so, in addition to the supports provided by the department to—and COPSE—to UCN, it's probably worth advising him that last year UCN went out and did a trade and technology consultation. It was an extensive consultation that tried to get a handle on industry needs in the North, on labour market needs and labour market opportunities, trying to make sure that we understand the—or UCN trying to understand what the obstacles were to ensuring that there was a full complement of students engaged in those programs, so recruitment, of course, and the additional supports needed to students in the North, because they are sometimes coming from remote communities, providing for tough circumstances in order to attend UCN.

So UCN did a trade and technology consultations far and wide to try to really get a handle on student needs and labour market needs. And I'm pleased to say that they'll be—UCN will be coming out with a new strategy on those very items in the near future. So we're excited to see what's involved with the new strategy as a result of those important consultations that happened. It's important to get out and talk to folks, try to understand what the opportunities are, what some of the obstacles might be, and then, I'm pleased to say, UCN will be issuing a new strategy on those very matters in the not-too-distant future.

In addition to that, and recognizing the critically important opportunities that await us and that time is of the essence, I'm pleased to say that the deputy minister has set up an advisory committee with a number of partners either from UCN or from other industry representatives. It's a significant table, and the northern sector council is represented on it. I believe Vale as well, so big, big industrial players in the North are involved.

President Jonasson is also on the advisory committee and that started not so—last fall, so not so long ago. So there's great energy around departmental initiatives in addition to the initiatives being undertaken by the UCN to build strong partnerships in the North, to understand what labour market opportunities are out there, to understand, as I said a few seconds ago, some of the complications

and obstacles that are there for students coming from remote communities in order to become involved in these programs.

So significant effort is under way within the department in order to that we can serve our students well, make sure that they get the kind of important training they need and the kind of skills they need in order to fill those critical jobs that are being identified to us in our conversations—ongoing conversations with industry in the North and that we can create, working all together, a strong and sustainable economic base for northern Manitoba.

I know that on this side of the House, with our member from Flin Flon, for example, very excited about some of the great stuff that's going on in Cranberry Portage in the training centre facility there.

So significant effort being made all across the North—government in partnership with UCN and industry partners in order to make sure that we're serving students well, identifying labour market needs, taking advantage of labour market opportunities and building a strong and sustainable economic base in northern Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank the minister for his response. It is very important that we are looking at increasing those opportunities for our friends in the northern communities, especially when it comes to post-secondary education, making sure that those opportunities are sustainable but, at the same time, making sure that we're getting good results as well.

The minister mentioned the member from Flin Flon, and I encourage the member from Flin Flon to keep working harder because his—in Flin Flon, the UCN campus there, from the same dates that I noted earlier—so five years, 684 registrants, 34 grads, less than 5 per cent. So I encourage the member from Flin Flon to keep working hard up there and—maybe stop working so hard and maybe we can get those graduation rates up even farther, Mr. Minister.

Now I know that I was reading a MGEU document, and they basically did a third-party survey of the University College of the North. And I know that last week we chatted about the Manitoba Teachers' Society doing a survey and helping out, you know, the minister's department, and they were listening to what that survey was bringing forward as far as how the K-to-3 initiative was doing from the Manitoba Teachers' Society.

Manitoba—or MGEU members did a third party on UCN, and I was just wondering if the minister was going to be listening to the results of that third-party survey, where they had basically asked the employees various questions as to how UCN was doing from a management point of view, from programs and communicating and all that type of thing. And the results of that survey show that 47 per cent of UCN employees said that they would like an outside auditor to come in and audit the University College of the North.

So I'm just wondering if he's listening to those employees as well or this third-party survey, or where are we at with that?

* (16:30)

Mr. Allum: Of course, in the same manner that wherever you get information from, if you regard it as being authentic and then you have no other choice but to take it seriously. I read the results of the MGEU survey. I certainly take the observations that were made in the survey seriously. As he knows, the Lobdell report did identify human resource practices among something that needs to improve at UCN, and I guess, in some manner, the MGEU survey probably reflected some of those human resource challenges that the institution has encountered in this it's—in the first—as it grows and evolves and in the early stages of its development.

So we're going to continue to work with UCN to help them provide the kind of human resource practices that one should expect. I know that they're making significant strides in that regard already. We think it's helpful to have information from employees of the institution to provide us with insights as to how things are. I can tell the member, categorically, that in my conversations with MGEU folks over this same issue, that they want UCN to succeed just as much as this side of the House does, the government of Manitoba, wants it to succeed, just as much as northerners want it to succeed.

MGEU are valuable partners in UCN. When they provide that kind of information, I think it helps all of us to do our jobs better and, as I say, Lobdell did identify human resource practices as an ongoing challenge. I know President Jonasson is aware of that. I know that the Governing Council and the Council of Elders are all working to row the boat in the same direction to make sure that all professional practices at UCN are working to the advantage of students, and so when we can get information that helps us to do our jobs, collectively speaking, better,

I think that's always a good thing, and we certainly have an open mind to learning and to going on to try to really build a great institution with UCN. It has enormous potential and that there would be growing pains is to be expected, but I think, as we go forward here, we're going to see it as a very valuable institution in the North, serving northern Manitobans very, very well indeed.

Mr. Ewasko: I guess I'll wait to hear if the minister is going to encourage or take on now that COPSE is moving into the department, whether they're actually going to be doing an audit on UCN because, you know, unless I missed it, I'll check Hansard, but unless I missed his answer as far as a yes or no to that part of the question, I'll have to look and, I guess, get back to him.

To the minister, what involvements have you had on the proposed U-Pass?

Mr. Allum: Well, the member will know, as per section 24 of the UCN act, that "The Auditor General, or another auditor appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, must audit the accounts of the university college at least once a year and make a written report on the audit to the Governing Council and to the Lieutenant Governor in Council." This report is tabled in the Legislature by September 30th or six months at the end of each 'fistal'—fiscal year so that, you know, it's kind of an ongoing yearly obligation to audit the accounts of the institution.

With respect to his second question with regard to the U-Pass, I think he asked me what involvement I've had, and I guess I would say that outside of my daughter in third year at the university who probably thinks it's a darn good idea from her point of view, me, personally, I've had no special or any real involvement in the program to date. Frankly, Mr. Chair, my understanding is that's a discussion between the institutions and the City of Winnipeg, who, of course, provide public transit here in Winnipeg.

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, I guess, when the talks started going in regards to U-Pass, the minister was not yet the minister.

Is the department going to be funding the U-Pass? And also is there going to be procedures so that students can opt out of that charge as well?

Mr. Allum: Just to reiterate that the discussion about the U-Pass, of course, has gone on between students and city council and I suppose the institutions as

well. In my time as minister, no funding requests have come, I don't believe, for that program.

Of course, the Province does support transit here in Winnipeg, so it's—that would be somewhat more indirect, and I think what the direct thing that the member is referring to, if I understand him correctly—but it may be in time that a request of the nature that he's describing for some funding may come forward, and at that point then we'll have to evaluate it, and—of whether it's something or not that would be—the Province would—where the department would be interested in doing. And, of course, that's just hypothetical because I don't know of such a request or none pending today.

* (16:40)

As for the opt-out provision, again, the programs are—have been a matter of discussion and negotiation between city council and the students. And so, what opt-in or opt-out provisions are available, I guess he'd have to look—or talk to the institutions, or to students, more directly, about what's in it and what's out.

Mr. Ewasko: I thank the minister for the answer.

I was under the impression that there was a certain amount of money and that dollar figure, I don't exactly know what it is but—percentage—that was going to be coming from the provincial government towards that program. But, I guess, today I'll take the minister's word, and we'll take a look to see exactly where that is.

In your opinion, as a past professor, a student, at various universities, any type of post-secondary institution, what's your opinion on mandatory inclusion to student unions? Should students be forced into a union membership when they first sign onto a post-secondary institution?

Mr. Allum: I say to the member, he was listing off, you know, as a prof or as a former student, and I was one of those for a long time. I thought he was going to say as a bus rider, which I've also been for a fair amount of time in my life. Might add that to the list of things, in my opinion.

Of course, these are decisions that are made by students on campus for the benefit. They go through a reasonably good democratic process, and a student consensus emerges as a result.

I certainly am a big believer in rapid transit and I think the degree to which that we can make it possible for students to—because transportation is a

difficult obstacle for some students, of going from one part of the city to the other—to make it a more affordable thing, where the benefits and the costs are shared equally among student bodies, is a good thing. But, you know, these are, ultimately, decisions made by students, for students, and that's as it should be.

Mr. Ewasko: I was sort of wondering how come the minister had to lean over and talk to the deputy minister on my question, because, actually, I didn't—I did not go to the U-Pass any longer.

I had asked if he felt that, as being a professor and a past student in post-secondary institutions, whether he felt that mandatory inclusion to student unions should be forced on those students who are signing up to get some post-secondary education. And, then, he went off on the U-Pass and travelling on buses throughout the city, which I don't feel had anything to do with that question.

But I'm putting on the record that I don't feel that it should be a mandatory membership to students.

So I'll ask him again, if—what is his opinion on the mandatory inclusion into student unions, and should students who are coming straight out of high school, some of them but not all of them, but—be forced to pay this hidden tax?

Mr. Allum: Well, I thank the member for the question. Of course, I've learned in my short period of time on the job that it's always a good idea to test my opinions with Dr. Farthing. He's a man of great experience and of great knowledge, and so any time that I can get the benefit of his opinion, the benefit of his judgment, I think that the member, in fact, would want me to take advantage of this extraordinary asset in the department. And we have a number of other capable people in the department that I listen to. One of the great values for me is that I'm surrounded by extraordinary people who are well versed in education from kindergarten all the way through to career and so, of course, I want—I seek out their opinion. I want their opinions and, of course, I listen very, very closely to what they have to say in order that I can provide the member with a more informed opinion than I might otherwise have done if just left to my own devices.

As for his questions, really, I just would want to say what I said earlier, is that, you know, these are the decisions that students make collectively on campus, whether it's on transportation or some other matter—if student services are decisions that need to

be made by students for the benefit of students, where we can broadly share costs to enhance benefits for everyone, I think is a very good idea. And so, consequently, you know, I want to be sure to provide our young people with the kind of autonomy they have in decision making and not always being the one to say what I think is right and what I think is wrong and standing in judgment on high. Personally, I'm quite pleased that the City and students undertook the kind of dialogue and negotiation they did to develop the U-Pass program. I understand that students are interested in the service that transit has to offer at a cost that's manageable across the system, for all students, and so the degree that we can improve accessibility, transportation services for students to get them into the classroom, I'm all in favour of.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm glad to see that we made roughly an hour and 47 minutes without getting off-topic from one of my questions, but the minister went back at it and I'd be more than happy to hear that he—since he was talking to his deputy in regards to his own opinion about inclusion of student union fees onto brand new students—some of the brand new students. I'd like to also know what the deputy minister had to say, then, since the minister won't commit one way or another to his own opinion, and he has to listen to, or ask for guidance, on his own opinion on such a simple question. But, that being said, I don't expect the minister's going to be forthcoming with any other information on that question, so, I guess, I'll move on to this one: School bus cameras.

So the topic had come up earlier, and I would just like the minister to put on record who advised him in his department or otherwise, who is he listening to to make the decision to not proceed with cameras on school busses?

*(16:50)

Mr. Allum: Yes, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for the question. It is good—there's nothing—good question—there's nothing more important to me or to him or to any member of this House than the safety of our children, especially on their way to school and on their way home. And so that goes without saying that we want to make sure that all of our kids are safe when they're getting on their way to school or on their way home and—because, I mean, that's the most important thing.

With regard to the cameras on buses, I wish that it could be the silver bullet that the member probably wants it to be in securing safety, but I think we know

that this issue really is primarily around driver awareness and being cognizant of where you are on the road and what you're doing when you're behind the wheel of our cars.

They're—as he knows, the Province, in partnership, and MPI have all kinds of driver awareness programs. Distracted driving has become a critical feature of our vehicle safety campaigns—MPI's vehicle safety—passenger safety campaigns. We know that when members—or when people are driving and they're distracted, if they're looking at their BlackBerry or if they're distracted by something else, something tragic, an accident, may well ensue. It may well, indeed, cause incredible grief to a family and a neighbourhood and a school and a community. So, of course, no one wants any of those things to happen.

As he knows—I think he knows—that we have very strong laws in place already. If you wheel past a bus, you're going to pay a really hefty fine and you're going to lose a couple of demerit points, so the deterrent factor is already exceedingly strong when it comes to school buses.

And what I think, personally, on this matter is what I've said on more than a few occasions when this item has been raised with me in my short time on the job: If you're out driving in your car and you see that big yellow school bus in front of you, you see the light going on on top, you see the arm with the stop sign come out, stop, wait, be patient. Our kids will be safe as a result.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Chair, now looking at—I know the last few question periods, we've brought up a few points and I know that the minister has responded a couple different ways. We've talked about the fact that the—his government has raised the PST by one point or 14 per cent, and there's been quite a number of items that have been expanded—the PST has been expanded to. We're looking—in 2012 budget, we're looking at \$184 million or something along those lines, and then with the PST increasing again from 7 to 8, we've looked at another \$237 million, and so, in total, we're looking at \$500 million of increased revenue.

We're looking at the minister grandstanding, and had again patted himself on the back for the 2 per cent increase to school divisions, which equated to \$23 million. There was three fairly large promises in the 2011 election that—which I know he went door to door as well, and I've stated that in question period, you know, No. 1, promising not to

raise any taxes—door to door. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) himself, as well, absolutely said that that idea was ridiculous and it was utter nonsense that they'd even be entertaining the fact to raise taxes.

I know as well as many of the elderly people, the seniors out in my constituency, in various other—in all the constituencies, for that matter, Mr. Chair, that all the 57 candidates had gone door to door and had also offered up the promise to take education tax off of seniors, which was to equate to about a \$37-million saving, I guess, off of the backs of hard-working seniors that have dedicated many, many years working in this fantastic province of ours, and they're continuing to pay education tax.

And then, again, of course, the third one of balancing the budget. We look at the minister going ahead and promising the 2 per cent increase to school divisions. At the same time—you know, \$23 million—at the same time, we're realizing that he's also telling school divisions that they have to balance their books, where I don't see this government leading by example. Again, where \$300 million and change—we're going to run a \$300-million-and-change deficit this upcoming year, 2014.

School divisions are mandated to balance their books. Two per cent increase—the minister has been on record saying that he feels that school divisions have more than enough money to operate. And it's interesting, because it seems that a lot of school divisions within the province are seeming to have a different opinion than the minister.

They're—we've seen 11 teachers already fired. I'm putting that directly on the minister's shoulders, because he turns around and says on how many they've hired. Well, due to the K-to-3 class size

initiative, well, what are we looking at? We're looking at our PISA scores, numeracy and literacy, we're near the bottom of the barrel for Canada, and it's not seeming like we're getting any better. You know, if he wants to hire teachers, he could go to a 10-to-1 ratio, and then he could pat himself on the back for hiring more and more teachers. That's not necessarily going to get our students ready for the world of work.

I know that he belongs to a government where back in the early '90s, his back-then premier had promised that when they won, they were going to guarantee that all students at the—in grade 3 were going to be able to read and write and do math and have competency in numeracy and literacy skills. And I would just like to know how they're going to do that.

And, unfortunately, I just wish that this Minister of Education would've gone door to door and be up—been upfront and honest with those people in the constituencies and saying, hey, look, we're—when we get elected, you know, I know the Premier's saying he's not going to raise taxes, but we're actually going to raise it to 8 per cent. And, with that, they're also going to raise it to 9 per cent.

So I would just like to know what the minister's opinion is on that.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 14, 2014

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Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry Wishart; Irvin-Ross	1856	ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Manitoba Hydro Expansion Plan Eichler; Struthers	1856	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
		Committee of Supply (Concurrent Sections)	
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