

Fourth 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	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	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, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 20, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 27—The Veterinary Medical Amendment Act

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (Mr. Kostyshyn), that Bill 27, The Veterinary Medical Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Manitobans count on a pet as part of their family. Taking a pet into a veterinary clinic can be emotional and stressful. Bill 27 will help pet owners to ensure that they get a clear upfront price for veterinary care and don't face any extra charges or surprise fees. The bill also modernizes the legislation that allows veterinarians to incorporate their practice and strengthens the role of the regulator.

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.

Bipole III Land Expropriation—Collective Bargaining Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by D. Fischer, R. Wiens, L. Wiens and many more 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.

Rights of Manitoba Children

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

Instead, many children in Manitoba, especially those in the child-welfare system, reveal they sometimes feel they have no say in what happens to them.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to

ensure that all—that the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and that the opinions of children are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

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

This petition's signed by D. Sperling, C. Reenz, E. Ayoub and many more concerned Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Just as a reminder, before I recognize the honourable member for St. Paul, that when members are reading petitions they're not to add editorial comments, please.

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

* (13:40)

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

This is signed by S.L. Leung, J. Ginter, I. Ginter and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

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 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 R. Stefaniuk, D. Stefaniuk, M. Mickey and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Employment and Income Assistance—Rental Allowance Increase

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:

(1) The rental allowance for people on Employment and Income Assistance, EIA, in Manitoba has remained relatively—remained

effectively flat for over 20 years, even while the cost of renting a home has steadily increased.

(2) Despite the many calls from the official opposition caucus, individuals and community groups, and despite the fact that the very same recommendation was made in the final report of the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Phoenix Sinclair, the provincial government has failed to protect the most vulnerable Manitobans by refusing to raise the rental allowance portion of Employment and Income Assistance to 75 per cent of the median market rent.

(3) Fewer dollars to use for rent forces Manitobans receiving EIA to live in a substandard, overcrowded and unsafe condition.

(4) Fewer dollars available for EIA recipients to rent safe and hygienic housing means increased pressure on food banks, the health-care system and other services as Manitoba families have to divert money for food and other critical necessities to pay for the rent.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Jobs and Economy to increase the rental allowance for EIA recipients to 75 per cent of median market rent so that the EI recipient can secure clean, safe and affordable housing without sacrificing other necessities such as food and medical expenses.

And this petition is signed by S. Stein, A. Ruttan, D. Funk and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route—Information Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating-current transmission line set to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

(2) The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 and 60 metres and be located every four to five hundred metres.

(3) The preferred route designated for the line will see the hydro towers come in close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternative route that was also considered.

(4) The alternative route would have seen the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and eventually terminate at the same spot at the US border.

(5) The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

(6) Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing represented the least intrusive option to residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

This petition is signed by J. Schreyer, P. Slobodzian, C. Slobodzian and many more fine Manitobans.

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

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

There are currently 125 licensed personal-care-home beds across Manitoba, consisting of less than 10,000 beds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

And this petition is signed by S. Cure, B. Bondzuk, S.L. Mancheese and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

* (13:50)

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

And this is signed by R. Van Kleek, S. Burgess, V. Bertram and many others, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I'd like to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by L. Shao, S. Symchych, D. Harvyl and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports?

TABLE OF REPORTS

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I'd like to table the Estimates books for the Department of Education and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Speaker: Further tabling of reports?

Hon. Erna Braun (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Today I would like to table the 2014 Workers Compensation annual report, including 2014 Appeal Commission and Medical Review Panel annual report, 2014 Fair Practices Advocate annual report, the Workers Compensation Board five-year plan for the years 2015-2019.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

Seeing none, we'll move on to ministerial statements.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Before oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Collège Béliveau teacher Joël Tétrault, along with students Erik Houston, Connor Lavery, Danika Fran and Cody Acres, all of whom are the guests of the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Jha).

And also seated in the public gallery we have with us today from Border View school 10 grades 6 to 10 students under the direction of Walter Wiebe, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

EIA Housing Allowance Implementation Timeline

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): All of us here care deeply about the plight of our more vulnerable citizens, and this is why we have advocated in the official opposition for three years now for an increase in the EIA rental allowance, advocated by Make Poverty History, an organization that has done excellent work in bringing together broad cross-sections of public opinion and through its efforts has, I think, made a tremendous contribution to Manitoba and particularly those more vulnerable in our society.

So I wanted to offer our thank you to the government for acting, finally. They have not acted but committing to act, I should explain, Mr. Speaker, committing to act on increasing the rental allowance.

And I'd also like to specifically, because it takes all of us working together at times to achieve these things, I'd like to also offer a specific thank you to the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) for making this part of her leadership campaign effort and for bringing the issue forward.

I'd like to ask the Premier if he would also like to commit to a specific date for the introduction of the increase in the housing allowance today.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I think I heard the member ask me when the Rent Assist program would start its increases. We've proposed July, Mr. Speaker, early part of July for the first tranche

and a subsequent tranche later on in the fall, subsequent, of course, to the members opposite allowing the budget to pass.

And we look forward to them co-operating on that, because we know that the Rent Assist program is an important part of our jobs strategy. It provides people with the support they need to get training and skills as well as move into employment opportunities. We know it provides them support to have access to market housing in the private sector, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to the members opposite passing the budget to support that initiative.

Mr. Pallister: Well, to be fair, Mr. Speaker, there were three years there where the government didn't listen, didn't act and didn't include any increase in the EIA rental housing allowance in any of their budgets, and so, of course, we'd have mixed feelings about supporting any endeavour that the government would commit to when they failed to demonstrate any real compassion for the most vulnerable people in our society.

That being said, though, I would also like to add our thanks and congratulations to the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), who made this part of his platform as well. We appreciate that. Thank you.

There are times when it takes advocacy from the opposition to assist, but it's—most certainly it does also take, many times, to get things done, support from within the government caucus, and I appreciate the support of the two members I referenced and other members in the caucus as well who also advocated for some time. I know the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) has claimed that he advocated for this issue as well, though we've seen no evidence of that whatsoever.

I'd ask the Premier also to acknowledge that this is, as documents have now been tabled, this was a position of our opposition party for some three years, and he still has failed to act on it and fails to commit to acting on it even today.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased to introduce the Rent Assist program. It's a very strong complement to the social housing units we've built in Manitoba and the affordable housing units in Manitoba. It's particularly helpful to working families, families that continue to get training and skills and enter the labour market.

And I have to say it contrasts very dramatically with what the Leader of the Opposition proposed. The Leader of the Opposition wanted to build a

wall-wanted to build a wall-around people with social assistance, because under his program that benefit would not be available to people that were entering the workforce, Mr. Speaker. The minute they left social assistance, under his proposal, and entered the workforce, they would be cut off benefits.

Our program is dramatically different. It's available to everybody in the labour market. It's available to people moving off social assistance, and I encourage the members to take the enlightened approach and vote for it as quickly as possible in the budget.

NDP Political Staff Severance Packages Request for Identity of Legal Adviser

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the most unenlightened approach possible is the one the government has pursued by jacking up PST and fees, disproportionately hurting our low-income families and low-income people in our province.

Now, in respect of this departure tax, the Premier is claiming that he did not decide to offer six-figure severance payments. He claims he's not responsible for paying these staffers to leave our province. His lawyer apparently made him do it, Mr. Speaker, but who is this lawyer, and who is this lawyer who's so very generous with taxpayers' money? Since neither the Premier or the NDP are responsible for making these payments, perhaps they do not care, but Manitobans who were asked to pay \$670,000 do care and they want some answers from this Premier.

Since there are no answers forthcoming from this Premier, would he at least today tell us the name of this lawyer who has advised him to give away \$670,000 to his former NDP friends? Who's the lawyer?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite was part of a government that clawed back the Child Benefit from all the families on social assistance, and when we came into office we made that benefit available to every family in Manitoba regardless of their source of income, including people on social assistance. That benefit is worth over \$50 million and the members opposite voted against it. It's no wonder they want to avoid their reactionary policies on social assistance, because they do not make support available to working families.

* (14:00)

They do not make support available to families who want to get education and skills. They do not want to vote for our budget even though they know there will be more support for families to get the good jobs that are available in Manitoba under our infrastructure program, which they also do not support. They do not want 60,000 jobs to be created under our infrastructure program. They said they would roll that back. Let them explain that to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

NDP Leadership Candidates Guarantee to Support Staff

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): This year's budget contains \$500 million just in broken-promise additional taxes levied on Manitobans. Each and every Manitoban is being asked to fund this government's pre-election bid with dollars taken from their kitchen table, and meanwhile the Premier's in hiding.

Before Christmas, he was very concerned that his staff were supporting other NDP leadership candidates behind his back. But how could he get them to come out and declare themselves? Well, the answer was to guarantee that they could work for any other campaign without fear of reprisal. And right after his wafer-thin victory, pow, housecleaning time.

Now, how can you get away with firing people when you have guaranteed them that you wouldn't fire them just a few weeks before? Well, that's easy. For the Premier, it's easy, simple. Just offer them wads of cash and, poof, no more problem, no more staffers, no more \$670,000 either, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Premier admit that these inflated severance payments were ridiculously high because of his ridiculous promise to the staffers?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite said the following: I am not talking about individual staffers with you guys, and I never will. That was his comment to media. He doesn't want to talk about the staff that have left his employ, but he does want to talk about everybody else's staff. He wants to receive severance payments for himself and former members of the government that he served in, but he doesn't want to talk about it in their case. He does want to talk about it in our case.

When we start actually having a serious debate about social assistance policy, about helping people getting jobs through Rent Assist, through helping people get skills and training, he diverts his attention because he doesn't like the contrast of our policies, which provide people opportunities for work, and his policies, which deny people support when they're seeking work.

The contrast is very clear. His cancellation of the infrastructure program: 60,000 lost jobs. His approach to social assistance reform: less support for people when they want to enter the workforce. No wonder he wants divert attention.

**NDP Political Staff
Responsibility for Severance Packages**

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Tired out government and tired out talking points.

It isn't relevant, of course, the points that the Premier is *[inaudible]* The reality is, we work with donated money in our party, Mr. Speaker. They work with subsidies and still run a deficit in their party.

We're talking about taxpayers' money here today. We're talking about money taken from taxpayers. And the Premier wants to cover up what he did with it. He says he's not really responsible. He says his lawyer said that he had to pay. He says his lawyer makes them go away, these staffers. He said his lawyer did it. We have to get the name of the lawyer to find out who's accountable here.

It's time for the Premier to stop blaming the anonymous, nameless, faceless and, possibly, imaginary legal adviser. This Premier is running away from accountability, frightened by transparency and engaging in a cover-up, and if I'm wrong, he can prove me wrong right now.

Will he stop passing the buck? Will he take full responsibility, personally, for making the decision to pay the \$670,000 in departure tax money?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite received \$77,700 in severance from the government of Canada. He received \$22,000-plus in severance from the government of Manitoba. Former staffers in the government he represented when he was in this Legislature in his last incarnation received \$1.2 million in severance. But when it comes to talking about his individual staffers, he goes on the record and say, I'm not

talking about individual staffers with you guys. It's a double standard.

He wants to talk about everything about his own behaviour. He wants to talk about everything about his own failed policies for the future of Manitoba. He wants to cancel hydro build for export; there we go, another 10,000 jobs that disappear. He wants to cancel the infrastructure program; whoops, another six–59,000 jobs have disappeared. He doesn't want to talk about his narrow policy on social assistance reform, where ours helps people get jobs and training. Whoops, he doesn't want to talk about that.

Double standards, failed policies. We're building a better–

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

**City of Winnipeg
Job Growth Rate**

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, according to StatsCan, since 2009 when this Premier first became the leader of his party, Winnipeg's job growth is second last in Canada.

I'd like to ask the minister responsible for the City of Winnipeg, the member for Brandon East: Will he admit that under the leadership of his Premier, Winnipeg, once again, is dead last in our country?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): Mr. Speaker, our government is privileged to work with the City of Winnipeg in its new administration under Mayor Bowman. We're seeing Winnipeg undertake a new wave of enthusiasm. Our government's working very closely with Winnipeg to provide prosperity for the city, to grow the city. We have collective aspirations to grow Winnipeg to a million people, and we're the government that's going to do it with the city of Winnipeg.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, almost dead last in Canada is hardly something to be proud of and it hardly shows leadership.

Since this Premier first became leader of his party, not only is our city ninth out of 10 major cities in job growth, but Winnipeg's employment rate experienced the greatest decline in all major cities in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister just admit that his risky pay-more-get-less policies are having a negative impact on our city?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): Private sector forecasters, Mr. Speaker, continue to say the same thing. There's more people working in Manitoba, including Winnipeg, now than ever before. They're making more money now than ever before.

In fact, you've got to listen to Rosemary Sparks, executive director of BuildForce Canada: There's never been a better time to get involved in the trades in Manitoba.

Or you can listen to Michael Legary and Dave Angus and they'll tell you, at one time, when members opposite were in government, you looked at Adelaide Street, people saw it as a place of hardship. Now it is called Innovation Alley, one of the most exciting places to be in our city.

At any time members opposite want to come down to Innovation Alley and see why Winnipeg is seen as leaders when it comes to start-ups, I'd be willing to take them down for a coffee. Come down to see Startup Winnipeg and the amazing—

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

Mrs. Stefanson: There seems to be a dispute over the facts, and I'll take Stats Canada facts over their facts any day.

Mr. Speaker, since this Premier (Mr. Selinger) first became leader of his party in 2009, not only is Winnipeg second last in job growth and not only has Winnipeg experienced the greatest decline in employment rate, but Winnipeg also holds the title of second largest increase in the unemployment rate in Canada.

Will the minister just admit that his Premier's leadership has resulted in a negative outcome for our city when it comes to job growth and the employment rate?

Mr. Chief: Seen as leaders in the country on jobs, seen as leaders in the country on wages, private forecasters saying we're going to have one of the strongest economies this year and in the years to come.

You know, members' opposite message to young people has been clear: they should give up and move to Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here's what young people tell us: that they're proud of who they are, they're proud of where they come from, they're proud of their

hometowns, they're proud of their home province, and they want to give back.

Mr. Speaker, this coming summer, because we increased minimum wage, we'll have more young people working this summer than ever before. We'll have more young people making more money than they have ever before and they'll work more wages—more weeks than they ever have. We continue to stand with young people. We continue to stand with businesses.

Members opposite should know there's always a right time to do the right thing, and they should support this budget.

Infrastructure Projects Legal Disputes

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): And those young Manitobans will be paying more taxes than ever before to this NDP government.

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker, I was shocked, as were many Manitobans, when this minister indicated last week that it's not unusual to have legal disputes in large construction projects; maybe in this minister's world, maybe in the Manitoba NDP world, but not in the real world. In the real world, major projects are completed on time, on budget, with no lawsuits. Close by, the Chief Peguis Trail is a fine example.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba NDP has experienced lawsuits with the stadium, Primera construction, the Jockey Club, numerous flood-related lawsuits from the floods of 2011 and '14.

Is this the norm in the minister's world, another indication that Manitobans are paying more and getting less?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. I—this is a rhetorical question. I don't expect members opposite to answer this, but what major construction project did they actually build when they were in government? This is a trick question, because even they have no answer. There was none.

And, indeed, we've seen historic investment in our highways. We've seen an historic investment in terms of flood protection, more than a billion dollars.

But I thought the ultimate last week was when the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) accused us of being the get-'er-done party. Mr. Speaker, we are the get-'er-done party.

Mr. Helwer: Well, there's another lawsuit in action. A trademark will be—have to pay on that one.

The minister and his government seem to be a magnet for lawsuits. Such waste threatens essential front-line services as the NDP wastes money and resources defending the NDP's action or inaction on files. The minister has admitted he expects to be sued. Mr. Speaker, that is not normal.

Is that why the NDP paid \$670,000 in hush money to its former staffers, so that they would not sue?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to stress one thing. I did reference the fact that in some cases we have engaged in legal action. The south Perimeter bridge is a good example of that. When we don't get what we expect in the way of quality of work, if it's not done on time when there are schedules, we will take legal action. So it is fairly standard.

But one of the other key things you need, Mr. Speaker—again, members opposite, perhaps, wouldn't know about this—you also need the resources to do it. And I know, by the way, that they know nothing about this, because whenever we brought in a budget, as this past budget did, that's put in place the resources that we need to build those projects, guess what they do? They vote against it.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, at this point it must be a relief for this minister when a day goes by without a new lawsuit. In contrast, his predecessor, the current Minister of Agriculture, was not sued—was—while he was the minister responsible for MIT.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, Manitobans are tired of the same old NDP broken promises and want a change for the better.

Can this minister inform the House: What will be the next lawsuit involving this tired NDP government?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can also inform the member again, and I realize that the member opposite doesn't have much experience with this, but I'll tell you what makes a great day for those of us on this side of the House: seeing things like Highway 1. And perhaps the member opposite may have noticed the new sign on the side of the road; it's got one, one, zero on it. It was this government that upgraded the highway, four-laned to the border, and he can even get home to Brandon a little bit faster.

Unfortunately, once again, he never voted for any of that.

Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin Operation of Emergency Channel

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend saw widespread flooding of farmland, First Nations and other properties around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

Mr. Speaker, who are the NDP blaming for their mismanagement this time? Is it the fault of the feds, the flood victims themselves or Mother Nature?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear, and I'm surprised the member opposite would've referenced there First Nations or the federal government. We've worked co-operatively with the federal government on the flood file.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it may come as a bit of a surprise to members opposite, but when it came to, for example, building the emergency outlet, we had full co-operation from the federal government. We're still waiting for the cheque in the mail for the cost of it, but I want to stress that we did work very co-operatively.

And I want to put on the record, too, that it's this government that not only built the emergency outlet but put significant resources into protecting people in and around the lake. We're engaged now in an additional outlet from Lake Manitoba and a permanent outlet from Lake St. Martin.

Again, I mentioned this earlier, we are the get-'er-done government, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to flood protection, we're the get-'er-done government.

Mr. Briese: They supposedly built it, but then they never use it. Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin are both still well above recommended operating levels and have been for four years, since 2011.

When will this NDP government stop making useless promises and actually take some action that will result in Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin returning to normal operating ranges?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure what the member's referring to, because it's certainly not a useless promise to commit like we did in the first decade of our government where we invested \$1 billion in flood protection to make the top priority Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

We've already built the emergency outlet from Lake St. Martin and, by the way, it has been

operating. We are also now working on the final designs in terms of the outlet from Lake Manitoba and the permanent outlet from Lake St. Martin. We're working as well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the Assiniboine valley. We're working in terms of southwest Manitoba. We're working around this province because we are the get-'er-done government when it comes to flood mitigation.

Mr. Briese: Well, an awful lot of noise and no action.

The NDP promised that the emergency channel would alleviate the high-water problems of Lake St. Martin, didn't happen. The NDP promised unrestricted flows at Fairford, didn't happen. The NDP promised full compensation for victims of artificial flooding, didn't happen. The NDP promised additional outflow for Lake Manitoba, hasn't happened, and maybe never will.

Mr. Speaker, it's been four years now. My question is simple: When will the empty NDP promises end and when will some meaningful action to lower the high lake levels actually begin?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I noticed the member said cryptically something about the Lake Manitoba outlet might actually not happen. The only way it won't happen is if members opposite were to form government and put in place the cuts in the kind of funding that will be necessary for that kind of investment.

We've invested \$1 billion in our first decade. It's going to take in the range of \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker, with some of the investments we've already put in place.

And in terms of delivering: emergency outlet, done; flood protection in and around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, done; nine stand-alone provincial programs, more than \$1.2 billion in 2011 and significant investments and payouts since then.

In fact, we got further announcements coming up, because when it comes to floods and flood mitigation, much accomplished, but there's a lot more to do.

Headingley Correctional Facility Overcrowding and Safety Levels

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, nine years ago the Headingley Correctional Centre was over capacity by 172 inmates. The NDP minister of Justice at the time, the same NDP Minister of

Justice today, said that it was unacceptable and he would do whatever he could to get it corrected.

According to new information from freedom of information, Headingley was 285 inmates over capacity last month.

Mr. Speaker, why did this Minister of Justice not tell the truth to the hard-working men and women at that facility who are concerned about their safety?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, it's really rich to hear Conservatives lecture anyone in this House about correctional capacity and safety within corrections; the worst jail riot in this province's history and one of the worst in Canadian history happened under their watch.

Ever since, we have been working diligently to ensure that our correctional capacity challenges are being addressed and, indeed, that includes ushering in new approaches and making sure that sometimes it's the problems behind the crime that have to be dealt with. And it's important sometimes that we have to look to see how we can ensure that we don't just put people who are ill into our correctional system over and over again, and that's why we have a mental health court, for one example.

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the honourable member for Steinbach, I want to caution him to pick and choose his words very carefully, please, when he poses his questions to make sure that we use the appropriate and parliamentary language.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, nine years ago the minister said that it was unacceptable how many people were in our correctional system and he was going to fix it. Last month there were 834 inmates at Headingley. That's the highest total in at least the last two years.

Overcrowding has an impact, Mr. Speaker, on those who are housed in the facility, but also those who work in the facility. They've indicated that they're concerned about their safety. They're indicated their concern about the morale of those who are in the facility.

* (14:20)

How many incidents, Mr. Speaker, in Headingley have there been of contraband, of weapons, of drugs that have been found in Headingley in the last two years as a result of overcrowding?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I know the member—I don't know how he has time to put together questions, because he's been writing FIPPA's one after the other. In fact, I—since coming back into the—into this department, I've discovered the research arm for the member for Steinbach is the Department of Justice. If I was still Conservation minister, I'd charge him with overfishing. But the information is at hand, and we'll pursue those questions and answers in—at Estimates.

But, Mr. Speaker, the incarceration rate is showing some improvement and some of the institutions are under capacity, but we have to get to the root. And I know Conservatives, they always talk about the answer to crime being at the courthouse or being at the jail. Those on this side know, yes, more prosecutors—

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

Mr. Goertzen: Members of the government caucus are not embarrassed for that member, but I am embarrassed for him from that answer.

In the last two years, there've been 161 incidents of contraband in Headingley. There've been 186 in the Remand Centre. There's been 187 in the Brandon Correctional Centre. That includes drugs, Mr. Speaker, that includes weapons designed to kill or injure, that includes explosives or bombs.

It's been nine years since this Minister of Justice said that overcrowding was causing a concern for safety of those in the institutions.

Will he not admit that his failure to deal with the problem in the last nine years have put those who are in the institutions at even greater risk today than they were even nine years ago?

Mr. Mackintosh: If the member had read the FIPPA's that our department researched for him and provided to him, he'd realize that the contraband incidents are actually down, Mr. Speaker. He neglected to put that into his question.

I also question any member in the House that gets up and thinks they have an answer on a—on the issue of crime, the challenging issue of crime, when it was this member, Mr. Speaker, who spoke so vociferously and fought tooth and nail against the Auto Theft Suppression Strategy that has reduced auto theft by 80 per cent. He said it wouldn't work, that it was a blame-the-victim strategy. He should get up and apologize right now.

Emergency Medical Services Reports Implementation of Recommendations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, the Paramedic Association of Manitoba released their Quiet Crisis report on the situation of emergency medical services in Manitoba. Six years later, a report in 2013 on the emergency medical services in Manitoba decide to sit—described a situation that was continuing to be so bad that a 'batient'—a basic patient-care record program was removed and never replaced. Still today, only Winnipeg has the EPCR, and after two years after that report we hear that only one of 54 recommendations has actually been implemented.

What has today's NDP government been doing instead of attending to the urgent needs to improve our emergency medical services in Manitoba?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question.

For the record, in 1999, there were 280 paramedics in Manitoba. How many are there today? One thousand five hundred, a dramatic increase. In 1999, in terms of advanced-care paramedics, there were but seven. Today, we have 180, Mr. Speaker, 180. In 1999, 80 per cent of the paramedic workforce were casual or volunteers, some excellent people working very hard to do the job. Today, 70 per cent of the paramedic workforce is full-time employees. Those are very significant increases in resources.

And I can say this: The emergency dispatch centre in Brandon has been completely rebuilt and outfitted with modern technology. The fleet of ambulances throughout the province, Mr. Speaker, has been modernized and updated and outfitted with GPS technology.

We have made very significant investments in paramedic services in Manitoba. The numbers speak for themselves.

Paramedic Services Critical Incident Reporting

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): But is it working, Mr. Speaker?

The 2013 report was very critical of the variation in services and the lack of provincial oversight. The large salary differential between rural and Winnipeg paramedics is creating major inequities and problems. On page 14 of the report, it is blunt and it says there is no accountability.

Can the Premier explain to the Legislature why in 16 years of today's NDP government there is still no standardized approach to the reporting of critical incidents and near misses in the work of paramedics throughout the province? This is vital so that problems can be identified and improvements made.

Why is it not standardized? Why is it not easy to do all over the province?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, there's—we've gone from 280 paramedics in Manitoba to 1,500, from 80 per cent casual and volunteers to 70 per cent full time. A new fleet, new dispatch mechanisms and critical incident reporting never existed under the members of the opposite—of the opposition. They didn't have a critical reporting incident system in Manitoba. We have that system now. That system provides information on how to improve health-care services. It is a very important part of the process and we always look for ways to continue to improve that system so we can offer better quality services to people everywhere in Manitoba.

Mental Health Supports

Mr. Gerrard: But, Mr. Speaker, for paramedics the system is not working properly.

In—the 2013 EMS report conveyed concerns about long shifts and the risk of individuals being overly tired. In fact, the problems with the whole system are so severe and so far-ranging that the mental health status of paramedics and the lack of available psychological support has become a major concern. Yet little action has been taken to ensure the health and safety of our overworked paramedics is paramount.

Why has the Premier and today's NDP government done so little to address the major problems that were unearthed at the time of the EMS review and before that in the Quiet Crisis report of almost 10 years ago?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, 80 per cent of the workforce is full-time now. In 2012, in response to concerns about paramedic fatigue, everybody was brought together around the table, and that included the paramedics themselves, their unions and regional health authorities, and they agreed to work together on how to 'improve' that situation.

I note for the record, we are bringing in legislation announced in the Throne Speech for post-

traumatic stress disorder Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, to cover front-line workers.

But we believe, most importantly, in prevention, Mr. Speaker. We believe in prevention. We believe that we can do things in partnership with the people on the front lines to reduce fatigue, to increase their capacity to provide good services, and we make that commitment and we'll continue to work with them to do those things that will improve the quality of their work and their ability to respond effectively to the public.

École Noël-Ritchot New Renovation Project

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, unlike when the opposition had their time in power and education was facing rollbacks and zeros, and 700 teachers lost their jobs, our government is investing in schools and communities.

In St. Norbert, schools are the heart of the community and the key to creating a bright future for our children. Today we were joined by parents, teachers and the principal of the school, the minister and the Premier for a wonderful announcement at École Noël-Ritchot.

I'm wondering if the minister can inform the House of what that announcement was.

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I was joined by the Premier and my friend from St. Norbert, as well as the school principal, officials from DSFM, teachers, parents and, of course, an enthusiastic group of students who were very pleased to hear about our announcement, announcing a major new renovation for École Noël-Ritchot school.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what this expansion includes: two new kindergarten classrooms, five new grade-school classrooms, a new gymnasium, a new music room, new washrooms, a changing room with barrier-free access and a child-care centre that has 74 spaces for infants and preschool-aged children.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we continue to invest in education to ensure our young people have opportunities in the future. On the opposite side of the House, they want to cut a half a billion dollars—

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

Minnesota Transmission Line Release of Information Request

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I have petitioned the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to provide an explanation regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for this Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line.

When will the minister release this information?

* (14:30)

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): I rose in the House yesterday to address this very issue, Mr. Speaker. This was done over a long period of time and—[interjection] I will try again.

The project is strongly supported by Minnesota Power, who's also done a great job in shepherding it through their own Assembly or their own Senate in the State of Minnesota. And on May 14th, just a little while ago, the project cleared a major hurdle by receiving a certificate of need by Minnesota Public Utilities Commission people.

Now, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this was something that was recommended by the Public Utilities Board and NFAT here in the—

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

Costs to Manitobans

Mr. Smook: This NDP government interfered with Bipole III, and we know that cost Manitobans billions more. Is the same interference affecting the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line?

Manitobans are tired of paying more and getting less.

How much more are Manitobas—Manitobans paying for this government's mismanagement of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Robinson: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, on the 14th of 2014, the White House issued a press release in which President Obama called the project a leading example of building 21st-century infrastructure.

Now, what the member has asked me as well involves another aspect of hydro initiatives, and adding to it is the Bipole III. And I don't believe I have enough time to go through the many efforts that Manitoba Hydro has done in involving the

community and advising the community and landowners, First Nations and other people that are interested in this project. Let me start, Mr. Speaker—

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

Mr. Smook: I have constituents from La Verendrye and Dawson Trail contact me with concerns and complaints about the intrusiveness of the preferred route.

This Hydro Minister and this—his NDP government are not listening to Manitobans.

What is this minister hiding?

Mr. Robinson: Well, I'm not hiding anything, Mr. Speaker.

Let me advise the other side that in 2013, Manitoba Hydro, in fact, launched a series of open houses and workshops to engage the public on a proposed Manitoba-Minnesota transmission project. Beginning in January 2015, a preferred route has been presented to the public, and this is what is being discussed at the current time. Now, until the environmental impact statement is filed with Hydro, it'll continue to accept comments and questions and address concerns from the public and stakeholders, and that's what the member ought to be telling his constituents.

Wellman Lake Campground Staff Office Hours—Victoria Day

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Wellman Lake Campground, located in Duck Mountain Provincial Park, is an absolute jewel. As the minister can see on the attached campground maps I'm tabling, the campground office is located at the entrance.

Can the minister advise why he was unable to staff the campground office during this past long weekend?

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I thank the member for the question, gives me the opportunity to put on the record the investments and the commitment that this side of the House has to campgrounds, to parks and so forth, unlike members opposite, in their time in office, put virtually no money into the system whatsoever. I think the public of Manitoba knows which party best serves the people in terms of preservation of entities such as this.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

Komagata Maru

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, on May the 23th, 1914, the SS Komagata Maru arrived at the Vancouver harbour. The ship was carrying 376 immigrants from India, mostly Sikh veterans of the British Army. Aside from the 22 who were deemed returning Canadian citizens, tragically, the other 354 would not get to set foot in Canada. I rise today to commemorate the 101st anniversary of this low point in Canadian human rights history.

For two months, the ship remained docked at the Vancouver harbour. This was due to the continuous journey regulation which was passed by an order-in-council by the Liberal government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1908. These regulations stated that any ship arriving in Canada would have to make a continuous journey from where it started. As there was no direct route from India to Canada, the policy was a way to exclude immigrants from India arriving to Canada.

For those two months, the passengers were denied food and water. They survived with the help of Asian immigrants who had arrived previous to the continuous journey regulations, who took it upon themselves to smuggle supplies to the passengers still on the Komagata Maru.

On July the 23rd, the Liberal Laurier government sent two naval ships to escort the Komagata Maru out of Canadian territory. On the return journey, the ship sailed to India to drop off passengers. A British gunboat intercepted the ship and went to arrest more than 20 of the men that they thought were the leaders. These individuals resisted arrest, and 20 passengers were killed from gunfire.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember this tragedy, but it is also important to reflect how far we have come since then. Across Canada and Manitoba, we have a thriving population of citizens of Indian heritage. They are our neighbours, friends and fellow community builders. Their contributions have helped make this province and country a great place to live.

Today we commemorate this unfortunate and tragic event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Collège Béliveau–Europe Trip

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, earlier this spring, history teacher Mr. Tétrault and 60 students from Collège Béliveau had a trip of a lifetime. They travelled to Europe along with other teachers and parents. Some of them are up in the gallery today.

The trip focused on making the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe and the end of the Second World War. They visited London, the Netherlands and France. The students had the opportunity to tour Winston Churchill's bunker, the British Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park, Anne Frank's home in Amsterdam and the battlefields of Vimy Ridge and Juno Beach.

The students also visited the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. Before they left, each student researched a Canadian soldier who rests there. They also visited the cemetery, and the students were able to visit the grave of the soldiers they had researched.

This trip was a unique opportunity for students to learn and understand more about the Second World War and how about Canadian soldiers would have experienced.

I'm sure that spending 10 days in Europe was a highlight of these young students. It's not every day that you can climb the Eiffel Tower, visit the Versailles palace and stop by Buckingham Palace with friends and classmates.

It is without a doubt that the students will carry both the lessons of the World War II and many memories of travelling with them for the rest of their lives. Thank you, Collège Béliveau and teachers like Mr. Tétrault, who go to the extra mile to organize trips like this one for Manitoba students.

Thank you very, very much.

Cattle Industry in Manitoba

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, 12 years ago today, May 20th, 2003, was the day bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE, or, as the media coined it, mad cow disease, was confirmed in one cow in northern Alberta.

This landmark day changed the entire cattle industry across our country and it is a day I will never forget. In 2003, our farm was heavily into the cattle industry and the uncertainty emanating from this will always remain with me and with people involved in the cattle industry.

A lot has happened to the cattle industry in the ensuing 12 years. The industry has severely contracted, but for those who remain, the cattle industry has finally rebounded with higher prices being paid for their product.

Yesterday, in a related item which has further restrained our cattle industry here in Canada, the World Trade Organization has delivered its final verdict in favour of Canada and Mexico against the US trade barrier country of origin labelling, or COOL, as it is known.

This ruling now allows Canada and Mexico to impose tariffs against the US should the US continue to refuse to amend their anti-free trade legislation.

*(14:40)

Our thanks go to federal Ag Minister Gerry Ritz and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association for their tireless efforts on this file.

Mr. Speaker, the cattle industry remains a vital component of the agricultural sector in Manitoba. Manitoba's cattlemen and cattlemen deserve our respect, as they have taken on the adversities of BSE, COOL, low prices and flooded lands. Manitoba's cattle industry will continue to rebuild, aided by stronger prices and free open trade with other provinces, the US and around the world.

On behalf of the members of this Legislature and all Manitobans, our thank you to the cattle industry for their positive contribution to Manitoba's economy and ecosystem in providing a safe, wholesome food product for all of us to enjoy. Fire up the barbecue.

West Alexander Residents Association

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Multiculturalism and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, the boulevards and parks in the West Alexander neighbourhood are much cleaner lately thanks to the great work of the West Alexander Residents Association or WARA.

Earlier in May they held their 10th annual neighbourhood cleanup. Many local residents came out, as well as volunteers from Canada Helps, to clean up garbage throughout the neighbourhood. By noontime, we had filled every last one of our collection bins. To celebrate the job well done, we gathered for a barbecue afterwards at the Burton Cummings Community Centre, followed by the annual general meeting of WARA. It was a great opportunity for people from our community to mingle and get to know each other.

The West Alexander Residents Association strives to build a sense of community by bringing residents together. Thanks to the work of Kathy Collins, Harold Martinos and many more hard-working volunteers, the West Alexander Residents Association has been making a big difference in our area.

Many of the volunteers at the residents' association also donate their time to the Central Neighbourhood Development Corporation, or CNDC. CNDC serves the central neighbourhoods of West Alexander, Centennial and Central Park. Their community development work focuses on organizing and running programs like Feet on the Street where volunteers walk with young students to and from school. Ever since the CNDC was founded roughly 10 years ago, WARA has been a key supporter of the CNDC's work to help build stronger and safer neighbourhoods in central Winnipeg.

Thanks to the work of organizations like WARA, West Alexander continues to be a wonderful and thriving neighbourhood that many call home. A huge thank you to everyone from the West Alexander Residents Association.

Bill Gendron—Male Coach of the Year

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in appreciation of the outstanding contributions that Manitoba's coaches have made to athletes and sports in our province over many years.

Last month, Bill Gendron, the head coach for the River Heights Speed Skating Club was recognized for his vast contributions and many achievements at Sport Manitoba's Night of Champions. Bill was named the male coach of the year on April 25th at the annual Coaching Manitoba IMPACT Awards. This is a well-deserved recognition for somebody who has served the athletic community as a coach for 11 years.

For over a decade, Bill has been a mentor and a guide for many young athletes. In fact, many young speed skaters from the River Heights club, under Bill's coaching, have been selected for the Manitoba provincial speed skating team and have competed in the Canada Winter Games. The River Heights club has placed more skaters on the provincial team than any other club in Manitoba. There's no doubt Bill's role as an exemplary coach played a key part for Manitoba athletes like Stefan Waples, Elise MacDonald, Andrew Lawler, Kyle Gendron and

Heather McLean who now skate on our national team.

Bill feels that it's very important for all young athletes to play a wide range of sports to develop balance, co-ordination and agility. As an example, Bill has also coached baseball, softball, hockey and cycling. Bill is known for his understanding of the commitments many athletes have outside of sports and has always been accepting that school and family need to come before practice.

Bill is known to go above and beyond the call of duty. In one instance, a family drove from Dryden to find out what to expect if their child joined the Oval Program in Calgary. They were greeted at the oval by Bill with several pairs of skates, and he gave the family a personal hour lesson as well as answered all their questions about the sport.

I'm honoured to stand in the Legislature today to thank Bill for his tireless efforts and expertise in instilling a love of sport in our young Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, we'll move on to orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if we might resolve the House into Committee of Supply, the same places, the Chamber, room 254 and room 255.

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

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections) FAMILY SERVICES

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): This is the Department of Family Services. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My first question deals with the Leadership Council, and I

wonder if the minister can tell us when the last meeting was.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): You have to give me a moment. I can just—I'll just use this handy equipment I have here.

I can tell the member that we have met four times in 2014-2015: May 12th, 2014; November 5th, 2014; December 15th, 2014; April 23rd, 2015. I just want for him to know that I meet on a number of occasions with the grand chiefs and the president and the CEOs, not necessarily always in the formal Leadership Council, but there is a very open-door policy that we have, where we're constantly working together to resolve the issues facing the child-welfare system and to work together.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, I'm going to ask you a question about the role of the Leadership Council as you as the minister see it. I know what's specified in legislation, but the legislation gives some flexibility or interpretation, and so I'd like to—if you, as minister, if you would talk about what you see as the role of the Leadership Council in Child and Family Services.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, since the establishment of the Leadership Council, there has been an ongoing debate, which I am sure the member is very familiar with, about what the role of the Leadership Council is. And it goes long back, many ministers, where the conversation was happening. Right now, the legislation states and refers to it—I'm not sure about the exact wording in the legislation, but that it is an advisory committee, that it is a committee that comes together to talk and reflect about what's happening in the child-welfare system.

I think it is essential when we are talking about Leadership Council and elected officials that we are not involved in the daily operations, that, really, it is about policy development. But I also have encouraged my partners at the Leadership Council table to consider looking at it even broader than that about what are the root causes, what are the issues that are facing families, and why are we seeing the numbers increasing, and why do we have the children in care we do, and what are those solutions to address that.

So we talk on a lot of different topics at our meetings. Often, it's about roles and responsibilities, and we continue to work on a definition of what that will look like. We have very meaningful meetings

around the issue of housing and poverty and at our last meeting had a conversation about how do we move forward and look at putting—implementing traditional ways into the legislation, into policies. A good example of that would be around customary adoptions and having those conversations. So I think as time goes that we evolve, and we are working in a respectful environment. Do we always agree? No. And I think if I suggested that we did, you would call me on that. But we do have conversations that are open and frank and respectful. What we work on every meeting is ensuring that the children are at the centre of our conversation because, really, that's what our responsibility is.

I'm not naive in realizing the pressures that the indigenous leaders feel and the responsibility that they feel as they get the phone calls from the families in the middle of the night and on the weekends. And, because of that, that helps them to inform our table and to move it forward. Our goals at that table, as I've said, are around policy development, supporting the workforce. There is an interest and acknowledgement of what's happening in—for our workforce and what they need. But most importantly, it's how do we better support families across this province so they can care for their children in the way they'd like to.

Mr. Gerrard: So, in brief, you see the Leadership Council as an advisory body, not a decision-making body?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That is the debate that happens at that table. When you read the legislation, the legislation refers to it as a advisory, that there is an interest. And I think you've had the conversations with the Leadership Council members that there is an interest and that it'd be a decision-making body as the legislation is written, as representatives from AMC sat at the table and MMF sat at the table, and MKO, as they developed the legislation with Tim Sale, that is what they agreed to.

So we are prepared to have conversations. There has been multiple conversations about roles and responsibilities. We've developed some new processes that we will have conversations about specific policies and programs or if letting Leadership Council members know if there's going to be an announcement. There was—prior to our public release of the AMR report, we had a briefing with the Leadership Council and made sure that they were comfortable with the direction we were going.

So there are—we're—as I'm saying, we're evolving, and I think that I'm very optimistic about what we're going to be able to accomplish together because we've been able to set aside some of the politics and—that weigh on all of us and put the children in the centre of that table and make some good decisions about how we move forward.

Mr. Gerrard: Over the last few years, the government, first with the Southern Authority, when the government took over the management of the Southern Authority and then more recently the government took over the management of the Northern Authority. Was the Leadership Council convened to discuss the takeover of Northern Authority before it occurred?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: When those decisions are made, those decisions are made after much deliberation. And, as I've said before, the Leadership Council is not a decision-making body. It is not a—the role of the Leadership Council is not the daily operations of the agencies and the authorities, it's the broader policy development that we need to work on. So, no, the Leadership Council was not called upon to be part of that decision. That decision was based on a critical incident that occurred. It required swift action, and the legislation permits the minister of the day to place a agency under administration. It is the last thing that anyone wants to do. Whether you're in the department, in the agency or in the authority, we want them to be independent; we want them to do the good work that they do.

We've had a number of conversations with the Northern Authority prior to taking that action. Grand Chief—[interjection]—Harper—sorry, David—Grand Chief Harper was very aware of the issues that was facing the Northern Authority. We had very frank conversations; you know, it was not a proud day, but it was a necessity that we had to do. I'm confident that we'll be able to resolve the issues and to work with them to get them back independent again.

We have some work to do, but I feel that there is some co-operation that is happening. And you're correct when you asked me that question, it was posed to me at the Leadership Council what their role could've, should've been. And at that time I expressed my desire that it—we needed to make those decisions, and it was a decision that legislatively we're permitted to make and that we can certainly have conversations going into the future about what

is the role and responsibility of the Leadership Council.

I was just going to put on the record what the—how the role of the CFS Leadership Council is defined in the legislation in section 29(2). It says: "The role of the Council is to provide a forum to discuss issues related to child and family services." That's what it says. We've been fulfilling that commitment, but we've also been entertaining with the membership of the Leadership Council how else we can evolve that so that they feel that their voice is being heard and they're able to see the changes that they desire.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, perhaps the—you could talk in more detail about the reasons for taking over the management of the Northern Authority.

* (15:00)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So as I said to the member, that the action of taking the Northern Authority under administration was not taken lightly, that we had worked with them for a number of years around issues, around compliance, with CFIS, with compliance with other standards, and what had happened is that there is a responsibility that the authorities do comply with the CFS Act.

We received a memo from the CEO of the Northern Authority, Mr. Ron Monias, and he had asked for us to provide him with support with the authority and to help him come into compliance with the CFS act. And when we reviewed the concerns that were listed, we felt that it was our responsibility to act immediately and we did place the Northern Authority under administration. Mr. Izzy Frost was appointed as the administrator and is working very well with the CEO as well as with working about how do we move forward and working with the agency as well to ensure that children in the North or with—involved with agencies are still receiving good quality service, that we're working on remedying some of the issues that were addressed or identified, and I'm confident that we will be able to resolve this.

Mr. Gerrard: So in essence, the concerns were around compliance with CFIS. What's the minister's goal and objective, right, in terms of the outcome of the takeover?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm disappointed that I hear the member opposite using the word takeover. That's not at all what it was. Maybe that's what it felt like to some of the board members at the time, and so I will accept that. But the goal is to have a functioning

authority that is supporting the agencies, that is complying to the standards set out with—through Child and Family Services, through the act, and that they're able to provide a good quality service for the children and the families that they represent.

I do not want the record to suggest that it was only compliance of CFIS, that there were a number of other issues that had developed. Prior to taking Northern Authority under administration we had a working table, and I can't—the collaborative working group that met infrequently, but the purpose of that was to address the issues that had been identified.

So I want you to understand that many actions were taken before the step to take the authority under administration. We had tried to work with the board, with the CEO, and it really, as I said, it was a very disappointing day when we had to sign that letter and to inform the board chair that the Northern Authority was taken under administration. I believe and I support that when the administration is lifted and the board resumes responsibility, that it will be a stronger authority that will be able to support the families that it represents and the agencies in which support those families.

I do not want it to be long term. I can't tell you today, if that's your next question about what the timeline is. I think it's really moving towards a way of addressing the issues that have been identified. I know that Mr. Frost is working very diligently with the CEO to identify solutions, and I'm confident that they will happen in the very near future.

Mr. Gerrard: You mentioned working with the board. Perhaps you could describe a little bit more detail what efforts were made to work with the board to sort the problems out.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Since 2011, the department has been providing support to the Northern Authority in different capacities and trying to help them meet the needs of the families that they represent.

In 2012, it was the member from Fort Rouge who established the collaborative working group and that included the—some board members as well. And it was specifically around, how do we move forward? How do we support the Northern Authority? And I think that we've been able to.

Unfortunately, those—the collaborative working group and the other initiatives that we had, we did not get the outcomes that we had anticipated getting and weren't able to have the outcomes. We continue to work with them though but, unfortunately, after

we were approached by the CEO with requesting additional support, the action was required.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the—one of the concerns that I have in discussions with people who are involved in the delivery of services for children in the North through CFS, is that the—some of the problems stem from the provincial government trying to overly micromanage circumstances, and setting rules which make it more difficult for them to work with families and support families. And so, you know, I'm concerned that the direction that the minister may be going is not necessarily going to be one which is going to be better support for families and one which could even, you know, continue the trend of more children being apprehended. So, I—you know, I just express this as a concern that I have heard and a feeling that the micromanaging in a number of ways by the provincial government is not being as helpful as it should be.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The Northern Authority has the same legislation, the same standards and the same responsibility as the other three authorities. There is no difference in how they are treated and what we work. We've had a co-operative, collaborative working relationship with them. I do not accept the reference that it's micromanaging at all. It's about working with them so they can better support their families.

*(15:10)

I will agree with you that providing service in the North presents much different challenges than it does in the south. That I will agree. But we have made some attempts to address those issues. We have great workers that are out in the North that are providing good quality service to families and really being practitioners, very eclectic practitioners, taking on many different roles in a family. And we need to acknowledge that.

You yourself often talk about the Nelson House work that Felix Walker has done. Well, that is making a difference in his First Nations community. And we celebrate the work that he's done and how they've been able to change the tide in Nelson House and have more children living in their homes. And I hope that we're able to do that in many more communities. And I'm confident that by strengthening and supporting the Northern Authority so it can provide the direct support to the agencies, so the agencies can work with the families, we'll see positive outcomes.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean, indeed, it is the fact that there are some successes, and we—I've talked about what's happening in Nelson House, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, and I'm glad that you're also acknowledging the major progress that's been made there.

It is concerns coming from other communities, and it is a feeling that the conditions in the North, that the cultural background and the—what is available to people in the North in the CFS system is, you know, has not been providing precisely the same without any flexibility in terms of some of the standards, for instance, of housing, may be, you know, a little harder, right, to achieve. And, when we're looking at, you know, the resources to make sure that there are beds and adequate housing and so on for every child in the community, that there are certainly some struggles and that, sometimes, that struggle can be better met by addressing the housing than in taking the child away.

And one of the things that Felix Walker has done which has been so successful—in fact, it really was the chief and council, when Jerry Primrose was chief, who got this started, and that was bringing together the—a number of programs, not just child and family services but public health, the counselling services, the child-care services, the FASD program, so that the whole wellness centre could provide much better supports and so we're not needing to apprehend as many kids or put as many kids in care.

And so I would ask what progress has been making—made in other communities to help them move in the direction that has been successful in Nelson House at the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation 'fild' and—family and child wellness centre.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So it is a multi-faceted question which you ask. I think what—I want to go back that your acknowledgement that it is much broader, the child-welfare issue is much broader than CFS, that it includes health, education, it includes good-quality housing. So I want to talk about what we've done across the province around poverty reduction. I think that that is an example of what we've accomplished.

I think in the North you can look at UCN. You can look at the hydro development, the jobs that are being created. You can look at the apprenticeship initiatives that are happening. You can look at the mining academy that's happening in Flin Flon. There are opportunities. And one of the best ways out of poverty and inclusion into a community is a good job. And so those opportunities are being made available.

We have a lot more work to do, and we acknowledge that. We have made commitments of building houses in the North. We have the—we've had some housing that's been built in Thompson and The Pas. Cross Lake is another example where we've been able to build. So we have been addressing those issues.

And like I've said, there's a lot of work, and many partners have to come to the table to help us see the reality of that. So whenever the federal government is willing to sit and talk about the importance of housing, good running water and sewer systems in the North, I think that's one of those pieces that also have to happen.

So we have ongoing conversations with many leaders from the North about their vision and their desire. I don't think I'm speaking out of turn when I say that, you know, we are all very concerned about what's happening and that it needs to change. There is lots of conversations among agencies around best practices.

I think that there are a lot of good stories that happen in Child and Family Services agencies that we never hear about. We don't hear about the reunifications that happen. We don't hear about the family support that is given to a young mom and a baby so they can stay together and the bond that is developed that lasts a lifetime. Those are stories that need to be told, and I look for that opportunity where we are able to share those stories and to celebrate the success because in amongst all of the multiple issues that are facing the families and the crisis that the families are in and the tragedies that have happened, that there are some successes.

We welcome any proposal, any opportunity to see change. The authorities and the agencies are able to implement new initiatives if they want to, if they see fit. We challenge the innovation because really that is how we're going to make a significant change in the system. That's why I get up every morning, because I still have hope that there's an opportunity for change. And some days are harder than others, I'll admit, but I am optimistic and that there are some really good people that work and have worked for many years in this field and are committed to seeing a difference.

So it's everyone working together to support families, it's addressing the root causes. I'm—we've had the privilege—one of the Hughes inquiry recommendations was that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) take the issue of child welfare to the

Council of the Federation last summer. And he was successful of getting it on the agenda and had a—quite a robust conversation. And following that conversation, there was a commitment made by the premiers that we would have a national committee that would look at what is the issue about Aboriginal children in care because, yes, it's an issue in Manitoba, but it's an issue in other provinces and territories as well. So I have the privilege of co-chairing that with Premier McLeod, and we are in the process now of finalizing the report to table at the premiers' meeting.

So I'm hopeful that there are some best practices that can be shared that will give us some insight of what we need to do differently to support families so kids can stay within their family unit and within their community, because that's where they will, for the most part, flourish. The child-welfare system is not a system that was developed to raise families and children. It's really about families, so that's where we need to go.

Mr. Gerrard: Just—I'm a very strong believer in the importance of, you know, addressing poverty so that we decrease the amount of 'poverty' and the importance of that in making a difference in the lives of children and families.

That being said, if one looks at Nelson House and what's happening with the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation family and child wellness centre and you look at other communities, you know, I'm not convinced that the amount of poverty in Nelson House is actually less or more than the other communities.

So I really feel quite strongly that there are possibilities of actions which are not necessarily dependent on addressing poverty and that we—can be taken within the existing child and family services system without having to, you know, address the sweeping question of poverty. And, because much as I think that we should be addressing poverty at the same time, that I also think that we shouldn't be—lose the focus, right, of how we address child and family services and be able to better support families.

* (15:20)

Now, I want to come back to the Northern Authority, right, and the fact that the government is now administering the authority, and I'm just seeking clarifications on what the minister feels needs to be achieved before the authority can be turned back to the board of the authority to manage and run the authority.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's—there are specific issues that have been identified that we need to ensure that they are resolved, that we have confidence that the authority has in place a strategy to ensure the implementation of standards. And I just threw out the one standard around CFIS, as an example, but there are other standards that we are concerned about, the implementation and also the support that they're able to provide the agencies. I strongly believe that with the support of Izzy Frost that—and the CEO of, Ron Monias, that we'll be able to address them and to get them out of administration as soon as possible.

I support devolution 100 per cent, and having an authority in administration is not us moving forward. And we have a responsibility, though, when we see that an authority is struggling and needs support, and they ask for that support that we're available for them. And so that's what we've done, but it is not a long-term strategy that we have in place. Really, the goal is to get them independent as soon as possible.

Mr. Gerrard: Perhaps the minister could clarify what the role of Ron Monias is in this.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Ron Monias is the chief executive officer for the Northern Authority, and he is responsible for daily operations. He works in partnership with Izzy as far as looking at what are the policies or the standards that need to be moved forward, implemented.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, I'm a little bit concerned about a situation where an organization, in this case, Ron Monias came to the minister and asked for help. And the reason is that, for instance, if you have a situation where the response to asking for help is to take over and administer the whole organization from a government perspective instead of the board, that it raises some questions and concerns about organizations coming to government asking for help, if this is the response of government.

You know, for instance, I have received significant concerns, is the Metis Authority going to be next? Are they going to be taken over?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I want to assure the member that this was not a decision that happened quickly or overnight. This was an authority that we had—concerns had been identified to us and we had, since 2011, had been working to address them. By the time we got there—when Ron Monias approached us, it was very clear that there still was a lot more work to do and that we felt that because of his concerns and his request, that we needed to take action. We took it

very, very seriously when we made that decision. It is not what we want to do. Authorities, they have their roles and responsibilities in order to support the legislation as well as supporting the agencies that support the families. I have a lot of confidence in the work that the authorities are doing and the progress that they have made in the creation, really, of a new system. And I believe that we'll continue to work with the authorities and provide them with the support when they require it. And, like I said, I have confidence that they'll be able to work with the agencies. I also have confidence that we'll be able to resolve the issues at the Northern Authority in the short term.

Mr. Gerrard: Should the people within the Metis Authority be concerned about coming to the minister to ask for help, that the minister may takeover or become the administrative managers of the Metis Authority?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I have ongoing conversations with President Chartrand about what is happening in the child-welfare system. He—I'm not sure he'd like me to say he asks for help, but we have conversations about how do we strengthen the system, frequently, and we'll continue to have those conversations. I don't think that there is any fear by either the CEO of the Metis Authority or President Chartrand himself about approaching and having a conversation. I hope that we have one of a trusting and respectful relationship and believe that we can truly make a difference for the children that are being served within the whole entire child-welfare system amongst the authorities and the 22 agencies that represent them.

Mr. Gerrard: Let me move on to another area.

In the Children's Advocate report on children with complex needs, the report stresses the need for and the importance of psychological help and counseling because many of these children are traumatized in one way or another and for a variety of reasons. That report basically stressed the need to make sure that counselling and psychological services were available for children and families.

What's the state of implementation of this part of the report on complex needs from the minister's perspective?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So there is a multi-faceted approach as we have acknowledged earlier in my responses, and in your questions you also acknowledge that the solution is outside of the child-welfare system as

well. So really, it is about working with our health partners, our education partners, so I cannot directly speak to those initiatives because we are here in the Family Services Estimates, but what—I think that you're familiar about the \$2-million commitment that we made for the new child and youth mental health strategy. I think that that is a significant contribution, it's a multi-year strategy so it will be phased in over—how many? It will be phased in over a number of years and we'll be looking at not only prevention but also how do we deal with the children with complex needs.

There are some specific examples where we have the northern Mobile Crisis Team to assist youth. We also have—we are delivering trauma-informed training to our front-line staff as well as our foster parents, and that is going to make a difference, I believe. There has been investments in suicide prevention, Reclaiming Hope is another one of the initiatives that we were doing, and I think a really good example is our partnership with Macdonald Youth Services, Winnipeg School Division and the COACH's program where we're providing support to children between the age of five and 12 in a classroom setting, in an educational setting that have had limited success to date within the education system, but because of our one-on-one intervention, it's one coach per child and the coach is not only supporting the child, he is also working directly with the families. I heard stories yesterday of coaches taking children to swimming lessons, but not only driving the child to the swimming lessons also the parent to swimming lessons and the role modelling that happens.

* (15:30)

So I have had conversations with the Children's Advocate around the complex children and the issues that face them and our responsibility, but our collective responsibility to address them. So I am very fortunate that I have a strong partnership with the ministers of Children and Youth Opportunities as well as Healthy Living, and we're looking at how do we further addiction and mental health treatment and address those issues. There are a number of service providers that provide daily care and supervision for the children, and I think I've listed a few of them, but I, you know, I think Marymount and New Directions and Knowles and Macdonald Youth Services are strong examples.

But we don't stop there. We also have the specialized foster parents that have specialized

training and that are able to provide support for the children.

But, you're right. It's about providing them with support in the home, but also in the education system, in the community, and helping them to launch into adulthood and to be successful. That's truly what we want for all of our children.

Mr. Gerrard: Perhaps the minister could provide some insight in this way: What proportion of the almost-11,000 children in CFS care are now receiving some form of psychological counselling or help?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I would not have that number on me today. I apologize for that. I will—as you know, the system is devolved and there are agencies that were responsible for the children. So it would take a while to develop that information. I will see if we can acquire it off of CFIS. If there's a way to do that, I can offer to do that, but I will report back to you in the next time we're in Estimates.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the—I mean, I think it's—well, the obvious concern in terms of traumatization of children is the trauma that comes through child abuse of one sort or another. But I think that the less well-appreciated, but which may actually be as important in many ways, is that, well, first of all, a lot of the children are there because of neglect because the housing and the food and so on, the parents are not able to provide it adequately, even though they may be very loving parents, right?

But one of the, you know, things that I have found in helping mothers and families and children who are dealing with issues related to children being put in CFS care is that there is often major trauma which occurs when you remove a child from the family, right, and that this trauma—many of the parents, though they may not be perfect, are loving parents and they may be doing their best under often difficult circumstances, and that one of the things that we need to, I think, much better appreciate, is the extent of traumatization when a child is removed from, you know, their normal surroundings, their parents, their family, their friends, and put, you know, in care, whether that care be, you know, in a foster home or in a group home or, as occasionally has occurred recently, in hotels.

So what is the minister and the approach—what's the approach being taken to address the trauma when children are apprehended and put into care?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'd like to go back a step and talk about the prevention that needs to happen about children not coming into care and how that is so important that we are able to provide the supports within the home. I agree with you that many, many parents that are involved in the child-welfare system, they love their children just like we love our children. And they want the best for their sons and daughters, and sometimes circumstances and stressors and health issues prevent them from being able to provide that. And the trauma that they themselves experienced related to colonization, residential schools and the '60s scoop, we have to acknowledge all of that. There is a healing that needs to happen and we need to provide that. It needs to happen in the family, for the generation today, but the generation for tomorrow. There's a lot of pain that has to be healed. And I wish I had the answer and I wish it was easy; it's not. It's, again, all of us working together, but I think it's looking at where there are opportunities and where there are communities that are—example like Nelson House, when they're able to identify a new way of doing business and to see the impact.

We have a pilot project—two pilot projects that we're working on. One is with Sagkeeng First Nation and with Sagkeeng Child and Family Services agency with the Southern Authority, and it was initiated by Justice Roller and Justice Champagne. They approached us at Family Services and said, you know, we just see this revolving door happening and I think we can do a better job, and you yourself know that once you get into the court system, you'll lose—you can lose months and sometimes a year before actions are being taken, and that's not okay, and that contributes to not only the trauma for the child but the trauma for the parents.

And so we have what we call the circle of caring, and it is a voluntary process. When a child is apprehended in Sagkeeng now, a family is provided with the opportunity to participate in the circle of caring. And it is one where the justice sits at the table. It is in a circle; it is in a community agency; it's at the health centre, I think, it's where it's hosted. And the parents themselves can identify who are their champions, who are the people that support them the most—families, service providers, whoever they see—and sit down together and talk about what is the plan to get the child back in the home.

I feel that that's a promising practice. I think that it's been happen—it's happened before in our system and we need to support it so it can continue. So I

know that there are many other communities that are watching to see how we—the outcomes from this initiative. And there's an interest in seeing if we can have it across the province or in other communities where they're willing.

There's also a resurgence of a mediation strategy that we are working with. It's a pilot project that we're doing with the Metis Authority, and I think that it's really—in itself it's very promising, and sort of looking at how do we work together in mediating between the family and the agency and finding a path forward that is about reunification and ensuring that there is frequent contact with parents, if that's at all possible, and ensuring those relationships are built.

You spoke about the trauma for the child, and I can tell you from my own experience as a child protection worker and what I was—when I was on the front lines and walking into homes and having those really hard conversations with parents and—but I have to tell you, I walked in with the lens of how do I support you, I'm here to help you. Sometimes people accepted that and sometimes people didn't, just because of the agency or the department that I worked with. But we were able to, in some cases, provide that family with the support they needed, whether it was a family support worker coming in; whether it was addiction treatment; whether it was, as you've identified, the issue of food and security; whether it was connecting them with the local food bank and getting them that service, that food that they needed for themselves and their family.

In some cases, as elders have shared with me, unfortunately you don't have a choice because of the need of the child; because of the need to protect that child, that child has to be apprehended. But we have to make sure that when we apprehend that child that it's done in a way that limits the trauma as much as possible.

* (15:40)

So I have had the opportunity to meet with foster parents, and the foster parents have talked to me about what they do to support the little ones and the big ones that come in the middle of the night. And one foster parent and her sister, they knitted blankets—or in Saskatchewan we call them afghans—and shared them with the child. And some folks are using the teddy bears for them. It's really—and hard for those children to understand. We need to make sure that we're clearly communicating with the children age-appropriately about what's happening, but also what's their rights and their responsibilities.

I meet with children that are in care a number of times, and I hear the stories and the confusion that they feel, but I also hear sometimes that they're grateful that we were there to help them. They love their mom and dad and they want to be back with them, but they understand that at this time it's not the safe place for them.

I think another way of addressing the issue of trauma is making sure that we are providing regular visits and having that contact with their family. It was—when I was at one foster home one evening for dinner, it was really important for the foster mom that she cooked me what she felt to be a culturally appropriate meal, so we had—the kids produced it or made it for us—we had hamburger soup and bannock, and it was kokum's bannock recipe. And that young woman was so proud that she could share it with all of us. It seems like a very small, miniscule thing in the big scheme of life, but I hope that it was one of those moments that she felt respected. And I know that she felt at home with that foster parent.

So apprehension of children is something that I know that workers take very seriously, because they know the impact for the family and for the child.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I think that the—one of the concerns that is raised sometimes about kids who are taken into care is that they are kids with behavioural problems with very complex needs, and I had an interesting conversation with somebody who was working in Child and Family Services who was trying to understand how kids react. And, oh, he had a family with, I think, a couple of teenagers and a healthy family. The kids were doing really well in school. Everything was going fine; there was no problems. And just to sort of get a bit of an understanding how they would feel, he asked his daughter, you know, what would your reaction be if you were taken away from our home—right?—and put in somebody else's care. And his daughter said, well, you know something, dad? I would kick up a huge screaming fuss. I would be the worst possible kid imaginable because that's the best way for me to get back to you, where I should be.

And here you're taking, in this instance, a child who's doing really well, and all of a sudden if you're not careful you're creating a child who's—would appear and would be labelled often as having major behavioural problems with complex needs. And so I think we have to be really careful in terms of, you know, apprehending kids.

Let me move, you know—and this—you know, the family provides some really important support for kids. One of the areas, as the minister knows, I've been very concerned about is the apprehension of babies at birth. And the problem here is that we've got approximately a baby a day being removed from—taken away from their mother or mother and father and at birth or within a few days of birth. And the numbers, you know, are not going down. I mean, we know that from the last number of years from the numbers that we've got and which, in fact, I tabled in the Legislature not—quite recently. And so, clearly what's being done at the moment is not effectively reducing the number of babies which are being apprehended.

There may be some successes here and there, and I mentioned a couple of these to the minister, but when we look at the big picture around the whole province, we are not improving. And so, clearly, we need to make some improvements, you know, province wide.

And so I would ask the minister: What is the minister planning to do that's different from what's happened over the last 15 and a half years, because the last 15 and a half years hasn't seen the change that I believe and many others believe should be happening with fewer children being taken away from mothers and fathers at birth?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So we, again, have initiatives that are involved in our continuum of support and, again, those initiatives happen outside of the child-welfare system. So the Prenatal Benefit is a really good example of the \$80 a month that we provide so a mom, a pregnant mom, can purchase food if that's what she needs—whatever she needs—we don't—whatever she needs to have a healthy pregnancy. The work that we have done around awareness of having healthy babies, the Healthy Baby program itself that is across the province that reduces isolation, provides parenting information and literacy information for families, I think that that's essential. We have what we call the birth alert, which we are now in conversations with our partners in Health and Healthy Child about how do we best use that resource and making sure that we're able to work with that mom and dad prior to the birth of that child and start—if there is a need to develop capacity and support or if there's an issue of housing, issue of food security, securing those basic needs for them and then also providing them with the support.

I think Families First is a really important program that I think you're very well aware of—the extremely well-trained Families First workers that go into the home from zero to five years and provide hands-on support under the supervision of a public health nurse—that that's really very, very valuable support that happens. We also have the—and you've referenced this—the Mothering Project, where there are 50 families that are either in a process of being reunified or are together because of the support that Mount Carmel and the phenomenal women that work in the Mothering Project are doing.

So I think that what the statistics don't tell you is that some of those children will go home, will be successfully reunified with their families, and that's what we'll work towards. But I think, again, it's about doing the—working on the prevention side and providing those services and then, as I mentioned earlier, about the healing, giving that support to the past generation so we can pass on good parenting skills to the next generation.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, I appreciate the efforts that the minister is talking about, but I am concerned that, you know, most of those have been around for a number of years and that they don't seem, by themselves, to have changed the trajectory of what's happening in terms of the number of babies being taken away, and that what is needed is, you know, more focused efforts along the lines of what's happening at the Mothering Project and what's happening at the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, because those both seem to have had some success.

Now, there's one, you know, really, really big difference in the apprehension of a baby compared to the apprehension of an older child, and that is that when you have a mother who is looking after a baby, who is breastfeeding a baby, that this is a time in the infant's life and in the mother's life when, you know, it—the attachment and the bonding occurs and they are so important.

* (15:50)

And when breastfeeding, where it occurs, and, you know—and, in fact, in Manitoba it occurs with the large majority of mothers and babies that—right after birth, that when you apprehend and take away a baby and, for example, I speak to you of a mother who was in hospital, was shocked to find that her baby was to be taken away because there'd been no prior notice that this was even likely. And she, of course, began breastfeeding and was doing really well. And after four days, when she left hospital, the

baby was apprehended and taken away. You know, in this case, the mother, you know, felt very strongly that this was the wrong decision. She, fortunately, had a good lawyer who was willing to work very hard with her, defend her. Six weeks later, the decision was reversed. I mean, it clearly was, in retrospect, a mistake in terms of the baby being taken away.

But the problem is that after six weeks of not being able to breastfeed, she's lost the ability to breastfeed that child completely. Now, I mean, you could argue that, you know, she could potentially have tried to, you know, get the breast milk and get that to the baby but, you know, in fact, she tried that and she was very strongly dissuaded from doing that by the people in the—CFS worker, and was not encouraged. And so six weeks later, she has no ability to restart breastfeeding, and the—you know, the breast milk and the breastfeeding is probably one of the, you know, most significant health benefits that a mother can provide a child, particularly early on. And, of course, it has lifelong benefits, decreasing the incidence of diabetes and heart disease and various other things, probably improving the child's ability to deal with stress.

So, you know, here we have a situation where, you know, it's not as if you can come in and rectify the problem a few weeks later; you've already done a huge amount of damage if you take away a baby when, you know, the mother could've been supported and the mother could've done very well. It's also at a time when the mother has a tremendous stimulus to nurture the baby and to look after that, and if you go in and you take away the child, you can do a tremendous amount of—you know, the mother can spiral downhill, right?

So you have an opportunity to do a tremendous amount of good if you're able to support a mother in looking after the child and breastfeeding the child, and I just think that this is one of the areas where it's tremendously important to put a major focus on changing the pattern that we've seen over the last number of years. I would just stress that to the minister, and maybe you would like to make a comment.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I think that what we have to balance here is, yes, I agree with everything you've said about breastfeeding, attachment, but the underlying issue is the safety of that baby. And our legislation says that safety is first, it's the paramount concern. So we need to work within that legislation. We need

to be able to, if we know that there is a family that is in need, that we're able to wrap around the services that will support the mom and dad but also ensure the safety of that baby.

So Families First, again, is a really good example of that. The family-first program sees 1,500 families across the province, and the research is showing that it is reducing the children in care, it's reducing hospitalization, that it is also, you know, dealing with positive parenting and problem solving and addressing the issue of isolation, which, I think, the member well knows is an impact that happens for some of our families.

But we also have Towards Flourishing, which is a program that is part of Families First but is very specific around postpartum depression and what are the indicators of postpartum depression and starting to work with that family.

Our child-care investments that we've made in this budget, again, 900 more child-care spaces, our interest in developing what we're calling, for lack of a better word, the hub model, which is the Abecedarian, which is operating in Lord Selkirk Park and doing very well. I think you're familiar with it, it's a family resource centre. Its outreach workers and a child-care centre all working as one—looking at expanding that in the near future. So I ask you to stay tuned, and, again, COACH is another really good example of what we've been doing. Our work that we do around choices and the prevention of FASD, and I had talked about the Healthy Baby community support program, since 2004, there's been—33,000 women have participated in that program. So that is making a difference as well as the other supports that happen with the regional health authorities and the work that they do.

So we have work to do. We've identified that as an issue, but, again, our responsibility is the safety of that child. And the Mothering Project as well is working with some of the most complex cases and we're seeing some really good results from them. So I think that it's very promising, that practice. And we need to work with the agencies and with the authorities and community to come up with a plan that we continue to expand those resources for the child.

Mr. Gerrard: The—I mean, there are a lot of programs and there's efforts here and there throughout the province, but until we actually see the numbers of babies being taken away at, or close to, birth and it's—we don't have, you know, credible

evidence that province-wide we're really achieving what needs to be a goal.

Let me move on to talk for a moment about Jordan's Principle. Jordan's Principle was that the child and children in First Nations communities be treated equally with other children and that—make sure that the help and the resources are there and that we're not battling back and forth between governments to be able to, you know, argue about, you know, whose responsibility it is that we actually get down and do the work of making sure that children get the best possible situation. And I'm—I know that after I brought forward legislation in 2008, that the government signed a memorandum of understanding with the federal government, and—but that memorandum of understanding basically has led to a situation where you often have case conferences and we're still having children who are not getting the kind of support that they should be able to get.

I had somebody with a lot of experience in this area in my office this morning and basically saying, look, we have made not much progress when it really comes down to it. And so I'm just asking the minister for, you know, what is her commitment to making sure that we actually get Jordan's Principle implemented.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm very familiar with the Jordan's Principle and the MOU that we signed in 2008, and have been watching to see the progress that we've made. And I know that these case conferencings have made a difference for families.

You may have some particular cases that you're suggesting that there hasn't been progress, but I know that it's been reported to me that there have been, really, what people see as significant movement away from the jurisdictional debate and focusing on what's in the best interests of the child on many of the files. So I think that that is very valuable.

* (16:00)

So I'm just referring to my notes here where we had a report that we had completed, and we had forwarded it to AMC for their feedback, and right now we are working with our partners, including the representatives from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and we are examining the services that are available to children with disabilities living on and off the reserve, and identifying the service gaps and disparities.

And, again, it's similar to what we talked about around child welfare about how it's very different,

the south versus the North and what we're able to provide. However, our government is extremely committed to Jordan's Principle. We are active at the table, participating with the federal government and trying to move forward as we try and resolve this. And I think that it's important that AMC is a part of this process now, and they will be helping us find our way forward.

Mr. Gerrard: That's the questions that I had, and I thank the minister. And I'm going to turn this over to—is it Bonnie—okay, the member for River East.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I just wanted to go back and follow-up on a few questions that I asked yesterday—or were asked, I didn't necessarily ask them—but I just wanted to get more information on them.

When we talk about the new emergency placement resources, I believe—was there a commitment to another couple of hundred, or how many? I think the minister mentioned yesterday that there were 51 new emergency places—emergency placement resources available as a result of the hotel reduction strategy, and I'd just like a little more detail around that. What was the commitment? Are there, in fact, 51 more and where are they?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So that was made in November, was that there were going to be 100 new emergency-foster beds. There are 57 that are in place now, and they are throughout the province. And I—we also developed, at that time, a special unit for high-risk victims, specifically girls. We also made a commitment that we were going to hire 200 permanent staff, and I think at that—yesterday I put on the record that we had approximately 70—that we have 75 staff that been—have been hired to date. And we are going to work with our partners to develop more additional emergency foster parents—or foster placements, but we also are going to ensure that when kids are needing of assessment, of additional services, that we have that ability to provide those supports to them as well.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So there are 57 new foster beds in the system today? Are there any foster beds that have closed or any foster placements that have been reduced at the other end, or are—is there 57 net new foster beds?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: For emergency, it's 57 net new. We're talking 100 net new.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I seem to recall—and maybe it was 57 not 51 yesterday that the minister mentioned—new

emergency placement resources. Would those be just foster beds or is there any other emergency placement resources available other than the special unit for high-risk girls?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There is a—we are working with Marymount about a new residential-care facility, but the details for that have not been completed yet. We're still in negotiations.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So those—that negotiation—and I know there's been no announcement made about what might be happening at Marymount, but are—is that over and above the hundred foster—new foster bed resources?

My question was—is, sort of, not wanting to get details of whatever's happening at Marymount. I'm sure the minister will want to make that announcement when the time comes. But is that over and above the hundred foster—new foster beds that might be available?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister indicate, when children are placed in hotels, or have been in the past placed in hotels, how—who pays for that hotel placement? Is it the agency? Is it the authority? Does the department have any role in paying those bills?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: If it is through the EPR system, it's the department that pays. If it's an agency, it is through the child maintenance billing that it occurs.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I'd just like some clarification around that. If it's—the department pays for which ones, and is—the—do the maintenance payments go directly to the agencies for those that are placed by agencies?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: If it's through the EPR system, we pay, that is, through Winnipeg Child and Family Services. If it is through an agency, the agency bills us through the child maintenance budget line.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I'm not that familiar with the Estimates book, so I'm wondering if the minister could point me to the child maintenance budget line in the Estimates book, and I'll wait for that answer and then ask another question.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It'll be page 103.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The honourable member for River Heights—sorry, River East.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister indicated that the budget for the emergency placement resources, that would be, I guess, all of the new foster beds then—the 57 that have been approved and the other, I guess, would it be 43, I guess, that will make up the full hundred-bed complement are paid for out of the Winnipeg Child and Family Services budget line. Am I correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's EPR line.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And where would I find that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It would be on page 103 on the same budget line, Authorities and Maintenance of Children.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the—okay, the budget line for authorities and maintenance of children, is that for all of the authorities and all of the agencies? Is that the total budget?

* (16:10)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, it is. It's EPR, but it's also foster parents, it's also residential care services.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister indicate to me, then, how this money is allocated for emergency placement, for foster care and for residential care? How does the money flow? Do agencies bill the department and on what—how often? And how does the money flow, then, to the agencies?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: They do bill us, and the—they can choose when they bill us. It's—they're managing their finances and their administration. So sometimes it's once a month; sometimes agencies are billing us twice a month.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I see that the—there has been a reduction of full-time equivalents in this budget line from 20 down to 13, or 7.5 FTEs less, and yet there's been a \$20-million increase in that budget line. Can the minister explain that to me?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: On page 103, when you look at the expenditures, what this is talking about is this is talking about the reduction of 7.5 FTEs. They were vacant FTEs; that's what is reflected here.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Where were those positions located, those FTEs that were vacant? Where were they allocated and where were they cut from?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: These were positions that were vacant for two years and were from the General Authority.

Mrs. Mitchelson: What were the job descriptions of those positions?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We'll have to take that under advisement.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chair, so when we talk about the new 250 staff that are going to be hired, and 75 of those have already been hired, can the minister indicate what the job descriptions of those 75 individuals are and where they're located?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We have everything but the job description, so we'll take that under advisement.

I just wanted to correct the record that it's 200 new employees that we're hiring, and it's a combination of front-line direct service providers and I—there is portion of the group that are also providing supervision. When we spoke with the individuals in the EPR system and the work that they are doing, they identified very clearly that there needed to be some continuity and some support provided to them, and so that's how we've decided to allocate those positions.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes. Of the 75 that have already been hired, how many would be supervisor positions and how many front-line positions are now active and involved and up and running?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There—I—there are five supervisors that have been hired. We'll confirm that for you. And right now, that there are a number of people that are in the training process. I think there's around 20, 25 that are being actively trained. But we are continuing to have a hiring strategy that is going to see us meet our commitment of 200 in the very near future.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And, if there are 20 or 25 being trained, what are they being trained for? What would be their job description?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, they'll be working with the youth that come into the system, that come in through the EPR system, so working with high-risk youth, children that have been traumatized, children with mental health and addictions, children that have been sexually abused. So we're really—we're looking for individuals that have a desire to work with youth, that have—a youth care certificate is a credential that we're looking for.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the minister is indicating, then, that—what was the application process? Did we see a job ad anywhere and does the minister have a copy of that that she could share with me?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, there was a posting. I don't have enough copies yet. But we will get you a copy

of it and table it. It was posted—the closing date was January 23rd, 2015, but we'll provide that for you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the minister has indicated that there are—I mean, I can't remember whether she said 20 or 20 to 25 individuals that are being trained presently. Do they have a youth care certificate, and are they receiving additional training, or are they being trained as youth care workers?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: To speak about—I'm not part of the hiring process. That is happening at the—in partnership with the Civil Service Commission and the department are a part of that. You're very familiar with the hiring process. It takes a while, especially when you make a commitment to hire 200 people, and so we've been following the process. We've had applications out. We have encouraged people to apply. That is our preference, a youth certificate. However, the training that we are providing in-house is really around providing support to the youth that will be a part of the EPR system.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And, if that training is being done in-house, where is it being done and by whom?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We'll get that information and we'll provide it to you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But I have a little difficulty understanding why that information isn't readily available. We have—the minister indicated clearly there were 20 to 25 people in training. That training is being done in-house, so it's being done, I would presume, in the department. If it's being done in the department, surely, senior administration within the department would know where it's being done and what kind of training it is and who is doing it. So I would ask—that information should be readily available.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There is no intention to frustrate you at all. We are—we don't want to put incorrect information on the record, and so we need to make sure that we provide you with accurate information and we will do that. I think that what we need to acknowledge is that our government has made a commitment of providing more resources for youth that are at risk and providing the services that they need: shelter and supervision and qualified staff.

* (16:20)

There has been an expectation by Manitobans that we ensure that those three pieces are covered, and we know the value of them. So I—we can have a conversation about who knows about where the

training is. I think that we should acknowledge that it is extremely positive that there is hiring of 200 more staff and that there is training that will be made available to them and that they will be able to provide a quality service to the youth they serve.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I thank the minister for that. And I guess then the question is who is responsible for the training in the department? There must be an individual or a group of individuals. So where is that happening within the department and who is the lead person on that training initiative?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I've said before that we will get you that information about where the training is happening. I think that we need to consider and acknowledge that the training is extremely important and that it is occurring and that we're providing the support to the staff as well as the supervision, and that this is a commitment our government is working towards fulfilling.

There are two trainers that we have on staff that will be providing the supports that they—the information that they need. As far as a physical location where the training is happening, I'm not able to provide you that. We will get that information for you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: While the minister is getting that information, maybe she could confirm then there are 25 individuals—I know she said that there are 75 staff that have been hired and there's five supervisory positions and there are 20 to 25 individuals in training, are the other—that looks like about 30 out of the 75 staff, and where are the other 45 staff that have been hired at right now?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: They were hired previously, so I would trust that they are working within our system and serving the youth that we provide services to.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I guess they're not—I mean it appears that the new emergency placement resources are all going to be 100 foster home beds, they're not group homes or residential care facilities. I think that's what the minister put on the record a little bit earlier. So I guess my question would be where are these 200 staff going to be working in the system. Are they going to be working in group homes or residential facilities that already exist or where? And, if there are 45 that have already been hired, where are they working today?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, as far as the 100 emergency foster beds, some of that is a mix. It could be foster homes, it could be group homes, it could be

residential settings, what we call group two, so it's a combination. Though the people that we're hiring, they're going to be working within the EPR system, so within our group homes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So, if they're working within our group homes, are those group homes that presently exist or are those new group home facilities?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That, too, will be a mix. It will be within our existing homes but also our newly developed homes.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay. I'm not sure whether the minister's put contradictory information on the record because when I first started to ask my question she said there would be 100 new foster home beds, now she's saying that that is a mix of group homes and foster homes. So I guess I would ask the question, she may not have the information today, but I'm wondering if she could bring it back tomorrow on how many new foster home beds have been licensed as a result of this initiative because the minister did indicate that there were 57 new foster home beds. So have those foster—have they all been licensed as foster home beds or are some of them group homes? Can she give me the mix or the split of how many foster home beds there are and how many group home beds? And what is the expectation for, you know, when we get the full 100 up and running, are we looking at—what kind of a mix are we looking at as far as group homes or foster homes?

I'm trying to put all my questions on the record because I know there's probably some work that needs to be done to get that information back, and I would hope that it should be able to come back fairly quickly, because we would know what's been licensed within the system. I'm sure these 57 new emergency placement resources are licensed, and so what have they been licensed as?

And subsequent to that, then, if there's a mix of the 45 individuals that have been hired, are some of them working in the new 57 resources, placement resources, that are available? I would presume that if it's a foster home there's foster parents, and those aren't included in the numbers, that those would be over and above what the minister is talking about when she's talking about 200 new staff.

So the question is, or the questions are: Where is the training ongoing right now, and what does that training look like for the 20 to 25 individuals that are being trained? And where are the 45 individuals that have already been hired working? Are they working

in new group homes or are they working in previously existing group homes or residential facilities? And I think that that was all that I had asked.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, I will do my best to be as clear as possible, and I apologize for any confusion.

So, as of May 1st, we had 105 emergency foster placements that provided for 335 beds. Additionally, in the EPR program, we have 62 shelters that have the capacity to provide an additional 187 beds. What we are saying that we are going to add onto those beds, a combination, some which will be foster placements, some which will be group home. The staff that we will hire will work amongst our shelters and the new group homes that we establish.

Was there more?

Mrs. Mitchelson: So then, the—as of May 1st, there was 105 emergency foster placements. Were those new or were those facilities that previously existed? And if there were new ones since November, when the announcement was made, how many are new since then?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There would be 57 that were new—

An Honourable Member: Foster beds?

* (16:30)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, that is what we need to get you more information on, to define which were new. But there are a number of beds that are being developed throughout the system because our initiative to end the use of hotels is going to take the co-operation of agencies and authorities across the province, but also what we call our group 2 agencies, which is Macdonald Youth Services, New Directions as well as Knowles Centre, and working with them—and Ma Mawi—working with them to develop other residential resources.

So this really is—you're going to be seeing not only our initiatives towards preventing children coming into care, but you're also—in the coming months, and as you have seen recently, the number of placements increasing. And I think that because of the children that are coming into care, that we need to have a variety of resources; that we're able to assess what's the best need of that child and we are able to adapt to them and have options to ensure that they can have the greatest success.

So I am—apologize about the confusion around the numbers and the categories, but I am extremely

proud of a government who is prepared to make this investment in the youth and serving the youth, but also while we're doing that, investing in prevention to keep kids and families together.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So I think the minister, though, did commit to get to me the information on the 45 individuals that have been hired already and where they're working—if they're working in shelters or group homes. And are they complementing the staff that existed before, because some of the shelters—or most of the shelters, I guess, existed previously. So are they complementing the staff in there? Are they replacing the staff in there? Are they enhancing the training of the staff that in—that are working in those facilities presently?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just so the member knows that the 45 staff—well, it's—actually, it's 75 staff that we've hired, but those staff will be used to replace contract workers that were presently in the system. But they're also—they work throughout; they don't necessarily always work in the same group home, that they're casual work. And sometimes this is students are being hired, sometimes this is a second job for folks. So to tell you exactly where every person is working yesterday or today would be very complicated. I can assure you that they are working within our shelter system, they are supporting our existing system as it exists, and the training that you had asked about previously, it's occurring at ANCR—the ANCR site on Portage Avenue is where the training is occurring for the department.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I then—I thank the minister for that answer.

And then is it staff within the department that is doing the training? And do we have some example of, say, training modules that might be available that could be shared so we know what kind of training individuals are getting for the jobs that are available?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, the training that is happening, we have a supervisor of the trainers. We're just getting the information about the numbers of trainers that we have on-site that is providing it. So there is Broadway Pharmacy is providing medication training, we have CUPE coming in that—to provide them information on what their role is and what the expectation is, and we're now just getting information on the curriculum for you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I thank the minister for that.

And, I guess, then, they will be Department of Family Services employees? I would presume, then,

and maybe the minister can correct me if I'm wrong, but they're being hired by the department and they will be government employees?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We do have trainers on staff in the department that do provide a number of training across authorities and agencies. We have what we call the structured decision-making training, and that is provided on a regular basis, and people participate in that. The training that's happening specifically for the child-care youth workers is—could be happening directly by our staff but in some instances with other trainers. We do sometimes contract to have a different expertise. So it could be very much a combination of who the people are.

Mrs. Mitchelson: That is the training, but I guess—as these people that are being hired, the 200 employees that are being hired, are they Department of Family Services employees or how—they will become—they'll be added into your complement of staff in the Department of Family Services? And then where would I find them in the Estimates?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will have to confirm this for you, but they will be staff with Winnipeg Child and Family Services, which is part of the EPR program, and they are casual staff.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Oh, okay, so they are hired—I'm trying to understand this, because I'm not sure. The Winnipeg Child and Family Services is then—they are not employees of government. Or are they government employees?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Because the positions are casual, they're not attached to an FTE, so that's why you won't see them in our books. They're casual employees that work when we need their support within a particular setting.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So the minister's telling me, then, that there will not necessarily be 200 full-time equivalents working with children that need support within the system, but they will just be casual workers called on an as-needed basis. What is the expectation for how much they will be working?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: My understanding, in our EPR system, is that is the employees have always been casual employees. Many of them can work as many hours as they want to, like, their 40 hours a week, that that is how the system has been developed.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And the minister has indicated that they've hired 75 already. Is there another intake

process or are there—I guess my question would be, given that they are casual employees, what would be the salary range for these employees on a casual basis? And is there an expectation that they're going to be able to find 200 individuals that are interested in a casual position in this field?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The salary range is around between \$13 and \$18.21 per hour. That—when this job posting went out, that there was a large interest of people that did apply.

I know that many of our group 2 providers were very concerned that we were hiring, because they do such a good job of training people, and they were worried that we were going to headhunt some of their best and brightest.

So there is an interest in working with us. We are so fortunate that there are dedicated people that want to provide support to children and want to develop relationships with them, because we know that the best way for them to be successful is that important bonding and relationship.

So I have confidence that the staff that we will hire will be able to provide the necessary supports that are required. What we are doing is still going through the number of applicants that we received in January.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Mitchelson: I—oh, you know what, I'll get my thoughts together. I'll turn it over to my colleague to ask just a few questions.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Thank you, Madam Minister.

Yesterday, I was asking some questions in regards to some of the treatment care facilities, and my last set of questions was asking for clarifications that you had said that there was 150 treatment centres. And I looked back in Hansard and, basically, you had corrected me and said that you had stated that there was 190 residential child-care-facility beds and 176 specialized foster-care beds. Now, earlier on in Estimates, you also said that you have 150 licensed residential-care facilities. Now, of those 150 licensed residential-care facilities, how many of them are considered to be treatment facilities?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So I will just put on the record what we define as a treatment centre, just so we—because I—that's part of the challenge that we experience around this Estimates process is language and understanding each other and, sometimes, my ad

libbing with numbers. The treatment centre is any place established or designated by the minister primarily for the care and treatment of more than eight children and include facilities operated by any government department for the purpose, but does not include facilities for the reception and temporary detention of a child. So talking about that, the treatment centres that we have—I have examples for you: Whiskeyjack Treatment Centre is one; Behavioural Health Foundation, the female program and the male program; and Compass which is both male and female. These are all primarily—well, they are all addictions agencies, and then we also have licensed residential child-care facilities.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and the minister for the answer.

So I guess my question—or I guess I'll just follow up on the question from yesterday. Were you able to find the information or the number of facilities that you have that have four beds or more? And now, looking at your definition of treatment centres, it looks like a number—an increase of—or not an increase—a total of eight children or more in these treatment centres. So how many of these treatment centres that have eight children or more are there in the province of Manitoba?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The treatment centres, we just—we have no treatment centres that have less than—we have no treatment centres that have four beds. We—our treatment centres that we have: Whiskeyjack Treatment Centre is for 20 youth; Behavioural Health Foundation, female program is 16; the Behavioural Health Foundation, male program is 16; and Compass is for 16 beds.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for the answer.

So you have four treatment centres, then, in Manitoba, is what you're saying, that has—that services eight or more children. Correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Based on the definition that I provided, I think that we need to acknowledge that there are a number of service providers within our system that provide residential care but have a treatment focus, and I think Knowles is a really good example. The member from River East is very familiar with the work that they do with their team and how they're able to engage the youth and the foster parents. But Macdonald Youth Services, New Directions as well—as I had one go through my mind—Macdonald Youth Services, New Directions,

Marymount is another really good example, and we're very fortunate that Macdonald Youth Services have expanded their services to the North now and provide services in Thompson. So I don't want to lead you and mislead and just suggest that there are only these four programs that we have, that we have many other residential programs that do provide the necessary support to the youth.

Mr. Ewasko: So within these—whether it's a residential centre or it's a treatment centre, whether it's voluntary or apprehension, what is the safety guidelines for the staff in regards to any type of accidents that happen with any of the students or the children that are in their care, as far as assessment of the accident and then whether they decide to call on EMS services or they take them to the hospitals or anything along those lines? So what is, basically, the protocol for that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: May I just clarify, are you speaking about the youth is in an accident or the staff person is in an accident?

Mr. Ewasko: The youth.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We have an internal policy that—we don't have it on us right now. We want to make sure we that we give you correct information, so we'll get a copy of that and share that internal policy and that standard that we have for the authorities and the agencies and the service providers in which we work. But we also have announced the critical incident reporting and the responsibility for a caregiver whether it's within an agency or a foster parent to report any critical incident that happens to a youth in care.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, thank you, Madam Minister, for that answer.

So, if there's a situation that happens in a facility where a child is either voluntarily placed or apprehended and a critical incident happens, and I know that we're going to check out the policy tomorrow when you bring that, but is it the responsibility of the centre to then alert the family, the foster family or the department when those things happen? And is that all going to be within that policy or do you, by any chance, have that answer today?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm not going to take a risk and misrepresent the policy, so I'll—I will leave it for the policy to lay it out. There is clear communication about what needs to happen and in what order, but I will make sure that it's accurately reported. If the member has a specific case that you're referring to, if

you want to have a conversation off the record, because we cannot talk about particular situations or case-specific situations, I'd be more than welcome to have that. And, if I'm familiar with it already, I apologize.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister. So I'll wait for some of those answers for tomorrow then.

In regards to children in care and whether it's different agencies throughout the umbrella, is there situations that the minister knows of in the past few years where a particular family might have children in care with one agency and then yet be fostering children who are in care from another agency? Has the minister come across situations like that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Not that I can recall. Again, if you have a particular specific case—it sounds like you do—if you do, I welcome you to present that to us.

Mr. Ewasko: I actually don't have a specific case. I just wanted to know if it was possible within the agencies to have something like that happen.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What happens when an agency recruits a foster parent, that they have a responsibility to do a home study and check on CFIS for any involvement with a child-welfare agency. If it's not on CFIS, they might not be made aware of it. But we want to make sure that when we're recruiting foster parents that we are providing them, the children, with a safe place to call home. We also have a Child Abuse Registry check that needs to happen for a foster placement as well.

* (16:50)

Right now, we are working with the Manitoba Foster Family Network and are—they've developed a mentorship program, and so we're working on implementing that across the province to provide support to foster families.

Mr. Ewasko: So, just so that I'm clear, so that if a family has some sort of dealings with Child and Family Services, and their child is either apprehended or taken into some sort of care, whether it's a voluntary treatment or whatever, they are automatically put into CFIS, and then—so then they can easily be tracked as a family within the umbrella agency, and so that if their name or situation comes up where they're able to foster a child in the future, then technically CFIS would pop their name up or send some sort of flag up that they are, in fact, within the system already. And so there would be due

diligence and checks throughout the department, checking to see, just to make sure that those parents are not having children under care in their care?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just to clarify that right now, the way the system is, it's agencies recruit their own foster parents and do their own checks and responsible for that. But in our system, and I think you're familiar, that we have a kinship program or a place of safety program where family members can offer to care for the child if they're willing, and so that's a different route in coming into providing care for children.

There is still an expectation that there are the checks made, as far as CFIS, Child Abuse Registry and the Adult Abuse Registry and also a criminal record check. But, as far as a lengthy home study, that doesn't happen with a place of safety unless they decide that they want to become a foster parent, long term.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I—just going back to the 200 new staff that are going to be hired through Winnipeg Child and Family Services, where—which budget line would I find those additional staffing resources?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That will be embedded on page 103 under the child maintenance line.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And can we get a breakdown of how much has been estimated to be allocated to the authorities and to maintenance of children by agency, by authority, by—

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The Honourable Minister.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm very pleased to say that the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) can refer to our 2013-2014 annual report, page 90 and 91, and that information—and 92, 93—that information is outlined there, broken down into the service provider, whether it's a foster home, residential care, whether it's other placement, a non-pay-care living arrangement. Then it also talks about what the legal status of the child that's in care. So it's very comprehensive. As you know, that this would help us direct our service and our programs and policies going forward, so it is there.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And that's for previous years. I'm talking about when you estimate the budget for this upcoming year and money that is allocated in this year's budget. Can the minister indicate how much additional is allocated to Winnipeg Child and Family

Services to provide for the salaries of the 200 new staff that are being hired? And the training dollars, because I'm sure there's some training dollars associated with the hiring of those staff. So can the minister indicate approximately what the budget estimate increase for the Winnipeg agency is for this initiative?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's an interesting item—issue that—not an issue, it's a good thing—an interesting consequence of not using the contract staff anymore, because that—there was a lot of money expended in the budget on contract staff. Now, that money that was allocated for that contract staff, we believe by hiring our own people we may even save money as well as providing better care for kids.

So that budget line, the child maintenance budget line, that's a line that is—it's really driven by volume. And so that—we don't say Northern Authority, this is your money, and Awasis, this is your money. It really is driven by the child maintenance billing, so it's hard for us to tell you today about how that money breaks down. That's why I referred you to the last annual report.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, do we have the annual report for 2014-2015 and the actual that was spent for the authorities and maintenance of children in 2014-2015?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That gets released in the fall, I believe, so we'll be working on those numbers.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But I guess the question would be, because I do know that there was additional allocation of resources to the Department of Family Services, and it probably was for maintenance of children, that would have been—there was overexpenditures in the department. So, if you estimated \$433 million last year, I believe there was probably an amount that was provided in addition to that amount for maintenance of children. Can the minister indicate to me how much that was? I just don't have that information at the top of mind.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm being told that it is cost neutral because of the reduction. So maybe we need to—I need to understand your question a little bit more.

May I put—I have the answer about the standard. May I put that on the record now, or do you want to ask me another question? May I do that, if I may?

So the question was around what is the reporting procedure if there is a critical incident in a residential-care facility. And so the licensee advises

the placing agency about the incident by phone or electronically—[interjection]

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The honourable member for River East.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes. I was just wondering, for clarification, was that a question I asked?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Oh, okay. Yes. No. If you want to put it on record or provide that information to my colleague, that would be great because there wouldn't be an opportunity for a follow-up question if—

An Honourable Member: Fair enough.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay, thank you.

My question was the estimate of expenditures for maintenance of children last year was \$433 million; what was actually spent last year, because I think there was a requirement for additional resources in last year's budget for child maintenance, and what was that additional request?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I know that our time is running out. We are just in the process of finalizing our numbers right now, so we will do our best to get that to you as soon as possible. However, the last minute, what we're saying is that it was around four hundred—I guess I do have the answer—\$449 million, so it was an additional \$16 million, \$16.8 million.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I was just wondering if I could have one more quick question, Mr. Chair, and that was just around the young girl that just died in—on I think it was Garden Hill, Teresa Robinson. Does the minister have any indication at all—

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The hour now being 5 p.m., committee rise.

FINANCE

*(14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Jim Maloway): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of Estimates for the Department of Finance. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed on a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Yesterday, at the proceedings, I took some issues—or some questions, as noticed, and made a commitment

to get back to the member. I can do that now, if he would like, or I could—okay, thanks.

The first question I'll respond to was you asked about the—if I could clarify the difference between a project manager and a special adviser. A special adviser is a senior position providing strategic advice, policy analysts and overall direction on the portfolio to the minister, and a project manager provides advice to the minister on specific files within the portfolio.

Another question you asked, is Jeannine Kebernik and Jean-Guy Bourgeois FTE? The answer is no.

The next question was regarding, again, Ms. Kebernik's classification as a special assistant. She is now classified as a professional officer 7, and we don't discuss specifics on individuals' salaries. Of course, yes, their information will be available through the Public Accounts.

Last year's vacancy rate for Finance, I think we answered it yesterday, but the answer, again, is 79 full-time equivalents or the percentage is 17.06.

Another question was, how does Accommodation Services—or why does Accommodation Services have about \$2 million less in staff costs? The reduction was a result of an increase in staff turnover allowance, and you could see that in the glossary on page 153.

Do you have any employment contracts? As far as I'm aware, the only employment contract that Finance has is an acting deputy minister for Intergovernmental Affairs and International Relations, and he provides advice and support to the Province on national and international relations matters.

And I can provide the member with a copy of the vacant positions, which I'll table for the committee.

And the final response was to the last question, and the member asked why the tables in the back not match last year's SILR. And, in order to enable year-over-year and multi-year comparisons, schedule 7 is reinstated annually to include the actual and adjusted figures, Estimates figures for the program areas that transferred into Finance, as well to exclude any areas that are transferred out of Finance, which was—the example is the Disabilities Issues Office. Other departments impacted by those transfers will reflect the offsetting reinstatement in the—in their SILRs.

The reconciliation statement on page 8 of the SILR provides additional information on the functions slash funds transferred in and out of Finance that impact the multi-year reinstatement.

* (15:00)

Charts 5 and 6 are graphic representations of the data in schedule 7 and are therefore also restated from what was printed in last year's finance SILR. I think those will deal with all the questions that were raised yesterday by the member.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): I thank the minister for providing the answers to those questions.

There were a few details I missed, but that's okay, I'll wait for Hansard to come out tomorrow in order to make efficient use of our time, and I will check back on those just to see if there are further questions arising as a result of the answers that have been put on the record this afternoon.

I would clarify a matter for the Finance Minister, he says that within a salary step scale that the information pertaining to the salary petition—the salary position for Ms. Kebernik isn't made public, but I remind him that it is because it's an order of council appointment, and on March 25th, 2015, it indicates both what the salary scale for that employee is and it also indicates their starting salary as well. So that information is in the public realm as would be any salary information proceeding from an OIAC.

With respect to the answers that the member did provide, I did have one other follow-up question for him. The minister made reference to—I believe he said one contract under Finance. Could he just repeat for me the information of what that contract was for and the amount of that contract? Thank you.

Mr. Dewar: I want to remind the member that it is—we have one employment contract and it is with the acting deputy minister for Intergovernmental Affairs and International Relations, and he provides advice and support to the Province on national and international relation matters.

Mr. Friesen: I wonder if I could invite the minister to comment on the decision of the government to move away from summary reporting and favour a core reporting structure, as I know he has made reference to in this session already.

Mr. Dewar: Well, when, you know, when Manitobans think about the budget, they think about

core government. They think about health care, education, infrastructure, and we're committed to protecting and investing in these services because that's what Manitobans told us to do.

And we also realize how unpredictable weather has become and how weather can affect our Summary Budget. We know that one cold winter and a series of automobile accidents and that could infect—affect the, in a negative way, Manitoba Public's Insurance bottom line. And we know that, for an example, a drought can affect Manitoba Hydro's bottom line, and we've seen that in the past where we've had a drought situation which has hurt the bottom line of Manitoba Hydro. In fact, it has caused losses in Manitoba Hydro. And we don't think that these type of things, losses in Manitoba Public Insurance or losses in Manitoba Hydro, should affect the front-line services that Manitobans rely on.

So—but we're still reporting on summary; that has not changed. Well, we think by showing a balance on core government would give Manitobans a better picture of how we're actually managing the revenues and the expenditures of the Province to meet the priorities of health care, education and investing and growing the economy. So, No. 1, we're still reporting on summary. But, as I said, when they think about—when Manitobans look at the government budgets, they think about core government. They think about health care, education, infrastructure. And we think that when you have a situation, again, when you've report on summary and you have a situation like a loss in Hydro or a loss in Manitoba Public Insurance, that those losses there should not be reflected in our ability to provide services such as health care, education to Manitobans, and that is why we're—we'll be reporting on core, but we're also reporting on summary as well.

Mr. Friesen: Now, the reason I ask the question is because there seemed to be statements that are not consistent in the minister's reply and then comparing it to what his predecessor says and, indeed, comparing it to what he says elsewhere. As proof of this, I turn to the foreword of the budget. I'm looking at the Budget 2015 on that preliminary page 5, and it indicates that to ensure transparency and accountability this budget is presenting information on core government Estimates, expenditure and revenue, and then it says, reconciled to the Summary Budget. And, again, later in the budget on page 9, it says, this strategy focuses primarily on core government activities.

However, I can recall strong statements that his predecessors said in the context of these Estimates only a year ago, and at that time we had a discussion about why it was that the previous Finance ministers thought it was far more meritorious to report on summary than core. As a matter of fact, she referenced the Saskatchewan situation, specifically taking note of the fact that the Saskatchewan Auditor General had put this in a report—in her—in the annual report of that Legislature. And the minister's—the Finance Minister's predecessor had stated in strong terms that Saskatchewan had finally been forced to move to a summary reporting standard, one that she preferred. Is the minister's statement here today expressing that his strategy to report in core is at odds with the department's or with his predecessors?

Mr. Dewar: Well, we have tabled a summary budget which provides the financial overview of the government reporting entities, the so-called GREs, which includes core government and Crown corporations, public sector organizations like the regional health authorities, school divisions, universities and colleges.

*(15:10)

The decision was made this year—the—was to focus primarily on core government activities. As I said, they are the revenues and expenditures of the government departments that are under the direct control of the Legislative Assembly. As I said, we shouldn't—because of a drought situation which would impact Manitoba Hydro's bottom line or a bad winter which could impact Manitoba Public Insurance's bottom line. We don't think that a loss there should mean extra stress on us providing what Manitobans want and need, and which is a strong health-care system, which is education system that's funded at the rate of the growth of the economy, which we've done now for 16 years, or to stimulate the economy like we're doing with a 5.5–5 billion–\$5.5-billion five-year plan over the next—just concluded the first year—the next four years, which will create 60,000 jobs and grow the economy.

But, again, I'll remind the member that we are reporting; we tabled a summary budget.

Mr. Friesen: While I accept the minister's rationale, I understand why he's saying what he is saying about the volatility of what is reported in the Summary Budget, I think he would have to acknowledge that he's not talking about a consistent argument on the side of his Finance Department. We have seen the

Finance Department advocate for exactly the opposite position.

As a matter of fact, it was his predecessor, in 2008, who introduced a new Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act, and at the time it was indicated that it would require the government to keep one comprehensive set of books and audited financial statements for Manitobans that are consistent with generally accepted accounting principles, the GAAP principles. And at that time, the former Finance minister, now Premier (Mr. Selinger) of Manitoba, indicated that the old law did not require summary reporting and, as a result, some government entities were left off the books.

My question for the Finance Minister is—I guess the question is: Does he disagree with the previous Finance minister, who is now the Premier of Manitoba, who stated that summary was better than core?

Mr. Dewar: Well, absolutely not, that we did table a summary budget in 2007, and we continue to do so. This budget aligns with the accounting standards set out by the Public Sector Accounting Board and fully reflects the GAAP, so-called generally accepted accounting principles, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Friesen: The news release from April 30th, 2008, goes on to say that the Province began moving to summary budgeting in 2005 on the advice of the Auditor General, who had been advocating for the change since the mid-1990s to bring Manitoba in line with the majority of provinces.

Would the Finance Minister comment on whether he received advice or had conversations with the Office of the Auditor General in advance of making this move to favour core reporting over summary? And I would say this as a caveat: I understand what the minister's saying, that both are there. But I would remind him that page 9 makes clear, and I quote from the document: "For Budget 2015, the strategy focuses primarily on core government activities." End quote.

So I would think it would be fair to say that the 2008 news release makes clear that at that time the focus was to be on summary. Did the Finance Minister seek the advice of the Auditor General with respect to the change?

Mr. Dewar: In terms of the Auditor General, you don't have to; we are tabling a summary budget and

the—as I said, we've tabled one since 2007—excuse me—and the budget that we tabled in the House just a few weeks ago also reports on the summary basis.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the Finance Minister for that response.

I want to look just briefly at the information that the Finance Minister provided when he indicated—or has supplied a list of vacancies within a department. I was just looking for a clarification rather than wait for the next day, and I thank him for providing the information both including Central Services and, I believe, also excluding Central Services? I think that's what I'm looking at for the two percentages. So I'm looking just for a clarification; is the percentage that I see on the third page of that document, is that indicating the vacancy rate as an expression of the total complement of staff, of employment, at 17.2 per cent, but that would be excluding that appropriation for Central Services. Is that a correct reading of that information?

Mr. Dewar: The member is correct.

Mr. Friesen: And then, just my other question would be, then, on the last page of the information that was supplied, then it says, total for Finance. So then I'm assuming that that is going to be the total number of positions that are vacant as an expression of the total complement now under Finance under the new fiscal year including Central Services. Is that also correct?

Mr. Dewar: That, too, is correct.

Mr. Friesen: And I will go back and check later on to see what the numbers were that was supplied yesterday, so we can check and see to see those vacancy rates, how they compare previously. I do notice that when you factor in the new Central Services, though, it does push down—as an expression of the full complement of employees it pushes down the vacancy rate by a few points. So my thinking on that is that there were, I guess, less vacancies in the—in that part of operations that is now referred to as Central Services, and that would have been prior to Finance. But, of course, I realize that the variable within that would be the size of the work complement. So it gets a little bit tougher to calculate.

Just looking at this list, though—and I promise the minister I don't plan to go line by line through this list of positions. I did want to ask the minister to comment, based on the positions that are listed here, does the minister have a—is there any concern within

the department or the minister's office about ability to perform work in a reasonable amount of time in the taxation office when I noticed there are—I mean, just at first count, could be as much as 25, 30 positions that are vacant, or does that—is that number of positions and that particular list of positions more of a business-as-usual thing?

* (15:20)

Mr. Dewar: I had a discussion with the deputy minister, and he informs me that this is a fairly consistent year to year and that within that section of a Department of Finance there is a fair number of turnovers. It's an issue of demographics, but—and there's a higher turnover rate within that particular section but we're confident that we're able to maintain the responsibilities, which, of course, is to collect the taxes that are necessary to run the province.

Mr. Friesen: Would the minister provide additional information and indicate what would be some of the underlying reasons that would be owing to the fact that there's a higher turnover rate in this particular area of operation?

Mr. Dewar: Again, I'm informed that it deals with demographics. It really is a snapshot in time when someone will move into the senior's position and someone will take their place, and someone with an entry level into that. But, again, it's a snapshot and it has, as well, to deal with the demographics within that particular department.

Mr. Friesen: Still dealing with FTEs, I'm looking at page 12—this is schedule 5 of the Estimates. And this is one of those places where I see a departure in terms of—it's that variance we referred to before, about how Estimates of expenditure are updated and then reprinted with a different number. Now I noticed that on the books from last year, under appropriation 7.1.(c), under Corporate Services, it was previously listed as 38 FTEs as a workforce there. And now I see it's reported as 43.

Where did the increase of five come from? What led to the decision to increase by five, the number of employees in that particular service?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I've been informed that the growth in these positions are transfers from MITT and Jobs and the Economy, and they are positions that support the—excuse me—the reorganization from those positions—from those departments to the Department of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: Well, then, that leads me to another question, because in our discussions yesterday, on page 8, when we were looking at the reconciliation statements and the allotment of funds from each of these core government areas, the minister—at least in my memory—seemed to indicate that all of these positions and all the allocations were pertaining to the formation of this new area of responsibility as indicated on this—on the organizational chart and referred to as Central Services. But the positions that I'm referring to aren't under that appropriation for Central Services. So Central Services, they're listed as including accommodation and procurement and business transformation.

Now, if I compare that to the organizational chart—I realize, as well, that there's other services not listed there—like Manitoba Education, Research and Learning Information Networks, material distribution agencies like SOAs—I'm just wondering if the minister can clarify for me why we would be finding FTEs, in other words, salaried positions, entering into other appropriations other than Central Services.

Mr. Dewar: The positions that the member refers to are ones that were—directly supported the programs in Central Services. They came from the Finance admin areas of IT and T and Jobs and the Economy; an example would be payroll clerks.

Mr. Friesen: Okay, so now I understand that when I'm trying to reconcile amounts allocated from other core areas, other departments, I should not simply be looking within 7.5, appropriation under Central Services, indeed, that—we could see on any one of these lines employees also being added to other areas.

Are there areas besides Administration and Finance, in other words, under fiscal or financial management Treasury Board, Priorities and Planning, where we would also have employees coming inside Finance who previously would have been employed—who was previously the FTEs would have appeared under another department's appropriations?

* (15:30)

Mr. Dewar: Well, the Disabilities Issues Office was transferred from this department to the Family Services department, was transferred in new positions. There was a transfer from Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection. Of course, the responsibilities regarding the Public Utilities Board, there were eight FTEs from Jobs and

the Economy, Administration and Finance there was one, Business Transformation and Technology, government information and technology, communication technology—207.6 transferred in. The Legislative Building Information Systems—LBIS—it was 11 positions transferred in. From the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation and Administration and Finance there were three positions transferred in. Accommodation Services; 490.35 positions transferred in. The Office of the Lieutenant Governor there was three positions transferred in, and Procurement Services there was 29.6 positions transferred in, for a total of 753.55 positions transferred from Tourism, from Jobs and the Economy, from Infrastructure and Transportation, to Manitoba Finance.

Mr. Friesen: And I thank the minister for that information.

I will go back and reread that, but, yes, and what I notice, of course, in my Estimates book is that for the last three of the list of positions transferred in, those I see clearly listed under essential services. And there's other ones, of course, that I see filtered indirectly under Administration and Finance, like the PUB and the LG office, and those, of course, I see, it was these other ones that I wasn't clearly seeing where they had been listed on a line item that I'll be looking for clarification of. But I accept his explanation about why five more appear now under Corporate Services.

Now, just the one logistics question I had, and this is just as I'm learning how the Finance Department works, and this is the same principle, I would imagine, for any other department's Estimates. I'm wondering, when it comes to something like the actual transfer of responsibility—let's say, let's take the office of the Lieutenant Governor because it's the easiest one to understand with just three staffers. Is there a date at which it becomes current and there's a start date at which that comes under the Finance Minister's responsibility? And, if so, is that date set to coincide with the start date of a new fiscal year, or is it simply done through—it would be done through an order-in-council or by another process? How would—I guess, two questions: How is it done, and then how does the public receive notification of the fact?

Mr. Dewar: Okay. The Public Utilities Board was transferred by an order-in-council in November of 2014. The transfers are official when The Appropriation Act is passed by the Legislature and

receives royal assent. I anticipate that to be in the next few months.

And, in terms of public notification, the public is notified with the publishing of the budget papers. So when the public—when the budget was presented, notification was in that document. So you get the royal assent of The Appropriation Act, it will be when the—when it will be official, and the—last November the Public Utilities Board was transferred to Finance by an order-in-council.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that explanation.

Just one question that stems from that: I understand, then, that in the past fiscal year the order-in-council would have been published with that information. I'm just wondering, then, if the official ratification only happens with royal assent, then why would the amounts appear for the 2014-15 fiscal year in these Estimates? Why would that happen and—so do they actually appear both in these Estimates and in another department's Estimates or only here?

* (15:40)

Mr. Dewar: Well, we do reinstate—restate the prior years. Of course, the desire is to make it more transparent, but in order to make it comparable so we have—we do enable year-over-year, multi-year comparisons. It's reinstated annually to include the actual and adjusted estimate figures for the program areas that have transferred into Finance but as well that those who are transferred out of Finance. And other departments impacted by those transfers will reflect the offsetting reinstatements in their SILRs.

Mr. Friesen: I'm on schedule 3 of the Estimates, and I would like to point the minister to the variance in the capital assets amount between last year's Estimates and this year's Estimates and wonder if he could provide explanation of why the capital investment under capital assets is indicated as 500,000 last year but indicated this year as 63,125,000.

Mr. Dewar: The number reflects, of course, the transfer of assets of Accommodation Services, 60-odd million dollars over 415 buildings which the Province owns and manages as well as the assets from the Business Transformation and Technology division.

Mr. Friesen: And what type of assets would have been transferred under this second entity that the minister mentioned?

Mr. Dewar: I'll refer the member to page 117 has the general assets that were transferred, and Accommodation Services, capital projects, around \$60 million; information technology projects, \$3.125 million; in total, 63.125 was the projects that were transferred from, in this case, both—some from MIT and some as well from jobs and economy that were transferred to Manitoba Finance.

Mr. Friesen: And I invite the minister to also indicate the—or comment on the change, then, it listed in this year's Estimates between—on that same line, capital assets, general assets. What changed, then, from \$84 million in the previous year's Estimates to the \$63 million in this year's Estimates? And I just remind him that we're looking at the number that's printed here, not referring now to that estimate as indicated in last year's Estimates book.

Mr. Dewar: These, of course, are designed for cash-flow purposes. They—Accommodation Services may have up to 150 projects on the go at any given time, and this reflects the cash flow that is provided to accommodate the—those projects.

Mr. Friesen: I'm sorry, so it's like—it's a snapshot, like, of the calculations in the book.

Turning to page—on page 8, and I know the minister already made some reference to this—I want to just explore a little bit more the transfer of functions under—there's a separate line for Infrastructure and Transportation below the line referring to printed estimates of capital investment. So above that we have those allocations of funds from other departments, and those include a line for Infrastructure and Transportation stated as \$6.774 million. But then lower on the page, another—not just an allocation of funds, but a transfer of function, can he indicate the \$80 million—just to remind me—the transfer of functions, what functions have been transferred from Infrastructure and Transportation?

Mr. Dewar: The \$80 million the member refers to was the 2014-2015 capital projects on page 117.

* (15:50)

Mr. Friesen: Perhaps I didn't state that clearly. I wasn't looking for a further explanation of—oh, I think I might see what the minister is referring to; the 80,000 being the number from the

2014-15 expenditure printed in the new Estimates. That's that accommodations services capital projects—I see—that he referred to.

Then thank you for that, and I'm looking then for the same explanation for the transfer of function from Jobs and the Economy, also on page 8, the reconciliation statement, that's stated as \$3.988 million. Could he provide the explanation of that?

Mr. Dewar: I'll refer the member to page 8. Towards the end there's \$500,000, plus the—when you add that to the 3.988 transferred from the Jobs and the Economy, that'll add up to the—on page 117 the 4.488 that was transferred from information technology projects which, of course, was transferred from Jobs and the Economy to Finance.

Mr. Friesen: I'm not quite getting the explanation I'm looking for, and I could be asking the question in the wrong way, but I—I'll ask the minister. Where would I see the number 3.988 directly referenced elsewhere in the Estimates? Because I'm not seeing that number on page 117.

Mr. Dewar: The Department of Finance had \$500,000 and when you add that to the money that was transferred from Jobs and the Economy, which was \$3.988 million, add it together, works out to \$4.88 million, which is reflected on page 117.

Mr. Friesen: Okay, and then one clarification from the minister just so that we're clear. Whether we're looking at that amount on page 8 or page 117, when we're talking about these capital—this line for capital investment we're looking at those lines for general assets. It refers to it as accommodation services capital projects. These are monies, these are funds that the government plans to invest in new capital projects. These are not referring to assets on hand; they're capital amounts to apply to new spending.

Mr. Dewar: Yes, the member is correct. This is new spending.

Mr. Friesen: Turning back to a subject we covered earlier, but just for the record I wanted to indicate that I had located the discussion that I had with the previous Finance minister last year in the Estimates process, and some of the other people in attendance today may remember the conversation. I just thought it was instructive to our conversation to also include these remarks.

They're indicated on page 77 of the Estimates from last year, and I believe, if I was guessing, it was

probably around March the 24th or so, which means we were sitting considerably earlier last year than we were at this time. It wouldn't have been quite so green and sunny outside at that time as it is today. At that time, the minister of Finance said: I think it is probably true for all governments throughout all time that we all need to strive to make financial information clearer to people that, when you have an organization that is as complex as government is, you always need to try to communicate more clearly and more transparently.

And she said: I think we've made some progress. Later in the page it says: But I think when we made the move to summary budgeting that was actually an attempt and recognized by the Auditor General as a way to provide a more complete picture of the finances. Two paragraphs later, the Finance minister says: And I would note that recently the last holdout in the country, Saskatchewan, has also finally decided to move to summary budget, and it took some pain to get there. And then she goes on to talk about the fact that they were dragged into the process by the Auditor General of that province. She concludes that section by saying, so that was a step forward.

So, without uselessly prolonging our conversation on summary versus core, I just wanted to know if the minister would care to comment at all on whether if the—or his predecessor said it was a step forward to focus on summary, would he now suggest that it could be a step backward in the eyes of the Auditor General or others to focus instead on core?

Mr. Dewar: The member is correct. We did have a discussion earlier on in the—in our Estimates process today about summary versus core, and we are reporting on summary. So the member is correct when he was quoting my predecessor. We continue to report on summary and this budget reports on summary. This budget also makes—reports on core, as I said, because it's something that we have more control over. We're able to—it—like I said, when Manitobans look at the government they—when they think about budgets, they think about core budgets. They think about issues related to health care, education, infrastructure.

As I said, when you report on summary, there is the possibility of, you know, a unfortunate event such as a bad winter which would hurt the profits of Manitoba Public Insurance, or a drought situation, drought scenario, which would impact the profits of Manitoba Hydro, and we don't think that that should

be reflected in our ability to provide services to Manitobans that they depend on. But, as I said, we've tabled the Summary Budget that provides the financial overview of the government and includes the government reporting entities such as—includes core government and includes the Crown corporations, other public sector organizations such as the regional health authorities, the school divisions, the universities and colleges. And our budget aligns with the accounting standards set out by the Public Sector Accounting Board and wholly reflects the generally accepted accounting principles, so-called GAAP.

So we have tabled the Summary Budget. That has not changed.

Mr. Friesen: This conversation takes me back to the second quarter results for the year 2013-14 and, at the time, the Finance minister had held a press event and indicated that two quarters into the fiscal year she was pleased to report that actually the government was ahead of schedule in meeting its deficit targets. And I smiled at that at the time, because I was rather new to this file, and I looked at the information that the minister was referencing in order to make that statement and noticed right away that what she was doing, she was referring to the Summary Budget and looking at greater than anticipated revenues coming from the government business entities, including Manitoba Hydro.

*(16:00)

We had a combination of very high water levels at that time, and a combination of that and very cold winter conditions which I believe that the minister probably will remember. And as a result, at that time—and I'm going to guess here—I believe, at that time, after second quarter results had been reported, I believe that it was \$100 million in unanticipated revenue additionally flowing to government. The minister of Finance at the time took that opportunity to say that the government was ahead of schedule. She used that summary number.

So I'd say this, I'd say in with respect to what the minister has said and with the comments he's put on the record, I would say it would be a comment that would fly in the face of the, you know, of that decision of that minister, to reference a number that she felt would paint a rosier picture. As the minister knows, at the end of that fiscal year, when the Public Accounts were reported, the government did not make its deficit target. And the actual reporting of that summary amount had actually had the effect of

skewing the government's actual performance when it came to core government.

So at the very least, I welcome his resolve to not use GBE revenues to paint a rosier picture of his government's progress on deficit targets. And if he has a comment to add on that, I'll allow him, but if he doesn't, I will—in any case, he can—he has the prerogative.

But I will say this, on a much lighter subject, I wanted to thank the department for an area of clarity they had brought to the Estimates process by renaming the 7.1 appropriation. So it used to be the case that we would see Corporate Services as the appropriation, and then a subarea as Corporate Services. I noticed that it didn't—'dudn't'—didn't appear that way. It seems that they've renamed it to Administration and Finance. And I think that that will save a lot of miscommunication between myself and staffers as we talk about corporate services, and they always say, well, which corporate services are you talking about? Are you talking about the appropriation or are you talking about 7.1.(c)?

So can the minister indicate the decision-making process that went into renaming Corporate Services to Administration and Finance?

Mr. Dewar: I just want to, again, state to the member that this budget is reporting on summary. This budget has—reporting on summary were—has not changed. As I said, we are—we think that, you know, showing a balance under—core really gives a better and clearer picture to Manitobans how the Province is managing the revenues and expenditures. And—but as I said, we are not abandoning our—the decision by previous ministers to report under summary. The member is correct that Saskatchewan now reports under summary, as we are, as this budget will report under summary as well. But, as I said, we think it better reflects the actual ability of the government to respond to needs in terms of health care and education, as opposed to an event that would affect our bottom line, which we think should not have an impact on our ability to provide those services that Manitobans need.

Mr. Friesen: I want to turn to Executive Support in the Estimates. And just give me a moment to find that subappropriation in my book. So I'm on page 23 under subappropriation 7.1.(b) And I wanted to ask the minister if he could comment on the escalating salaries in that particular area. What I notice is that, according to the 2012-13 Estimates, total salaries and employee benefits were indicated as 688—now, this

would be reported as thousands. Then, a year later, in the '13-14 Estimates, that amount was 'inticated' as 947,000. And so that amount went up a lot. And now I notice that, somewhere, looking at the 742—can he comment on the changing amounts that are going into this particular area? Are there—and, perhaps, at the same time, he could—if he could comment, are there positions that are currently vacant that could also be skewing these numbers?

Mr. Dewar: Well, the member has us at a bit of a disadvantage because we don't have the '12-13, '12-2012-2013 documents. But I can tell the member that if he was to look at page 23, you would note that there was, in fact, a decrease between 2014 and 2015 and 2015 and 2016, from \$769,000 down to \$742,000 in this current fiscal year.

Mr. Friesen: I'm glad the minister mentioned that because I was going to ask him why the decrease in paid salaries and benefits of \$26,000? Could he comment on that?

Mr. Dewar: I've been informed that's a result of a normal salary adjustment, could perhaps being a senior member leaving and the one who would have taken his or her place becoming—being a more junior person in that position would have received a lower salary. And that's, we think, is the result of that \$26,000 decrease in Executive Support.

Mr. Friesen: Has there been a decision by the minister to manage any of the—any vacant positions with respect to this particular subappropriation?

Mr. Dewar: The—this department, like all departments, just matter of day-to-day management, carefully reviewing the staffing requirements, and that's why you would have seen the change.

* (16:10)

Mr. Friesen: I'm on page 27 of the Estimates, just looking at the subappropriation for Corporate Services. This actually references exactly the two—the five positions we discussed earlier, now in the detail instead of aggregate. And I see—I think this corresponds to what the minister said earlier. According to last year's Estimates, I see a change, a plus two under Professional and Technical, in terms of positions, and I see a plus three in terms of the administrative support. So I just make that comment, and if I'm incorrect about those positions being some of the responsibility transferred into Finance from other places, he will correct me, I'm sure.

And then just as a general rule, could the minister, at the beginning, you know, because we're still quite near the beginning of these proceedings, just remind me how it works when we see a less allowance for staff turnover? For instance, on page 27, the amount there, of course, is a realized savings because of not having to pay that money for pay and benefits. Is this amount including of any kind of severance or separation?

Mr. Dewar: Yes, I'll remind the member, in fact, there was a reduction in the expenditure, but it's always—there'll be a turnover within the department. And I'll refer the member to page 153, where 'taff'—staff turnover allowance is an adjustment made to a salaries account to allow for attrition and staff turnover. It is a negative adjustment to enable the organization to more accurately display salary requirements.

Mr. Friesen: I'm in the section entitled independent administrator on page 31 of the Estimates and wondered if the minister would just comment again on—could he remind us what the objective of this position is? With the demise of the Crocus fund, why do we—why does this position continue?

Mr. Dewar: Well, the independent administrator is appointed by the Minister of Finance, is responsible for monitoring compliance of three provincially registered labour-sponsored funds on almost 30 corporations approved under the Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit which is administered by Manitoba Jobs and the Economy.

The labour-sponsored funds and issuers approved under the Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit program are required to file an annual information return each tax year with the independent administrator verifying their compliance with the governing provincial legislation. A small business venture capital issuer must file an information return for each year it issues tax creditable shares and for the subsequent three years. The independent administrator files an annual report of his activities for the previous year to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: Now, there's no staff position indicated in this subappropriation, but there is an amount that's allocated, I believe I heard the minister say. Is this a responsibility that is actually performed by a different department, and did he say that it was Jobs and the Economy?

Mr. Dewar: The Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit is administered by Manitoba Jobs and the Economy. The administrator is a fee-for-service individual, or his fee is paid by a fee-for-service contract.

Mr. Friesen: I understand that explanation the minister has provided. I'm just wondering why that contract wouldn't have been identified when I asked earlier about contracts within the department of the minister.

Mr. Dewar: I didn't reference it earlier because it's not an employment contract. This is a fee-for-service contract.

Mr. Friesen: I bet the minister can guess my next question. I'd like to know if the minister would supply a list for—of fee-for-service contracts within Department of Finance.

Mr. Dewar: We'll have to take that question as notice for the member and get back to him as soon as we can.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for his co-operation. We know sometimes it's important to learn as we go and know the kind of language that is necessary to request certain things. So I thank him for the education. I look forward to the information as he supplies it.

I'm turning my attention to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council in the Estimates book. Give me a moment to locate that page.

* (16:20)

Could the minister begin by indicating who is seconded to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council?

Mr. Dewar: Maybe the member can clarify that. Seconded or employed by?

Mr. Friesen: I'll provide an explanation. Perhaps I could request this first: Who are those people who volunteer, not seconded? Who are the people who volunteer and create that action-oriented committee that advises the Premier (Mr. Selinger) on economic issues? I believe at one time it was stated as 31 people. Perhaps he could report the number of people who do that and who they are.

Mr. Dewar: The administration function of the PEAC is—falls within the Department of Finance. And, as I said yesterday, Pat Britton is the CEO of the organization, if I could use that phrase.

But we don't have the list. It is a list, of course, that is appointed by the Premier. If the member likes, we could provide him with that list, but we don't have it on—with us at this point.

Mr. Friesen: I would be happy to receive a list that would indicate the names of the individuals who comprise that committee or group.

Would the minister provide us a bit more information about that group and indicate how often they convene?

Mr. Dewar: Again, I'll remind the member that the administrative function is housed within the Department of Finance, but the committee is actually the Premier's committee and that question is probably best asked of him.

And I'll remind the member that exactly—the Executive Council Estimates are running concurrent with ours, so perhaps if he wants to take a break, he can go over and ask the Premier; he's probably waiting for him right now, for him to come over and ask that question. But I don't—like I said, we—it's the—the administrative function is housed within Finance, but the actual decisions regarding the—how often they meet is decided by the Executive Council.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that response, and I will see if the time will permit, at some point, for me to visit the Premier at the Executive Council Estimates and pose that question to him.

Might I ask the minister if he could make a comment on his government's progress in meeting its targets for in-year adjustment lapse?

Mr. Dewar: This is a practice, of course—remind the member since the mid-'80s, and it'll be included in the financial updates, which will be provided to the public of Manitoba later on this year.

Mr. Friesen: The reason I'm mentioning about the in-year lapse is because the Auditor General made a point of noting in her annual report that—saying in-year lapse was, a year ago, was projected to be \$150 million for the next four years, and there's no rationalization given to how that amount was arrived at, but the auditor had made the statement that the savings would need to be achieved as part of the Province's planned return to an operating surplus for the 2016-17 fiscal year.

Now the Finance Minister has made clear that the Province—or the government's not going to actually make it into balance for the 2016-17 year. But I do note that on page 10 of the budget the

government's no longer pointing to that in-year lapse of \$150 million; they've actually reduced downward that amount. They stated it as forecasting it for the current—or, I guess, the current operating year as a \$17-million lapse and then revising it to 70.

Could the minister comment why the change to reporting this number differently and what caused them to reduce their estimate for the in-year lapse?

Mr. Dewar: I am having a hard time hearing myself. There's a rather vigorous debate going on among members at the end of the table there. So maybe we could call them to order, but I'll leave that under your capable hands, Mr. Chair.

*(16:30)

But the lapse, of course, is adjusted throughout the year. I'll draw the attention of the member to page 2 of the budget papers; under summary budgets of 2014-2015, the lapse was forecast to be—or budgeted to be 150. It was forecast at the end to be \$38 million. And in this year, as the member mentioned, it is forecast to be \$150 million in the current year. But as—again, I'll remind the member that these things are—it's adjusted throughout the year.

Mr. Friesen: There doesn't seem to be a lot of information that gets reported about the lapse. And this is an important part of the government reporting, and the minister indicated earlier that, you know, the government is recorded—is committed to transparent reporting, accurate reporting. Where does the—where is an explanation provided in either the annual report or the Public Accounts to the—that indicates the—what comprises that in-year adjustment or lapse?

Mr. Dewar: I'll remind the member that this has been a fairly common practice for the last 30 years, and it's—in the Public Accounts. It's included in the budget column. So, of course, it's a reflection of a decrease in expenditures or an increase in revenue. But, again, as I said, it's a fairly common practice. They've been doing that, I mean, using this lapse process since the mid-'80s.

Mr. Friesen: I certainly would want to make clear to the minister that I don't dispute the mechanism of a line that would indicate adjustment or a lapse. I think that's a common practice and, certainly, government—the enterprise of government is very large. And what I am asking the minister to do is to indicate, in the interest of transparency, where is the government rationalize the number that they produce. For instance, for the budget year 2013-14, there was a

projection of \$150 million in net lapse. The government had indicated over a number of fiscal years they would achieve a net lapse of \$150 million and that would help them into budget. And, clearly, when you look at the numbers, the only—or, I should say, into a—out of deficit. And, indeed, when you looked at those numbers, the only way they could get to balance was to the use of a—of that \$150-million lapse. Now, in that same fiscal year, 2013-14, the actual lapse was only \$17 million, and that's reported right in this year's budget on page 10.

What I'm wondering about when I'm asking the minister is, can I have an indication—can I have a specification of the \$17 million in lapse that is reported in the '14-15 forecast? Can he indicate what that—what comprises that lapse and on what basis his department has made the decision to report the lapse—or adjustment lapse—on a different basis, on a go-forward basis, now revising it to \$70 million? How does the minister intend to reach the target of \$70 million when he was unable to reach the target of \$70 million for the forecast year?

Mr. Dewar: Again, I remind the member the—on page 2, the Summary Budget, the lapse was 150—in the 2015-2016 year, the lapse will be 150. The forecast for this—for the last year will be \$38 million, and a portion of that is allocated to core, a portion of that is allocated to other reporting entities, and the 17 was just pro-rated amount of the core.

Mr. Friesen: So it would seem that—and I'm looking at the same page the minister's referring to, and I welcome his response, but it would indicate to me that the minister didn't come anywhere—or isn't going to come anywhere close to his target in achieving his desired result.

I guess my question to the minister, if I could make it clearer, is what is the plan? And will he disclose a plan for arriving at his targeted lapse in the—in his coming fiscal year? Is there a plan that he has that he's willing to disclose of how he will arrive at that number?

*(16:40)

Mr. Dewar: Well, this is a budgetary tool that—it's been used for, as I said, decades. It is, when you look at the amount on a \$15-billion budget, a very small amount. But, at the end of the day, you know, we will—it'll be reported as a income or a loss in the budget.

Mr. Friesen: The minister calls it a very small amount. Can the minister quantify that? Can he

indicate, as a percentage of total budgeted expenditures, what is the lapse figure?

Mr. Dewar: Under summary, it's—oh, we're doing a calculation just for a moment. Under summary it's less than 1 per cent.

Mr. Friesen: And for core?

Mr. Dewar: It's just over half of a percentage point. Seven—excuse me—\$70 million on 12 billion, 865 million dollars.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to start with a question about the \$100-million fund that was set aside for, I believe, for people in Lake St. Martin, Little Saskatchewan, Dauphin River and Pinaymootang. I think it was in last year's or the year before's budget. Does that \$100 million appear anywhere in this year's budget, and how much of that money has been spent and how much remains?

Mr. Dewar: That was a—a liability was established in the 2013-2015 year. It has no impact on the current budget that's before the House, and we don't have that information for the member. It, of course, would've been spent out of other departments. And, if we could, we will get the information for the member and we'll provide it to him as soon as possible.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for that.

And if the minister could also get the—what's been spent and what's been left in the fund for Lake St. Martin—Lake Manitoba—there was a Lake Manitoba-based fund that was set aside after the 2011 election or 2011 flood—at the same time, that would be much appreciated.

I'd like to go to page 106.

Mr. Dewar: Yes, in terms of the member's question, we'll take that one as notice, as well, regarding the 2011 fund as he was mentioning for Lake Manitoba, I believe he said, and we'll get the information for the member.

Mr. Gerrard: I think it was the Lake Manitoba flood recovery fund or something like that.

On page 106 of the budget of Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue, there's a table which is part B, capital investment. And the total estimate of expenditure for 2014-2015 was \$586,510,000, and the estimate of expenditure for 2015-2016 is \$629,310,000. You know, from the description of the assets that we're talking about, I would—my understanding would be that the vast majority of

those would be assets or infrastructure which would be built under the funds of the core infrastructure program, which the government has put on page 12 of the budget and budget papers book.

I just want to confirm that that indeed is the case, that the—not the precise number but the—you know, a large majority of that would in fact be infrastructure investments which would be part of the five-year core infrastructure plan going to core infrastructure.

* (16:50)

Mr. Dewar: Well, I'm glad the member raises the issue of the core infrastructure fund because it gives me a chance to talk about the incredible opportunities provided to Manitobans by this fund. It's a 5-and-a-half-billion-dollar fund over five years, which will provide up to 60,000 jobs for Manitobans. It'll boost our economy by \$6.3 billion. It will—these are estimates provided to us by the Conference Board of Canada. It is one of the reasons why the Conference Board of Canada has predicted that Manitoba will lead the nation in economic growth in 2015 and 2016.

It's also one of the reasons why the—recently—the Bank of Montreal, in their projections, ranked Manitoba as one of the leading provinces in terms of economic growth—or one of the strongest economies in Canada. And we've seen that already with the 20,000 new jobs created in the last year. And not only 20,000 jobs, but those jobs are individual—are—those individuals who have those jobs are getting paid more.

And what is refreshing, and which is a different approach taken by the Liberal leader, as opposed to the opposition members, is that the Leader of the Liberal Party is not only she has embraced the PST increase, she's also endorsed our plan to invest that money into infrastructure. So that was refreshing. It was refreshing to see her state that, which sometimes is at odds with the current member for River Heights, I might add, in the Chamber, where he seems to be rather critical of the government's decision to raise the PST. He should maybe take some time and talk to his leader; his leader attends the House every now and then. He should ask his leader why she, in fact, has embraced the PST increase and has endorsed our plan to provide, you know, the \$5.5-billion infrastructure plan that we've initiated that will provide close to 20–12,000 jobs this year and 60,000 jobs over its term, which we're incredibly proud of. And as I said, you will not travel anywhere in the province this year without

encountering a construction crew, working, again to repair Manitoba's roads and bridges and flood protection.

But, to answer the member's question, that he is correct. The numbers that were stated in—on page 106 are reflected in the page 13 of the budget papers.

Mr. Gerrard: And I would now like to go to page 90—no—yes, I would go to page 105, and on this page, there is a line at the bottom which is the operating, and within that there is 332 million, 900-and-some thousand, which deals with amortization and interest expense. And I just want to confirm that a substantial amount of proportion of the infrastructure costs are actually the result of borrowing money, for which the government is going to be paying interest and amortization expenses.

Mr. Dewar: I do want to thank the member for that question, because it gives me an opportunity to speak about our—brought in significant investments that our government's making into infrastructure.

And, again, I'll just remind the member that his own leader—his own leader—stated publicly that she has embraced the idea of the PST increase, and she's made a commitment—well, she's made a number of commitments over the past number of years since she's taken on the responsibility as leader. But one of them is that she's embraced the idea of the PST increase, and then she's endorsed our plan to invest the equivalent amount of that PST increase into infrastructure, as we're doing.

And I want to draw the attention to the member on page 12 of the budget. He'll note that, in this year, we're going to be spending \$747 million on roads, highways and bridges; \$48 million on flood protection; and another \$285 million on municipal infrastructure. And that is, of course, in partnership with our friends who represent municipal governments across the province.

And, just wanted to note that, just recently, the government announced that we would be partnering with the City of Winnipeg in the rebuilding of many of these streets and roads within the city. We made a commitment to provide \$50 million to them over five years. In fact, we've not only matched that; we've met that target. We've exceeded that target this year, investing close to \$65 million in the city of Winnipeg roads and bridges.

And you'll see—I know I heard today when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was out in south Winnipeg and they announced new schools in that area. I

believe the Minister of Education joined him up there, and they were commenting, on their way back to the Legislature, the roadwork they were encountering on Pembina Highway, for example, and that is only one roadwork. I know the honourable Chair here will see some work occur in—within his constituency up in the northeast part of the city.

I know that, throughout the province, you'll see roadwork. We'll see Highway No. 1, for example. Highway No. 1 was upgraded, so now, in fact, you can travel another 15 kilometres an hour to drive from Winnipeg to Brandon. And recently you're going to see upgrades to Highway 59 and Highway 101, which upgrades you'll see incredible improvements to that interchange, which has been long overdue. But our government's accepting the challenge and we're going to get 'er done, as the phrase I've heard used in the Legislature by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), referring to our government's incredible investment strategy into building the economy. I also want to mention the Highway 75 which will meet interstate standards. So Highway 75 between Winnipeg and the border will be upgraded. So no longer it'll be susceptible to flooding. Those are just three of the investments I can tell the member.

I can also mention in my own constituency, Highway 9 between Lockport and Selkirk was rebuilt. Highway 9 between Selkirk and Clandeboye was rebuilt. Highway 59 between the Brokenhead First Nation and Highway 11 was just recently rebuilt. Highway 44, southeast of Lockport, to—all the way to Beausejour was repaved. Highway 12 between Beausejour and all the way up into almost the Thalberg area was repaved. Highway 10 was repaved. Highway 6 was virtually rebuilt. It's one of the major roads in our province. A major route between the south to the north was recently rebuilt. My friend who represents the area of Flin Flon was very proud of the many investments that we made in his area in terms of repairing Highway 10. Many other roads will be rebuilt.

You know, it's difficult to name them all in this short time that I have. But I'd be eager to bring the list back and read it into the record in the following days and weeks that we have, when we'll be dealing with these Estimates, and I look forward to that.

So, as I said, the 5.5, five-year plan—\$5.5-billion plan, we just concluded the first year of that plan. We anticipate it'll create 12,000 jobs this year. We anticipate 60,000 jobs. And I just want to thank—

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now continue consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council.

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

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

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'll just continue with a couple of follow-up questions. The question yesterday was in respect of who the legal adviser was the Premier was referring to who had given him advice in determining the amount—or was part of, perhaps, of other—a group that had given advice in respect of the proper amount of severance or during the negotiations which determined the severance.

And I just wondered if the Premier would be coming forward with the name of that legal adviser at this point in time, if he could.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Yes. We receive advice on human resource and human resource questions, personnel questions and this, through Labour Relations, through Civil Legal and through the Civil Service Commission, and those three bodies provide us advice for matters like this.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, and it's our own fault with paper rattling here, but I didn't—I missed the three—there were three groups, I believe, the Premier had referenced who gave advice, and I heard Civil Service Commission was one and, I'm sorry, I did not hear the other two.

Mr. Selinger: Labour Relations, Civil Legal Services and the Civil Service Commission.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, again, Civil Service Commission, and there was something civil as well there, but I—

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Civil Legal Services, I believe.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Okay, so Civil Service Commission, the Labour Relations board and the Civil Legal Services were all involved in giving advice to the Premier on the issue—during the time of the negotiation of the severance. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: The Labour Relations group is a division of the Treasury Board. Civil Legal Services is a branch of the Attorney General's office, the Minister of Justice's office. And the Civil Service Commission is a free-standing body with its own board of directors.

Mr. Pallister: So representatives from each of these departments or offices was involved in giving advice to the Premier during the period where he was negotiating the severance payments with the departing staffers. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Labour Relations usually takes the lead on dealing with these matters, and they get advice from the bodies that I've mentioned and take that into account in their deliberations.

Mr. Pallister: So help me picture this, then. The staff people involved, do they have a legal representative as well who enters into a negotiation with somebody from the Labour Relations office, or do they themselves enter into a dialogue with the Labour Relations office with a person from there?

Mr. Selinger: Labour Relations handles these matters and, as the member knows, these are matters where there's a confidentiality requirement, and I don't think I can go beyond that at this stage of the game.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I hope we could go a little bit beyond that without infringing on any privacy rule or agreement that—confidentiality or any legal thing that the government entered into to protect itself here. I just—I'm interested in knowing how the process works; I think Manitobans would like to know. So who was negotiating on their behalf here? Who was that? Was that somebody from the Labour Relations office? Is there a person who's assigned to do this?

Let's use Anna Rothney as an example. Was there a staff person from Labour Relations office assigned to negotiate with Ms. Rothney on her severance and who—if so, who was the staff person assigned?

Mr. Selinger: Have to remind the member that he himself said that he was not talking about individual staffers with you guys referring to the media, and I never will. And Labour Relations handles these

matters, and I don't think it's appropriate for me to make comments over and beyond that. It's up to Labour Relations to deal with these matters on behalf of the government.

Mr. Pallister: Well, with all due respect, the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) preamble—our staff haven't taken inflated severance payments from taxpayers ever; we didn't negotiate inflated severance payments with our staff using taxpayers' dollars. So I think maybe this is not a valid point the Premier's making.

What I'm asking, simply, is what the process is, and I'm asking him again. If, as he says, the Labour Relations took the lead on this issue, there must have been a person who was in charge in the negotiation. The only reason I cite Ms. Rothney is not to identify any individual aspects of her case other than who was the person who was accountable for negotiating the severance with her? Who was that? If it wasn't the Premier, we need to know who it was. If the Premier won't take responsibility for it, somebody else should, so let's find out who the staff person was. I'll ask again: Who was the staff person with Labour Relations who negotiated on behalf of the taxpayers of Manitoba the severance with Ms. Rothney?

Mr. Selinger: As I said, earlier, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, the Labour Relations division of Treasury Board was responsible for handling this matter, and I leave it at that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I can't leave it at that, obviously, Mr. Chairperson, because it's clear that the Premier is trying to obfuscate and avoid responsibility for a decision by saying it was allocated to someone in the civil service who he wishes now to have—remain anonymous. This is similar to his approach yesterday when he said he was—there were legal counsel involved, but wouldn't reveal the name of the legal counsel. And this simply is covering up from public view an understanding of even the process of how the severance payment was negotiated.

* (15:00)

So, really, my questions pertain to the process that was used and relate in no way whatsoever to confidential information that the government may have agreed not to disclose. I'm not asking for individual detail here, I'm—rather, I'm asking simply for a better understanding of the process that was used in determining the amount of the severance that was paid.

So I'll ask once more who was the civil servant involved in the process who, according to the Premier, took the lead on behalf of Labour Relations in the process with Ms. Rothney? *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): The Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger:—answer to the member opposite, the Labour Relations Division of Treasury Board was in charge of this matter.

Mr. Pallister: So let the record show, then, that the Premier's not in charge of this matter. He claims he is not responsible for the decision that was made and that he will accept no personal responsibility for it. Let's move on.

My next question will relate to the process that was involved with Jen Anthony. Jen Anthony—I would like to know, is it Jen or Jan? Jen? Mr. Chair, do you know? *[interjection]* Jen, thank you. So Jen Anthony was the director of issues management. I understand that she left her post to work on the campaign in the leadership race for the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), and that she was one of the recipients of the generous severance payments.

Could the Premier share with us, did Ms. Anthony act on her own behalf in the negotiations with the government or did she retain some legal counsel or an adviser of another type to negotiate her severance payment with the government of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Again, these settlements were arrived to by mutual agreement, and there's an element of confidentiality with respect to those. And we've been advised by our officials, who have received legal advice, that they are to remain confidential, and we're respecting that in terms of the settlements. However, there is certain requirements to meet the statutory obligations, and proper reporting will occur under the public sector accountability act in terms of the specifics, reporting on salaries over \$50,000 and severance that's attached to that, and that will be certainly respected.

But for the member to ask me to comment on specifics related to any one individual, I think, is inappropriate in view of the settlement that's mutually been agreed to by all parties.

Mr. Pallister: Who requested this non-disclosure aspect? Was it the government or the individuals involved in the severance negotiation themselves?

Mr. Selinger: Again, this is part of the mutually agreed to settlement, and which is to remain confidential, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier wouldn't dismiss the possibility that the government itself required non-disclosure to protect its interests in not allowing this to become more visible to the public, is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: The member knows full well that when it comes to personnel matters those specifics are never discussed in the House, and that's on a—across-the-board policy and certainly applies in this case.

Mr. Pallister: So there's very real possibility here that the wish of the Premier was to be rid of these staff members and so an inflated severance could be negotiated with these departing staffers because of his desire to be rid of the staffers in question then?

Mr. Selinger: I've answered that question, and mutual agreement was arrived at on the part of all parties. Confidentiality was an element of that. Personnel matters are not—the specifics on personnel matters are not discussed in the House, that's a long-standing tradition of the House. The member knows that full well. I'm respecting that tradition.

Mr. Pallister: I think the Premier is taking the word tradition and running it in to covering up the process itself entirely—not the detail of it, but the actual process, and that's—he's trying to hide that from view.

Let's go back for a second to the memo from the chief of staff that was sent on December 9th, a copy of which the Premier has, which I will read from now which says in about the fourth paragraph down: Now that the party has adopted the rules, I can share information with you about the role of staff leading up to the March convention.

Let me assure you that, as is the case currently, all staff will continue to have the right to involve themselves in any type of political activities outside of regular working hours leading up to the convention. This includes volunteering for any number of activities such as a leadership campaign, assisting with convention organization and being active in a local constituency association.

So does the meaning of that—is the meaning of that clear to the Premier? Is the implication clear to the Premier that a person in his staff could go and volunteer for a campaign without fear of reprisal of any kind?

Mr. Selinger: I think the member accurately read the memo into the record and I think it speaks for itself on what it says.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, so it's clear, Mr. Chair, in my estimation that people have the right to involve themselves in any type of political activity outside of regular working hours. So there'd be no question, then, that the Premier would have no right whatsoever to remove these people from the employ of his office or any other office as a consequence of doing so. That's quite clear.

However, what's also clear is that generous severance payments were negotiated with the same people who were given this assurance within days of the conclusion of the wafer-thin leadership contest. That would seem to me to imply, at least, that the severance payments would have to be more generous because of this guarantee. Let me ask the Premier his thoughts on that issue. Would the severance payments, given the guarantee that was offered by his office to these staffers that they would not lose their jobs, be more generous than if they had been given no such guarantee?

Mr. Selinger: The member's trying to violate the confidentiality that applies to specific individuals. We've never discussed that in the Legislature. There's a mutually agreed settlement that was arrived at here by all parties. Confidentiality was part of that agreement, and people do have that right to privacy.

On the other hand, we have a responsibility to be fully accountable for the amounts of money involved and we have given that global number based on the advice we've received, and we will totally comply with the public sector accountability act in terms of reporting on these matters.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'm going to ask the Premier to fly in the face of common sense for a second, if he will, in this response. Because the common sense in this is clear. His office and, by implication, he, assured these staffers that they could work in the campaign, volunteer as they put it in this memo, that they would be assured that they would not lose their jobs. And so I would ask the Premier, if he wouldn't agree, that by giving them a guarantee they would not lose their jobs, when they subsequently then did enter into a negotiation which resulted in them leaving their jobs, the severance would be higher than had he not given such a guarantee. Would he agree with that on the issue of common sense?

Not—and don't hide from it, I would encourage him. No, don't hide from a response using confidentiality as an argument, because I am simply asking him a question on the basis of pure common sense here. If you—if he gave a guarantee that these

people would not be fired—and it is here and it is clear—and three months later, then entered into a negotiation to fire these people or to part ways with them, would it not be simple common sense that they would receive larger payments than if he had not given such a guarantee at the outset?

Mr. Selinger: I've 'empted' this question for the member. He's probed it on more than one occasion now. We have not discussed personnel matters in this Legislature in the past. We have not currently done it, and nobody's proposing that we do it in the future, including the member opposite. He's made it very clear with respect to any personnel matters involving his staff, he will not be talking about individual staffers and—or even a group of staffers of which he's had several that have left his employ—the number I have here is seven.

* (15:10)

So he should apply the same standard to his questions, which he's not doing. There is a double standard applying here. He wants disclosure on things that he himself won't disclose, and that's inappropriate, Mr. Speaker. It's not the tradition to discuss personnel matters in public in the Legislature and these settlement agreements were arrived at through mutual negotiations on the part of all parties, and they had an element of confidentiality attached to them relating to privacy concerns.

But it is also the case that we have accountability to the Legislature for the amounts of money involved, and those are reported on a global basis and will be reported under the public sector accountability act as required by the laws of this Legislature.

Mr. Pallister: I think common sense stands on its own, so I'll let the Premier continue to take a position which flies in the face of common sense if he likes, but I'll ask him this: Since he was so consistently avoiding being accountable on a personal level for these decisions, and insists that there were a series of other offices involved in the negotiations, were these same offices involved in setting up the contract that each of these employees would have signed when they became employees as well? Was—does Labour Relations lead the way on establishing the employee agreements that each of these employees would have signed at the time of their hiring?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I can't comment on the specifics related to any individual or even a small group of individuals, Mr. Speaker, but in broad

terms, when employment contracts are entered into, there usually is a role for Labour Relations and the Civil Service Commission, and if they feel it necessary, they do get advice from Civil Legal or from any other party they wish to receive advice from.

Mr. Pallister: And were the terms of severance for these employees negotiated at the time they were hired?

Mr. Selinger: Unfortunately, I think the member is back into asking specifics on individuals, and I've answered my question on that thoroughly to respect the long-standing tradition of this Legislature not to discuss individual personnel matters and the specifics of confidentiality related to these settlement agreements, so—but in broad terms, I've answered the question about the role that different parts of government play in dealing with employment contracts.

Mr. Pallister: I'll just counter that the Premier has not answered a single question on this topic, and I'll ask again this question, then: If, in fact, the terms of the severance were negotiated at the outset of the employment contracts being signed by these individuals, why would there need to be extensive negotiations at the tail end when they were leaving?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member's probing individual circumstances of individual employees and that's not appropriate to comment on that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, could the Premier then make a general comment? Is severance negotiated on an ad hoc basis with each individual separately, and is there no formula that applies in a general sense to all employees of the government or his staff?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, the Labour Relations division of Treasury Board takes advice and offers advice with respect to specific contracts, and they also receive advice from the Civil Service Commission. They can receive additional advice if they wish from Civil Legal on specifics, but I'm not at liberty to comment on specific personnel matters here. The question is, is there some standard approach, or is there some variability, and I would say that the Labour Relations deals with that with respect to the specifics they're dealing with in each case.

Mr. Pallister: So, did the Premier, or someone in his office, seek legal counsel before they sent out this letter guaranteeing these people wouldn't be fired from either Labour Relations people or anybody else

in government? Did they get counsel in advance before they sent out a guarantee that the staff wouldn't be fired?

Mr. Selinger: So I'm going to have to ask the member to repeat that question.

Mr. Pallister: Did—

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, Mr. Chair.

I'm asking the Premier to clarify if, in fact, counsel, the counsel he refers to that's provided by these various agencies, such as the Labour Relations people, was sought prior to this notice going out to all staff to assure them that they would suffer no retribution if they decided to volunteer for a leadership campaign.

Mr. Selinger: And I can't speak for that—those bodies in terms of what advice they got and when. That's in—within their prerogative and their discretion to do that.

Mr. Pallister: I gather I wasn't clear enough in my question. I wasn't asking the Premier what advice they got. I was asking if his office asked for advice from them, and I'll ask it again.

Mr. Selinger: I'm not at liberty to discuss these matters. They're part of a confidentiality agreement. Personnel matters are confidential as a general rule, and the specifics of the settlement have elements of privacy to be protected and we're honouring that today. We do have a responsibility to report the amounts of money that are part of the severance package, and those will be reported in accordance with the public sector accountability act. And the global number has been made available, based on advice we've received, so that the public would know what the total cost was.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think the Premier has another obligation he's ignoring here, and that is to explain the process more fully. So I'll ask him again: Did he, before his office sent out this memo assuring these staffers they would not lose their jobs if they participate in the leadership contest, did his office seek or receive advice from any Labour Relations or any other—Civil Service Commission—any other department of government, or did they just simply send out the memo?

Mr. Selinger: And, again, I'm not at liberty to comment on the specifics of that. The process that

was followed was one that has been enunciated in the memo here that the member has a copy of and has tabled in these Estimates yesterday. And I've looked at it now, and the comments in here were—as I said earlier, they speak for themselves. He's read into the record the relevant paragraph and it's now on the record.

Mr. Pallister: Well, let's just cut to the chase here. Now, if I was to work in the Premier's office—a highly unlikely, I know, hypothesis—but were I to be working in the Premier's office and I was to receive this memo and then I was to decide, well, hey, I—may be able—participate in the leadership contest and volunteer. And then a few weeks later, I get called in and they say, you know, I'm dust. I'm going to probably negotiate pretty hard on my severance, because that's a breach of trust and that would lead to a wrongful dismissal suit, and I know enough about the law to know that.

So I want to ask the Premier: Did his office get counsel before this went out in order to make sure that this did not adversely affect the taxpayers of Manitoba in terms of causing, for example, an unduly large severance payment to be negotiated at the tail end because of a breach of trust by his office? Did he or did he not seek legal advice in respect of this letter going out? Because its impact on such a negotiation is clear to anyone with any common sense at all.

Mr. Selinger: I've answered that question.

Mr. Pallister: Were any of these people working in the Premier's office before, say, December 1st of last year?

Mr. Selinger: Ask the member to clarify which individuals he's referring to.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I have to refer to the individuals and I—really, I wouldn't want to put any kind of confidentiality agreement at risk here, but I'm talking about—and I want to be clear on this—the period prior to last December, when the factionalism began to emerge with a fervour in the NDP caucus.

My question is: Did Anna—was Anna Rothney employed as director of Priorities and Planning in November of 2014? When did she resign her post? Or did she take a leave of absence? Which was it?

* (15:20)

Mr. Selinger: [*inaudible*] to get some specific information for the member on that question.

Mr. Pallister: Okay. How about Sally Housser? Was she employed in, say, November of last year?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, and could the Premier share with me, then, when Ms. Housser took—did she take a leave of absence from her job, and, if so, when was that? Approximately when?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'll have to pursue the information on that, Mr. Speaker. The advice we've had is to provide the global number, to be accountable to the public for the cost of the mutually agreed settlements. And the rest of the information up to now has been confidential, and that's the advice we've received.

Mr. Pallister: So, just to be clear, then, the Premier can't tell us when any of these staff who received severance left employment of his office?

Mr. Selinger: I indicated to the member that I would take—seek information on that, but I gave him the context of the discussion and the questions he answered—asked, and I indicated to him the amount and the confidentiality requirements of the agreement. Any further information would be subject to getting proper advice on that.

Mr. Pallister: So, just to be clear, the Premier is seeking advice on whether he can tell me when these employees took leave from his office. Is that what he's undertaking?

Mr. Selinger: I'm undertaking that as part of the overall context in which the mutually agreed settlement agreements were arrived at.

Mr. Pallister: He just said, in the context of the overall agreement. I'm just wondering if he's qualifying the response there, Mr. Chair. I just wanted a clear undertaking from the Premier that he provide us in a reasonable time frame with the dates that these employees left or took leave, whatever the wording is, took leave from his office. Would he undertake to provide that without qualification?

Mr. Selinger: I have provided my answer to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Let the record show he's provided it with qualification and not clearly.

On the issue of leave taking, it says in this memo, and I quote: On the question of requesting time away, it will be the case that all requests from staff for taking vacation and/or leaves of absence will be granted. This builds on our past practice for—

this is the bottom paragraph of the document; the Premier has a copy in front of him—this builds on our past practice for municipal, provincial or federal electoral involvement, including the last leadership race. Any requests to use accumulated vacation time and/or take an unpaid leave of absence should clearly indicate the dates which you are planning to be away and be sent to the chief of staff's office, copied to the supervisors of your specific unit or office.

Would the Premier agree that this situation's an unprecedented one?

Mr. Selinger: Actually, I think that paragraph says the opposite. The office had said, this builds on our past practice for municipal, provincial or federal electoral involvement, including the last leadership race, which clearly indicates that it was not unprecedented; it has been done in the past, including the last leadership race. That's the sentence he read into the record; I just recall it for him for his information.

Mr. Pallister: So, when I refer to unprecedented, of course I'm referring to the fact that a sitting premier is being challenged for his leadership by members of his own caucus. Would he agree that that is without precedent in our country's political history?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member read a paragraph from a memorandum dated December 9th into the record, and that paragraph indicated very clearly that the practice used in this leadership contest followed past practice, including leadership races. And I've clarified that for him; he read it into the record. I ask him to take it for what it means.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the leadership races that are cited here didn't involve a premier staying in the office of premier while he was running to be premier.

Again, I would ask the Premier, doesn't he think that this is without precedent, this specific case? I understand that he's citing the paragraph here which refers to—and I'll read the quote again so he can get it all. It says: This builds on our past practice for municipal, provincial or federal electoral involvement, including the last leadership race.

But what I'm asking him is, does he recall any past example, any example, where a sitting premier is entering into a leadership contest to fight to preserve their own position as premier?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I appreciate the member putting this sentence and paragraph on the record

because it says very clearly: This builds on our past practice for municipal, provincial or federal electoral involvement, including the last leadership race.

The point there is it does have a precedent: past practice. And that's what he read into the record, and I can affirm that that's exactly what that paragraph says.

Mr. Pallister: So could the Premier then provide, for our edification, one example, any example, where a sitting premier has ever remained in their office while campaigning to be the leader of their party? Could he give us one example?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member was citing a paragraph in a memorandum. The paragraph was very clear in what it said: This builds on our past practice for municipal, provincial or federal electoral involvement, including the last leadership race. The paragraph indicates that past practice would be followed and whether staff could be involved in out-of-work activities, and that's what the paragraph says. It's built on past practice.

Mr. Pallister: So could—the Premier's failed to cite a single example where this has ever happened before. Could he explain what the intention was of his office in guaranteeing that the employment of the staffers who subsequently were all—who all negotiated their departures at generous cost to the taxpayer—could he explain what the thinking was in offering this guarantee in the first place? What was the purpose of writing this memo? What was the intention?

Mr. Selinger: I think the member has identified a very key sentence in the last paragraph on the first page of the memorandum, that it builds on our past practice for municipal, provincial and federal electoral involvement, including the last leadership race. I think the memo simply followed past practice.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, so the Premier thinks it's just normal course of business and this is a precedent that's well established, that the Premier's office, with the Premier remaining in his office, campaigns for the leadership of a party and sends out a memo which tells all his staffers they can go and work for someone against his leadership. I just—I would want him to verify that he believes that's a well-established precedent, even though he hasn't given us a single example.

Mr. Selinger: I just simply reiterate the paragraph that the member read into the record and what it says. It builds on past practice, including the last leadership race.

* (15:30)

Mr. Pallister: Did the Premier replace each of these people while they were on their leaves of absence or leave the positions vacant? Yesterday—I'm sorry to clarify, Mr. Chair—

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry, I didn't make that clear because yesterday we had a good exchange, I think, a good discussion about what has happened since they left, you know, who has been replaced since they left and so on.

But I'm asking in the interim period, I understand some of these folks were out of their positions who took leave for a good four months. How did the Premier cope with the loss of the skill sets of these people during that period?

Mr. Selinger: Other individuals stepped up to provide the roles that were—these people had fulfilled. As I indicated, other positions were—yesterday other positions were left vacant and so people did what they could do to do these jobs, and the business of government carried on and many activities were engaged in on behalf of the people of Manitoba during the period of the leadership contest. Many productive engagements were carried on and the business of government moved forward.

Mr. Pallister: So the office made do with other people taking on additional responsibilities beyond their initial—the initial contracts that they signed with the government and they assumed new responsibilities. Were all those employment contracts renegotiated with the help of the labour relations people at the time that these folks assumed their new responsibilities?

Mr. Selinger: The situation is no different than when somebody fills for somebody that's on a vacation or another form of leave. It's a very common practice that other people take on those responsibilities; similar situation here.

Mr. Pallister: So I'm taking it to understand, then, that folks would just assume additional responsibilities to cover for those who were away. Is that how it worked?

Mr. Selinger: That's often the case, and we do this all the time. People do take vacations, people do take time off for various reasons, and other people pick up those responsibilities.

Mr. Pallister: So these folks, then, would be—they'd be continuing to get paid then during the four months or so that they were away. I notice in the memo it says here that references unused vacation and things like that, I guess I'm not asking specifically for each person or anything like that, I just want to know—I want to have a broader understanding of it. The folks who left would just have used some unused vacation time generally, that type of thing, in order to get—just thinking how they would support themselves in the three or four months that they'd be out of work.

Mr. Selinger: That's the paragraph that the Leader of the Opposition read into the record. Requests for staff for taking vacation and leaves of absence will be granted. This builds on our past practice for municipal, provincial or federal electoral involvement including the last leadership race. That's exactly what the member read into the record, and I confirm that's what it says.

Mr. Pallister: So this—the question, the next question has to do with the coincidence of several of these staffers—I'm not referring to Mr. Martin but others all negotiating severance around the same time. I'm not sure of the exact day but—*[interjection]* March 9th, so March 9th, I gather, that all the remaining staffers negotiated severance on the same day. So what does the Premier attribute that coincidence to? It seems strange that a whole group of staff people would agree to depart on the same day. I wonder what happened there.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I have to reiterate for the Leader of the Opposition that these settlements were arrived at by mutual agreement and the specifics of that, I'm not at liberty to comment on them.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I guess, pretty obvious all of them have one thing in common. They supported the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald). So would that be the reason that the severances were all negotiated the same day, that they supported the candidate, the other leadership candidate for Seine River and volunteered for her campaign during the leadership race?

Mr. Selinger: I have to give the member the same answer I've given him previously. These agreements, all personnel matters have confidentiality attached to them, respect privacy rights. And these settlement agreements also have those conditions attached to them. But the member knows very well we don't discuss personnel matters in public. That's exactly what he says with respect to his own individual staffers: I'm not talking about individual staffers with

you guys and I never will. That's the standard he's set for himself; I don't know why he would expect anything different from anybody else.

Mr. Pallister: Well, with all due respect, this is a clump of staffers that took about \$670,000 from Manitoba taxpayers, and none of our staffers ever cost taxpayers that kind of money. So I'm just asking the Premier, maybe, if he'd recognize on the surface of it at least, pretty much common sense, that these guys all lost their jobs or negotiated these severances with the government because they didn't want to stay working with him. Is that what he would attribute the reason to here?

Mr. Selinger: I think we're going back over ground that we've already discussed, Mr. Speaker. I did in question period today indicate that the member himself has received severance on two different occasions at two different levels of government, and that in 1999 members of political staff from the Progressive Conservative government of the day received \$1.2 million in severance.

Mr. Pallister: That's great news, not really relevant to today's situation, but, you know, interesting in its triviality. The fact that I have asked the Premier and he's refused to answer as to why these people would leave is—doesn't surprise me, I guess, but disappoints me. The fact that he's refused to take the veils away from any aspect of the process of how the severance was negotiated, of who acted on behalf of the government, of who acted on behalf of the people who left, is also disappointing. The fact is he's kept—he's got a black cloak over the whole thing. But he has gone on record as saying we can get the global number in September, so that's gratifying.

Now, the global number that we get in September, does that break down the severance and the salary in compartments, or would it just be a global number that we would get in September and we would not really know what the severance was even in September?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the global number has been put on the record now for severance, and that's on the record now. The public sector accountability act requires that the—any compensation over \$50,000 be reported in the year in which it is provided, and—by September 30th—and those requirements need to be respected and will be.

Mr. Pallister: Does the Premier anticipate further severance payments will be made, and, if so, approximately how many and when?

Mr. Selinger: I have no comment to make on that.

Mr. Pallister: Is the Premier (Mr. Selinger) aware of other severance that has been negotiated since this was—these were disclosed and which has not yet been made public?

Mr. Selinger: No, I'm not aware of any incidents like that.

Mr. Pallister: Were the Premier to become aware of such situations as that, how would the public be made aware?

Mr. Selinger: In the same way that we've made the public aware of these numbers, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:40)

Mr. Pallister: I would submit that the public was not made aware of these numbers by the government at all. In fact, we had the FIPPA request for these numbers using our access opportunities, and we were provided information on Mr. Liam Martin.

So we were provided that information, but only after we went through a freedom of information request and not before. So I wouldn't want the implication to be there, and I'm sure the Premier wouldn't want to create the false impression that he was actually transparent in any way in respect of the severance payments that were made.

Okay, so in December 19th, we received some response from—through a FIPPA request that told us what the severance amount was for Mr. Liam Martin.

And I guess—I don't think the—well, the Premier may have a copy—does the Premier have a copy of that, or does he want me to table this document here?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I think it would be helpful to table the document, make sure that we're looking at the same document. *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, didn't mean to cut you off there.

It's dated December 19th, for the Premier's purposes, on the top right-hand side. Might save some time. I just had one quick question about it.

Maybe he could verify if that's the document he has and we don't need to go through the hoops.

Mr. Selinger: I have a document dated December 19th, but I still think it would be helpful if the member tabled his document in view of the fact that

this document seems to have a few flaws in terms of its complete transparency, okay?

Mr. Pallister: I'll table that one and I'll table this one as well at the same time just to save some time.

Just while we're waiting for that—oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: I'm just—just to help me understand the rules a little bit better, Mr. Chairman, there's—Premier's saying there's confidentiality around salaries and all that type of thing except for sometimes when it's tabled in the public accounts. But that's—that'll be later this year, I gather.

But there's a—this Osborne House situation raises an issue because the government released the salary levels and compensation of a Barbara Judt from the Osborne House to the media.

And I'm just curious, are there different rules for things like the people who work at Osborne House than there are for people who work for the Premier's office, or are the rules the same?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to see the document that the member's referring to to understand what has transpired.

Mr. Pallister: I'll just get this one copied as well and then we can have a look at it.

I just want to be clear, if the rules are different, I'd like to know why.

Question, not, you know, not fully understanding the process, but just in the interest of saving time in the future, how does it work if we just bring in a couple of copies and then nobody has to go running out of here to do that and then we can just hand one to the Premier and he has it? Like, can we do things like that from now on just to save a bunch of time?

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): I'm advised it's helpful if, when documents are to be tabled, that there's three copies ready to go, just so staff don't have to leave the Chamber, just to speed things up.

Mr. Pallister: I just want to be sure that the Premier could acknowledge they have those documents in front of him. I believe the one is December 19th and the other one's May 7th, and they're both from the clerk of the Executive Council. Yes?

Mr. Selinger: I've received the documents.

Mr. Pallister: Just a couple of quick questions. On the December 19th document it's—I'll just read from it, I guess, just to put it on the record, but it says: Re your request for access to information under part 2, et cetera, et cetera; and then it says: On December 1st, 2014, Manitoba Executive Council received your request for access to the following records. Please provide a copy of all records that indicate the amount of severance paid to Liam Martin, former chief of staff to the Premier. As well, please provide a copy of all records related to Liam Martin's departure. Manitoba Executive Council has reviewed your request and is able to grant access in part. In terms of the amount of severance paid to Liam Martin, former chief of staff to the Premier, I can advise that, as per the terms of employment, the severance pay was \$146,047, and then it goes on to talk about other aspects.

But I guess my question was, because the Premier's been referring to confidentiality agreements and the like, can we assume then, because the FIPPA was responded to at least in respect to the amount of severance pay for Mr. Martin, that he didn't negotiate some kind of secrecy agreement or something with the government when he left? And is that the reason that we're able to be given his number on an individual basis as opposed to the other staffers?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, first of all, I don't see these FIPPAs before they're released, that's the common practice. So there's no interference in what the documents say, but, presumably, the FIPPA was released based on the best advice available to the people at the time.

The second FIPPA would've also been based on the best available advice that the people filing the response would've received at the time. And so, again, I don't see these documents before they're released. As a matter of fact, I don't see them 'til after.

Mr. Pallister: I just want to be clear for the Premier. I'm not—my questions don't pertain to anything accusatory to him at all. I got enough other issues that I can go on that I'm not going on this one with the Premier. I simply want to understand the contradiction between the two, and he sees that because he sees the highlighted sections in each. What I'm getting at here, this—because the first reviews our request on December 1st, and it responds with the detailed information on the severance for Mr. Martin. But the second does not respond with a

breakdown. It references an aggregate amount of severance. So I'm just curious as to why we would be given the detail. I'm glad we're given the detail. I think it's in the best interests of the Premier, quite frankly, to make sure that the public knows how much the severance was. If it's defensible, he should defend it.

But I wonder why we would not be given the breakdown in the second FIPPA response and be given a global number for several staffers when we were given an individual number on Mr. Martin on December 19th.

* (15:50)

Mr. Selinger: The second FIPPA, I think it makes plain its rationale for what it has provided in terms of information. In particular, it is considered to be an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy to release information that relates to the third party's employment or occupational history and describes their income or financial circumstances. That's what the FIPPA responds when they give the aggregate number of \$670,000, and that was in the response to Robert Pankhurst of May 7th, 2015. And that's provided by the access and privacy co-ordinator.

Mr. Pallister: So what was on May 7th, when we got this response, considered to be an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy, was fine on December 19th of last year. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Again, these documents are released without any review or oversight from myself. They're handled by our officials, and, presumably, they are provided with the best advice that they've received at the time that they released them.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'll just remark, then, that the advice got a lot worse in May 7th of 2015 than it was on December 19th of 2014 because there's a failure to disclose the breakdown here using an argument that it's an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy when, in fact, that was not deemed the case just a few months before. Secondly, the employment salary levels of each of these employees is such that they would have to be disclosed according to other legislation that the government has passed. So, clearly, the fact is that disclosing a salary is not an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy under our own legislation, and I don't know why it would be used as an excuse under a FIPPA response.

Could the Premier explain how it is that these salaries have to be disclosed anyway by other legislation and that that is not considered to be an

unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy, and yet a FIPPA response can use an excuse like this to not provide detailed information that is—should be in the public domain. Can you explain the contradiction?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the officials providing these responses were—sought and received advice that shaped their response, and they based them on the best information they had and advice they had at that time.

Mr. Pallister: So, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker—or, Mr. Chair. I missed that response. It's my own fault, but I'll ask the Premier to repeat what he just said, if he wouldn't mind.

Mr. Selinger: Yes. I said to the effect that the information released by the officials was based on the best advice they received at the time that they filed the documents.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, but that wasn't my question. My question was, how is it that this is not a contradiction between our other legislation that requires salaries in excess of \$50,000 to be made public? If that's part of our legislation, and I understand it is, how could it be a legitimate excuse for a FIPPA cover-up? Again, in particular, it is considered to be an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy to release information that relates to the third party's employment or occupational history and describes their income or financial circumstances. That's put in a FIPPA response right here. Yet the income levels of these staffers are—have to be disclosed anyway. So how is it an unreasonable intrusion into their privacy in this respect, but yet it's legislated and required in another piece of government legislation? Is that not a contradiction?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I believe I've answered the question. The responses were based on the best advice that the officials received at that time, and they followed that advice in providing the response under The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and that's what the act is: The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. And they indicate in the response of May 7th, in particular, it is considered to be an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy to release information that relates to the third party's employment or occupational history and describe their income or financial circumstances. That's the advice that they operated under when they provided that response, and as I said to the member earlier,

these responses are not shown to ministers before they're made available. They're handled at the level of officials.

Mr. Pallister: Good. Well, I'm not trying to call the Premier to account on the contradiction here; I'm asking him to acknowledge there is one, and because he is the Premier and because these responses are incongruous to one another. They're in conflict with one another; they're contradictory. It would seem to me there's a problem with the administration here, that perhaps the Premier would want to do something about.

Yes, it may be said that people are going to try to find best advice, but the advice has obviously changed from December 19th of 2014, when the information requested was disclosed and no arguments were made about personal privacy or the argument that is being made on May 7th. The May 7th argument that's being used to not share the information is one which contradicts not only the response from December 19th but fundamentally contradicts, in fact, our own rules and laws that are in place in our province.

So, without fear of retribution, I would ask the Premier to acknowledge that there's a problem here and undertake to address it so that we have consistency in our reporting. If he would undertake to do that, I think we could move on.

Mr. Selinger: I just want to clarify what he's asking me to undertake.

Mr. Pallister: I'm just asking him to undertake to address this inconsistency. Apparently, the advice that was the best advice in December 19th in respect of Mr. Martin is no longer taken as best advice on May 7th, 2015, with respect to the other staffers. Therefore, the new advice is that the responses don't have to be given because of some argument which I consider specious about individual privacy in respect of salary disclosures which are already mandated under our laws.

So there's an obvious contradiction here. I would just like the Premier to undertake to address it in some manner, hopefully with a view to making sure that information, when it is requested through Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is disclosed whenever possible, and that arguments like this can't be used in the future to cover up information.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I think the member's asking me to give advice to the people that administer the

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to disclose information they've recommended not be disclosed. I don't think that would be appropriate. I think they have to operate on the best advice they have and the best knowledge they have about how that act should be interpreted in order to provide freedom of information and protect the privacy of individuals. And they strike that balance with respect to every request they've received and they try to respond accordingly under the legislation without any oversight or interference from elected officials. These are handled at the administrative level with respect to how they interpret the legislation. And I don't think it would be appropriate for me to now tell them to do something different than what they've already done. They operated on the best professional advice and judgment that they could make, given the request that they had in front of them at the time that they received it.

Mr. Pallister: When the responses to FIPPA requests are so obviously contradictory, it would seem to me that that should be a concern of all of us. Yet the Premier has tempted to say that the people who administer the act should be, you know, the only ones concerned with its administration, which I see as a contradiction.

Ms. Nancy Allan, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

If the act is administered inconsistently or without some fundamental adherence to principle, then it's going to result in a hodgepodge of responses and non-responses as time goes on. That's not in anyone's best interests, I would say, especially not the government, quite frankly.

Again, you know what, the least, I guess, I would ask the Premier to acknowledge that there's an apparent contradiction in these two responses, the one on December 19th, 2014, which discloses the severance of Liam Martin, and the following response on May 7th which fails to disclose the severance of the others and uses a privacy argument as a way to avoid providing the information which, if applied, would not have allowed Liam Martin's severance to be made public either, shows that there's a contradiction in the interpretation of the act.

Would the Premier agree that that's apparent from these two responses?

* (16:00)

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've responded to the member by saying that when a request for freedom of information is made and it's considered under

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the officials respond with the best advice they have at that time. And there was one request made on December 19th, another request made on May 7th, and the member believes that there's a change in the way they handled it, and I'm saying that they dealt with these requests, as far as I can understand—because we do not involve ourselves in these or are not allowed to be involved in these—they respond with the best advice they get at that time, and that's what they put on the record.

They said it in May 7th, they said, in particular, it is considered to be an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy to release information that relates to the third party's employment or occupational history and describes their income or financial circumstances. So that was the view that was provided by officials responsible for administering The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That was not the point that was made on December 19th, and I've acknowledged that they receive advice on each specific request they get and respond accordingly.

Mr. Pallister: So, okay, I'm just curious, then. The Premier has said he hasn't admitted there's a contradiction, whether it's an obvious contradiction, so that's okay, that's par for the course, but the signator for this response is the clerk of the Executive Council and Cabinet secretary. Is the Premier suggesting he doesn't see these responses but the gentleman sitting next to him does see the responses? Is that what he's saying?

Mr. Selinger: No, the documents, as I understand it, are signed off by the clerk of the Executive Council.

Mr. Pallister: But the Premier's saying he doesn't see them, the Premier himself doesn't see them, but the clerk of the Executive Council does?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I, through you, to the Premier and then to the clerk of the Executive Council, I'd suggest this is worth following up and finding out why the inconsistency. And we'll leave it at that.

This 'conflab' over the leadership must've been hard on the Premier, and I expect it was hard on a lot of people. To have people who worked with him decide not to support him, I'm sure was difficult and an incredible challenge in many ways. I want to ask him, how long did Ms. Rothney work with him? How many years?

Mr. Selinger: I have to get information on that.

Mr. Pallister: Jen Anthony, approximately how long?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to seek out information on the specifics of that.

Mr. Pallister: Sally Housser, the Premier have any idea of how long he worked with her?

Mr. Selinger: Same response.

Mr. Pallister: Meaghan Dewar—approximately how long did he work with Meaghan Dewar?

Mr. Selinger: Same response.

Mr. Pallister: Matt Williamson, is that also a person the Premier worked with, I believe, for how long approximately?

Mr. Selinger: Same response.

Mr. Pallister: Would the Premier undertake, then, to get back with me—to me with the approximate length of time that each of these staffers worked in his office or with him directly?

Mr. Selinger: I'll take it under advisement.

Mr. Pallister: I would suggest the Premier, with all due respect, that the fact that he's unwilling to answer that question or unable to answer it is a reflection of why they perhaps did not support him in the leadership race. If he does not know how long these people worked with him, if he does not understand the importance of the relationships that he had with him, then it's a reflection on his leadership. And I would ask him again, how long did Anna Rothney work with him? Approximately how many years?

Mr. Selinger: I've answered the member's questions, and he's trying to draw in conclusions from that, which is unfortunate.

Mr. Pallister: I would say what is unfortunate here is that the Premier doesn't seem to recall how many years he's worked with these staff people, and all of them made the choice not to support him in the leadership race. And I would ask him what he learned through this torturous process for him, for Manitobans, over the last several months, where his leadership was challenged by his own caucus members and where many of his senior staff departed and took leaves of absence to support other candidates for the leadership. What did he learn from this process?

Mr. Selinger: Again, as the member pointed out, the procedures that were followed and the processes of participation were based on past practice, including the last leadership race and other levels of involvement. So there had been a precedent set about people's participation in these events outside of their employment, and those were the practices that were followed. And that was the basis upon which people participated in this leadership contest.

And in any leadership contest, people decide where they want to—who they want to support and that—people from a variety of different positions support different contestants and that's the way it breaks out, and you go from there.

Mr. Pallister: At the outset of this process, when the staffers began to attend other Christmas parties and decide that they were not going to support the Premier's campaign, he issued that statement I quoted from earlier and was quoted as saying, in a story on Global News, we believe everyone should be able to exercise their civil rights as citizens to participate in an electoral leadership contest and they'll be respected.

But then after removing each of these staffers from their positions by mutual agreement with generous payments as incentives to cause them to want to leave, I expect, people have civil rights, is what he said, but we also have an organization to run and everybody wants to find the best way to do that. That was what he said.

So, in the interim period, what happened to that faith in civil rights? What caused the Premier to change his view that these staff members should be allowed to return to their work in that approximately four-month time period?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member is violating his own standard of conduct. He himself said that he doesn't discuss individual staffers with you guys and I never will, and yet he's asking other people to do what he refuses to do himself. That double standard I don't think is appropriate in this Legislature or in this Estimates process.

Mr. Pallister: Well, actually, I'm asking the Premier how his attitude's changed. I'm not asking him to refer to anybody else but himself. And I'm asking him why his respect for civil rights was so great in December and so lacking in March.

Mr. Selinger: And I gave him an answer on that with respect to the past practices as indicated in the

memo of December 9th and with respect to his own standard about discussing individuals.

Mr. Pallister: Well, is the Premier implying that the confidentiality of discussing things about individuals includes him and that I can't ask him questions today as well? I want to be clear on that.

Mr. Selinger: I've given the member the answer. We have a responsibility to respect individuals' privacy, and I'm doing that in my responses, and at the same time be accountable for any public payments that are attached to people arriving at a mutual agreement on a settlement.

Mr. Pallister: Those are inane points that have no relevance whatsoever to the question that I asked, and the question, again, was what happened to the Premier's respect for civil rights in that four-month period.

What civil rights was he referring to at the outset when he made the comment about respecting civil rights, specifically? What was the—what were the civil rights he was alluding to when he spoke so highly of respecting civil rights?

Mr. Selinger: Again, those were enunciated in the memorandum that the member tabled with us yesterday dated December 9th.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's chief of staff is the one who enunciates and clarifies his respect for civil rights, but he's unable to articulate it? Is that how that works?

Mr. Selinger: As I said, these—this document came out on December 9th that indicated the roles individuals could play. It indicated it was built on past practice for municipal, provincial or federal electoral involvement, including the last leadership race. And that's the point that I'm referring to.

* (16:10)

Mr. Pallister: So again I ask the Premier: What changed then, his respect for civil rights so apparent, as stated by his chief of staff in December, so absent in March? What changed in the interim period in respect to his respect for the civil rights of the staffers which he's negotiated generous severance payments with? What changed?

Mr. Selinger: The member shouldn't assume any changes were necessarily made.

Mr. Pallister: Well, there are 670,000 changes that Manitobans had to respond to, and that was the dollars the Premier negotiated to pay those folks to

leave. So I would say there was a change. There was a change in the cash balance in the government's coffers that they had taken from Manitobans. I would say that was a pretty significant change, and that change was caused by his change in his willingness to respect the civil rights of those people.

So again I ask him: What changed? What changed between December and the March period where he negotiated these severance payments? Through surrogate responsible civil servants, he negotiated generous and unprecedented severance payments for staffers who he had promised would not be removed from their positions. What changed?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member shouldn't draw any conclusions about anything changing. Privacy rights are part of respecting people's rights. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is the law of Manitoba and it does protect individual rights, and it protects their civil rights as well.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier is throwing rights around quite a bit here but he failed to respect his word as given to his staffers in December via his chief of staff, and when questioned about it I recall he said something about, well, it wasn't written in stone.

Is this the prerequisite for the Premier keeping his word to his staff or Manitobans generally, that he has to give his word in stone?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'm not sure what the member's quoting or what source he's identifying. I'm simply responding to his previous questions, and I'm indicating what the memorandum of December 9th stated, based on 'prast' practice and I'm indicating what The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act recommended with respect to certain pieces of information, with respect to specific staff members. And in both cases I'm respecting the rights of individuals.

Mr. Pallister: So, Mr. Martin, based on that logic, must've had his privacy rights breached when his severance amount was made public. Mr. Martin, I understand, is now in the employ of the federal New Democratic Party and is in charge of running their federal election campaign. The fact that Mr. Martin was given such a generous severance I believe it was in the service—he was in the service of the Premier's office less than three years and received severance which—approximately, it's one year of salary, which puts him at about 50 times what a front-line nurse would get in severance for that same period of work.

Or, more accurately, I suppose a front-line nurse would work for a half a century to get that level of severance. Now Mr. Martin received that severance, now works for the federal NDP, running their campaign in Manitoba.

Would the Premier agree that there's the potential for someone, you know, less subjective than political people like he and I to observe that and wonder if his generous severance payment wasn't used to cross-subsidize the federal NDP campaign?

Mr. Selinger: The information provided was provided with the best advice at the time from the privacy—from officials in charge of the privacy requirements—protection of privacy act and the freedom of information act. The member is making connections which, you know, I'm not going to comment on them. I think that he's trying to make connections which are unrelated to each other.

Mr. Pallister: So just to be clear then, the Premier doesn't think it's a logical concern. He would dismiss it. He would say that after two and a half years of service someone gets a full year of salary as severance and within some short period of time goes to work for a federal campaign in the same jurisdiction. No one should assume that the generosity of the severance has anything to do whatsoever with supporting that individual in another role for the federal New Democrats. Is he suggesting there is no basis for connecting those two things? Because if he is I'd like him to just to say that.

Mr. Selinger: I've given my answer, Mr. Speaker, and the answer stands.

Mr. Pallister: Well, he didn't really give me an answer, Madam Chair, but I'm getting used to that.

When the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) announced that she was resigning Cabinet, she made a statement in which, in part, she said that following a meeting with the Premier she had been given his assurance that the staff—because we all have staff in this building—that they would continue to have jobs and they would in no way be affected by the decision we've made today.

Can the Premier assure us that no staff were adversely affected and that he did not break his word to the member for Fort Rouge in any way, shape or form by adversely affecting staff in some manner as a consequence of the resignation of these members from Cabinet?

Mr. Selinger: I can tell the member that the resignation of Cabinet ministers was a decision they made and any staff implications of that were handled in good faith.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that's good to hear, Madam Chair.

The Premier assured me when I asked him in, I believe, November—I'm not sure of the exact date, but he'll recall that I asked him a question about what percentage of the time he'd be spending as Premier versus being involved in the leadership race. And I won't quote verbatim, because I can't, but I do recall he said 100 per cent of the time he'd be focused on the job of Premier.

After December, there was a—the Premier, subsequently to that time of answering that question, officially entered the leadership race. Did his approach in terms of time management change at any point or did he continue to devote 100 per cent of his time to his campaign for leader?

Mr. Selinger: I made a commitment to continue in service in the role that I was elected to and I followed through on that and made sure that we were moving the business of government forward. And we did that, and I recall coming to work every day to make sure that happened, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's suggesting that he did devote 100 per cent of his time to the job of Premier, then, during the leadership race for the NDP?

Mr. Selinger: I just answered that question.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier and I both know that's hogwash, so we'll just leave that there.

Now, in respect to the budget-making process that the Premier undertook, when did that begin? The preparation of the budget, when did that process begin?

* (16:20)

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the officials start talking in—as early as June about the upcoming budget, and the official call for Estimates to be provided is as early as the fall.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, I got the first half of that response and then I missed the piece just before as early as fall.

Mr. Selinger: I said that officials start discussing the upcoming budget as early as the spring—June, July—

of the prior year to the next budget, and usually some official communication starts 'occurring'—occurring as early as the fall.

Mr. Pallister: I'm especially interested in how the Cabinet members are involved in this process and when does—when do members of Cabinet get actively involved in the advance preparation of the budget document itself and so on? Is that—I suppose it might vary by department, Madam Chair; I get that. But sort of in the general sense, how does that process work?

Mr. Selinger: Give just some preliminary information as we seek more specific information but often the call for Estimates in terms of documents to be provided to Treasury Board starts in the fall. And usually engagement with ministers—and it does vary by department; I think the member is correct in that. It varies quite—depending on what circumstances are being dealt with in each department. And sometimes ministers have specific things that they want to advance. Other times, officials have issues that they want to advance and—but usually after the original call for Estimates goes out, within several weeks after that there starts to be an initial global discussion with ministers about what's being developed as part of the Estimates.

Mr. Pallister: So, at some point in the fall, just to be clear, the ministers, depending on departments, but at some point in the fall, the ministers would begin to get involved more personally in the process of budget preparation themselves? Like, departmental people would start earlier, but the ministers themselves generally would come into the process later?

Mr. Selinger: I would say generally that's the case but, again, I do want to emphasize what the member has said, that there can be wide variation on that.

Mr. Pallister: So that must—it must've been disruptive to the process, to have the Cabinet ministers, some senior departmental leaders, withdraw from their responsibilities in the middle of that process. Would the Premier agree that posed some challenges?

Mr. Selinger: Certainly, when new ministers take on responsibilities, they are going to have to catch up with some of the things that have gone on before them and brief themselves, and they're going to require briefing. So that's not unusual when there's a change in Cabinet composition.

Mr. Pallister: Right, Madam Chair, but the magnitude of—I mean, you're talking about senior portfolios, Cabinet ministers leaving after the budget process has started, which they'd been part of, and now new ministers coming in. It must've posed a significant challenge to the administration of the process, at the very least, not to mention other aspects, other challenges that may have occurred outside of here.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've indicated that there's always a learning curve for a new minister entering any portfolio. Different ministers have different levels of preparation and readiness for that based on previous experience and knowledge, and so, sure, there's always a requirement to brief people up when Cabinet composition is changed, and that's not unexpected.

Mr. Pallister: I'm not sure in what way the Premier was referring to that's not unexpected, but I think that this circumstance was pretty unprecedented and, I would think, largely unexpected.

We're talking about ministers of Health, minister of Finance, Justice, Municipal Affairs. Who have I missed? There was somebody else. The Premier recall who was the other minister that resigned? I've missed somebody here.

Just asking, the ministers who resigned, it was the minister of Health, the minister of Finance, minister of Justice, minister of Municipal Government, I believe, and there was one other, and I'm asking the Premier to recall for me who that was.

Mr. Selinger: Jobs and the Economy minister.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you to the Premier, Madam Chair.

So we have pretty major portfolios, and, I guess, in particular, the Premier, as a former Finance minister, would then recognize the challenges that might've been posed by having to replace a Finance minister in the middle of this process, certainly.

Were the departing ministers of any assistance in the transition in terms of the learning curve for the new ministers?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check with each minister on that. I think there may have been some instances where there was communication among the former and current ministers that may well have occurred.

Mr. Pallister: Hope that would be the case, certainly, Madam Chair. That would be, I'm sure, really appreciated by the incoming ministers.

So, as the process moves forward into the new year, would the Premier agree there could've been some distractions there as a consequence of the leadership contest or would he say it was just business as usual? You've got new ministers in major portfolios, some other changes have occurred as well, staff changes on top of that, staff leaving as well. It must've been a more challenging—would it be the—fair to say that this is the most challenging budget preparation process that he's been part of as a premier?

Mr. Selinger: I'd like to say a couple of things about the ministers that took on new responsibilities.

The—for example, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) had been serving on Treasury Board for several years, had been a legislative assistant to the minister of Finance and had also several years of experience on the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislature, so brought quite a bit of knowledge.

* (16:30)

The minister of Justice, who moved over from being the minister of Education, had done a lot of work on community-related prevention strategies in an urban setting. The Minister of Municipal Government (Mr. Caldwell) had been a previous minister and had been a previous city councillor, with many years of service at that level and had been a member of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, so knew a lot about municipal government. The Minister of Health had been the previous Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors, so brought quite a bit of knowledge in that area there. And the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Mr. Chief) had quite a bit of experience working on, particularly, the jobs area and generating opportunities for young people to get jobs.

So these ministers came in with various forms of experience and strengths that allowed them to contribute immediately to their responsibilities. And, in addition, they were well served by senior officials in their departments about what the challengers were, and a very experienced Treasury Board as well that also brought in a lot of knowledge. The Minister of Education, for example, that returned to that portfolio, had been the previous minister of Education so had a lot of knowledge and had been a long-time teacher as well.

So we were fortunate in having a caucus with quite a bit of talent in it and experience and broad experience in a lot of different areas, as well as a lot of professional experience and volunteer experience and leadership experience. So we were able to draw on those strengths as we changed Cabinet composition.

Mr. Pallister: Given the ongoing challenges the government faces with respect to what some call structural deficits, was—now we're knowing with this budget that we've just seen tabled a projected \$400-million-plus deficit and a withdrawal from the commitment by the government to move to balance.

Would—why—what would the Premier suggest that this process that I know that he's trying to polish up here—would he go on record saying that the rebellion within his caucus, in no way shape or form, contributed to the lack of progress in getting Manitoba's finances strengthened, as evidenced by this year's 20 per cent higher projected deficit than last?

Mr. Selinger: The member comments on the notion of a structural deficit. This has also been commented on by the Parliamentary Budget Officer in Ottawa, who made—provided reports that indicated that part of what was happening in terms of federal decision making around balancing their budget at the federal level, was having a very significant impact on provinces' ability to balance their budgets and—so there is a larger story here related to the notion of fiscal imbalance at the federal level and in our federation. And the Parliamentary Budget Officer made comments on that and identified that in his reports. And so that issue is larger than Manitoba.

We also know that we saw some very dramatic changes in the Canadian economy in the last several months which had an impact on several provinces, some much more severe than others, obviously, particularly, Newfoundland, Labrador and Alberta. We probably saw the most severe impacts of the changes in the oil and gas prices. But it had an impact on economic forecasts for the whole country. The overall forecast for the country has been reduced by all the forecasters. I can't think of any exceptions to that.

So this issue of provinces being challenged around dealing with deficits is one not unique to Manitoba, although we have been fortunate in having an economy that has performed quite well relative to our—other jurisdictions, even though the overall forecast for economic growth in Canada has trended

down, as it has on a global basis and that has been commented on by international bodies that connect on these issues. International Monetary Fund, the OECD, the World Bank, et cetera, they've all expressed concerns about that.

I believe I actually saw an article as recently as today, maybe yesterday, that unemployment on a global basis is still much higher than it was before the recession started. And so there has been a concern about maintaining employment and employment opportunities, not just in our jurisdiction but all across the global economy.

So all of these factors were in play, and Manitoba was part of that larger canvas of what's going on in the global economy.

Mr. Pallister: So, but the Premier's not suggesting that his Cabinet was strengthened by the departure of five senior members, is he?

Mr. Selinger: What I indicated was is that the new ministers brought, in many cases, deep and broad experience to the portfolios that they had. For example, the new Minister of Municipal Government (Mr. Caldwell) was a three-term city councillor in the Rosser ward in Brandon. He was elected in '92, '95, and again in '98. He was a founding director of the Brandon Regional Health Authority. He served on the board of directors of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the Manitoba Association of Urban Municipalities, and the Union of Manitoba Municipalities. He was a previous minister of Education, Training and Youth, previous minister of Family Services and Housing, and he had also served as a legislative assistant as well. So that just gives you an example of some of the experience.

So there were good people that stepped up to take on some of these responsibilities. The Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Mr. Chief) had done a lot of work in school divisions through the non-profit sector and in the community and had a lot of experience creating meaningful opportunities for children and youth through education, employment, and mentorship in the organizations he was involved in.

The Minister for Healthy Living and Seniors had experience in literacy programming and helping people get their skills up to re-enter the job market, so brought volunteer experience, including newcomers to Canada, particularly women, teaching English as an additional language.

I enunciated some of the background of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), who's one of the longer serving members of the Legislature, first elected in 1999 and re-elected every election since '95, '99, 2003, 2007, 2011, was a government whip for several years, member of caucus executive, House Strategy committee, Legislative Assembly Management Committee, and all the other responsibilities, including the Vice-Chair of Public Accounts, which I put on the record earlier.

The Minister for Children and Youth Opportunities brought a lot of experience: post-secondary education from the University of Manitoba with a focus on psychology and criminology; certified youth care worker from Red River College; a lot of experience working at a youth agency in Winnipeg for over 16 years with adolescent boys involved in crime. So seemed to be very well suited for the role of being the Minister for Children and Youth.

And the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady), I gave some of her background. She had been an instructor at the university level, had a lot of post-secondary education at the graduate level, and served on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie, the Midwestern legislators committee, and, as I said earlier, was involved in her community in block parents, social justice groups, recycling and environmental groups at the University of Manitoba, and had been the previous minister of Seniors and Healthy Living.

So all of these people brought a lot of experience. The ministers who resigned their portfolios were also people with deep experience and background, and we were fortunate in having a caucus with people with these kinds of backgrounds and experience that could make a contribution to public life in Manitoba. *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Nancy Allan): Sorry. Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's just amazing these folks weren't in Cabinet before. This is obviously, you know, an example of the, you know, tremendous, tremendous challenges the Premier faces dealing with all the talent he has in his caucus.

* (16:40)

Now, so the Premier is suggesting that this worked out for the best; this was just a good opportunity to clean house at the Cabinet level and get these talented people into their new roles right in the middle of the budget-making process and that nobody was engaged in the leadership contest at all, so there was no real problem that way.

And the result was, of course, that a budget came out at the end of the process which is projecting a \$400-million-plus deficit, 20 per cent higher than last year's projected deficit, that the rainy day fund is raided of \$100 million or so and down to record levels in the last eight years, and the—that we have a budget which clearly takes us in a direction away from the Premier's previously stated commitments as recently as December 28th of 2014 when he said, balanced budget by 2016 is the goal, and I aim to achieve it. So, geez, something must have happened in that process to take things a little bit off the rails, but apparently, the Premier doesn't want to talk about that today.

Now, the Premier said earlier that his laser-like focus was on becoming—well, staying premier, but not that that would involve in any way, shape or form distracting him by way of a leadership campaign, that he would not be involved in that.

So I have to ask him, because I noticed a bit of a trend during the first quarter of the year, just a bit of a trend that the Premier's duties took him to places that were coincidentally on the verge of having delegate meetings. And I have to ask him. He did an announcement about an icebreaker. Does he remember when that was?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the date, but we've done that every year for several years. It's part of our commitment to being proactive on protecting communities from flooding, and the Amphibex program, which I think is the one he's referring to, has been a tremendous success in the southern basin of the Lake Winnipeg and has prevented a huge amount of damage.

And, as a matter of fact, that Amphibex icebreaker program, which is preceded by a program which cuts and scores the ice to make it more amenable to being broken up, has now become a point of attraction for people around the world dealing with similar circumstances, and they've come and learned from the experience of the partnership between the local municipalities and the provincial government on how to deal with that.

And I give a lot of credit to the local leadership of that organization that has done the icebreaking and has done the Amphibex work and ice scoring because they've provided a lot of security up there, and they've expanded their operations every single year to be able to deal with more ice, and they've been able to take their experience and share it with other communities around Manitoba up in the Winnipegosis area as well as along the Icelandic River area. So they've done a good job, and we've gone out every year, roughly at the same time, usually when spring comes, to support what they do, and we've done an announcement together. So there's nothing unusual about that.

Mr. Pallister: So I just wanted to be sure on that, then. That's just normal course of business, just a coincidence that the Selkirk delegate selection meeting was a couple of days later? Pure coincidence, right?

Mr. Selinger: I gave the member the answer. We do the—we did this announcement every year for several years to support the work of those communities and what they're doing.

Mr. Pallister: So, just, again—well, on these coincidences, then, Madam Chair, just maybe keep going with that for a bit. So the Premier's northern tour, he undertook that. Does he remember the dates of that?

Mr. Selinger: I have to check the specific dates, but I believe it was in the first two months of the new year, 2015, the tour of reconciliation with respect to northern flooding in communities such as Cross Lake, Norway House, Nelson House, York Landing and Fox Lake, as I recall.

Mr. Pallister: So this was the tour where the Premier passed up on—was it a trade delegation to China? Is this the same one we're recalling now? And decided to go up to—was it Jenpeg for the apology issue and so on? Is that the same one?

Mr. Selinger: This grew out of the experience in the fall where there had been problems at Jenpeg. And there were extensive negotiations that flowed out of that to find a positive way forward for everybody. And the tour of reconciliation was a part of that process.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, so that, again, then—dates I have were Tuesday, January 20th, flight goes to Cross Lake; and then on thereafter, Norway House, for the apology event; and then Wednesday, Norway House; and then departing for Thompson; and then

so on and so forth. And, coincidentally, the deadline for delegates was January the 23rd, so that was just a couple days later. So it's just another coincidence, though, I guess, eh?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the agreement to come up to Cross Lake around January 20th was something that we gave prior to Christmas, prior before I even announced I was running in the leadership contest. So that was a commitment that flowed out of the negotiations with respect to the Jenpeg events.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's saying he had no involvement whatsoever directly or indirectly in the establishment of the timing for the cut-off of delegates or in delegate selection meetings, that was all done by a party body of some kind? He had no say whatsoever in any of that? Is that what he's saying?

Mr. Selinger: You know, those decisions were made by the election—the leadership contest planning committee. I'm a member of the provincial executive. They may have been vetted there. But really, those decisions were driven by the leadership election planning committee. But the dates with respect to the hydro matters had been set before Christmas and communicated before Christmas to the communities involved.

Mr. Pallister: So the whole tour was all hydro stuff, or just part of it? Like the trips to Cross Lake, that was hydro? Norway House was hydro? Thompson? Because it does, you know, it does kind of appear like it would be an ideal opportunity to generate delegate support. But I'm not suggesting the Premier would be doing that here. I'm just asking. Because the appearance of it is, you know, really, given the timing, it just, it really creates the impressions there's a possibility, at least, that the Premier might have been, you know, or through some other people, engendering some support for his leadership run in these communities. But he's—if he'll just assure me he wasn't doing any campaigning at all, I'll be happy to accept that.

Mr. Selinger: I was up there on the business that flowed out of the negotiations with respect to the Jenpeg events. And that was my focus. And that was something that we had agreed to as—that grew out of those negotiations. And we tried to do it at a time that was suitable for the community and suitable for us as a government, and that was part of the negotiation, it was at a time that worked for all parties involved. And we wanted to not just restrict it to Cross Lake, because there were other communities

that were involved in the Northern Flood Agreement and had seen damage as a result of the flooding that had occurred in the '70s. And so we were out there on that focus. That was the focus of our tour and our discussions with people.

Mr. Pallister: Good, so the Premier is saying his laser-like focus extended to premial responsibilities, but not to campaigning, and that he didn't campaign in any way, shape or form during this tour of the North. And also this Selkirk thing was coincidental and just a normal course of events. That's what he's saying.

Mr. Selinger: I answered the question with respect to Selkirk. I'm looking at the news release now, which I've received a copy of, and for—yes, it looks like this was announced on February 17th, 2015, and the previous year it was announced on February 18th, 2014, so very similar patterns over those two years with respect to that announcement.

And the tour of reconciliation was something that we'd worked out with the community.

* (16:50)

Mr. Pallister: And so the fact that the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), the new Finance Minister, was a strong supporter of the Premier's wouldn't have entered in in any way to the timing of the delegate selection meeting at all?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've indicated the dates were similar in previous years, one day difference, quite frankly, February 18, February 17–February 18, 2014, February 17, 2015. This was done usually because the scoring of the ice or the cutting of the ice has to be done at a time before spring breakup occurs in order to get that ice sliced and diced, literally, for the Amphibex to be able to move in and break it up for when the spring comes well ahead of major inflows coming potentially through the floodway or through the existing natural channels through the city of Winnipeg.

So this program is a proactive program. It's a very positive program for protecting those communities, and we've been out there to support it for several years and had increased our equipment and improved our equipment and brought in several innovations with the help of the local leadership. They were really in charge of it. The North Red Community Water Maintenance incorporation included the municipalities of St. Andrews, St. Clements and the City of Selkirk.

The first Amphibex was used in 2006. They started out by breaking about six kilometres of river ice each year, and then they enhanced their mechanical capacity, structural strength and hydraulics improvements and are—were up doing over 25 kilometres annually of ice breaking, and other equipment has been added. I won't go into it, but the—if the member would like to receive copies of these press releases and the dates on them, I'd be happy to provide them.

Mr. Pallister: Well, just for clarification, I wasn't referring to the timing of the Premier's appearance there, I was referencing the timing of the delegate selection meeting and its coincidental timing within 48 hours of the Premier's appearance in Selkirk, and I was—I guess I'll ask him, then.

What's the process in the NDP leadership contest for determining the timing of delegate selection meetings? I know it's important. Some of the ridings, I understand, in the NDP process allowed for mail-ins, but a lot of them, the folks had to be in the hall. Is that correct, they had to be physically present in order to vote?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, there were different arrangements for different meetings.

The timing of the delegate selection meetings, as I recall, I think was done by lot. I think they were drawn in terms of what times and which location. So that was completely separate from these decisions here that had been occurring in a similar fashion, for example, with the Amphibex over several years.

Mr. Pallister: So they didn't flip a coin to determine when these meetings were?

Mr. Selinger: I'm assuming the member is trying to make a joke and I'll take it as such.

Mr. Pallister: And later I'll explain it to the member. The member for Pas can explain to the Premier. after.

I believe the member for Steinbach had a couple of questions. Would that be all right?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Can the Premier indicate whether or not he sought legal advice on whether the separation from the six staff members who've been the subject of the severance would have been considered a wrongful dismissal? *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Nancy Allan): The Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: —all those questions for the Leader of the Opposition, and I'd invite the member from Steinbach to review the record on that. These were matters that were protected by confidentiality—mutual agreements around confidentiality.

Mr. Goertzen: I understand the Premier's saying that the nature of the agreements are confidential, but what I'm asking him is whether there was specific legal advice sought on whether this would be a wrongful dismissal.

Mr. Selinger: And I've just given the member the answer to that question.

Mr. Goertzen: He didn't actually give me the answer. He's talked about whether or not the agreements would be considered confidential, but the advice in particular, was it sought whether or not this would be considered wrongful dismissal?

Mr. Selinger: I'd invite the member to read the record of the discussion we've had on this quite extensively today, and I think he'll find the answer's there for him and I've answered his question already.

Mr. Goertzen: When members become—or staff become part of Executive Council, do they take an oath of loyalty? Do they sign on to some sort of an agreement when they take up that position?

Mr. Selinger: I'll—I'm going to get further information for the member on that. Staff are going to check that out on the oath portion of it.

Mr. Goertzen: It's my understanding that when staff become staff here in the Legislature, whether they're caucus staff or members of Executive Council, that they sign some type of a loyalty pledge and that they'll act in a manner that's confidential. Does staff at his desk not know if that type of pledge is signed?

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to have to ask the member to speak up a little bit, because I'm having trouble hearing his question. I know that that's uncharacteristic for him, but I want to give him an opportunity to speak a little more clearly without his hand in front of his mouth, and then I'll endeavour to answer his question for him.

Mr. Goertzen: There is a first for everything in this Legislature, Madam Chairperson.

My understanding is that when people become staff of this Assembly—and not of the Assembly staff, but perhaps them too—but members of the caucus, individual caucuses from the two recognized political parties and the Liberals or if they become

staff of Executive Council through OIC, do they not, when they're doing their human resources paperwork, already sign on to some sort of a pledge of loyalty or confidentiality to ensure that information that they obtain in their work in government is considered to be confidential?

Mr. Selinger: As I indicated earlier, we're going to check that and see what the practice was.

Mr. Goertzen: And would the Premier (Mr. Selinger) consider that the loyalty that staff have within the context of their work—does he consider that loyalty to be individual loyalty to him as the Premier or to the entity of government as a whole—to the Manitoba government or to him as an individual as Premier? Where is that loyalty owed? *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Nancy Allan): The Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: —indicated we'll determine whether—what the—whether there was any oath of loyalty or any pledge that was signed as part of the responsibilities of taking on jobs in Executive Council, and I'll report back to the member on that.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm curious why the Premier wouldn't know this in the terms of negotiating a severance. If he's negotiating a severance that requires an oath of confidentiality and there's a potential at least for that—the fact that that oath may have already been signed on when a member becomes staff either of the caucuses or the Executive Council, would he not have looked into that just to see if it's in some ways redundant, that maybe it was unnecessary to have another confidentiality agreement signed because it could've been covered off when the individual became a member of Executive Council?

Mr. Selinger: Again, to answer that question, I'd have to verify the information that the member's originally asked.

And settlement agreements have their own provisions to them, separate and apart from any presumption about other oaths or other pledges that may have been taken.

Mr. Goertzen: The Premier's actually making my point. My point would be that the potential confidentiality pledge of loyalty that staff may have already signed onto when they became members of Executive Council would be different from the confidentiality agreement presumed that he had staff sign. There would be something additional to that, and I'd like to know what would be additional and what cost that additional confidentiality came on.

If you already, as a staff member, have signed some sort of a pledge of confidentiality or allegiance to the government as a whole—I don't think it's to the individual premier—then to sign another confidentiality pledge, obviously, there's something in addition to that. And my argument would be that that would be coming out of cost, and the cost would be that top-up, that severance that you negotiated. If they're already under an agreement, why would they have to sign another confidentiality agreement with you, sir?

The Acting Chairperson (Nancy Allan): The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 20, 2015

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