

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

Tuesday, June 2, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 32—The Noxious Weeds Amendment Act

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), that Bill 32, The Noxious Weeds Amendment Act, now be read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kostyshyn: This bill updates and strengthens The Noxious Weeds Act while still preserving the original objective of protecting the province of noxious weeds.

The highlights of the changes that had been proposed include the tiered approach of noxious weed classifications. The bill is to designate new invasive weeds for the period of one year, increasing the limit of the cost of enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will make it easier for the province to take quick actions regarding biosecurity and deal with the potential threats of agriculture and natural lands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: We'll move on to petitions.

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:

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 K. Harmatiuk, E. Toews, P. Kallusky and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Government Record—Apology Request

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

And this is the background to this petition:

(1) Government members have been quoted as stating that, quote, Manitobans no longer trust the current government, unquote.

(2) Sadly, these same members have reportedly stated that since 2014 the government has been focused on their own narrow political interests, quote, ahead of what was once a government plan and what would be indeed the priorities of Manitoba, end quote, and the Premier is, quote, driven by his desire to hold on to his leadership rather than by the best interests of Manitobans, end quote.

(3) According to comments from the government members, their caucus is divided by, quote, fundamental differences and animosity, end quote, and that, quote, deep divisions are not just

amongst the MLAs and caucus, but they exist at the staff level as well, end quote.

(4) Regretfully, the dysfunction and infighting within the provincial government has nothing to do with addressing the fact Manitobans are paying more and getting less. A Winnipeg family pays \$3,200 more in sales and income tax than they would in Regina but receive some of the worst results in health care and education in the country.

Government members have said in the media that caucus dysfunction is entirely related to internal polls that indicate they are in, quote, annihilation territory, end quote, saying that, quote, our numbers are down and the status quo is not good enough anymore. Our own party pollsters have told us we're facing oblivion, end quote.

(6) Little has been done by government members to end the infighting with the Premier, claiming retaliation is justified because of public comments such as, quote, people have civil rights, but we also have an organization to run, end quote. Government members acting on behalf of the Premier have said basically, quote, we are not on a witch hunt, end quote, and have also said, quote, we have to look at who caused this and who are the ones that have damaged us the most, end quote.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier to take responsibility and apologize to the people of Manitoba for the social and economic damage created by his failed leadership and the disgraceful conduct of government members that has destabilized the provincial government and hurt Manitoba businesses and families.

And this petition has been signed by F. Gagne, S. Chouinard, G. Port and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route—Information Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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.

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.

The preferred route designated for the line will see 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.

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

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.

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 B. Carpenter, D. Kelly, T. Jonsson and many other fine Manitobans.

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, 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.

* (13:40)

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 procedures 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, 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.

Mr. Speaker, 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 Bipole III transmission line.

This petition is signed by P. Lanouette, M. Lenz, B. Kunka and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Agassiz.

Farmland School Tax Rebate—Cap Removal

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): —Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by T. Adriaansen, P. Adriaansen, J. Adriaansen and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Robison (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, I'm pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs for 2015 and 2016.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review of the 2015-2016 Departmental Expenditure

Estimates of the Department of Manitoba Mineral Resources.

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased as well to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for the Department of Children and Youth Opportunities for year 2015-2016.

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Multiculturalism and Literacy): I am pleased to table the Department of Manitoba Multiculturalism and Literacy's 2015-2016 Departmental Expenditure Estimates supplemental information for legislative review.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister responsible for the Civil Service): It's my pleasure to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, the 2015-2016 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for the Manitoba Civil Service Commission.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): I am pleased to table Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for 2015-2016 for the Department of Manitoba Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

Ministerial statements? The honourable First Minister.

Oh, pardon me, before I get to the First Minister, going back to tabling reports, I almost forgot, I am pleased to table, in accordance with the provisions of section 28(1) of The Auditor General Act, the report of the auditor on the Follow-up of Previously Issued Recommendations, dated May 2015.

Now, the honourable First Minister. Sorry for the interruption.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I rise to make a ministerial statement today, and I'd like to provide the requisite copies to the Legislature.

I rise to speak to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This is an important day in the history of our country. After six years and testimony from 7,000 witnesses, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission today released their far-reaching final report and recommendations.

I was privileged to watch the release of the recommendations with survivors, relatives of survivors and others at the University of Winnipeg. It was truly a moving event.

It is a day where we all must acknowledge the truth about what happened in Canada's residential schools. It is a difficult truth, a deeply regrettable stain on the moral fabric of our country. But it is necessary that the details on this tragedy be made public so that we can begin to move forward in a spirit of reconciliation, mutual understanding and respect.

Many don't realize that the last residential school closed in 1996. Residential schools aren't the thing of the distant past; they are a part of our recent history, a history directly experienced by our generation, our parents and our grandparents.

Generations of children were torn from their families and prevented from growing up with their loved ones. They suffered abuse, were forced beyond all reason to endure lives of hardship and were denied the most fundamental of human rights.

The commission's report shines new light on these tragedies. It is now estimated that up to 6,000 children never returned home from the residential schools. And we know now that this was not just an assault on the dignity of indigenous individuals but an assault on indigenous culture. The schools stripped children of their cultural identity, forbidding them from speaking their native languages, from wearing traditional clothing and from practising their spiritual beliefs. The objective, as quoted by Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, was to take the Indian out of the child. It was an attempt to destroy the indigenous way of life.

As Commissioner Sinclair and Justice Beverley McLachlin have said, it was cultural genocide. It is important that we acknowledge and appreciate the meaning of that.

Today we see the lasting effects of residential schools: a large number of indigenous children in foster care, a disproportionate number of indigenous peoples in jail and hundreds of missing and murdered indigenous women and children.

Mr. Speaker, reconciliation requires that these social imbalances be corrected. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has now set us on that path. With the release of the commission's final report, our country now stands at a crossroads. The report lays out a path forward, and it is up to us to

heed these recommendations. It will be a long journey. As Justice Sinclair noted, true reconciliation will take generations. We must make a conscious effort to acknowledge the wrongs in our past and recognize that many who lived and worked in these situations felt powerless to stop these wrongs.

I know our government will be actively studying and working to address the TRC's recommendations. We have already made progress on some of these issues. We are committed to closing the education gap through initiatives like the Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant and summer learning programs in local communities. Outcomes related to residential schools, the treaties and the treaty relationship are part of our mandatory kindergarten to 12 curriculum. We are working on an Aboriginal languages strategy based on our Aboriginal Languages Recognition Act with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, the University College of the North and leaders in Aboriginal languages. And we have continued to call for a national inquiry into the important issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and children, which is one of the recommendations of the commission.

* (13:50)

Of course, there is much more to do, and we will now begin to look at the commission's recommendations and they—how they can work here in Manitoba. I hope that all levels of government around the country will do the same. We must all do our part. As National Chief Perry Bellegarde has said, we have a shared responsibility, indigenous and nonindigenous, to make sure that reconciliation actually happens.

Today, I ask all Manitobans to reflect on the history of residential schools and to join in the journey towards reconciliation. I ask all of us to remember the thousands of lives that were lost and the thousands who were forever scarred by the residential schools experience. I ask us all to embrace your—our fellow Canadians, to stand up against injustice and to join the reconciliation process.

I know I speak for all members of my government when I say that we are committed to reconciliation. Our government is guided by the values of compassion, co-operation, social justice and a profound regard for human rights. We stand here today committed to doing our part in the healing and reconciliation process.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the thousands of survivors who shared their heart-wrenching stories with the commission. Former AMC and national chief Phil Fontaine, former AMC grand chief Dennis White Bird, Ted Fontaine, Deputy Premier, Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) and the MLA for Kewatinook, amongst several thousand others, have bravely told the public about the suffering and abuse they endured. This report represents the collective voice of Canada's indigenous peoples. It would not be possible without their contributions, so I thank them on behalf of all of us.

It is also an honour that the commission has decided to permanently store their records here at the University of Manitoba. They will be there for researchers, families and descendants to learn from for the generations to come.

And I would like to thank Justice Sinclair and everyone at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for their work. It was a trying six-year journey, and certainly there is a long road ahead to heal over a century of injustice, but I am confident we can move forward together.

The commission's inquiry has given us some of the tools we need to do that. Now it is up to us. With compassion, respect and a deep regard for the wrongs of the past, we must now move forward toward a better future.

Thank you. Miigwech.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): –Premier for his comments.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to have the opportunity to speak to the release of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. It is truly an historic document in Canadian history, as it addresses past struggles and it sets the course for future action.

First and foremost, our most sincere commendations have to go to all of those who participated in the work of this momentous committee. With over 1,300 hours of recorded evidence and nearly 7,000 personal-impact statements, the contributions of victims and their families to this document are truly significant. These people came forward, they spoke with the commission about tragic and sometimes inter-generational abuses, and it is thanks to their

willingness and their contribution that we now have this report and we have these recommendations as a way forward. We must also express gratitude to all members of the commission for their commitment and their work and, notably, to Justice Murray Sinclair for his dedicated leadership.

I'm proud to say that I was part of the government that initiated this commission. I look forward to being a part of the governmental team that will begin to realize the changes and take the action that is recommended within this final report.

It wasn't until the 1880s that the federal government implemented the residential school model for Aboriginal education. And although the government began to close the schools in the 1970s, it's important to note that the last school remained in operation until 1996.

We know of many of the abuses carried on in these institutions: the separation and destruction of families, the annihilation of languages and cultural practices and countless acts of physical and sexual abuse. And we mourn for the victims of these experiments and for all victims of the residential school experience in Canada, those who have survived and those who, tragically, did not.

It took many years for our nation to acknowledge what really happened in the residential schools. And after numerous reconciliation attempts, June 11th of 2008 marked a significant turning point in our nation's history when our Prime Minister rose in the House of Commons and formally apologized to all those who were traumatized by the residential school experience.

Aboriginal people continue to face systemic discrimination, racism and exclusion in our society, and these systematic problems require commitment and effort from all of us and from all levels of government to improve things like housing and education, economic and social development and health care for all Aboriginal people.

I spent a decade of my life working with Aboriginal women to advance equality in their property rights, and it was a proud day for me when all of us in this House joined together, unanimous in our support for that initiative. And that has been evidence of some progress that has been made when that was adopted by the House of Commons, but it is important for all levels of government to keep taking concrete steps to introduce the kinds of changes that Aboriginal Canadians have been calling on for years. And the recommendations set out in this document

will become a key part of many governments' commitments and actions to empower and improve the lives of all Aboriginal peoples in our country.

Mr. Speaker, Justice Murray Sinclair says that reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships. There are no shortcuts. We will continue to work together. Together we will never forget the trauma of the past. We know it is only through working together in the spirit of humility and mutual understanding that true reconciliation can occur.

Miigwech and thank you.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, this morning at the University of Winnipeg, I joined others to watch the announcement by the commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of their findings. The findings mark a turning point in the relationships among all people in Canada and particularly with respect to the important place Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture have had in the history of our country and continue to have today. The findings mark a much clearer understanding of what happened during the seven generations of the residential school experience in which about 150,000 Aboriginal children were put in residential schools.

The findings show that the efforts made during the time of the residential schools represented a cultural genocide in which many children were removed from their families against their will, subjected to mistreatment and physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and sexual abuse, and attempts were made to remove their cultural traditions from them and to replace them with others. The findings allow us to better understand the multigenerational effects of the trauma so many experienced during the time of their going to residential schools. The traumas have been previously acknowledged and apologized for. We now better understand, as Canadians, the extent of what we have apologized for and continue to apologize for.

The release of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission marks a turning point in another way, a turning point in showing all of us as

Manitobans and Canadians a pathway forward, a pathway outlined in the report, based on the treaties and based on implementing in Canada the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is a pathway with many carefully written recommendations including recommendations calling for major improvements in child welfare. As Justice Murray Sinclair said earlier today, the commission has shown us the mountain, and it is now up to us to climb it.

I want to acknowledge the many survivors who were brave enough to share their story with the commission. I want also to say a thank you to the three commissioners, Justice Murray Sinclair, Dr. Marie Wilson and Chief Wilton Littlechild, and to all those who participated in the work of the commission. In the very nature of the stories which were told and heard, it was tough work.

To the commissioners and all those involved, we say collectively, as Manitobans and as Canadians, thank you, miigwech, ekosani.

Mr. Speaker: Any further ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, I have a number of guests that I'd like to introduce to honourable members.

* (14:00)

First, seated in the public gallery we have with us today from Poplar Grove School, we have eight grade 6, 7 and 8 students under the direction of Jamie Penner, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers).

Also seated in the public gallery we have with us today from Kildonan-East Collegiate, we have 50 grade 9 students under the direction of Jamie Giasson and John Thompson, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

Also seated in the public gallery we have from Sisler High School, we have 24 grade 9 students under the direction of Mingdi Zhao, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Ms. Wight).

And also seated in the public gallery we have with us today from the Pembina Trails School Division Superintendent Ted Fransen and Cameron

Cross, who are the guests of the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Economic Growth Ranking Manitoba Forecast

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Babies are a special thing. We should congratulate the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) for the birth of their second child, her and her partner. I think that's a tremendous thing, and our best wishes go out to her today.

Since 2009, Mr. Speaker, our economic growth ranking under this Premier and his government is ninth, and the Premier doesn't seem to want to accept the responsibility for that. He has been willing to place blame on global economies, on Mother Nature and flooding, on the federal government, on Gary Filmon and the previous administration repeatedly. But after six years of falling behind, the Premier and his blame placing now falls away because he wants all the credit.

What does he want credit for? He wants credit for an economic forecast. Well, John Kenneth Galbraith has said that the only function of an economic forecast is to make astrology look respectable, Mr. Speaker.

So it's not the Premier's fault when things go bad; is the Premier trying to take all the credit when things in a forecast look good?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, short answer is certainly not.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba economy has been in the top three over the last decade in Canada, and it's performed in the top three over the last five years, since the great recession ended. The—this is an economy that's generating over 16,000 additional jobs last year, that has increased wages in Manitoba for Manitoba working people. At the same time, we've seen a record number of people move to the province. Over 16,400 more people have chosen to make Manitoba their home. It's a province where the average age is getting younger at 37 years old, and we have a very high participation rate in the labour market.

But there's more to do, Mr. Speaker. Our infrastructure program is intended to boost the

economy by 5 and a half billion dollars at a time of global economic fragility and uncertainty which we see all around us. And at the same time, we're building Manitoba Hydro, which is another thousands of jobs being created in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, all of those things are at risk with the policies of the members opposite.

Mr. Pallister: Ninth is not good, Mr. Speaker, and ninth's what it is since this Premier came to power. But not ninth in increasing taxes; on that one, first, first in increasing taxes, and the first downgraded outlook in a credit rating for our province in 28 years, in fact.

Another fact, since the PST hike in 2013, Manitoba stands alone with the largest increase in unemployment of any Canadian province. And here's another fact. Even if the rosy forecast came true, they wouldn't make up a fraction of the losses under this Premier.

Now, would the Premier admit that any progress we experience is due to Manitobans paying higher taxes and Manitobans tomorrow servicing larger debts?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, since the great recession has started, 31,000 jobs have been created, which are full-time jobs—full-time jobs—84 per cent of all new jobs. That's a strong record, the envy of many other jurisdictions in Canada.

And it's because the private sector has been very efficient in recovering from the high dollar. They've invested in technology. They've invested in training. And we've worked with them to do that through various sector councils. The communities and social enterprises have done a good job of generating employment for people normally left out of the labour market.

We've made many innovations in our government policies, including Rent Assist, which provides benefits to people when they enter the labour market or training, all of which the members opposite have opposed, I must note for the record, Mr. Speaker, and voted against those supports for people. We've got more apprentices training in Manitoba than any time in our history, over 10,000 people training for apprenticeship positions, and we've put more support for that.

And our schools, many of which are here today, are offering more curriculum at the high school level

for colleges, universities and trades than we've ever seen before. We are truly coming together—

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

Mr. Pallister: Three dozen NDP MLAs came together to take away the right of Manitobans to vote on the tax hikes they brought in, Mr. Speaker. Forecasts over facts. Facts matter more to Manitobans.

This year's budget, \$500 million of broken-promise taxes, in this budget alone, coming from Manitobans and going to that government so they can get credit for spending it, but they ran on a promise not to raise those taxes.

A \$400-million deficit in this year's budget, 20 per cent higher than last year's projection, and they raided the rainy day fund, but they ran on a promise to balance the books. And what do we get? Tenth in social services, 10th in educational outcomes, 10th in wait times. And this was the government that ran on a promise to focus on what matters most to Manitoba families.

Will the Premier admit that with a record of broken promises like this, he has no choice—he has no choice—but to credit grab using forecasts because he cannot possibly run on his record?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, let me do a little bit of contrast.

When the members opposite were in office, only 71 per cent of high school students were graduating. Now we have 87 per cent graduating.

When members opposite were in office, they dedicated over 13 cents on the dollar towards debt payments at the same time as they were selling off Crown corporations. We spend 5.6 cents on the dollar to service the debt at the same time as we are expanding the role of all of our organizations to create employment in Manitoba.

When the members opposite were in office, the disposable income of Manitoba families, middle-class families, was going down. They were being pinched every day, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite raised the gas tax and cut the highway budget.

We generated revenues to create employment in Manitoba, more jobs, more investment in infrastructure, more opportunities for people to stay in school and get a good education so that they can do those jobs.

And we are seeing the results right now. We're seeing it last year, we're seeing it the year before that. All the forecasts suggest that we are going to do well in the speaker, Mr. Speaker. We will contrast—

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

Manitoba Hydro Executive Salary Increase

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I'd like to table for the House a response to a question posed by the consumer coalition at Hydro's current rate hike hearings, and I quote: Please identify those divisions where the average salary increases by more than 4 per cent. End quote.

One such division to see increases of more than 4 per cent, Mr. Speaker, is the office of the president and CEO.

Will the minister today ask the executives at Hydro to lead by example and return the 7 per cent salary increase, or is this just hush money that this government loves to put on the backs of hard-working Manitobans?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): It's indeed a pleasure to rise today on a historic day which acknowledges the wrongs that were done upon indigenous peoples across this country.

The issue that the member raises is an issue that—where indigenous peoples for the first time in history have a role to play as partners at the site of where the power is generated.

Now, let me say to the member we have low rates here in Manitoba, and no doubt an envy to many in North America, and we'll continue to keep that an affordable place or at least keep the prices affordable here in Canada.

And let me itemize some of the things that we—

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

Mr. Eichler: I would suggest there is a more sinister reality to the salary increases, and that's the fact that the NDP is forcing Hydro down a path that results doubling hydro rates, doubling the debt, and Hydro is paying its executives for their silence on this failed plan.

* (14:10)

I'll again ask, Mr. Speaker: Will the minister today ask the executives of Hydro to end—lead by example and reject the 7 per cent salary increase, or will this just be another example of Manitobans continue to pay more and get less?

Mr. Robinson: Of course, that decision doesn't lay with me, Mr. Speaker, that's entirely up to the Public Utilities Board.

And let me say that among the issues that I was telling the member—*[interjection]*—and perhaps he'll want to listen because he might learn about the reality of many of these things.

A review of the Gillam redevelopment and expansion project, the consolidation of rural district offices are some of the measures that are being taken by Manitoba Hydro in order to curtail some of the costs that are a part of today's reality, at the same time implementing a mobile workforce management and relocating crews to complete work faster.

But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, we in Manitoba are the envy of many jurisdictions because we're engaging indigenous peoples as partners in any hydro development that's occurring—

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

Mr. Eichler: Since the minister has suggestions, I suggest that he listens to the people of Manitoba, the real owners of Manitoba, because they're saying no to this minister and no to this Bipole III.

Mr. Speaker, salaries in the executive offices of Hydro are projected to rise more than 22 per cent by 2016-17. At the same time, Hydro is pleading poverty before the Public Utilities Board.

It's a simple question: Will the minister today call Hydro, ask them to reject the proposed 7 per cent salary increase on the backs of hard-working Manitobans?

Mr. Robinson: Again, Mr. Speaker, today being the day that across the nation we are acknowledging the survival of indigenous peoples in spite of the onslaught of many genocidal attempts to end a way of life for indigenous peoples, let me say that we have made historic arrangements in the last few years with many of the communities where hydro is generated from and therefore resulting in a better Manitoba for all.

We have among the lowest hydro rates in Canada, with—indeed, North America. An average

home in Winnipeg, for example, currently pays \$81.09 using 1,000 kilowatt hours per month, the second lowest in Canada, only after Montreal.

Mr. Speaker, we have—

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

Gambling Addiction Lottery Ticket Advertising

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, last week the MLA for Kildonan stood in this House and said, and I quote: Gambling addiction is a very serious issue that costs people's lives. End quote.

Despite acknowledging the toll and sharing the personal story of a friend who lost his home to a gambling addiction, the minister's government sent a letter and postcard to households throughout Manitoba encouraging them to gamble.

Can the minister advise how many Manitobans he sent postcards and letters to to tell them there is, and I quote, a new way to purchase lottery tickets in Manitoba? And I will table the letter for the members' information.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister responsible for Liquor and Gaming Control): Mr. Speaker, I'm—I think it would be appropriate if the members opposite would apologize for taking an ad that was aimed at trying to deal with gambling addiction, making a joke out of it, laughing about it, making it a political issue, when, for the first time in history, we're dedicating a portion of revenues from liquor and gaming to go directly to addictions.

This is not a joke. This is the real world and members ought to enter the real world.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, one in four Manitoba households got a personal invitation by the NDP government to gamble, pretty good odds even for this government.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister advise how much funding was diverted from front-line services like health and education for the cost of this mailing?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, it certainly won't cost the \$60-million overrun by members opposite when they built the two casinos in 1993 and refused—at my request, when I was almost begging them—to expand hospitals, to stop the firing of nurses, to stop the firing of doctors, to stop the closure of programs of the doctor—they went from 100 doctors a year training to 70 doctors a year, which is why we are so

short doctors. I begged them when I was in opposition, don't do that; instead, they built casinos.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the MLA for Kildonan talked about, and I quote, serious ramifications, end quote, of gambling addiction while at the same time his government is offering financial incentives to hundreds of thousands of Manitobans to try their online luck.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister confirm that up to \$1.25 million was offered by the NDP to lure Manitobans to their PlayNow.com site?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, one of the, I think, the real successes that we've done in Manitoba in the past several years is merging lotteries and liquor to save millions of dollars a year. At the same time, for the first time in history, we are directly funding addiction programs as a percentage of expenditures to Liquor & Lotteries, something members opposite did not do.

Mr. Speaker, while acknowledging the right of Manitobans to—as the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) used to say, they choose to gamble; that's what their own member said—as we acknowledge the right of people to do what they want to do, we're actually putting real programs in place, 24-hour services, and a percentage of revenue directly to addictions to help Manitobans.

We can do both. We can grow the economy. We can help Manitobans. We don't have to cut and slash and treat them like second-class citizens.

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

Online Gaming Advertisement Youth Gambling Concerns

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): In 2013 this NDP government estimated a \$1.5-million profit from online gaming. This NDP government now admits they fell short by \$1.2 million.

In a coupon recently sent out by this NDP government, it states, and I quote, your lottery ticket is closer than you think, unquote.

Is the NDP member for Kildonan trying to make up the \$1.2 million by hooking children onto online gaming?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister responsible for Liquor and Gaming Control): Well, Mr. Speaker, I still—I'm still waiting for an apology from members opposite to the fact that we put an ad in the paper

talking about making public the fact that there is such a thing as a gambling addiction and that there's help available.

Members rose last week in the House, they made fun of it. They criticized the ad. They criticized the fact that we were advertising to advise Manitobans that they had resources that are available for addictions, and now they stand up, Mr. Speaker, sanctimoniously, and try to take advantage of that particular point.

Let them put their money where their mouth is, to use that term, and apologize.

Mr. Schuler: I wish to table copies of the coupon mailer, and I'd like to give this to the member for his photo album of shame.

In the coupon sent out by this NDP government, nowhere does it state you must be 18 years of age or older to, and I quote: Sign up for PlayNow.com today and get a \$10 online lottery free play. Nowhere does it say you must be 18 years of age or older.

Why is the NDP member for Kildonan sending out coupons that encourage children to go online to gamble on their iPhones, or is this to cover the NDP government's addiction to gambling revenue and make up for the \$1.2-million shortfall?

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Speaker, are the members opposite saying that they will stop the gaming that they started in Manitoba when they built two casinos? Is that what they're saying? Because they are being very hypocritical, as they are every single day.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

I know I just cautioned honourable members of the House, and the honourable Minister of Mineral Resources (Mr. Chomiak) will no doubt be aware of this. I cautioned the honourable members of the House last week about the use of the word hypocritical in reference to other members of the Assembly, and I'm going to ensure that we don't continue down that path of using that particular word, as all members will know is—been ruled unparliamentary in past by former Speakers and by myself as well.

* (14:20)

So I'm asking the honourable Minister of Mineral Resources to please withdraw the use of that word, hypocritical, in reference to any members of this Assembly.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I completely withdraw the use of the word hypocritical.

Mr. Speaker: Thank the honourable minister.

The honourable minister, if he has not concluded his answer, please quickly conclude.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Speaker, the members always have—want to have both sides of the argument.

Hydro Transmission Line Manitoba-Minnesota Route

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Yesterday in question period, the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro informed me that Manitoba Hydro conducted a serious—series of open houses and workshops regarding the proposed Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line.

Hundreds of Manitobans made presentations on the routing of this line, but it is clear that they are not being listened to.

Why is this NDP government insisting on this particular routing of the transmission line which is intrusive to the residents of southeastern Manitoba?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do recall the question yesterday.

And the member from La Verendrye, along with the—my colleagues on this side of the House the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), the current Minister of Culture and the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) and the member from Lakeside were at a meeting which discussed the routing process, and that was explained by Manitoba Hydro staff, along with a description of the criteria that was used to balance the decision making.

And at that time, the member for Midland subsequently posted an article in the Treherne Times praising the approach that was being used to—for the route of the line highlighted—

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

Mr. Smook: But they're still not listening. This Hydro Minister and his NDP government failed to consider the safety of Manitobans. This government is failing to listen to the emergency service providers who have expressed concern over the routing of the proposed Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line.

I would like to table a letter from the Eastman Mutual Aid Fire District which expresses serious concern over the preferred placement of this line.

Does the safety of the residents of southeastern Manitoba not count? Will the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro explain why he is not listening to Eastman Mutual Aid Fire District?

Mr. Robinson: As I was saying in my response, Mr. Speaker, there was a—I believe they call them an op-ed piece on the Treherne Times, and the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) was, again, praising the approach that was being used by Manitoba Hydro. And I will table that for the information of the members. And in that, he praised the approach that was being used for the route of the line that was highlighted from the information that was shared at that meeting.

Following the announcement, Mr. Speaker, the MLA for La Verendrye then requested to meet with Manitoba Hydro, which occurred on February 3rd of 2015. Now, this meeting did take place—

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

Mr. Smook: This NDP government continues to display that they say one thing but does something completely different. Manitobans are tired of this NDP government's broken promises.

The Minister for Manitoba Hydro stated that there have been consultations in southeastern Manitoba but won't do anything about the concerns. Eastman mutual aid fire department expressed concerns over the preferred routing of the transmission line, but the minister still won't listen.

Who is this minister listening to? Certainly not the constituents of Dawson Trail or La Verendrye.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable—order, please. Order.

Mr. Robinson: I know that the MLA for La Verendrye spoke in great detail, but, unfortunately, because of noise coming from his own side, I didn't get the whole—the question.

Now, let me repeat for the—*[interjection]* I'll repeat again what I said; perhaps he didn't hear me. But following the announcement of the preferred route, the MLA for La Verendrye requested a meeting, a follow-up meeting, and that happened on February 3rd. And the MLA for Midland wrote an

article in the Treherne Times praising the process that was being used by Manitoba Hydro.

That is the answer to the—

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

Rural Children in Care Emergency Accommodation Plan

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was June 1st, the date the Minister of Family Services promised to have all the Child and Family Services children out of hotels, but now that only applies in the city of Winnipeg.

Now we see the added confusion of an advertisement placed by western CFS for a hotel reservation clerk. Minister, what is your plan?

Rural CFS children are still in hotels and still at risk. Are you planning on shipping Winnipeg children to rural areas, or do you even know?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Prior to recognizing the honourable minister, I want to draw the attention to the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, when you're placing your questions, please place them through the Chair, not directing to another member of the House.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, what I do know is that this government has made record investments to support Manitoba children. From the point—*[interjection]* We've made investments in prenatal, in preschool, early childhood development within our education system and also within our post-secondary system. We are making those commitments.

When we made that commitment to reduce the use of hotels as of June 1st, we worked diligently with authorities and agencies across this province. We've succeeded in the goal in Winnipeg. There have been no children in hotels since May 11th. We're going to continue to work with the agencies and the authorities in rural and northern to make sure we get it right, to make sure that we have the resources that are available to keep children safe, make sure that we have the staff in order to supervise them.

But we're not stopping there. We're supporting foster parents across this province and—

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

Mr. Wishart: Well, Mr. Speaker, some might think this whole disorganized charade humorous, but it is not. The lives of children under the care of CFS are at risk and the impact on their families is huge.

What Manitobans expect from this department is professional and caring levels of service. The appearance being projected is anything but.

Mr. Speaker, the minister can designate her employees as she wishes, whether they be social workers or hotel reservation clerks, but her responsibility is to protect children at risk, and they still remain at risk in rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, what is their plan for children in rural areas?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, our plan for Manitoba children across this province, rural and northern children included, is to ensure that they have a good start, that their families have the support that they need, that we're building healthy communities, that we're creating jobs and employment and education. That's what Manitoba children need.

But we're not stopping there. When a child is in need of protection, we have the authorities and the agencies that are there to provide the support to them and to their family. We will continue to provide the support through intervention, through prevention programs.

I ask the member across the way, what would his government do after \$4.5 million worth of cuts?

Mr. Wishart: Well, Mr. Speaker, many Manitobans think that total confusion reigns here. First it was no children in hotels. Then it was no children in Winnipeg hotels. Eventually we do hope there'll be no children in hotels anywhere, but the concern remains.

Has the minister put adequate plans in place to deal with all the children that have come into her care?

In 2007, it was only six months later that they had children back in hotels. How long this time?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. We have a partnership with all the authorities and the agencies across this province. This is the most collaborative that we've ever seen within the child-welfare system. I'm proud of the work that they've done. We know we have more work to do.

*(14:30)

We have 90 more emergency placements being made available. We want to continue to expand that. We have 80 staff that we've hired, permanent staff that will provide the supervision and the care for the children. We need to expand that.

We heard loud and clear from the authorities and the agencies in the rural and the North that they are committed to no children in hotels, but they asked to have more time in order to implement that. We need to ensure that they have the resources that are available, more beds and staff that are being able to provide for this.

Group Homes Supervision of Youth

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the tired reactionary approach of the NDP doesn't work.

As we exposed not long ago, there's an ever-increasing number of children running away from group homes. Indeed, today's NDP is being irresponsible toward children who need to experience love and learning and limits. The minister has set no limits so that children can leave their group homes at any time of the day or night. The minister is being irresponsible toward the staff who look after children but can set no limits. The minister is being irresponsible to our communities who are exposed to children who know no limits and sometimes vandalize property in the middle of the night.

Why are the Premier and his ministers being so irresponsible to children, to staff and to our communities?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member, I believe, is overstating his view on this matter.

We do have the missing—we do have in Manitoba The Missing Persons Act. We have added hundreds of additional child-welfare workers in the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, to work with families, to work with group homes that do supervise those children. They pay attention to their—where they are and they make sure that they keep track of them.

It is true that some children do leave those group home situations and have to be found. There is a special unit—there's a special organization that we fund called StreetReach that goes out and searches out those children and finds them. We also work

very closely with the police department. We also work very closely with front-line agencies in neighbourhoods such as Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, such as the Andrews Street family resource centre, such as Rossbrook House, all of whom collaborate with us to find children if they're missing to ensure that they're safe and help return them to safe quarters and safe housing, Mr. Speaker, as well as getting engaged back in school.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it's time to face the truth. One missing or murdered woman in this province is too many, and it should not continue any longer.

On May 19th in Estimates, the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) admitted that she is overseeing group homes funded by today's NDP, governed by the rules she sets out, where children as young as 11 years old are allowed to wander in and out of the home whenever they wish at any hour of the day or night.

Why is the minister providing group homes such an irresponsible operational framework, a framework that is likely resulting in some of these vulnerable children being counted among the number of missing and murdered women in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, again, I will say to the member opposite, if a child goes missing from a group home, the group home looks for that child. And if they need additional support to do that, they can reach out to a unique agency we funded in Manitoba called StreetReach to do that. They can reach out to many of our partners that are involved in the child-welfare system to do that. They can reach out to family members to do that. And they do reach out to the police department to do that, as well as a number of non-profit organizations of which I've enumerated three. There's Ndinawe. There are recreation programs and Lighthouse programs that we fund. There are the public schools that are—we are regularly in contact with on a daily basis to ensure children are attending school.

So the network of caring in the community, starting with the families and then working into the non-profit sector, as well as the statutory agencies, all collaborate together and they do it in an intensive way of—projects like Block by Block, which is showing very dramatic results in those neighbourhoods of reduced risk to children in the streets, reduced crime levels and safer families. Those are the kinds of things we're funding that are making a real difference.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I say it again: Today's NDP's approach does not work.

There are, and I quote the minister herself, children coming in the front door brought by police and leaving the backdoor. The minister's mandate for operating group homes is irresponsible to the children, to their families, to our communities, to group home staff and to the police. We need to face the truth that today's NDP is running group homes in such an irresponsible way the children continue running away from the very place which is supposed to be helping them.

I ask: Why did the Premier promote his minister to co-Deputy Premier when she's performed so poorly in her current ministerial position?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, these challenging issues with children that decide to run away from the facilities they're in are ones that require us to have good relationships with all our partners in the community to find those children.

It's often said it takes a village to raise a child, and in Winnipeg, I'm pleased to say, and throughout Manitoba, and I've visited friendship centres where they're doing this, they run active programs to ensure children have a safe place after school.

In our Department of Children and Youth, we have a Brighter Futures program that provides places for children to be after school to get academic supports, to get tutoring, to get a safe place to be in the evenings. We have recreation programs. The Minister of Children and Youth just announced, less than a week and a half ago, a million and a half dollars for recreation supports all throughout high-risk neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, and we see the police department out there doing programs that work with youth right in the neighbourhood schools.

All of these things are part of the network of care, the fabric of support that we have in our communities, and we work closely with them to do that with child coalitions out of our early childhood development programs. All of these resources are at risk if the members opposite come into government and cut the \$550 million—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable First Minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Primary Caregivers Tax Credit Increase

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, caregiving is a very serious and sensitive task. It is an emotional, taxing time and highly responsible act.

Mr. Speaker, these can be very serious situations for caregivers and the families who have, at times, very conflicting tasks and responsibilities.

Now, could I ask the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors to see what the government is doing to provide some help to these caregivers who are working very, very hard in their own homes to look after their loved ones? Thank you.

Hon. Deanne Crothers (Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors): I thank the member for asking a question on an issue that impacts many Manitobans. We know that if caregivers do well, the ones they care for do well, and our families, our communities and our province as a whole are much stronger for it.

Last week I was very proud to stand with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) and the CEO of the Alzheimer Society to announce that our government has increased the caregiver tax credit by 10 per cent this year. This means that thousands of Manitoba caregivers are going to receive up to \$4,200 each. As of 2015, primary caregivers will have received close to \$116 million through the caregiver tax credit since we introduced it in 2009, and that provides tangible and needed support to Manitobans who are caring for loved ones.

And I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the informal caregivers across our province for what they do every day to help their loved ones stay at home, maintain their independence and the best possible—

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

Locally Grown Food Government Regulations

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, an increasing number of consumers want to purchase food products directly from farmers who are producing this for this niche market, and these are relationships built on respect and trust, something this NDP government does not know anything about.

Now, it should be a win-win situation, except the NDP government continues to interfere with more and more rules and regulations.

So why does this government insist on closing down a marketing opportunity for locally grown food products?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): Mr. Speaker, it's—I'd like to acknowledge the member opposite for bringing up an agriculture issue that this side of the House is very proud to represent the agriculture industry in the province of Manitoba.

We've made strong investments and we continue to make strong investments of the importance of jobs and the economy through agriculture, through manufacturing industries that we have. In fact, to the point, 9 per cent of our GDP is agriculture-related, indirectly or directly related, where we employ up to 64,000 people in the province of Manitoba.

And the member opposite is questioning our investment. I would check his investment or I'd check his records of what that side of the House has done.

And let me talk about the importance of cellphone communications, where that side of the House chose to abandon that and we as a government are still fighting to bring communication back to—

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

* (14:40)

Mr. Pedersen: Well, the minister continues to miss the mark. We've been talking about local food here, in case he missed it.

Mr. Speaker, farm families wanting to supply food products directly to consumers now face even more regulations from this tired NDP government. Farm gate sales to consumers are now banned from Internet websites. Farmers selling to consumers are now prohibited from working together to deliver their products to consumers' doors.

So why is this NDP government so intent on regulating local food sales out of business altogether?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I'd truly like to acknowledge the St. Norbert Farmers' Market of the great history of

involvement and the continual use of the farmers' market that we see within the city.

But I also want to recognize, our side of the House has moved forward with small-scale food processor industries. We put together a team. We continue to talk to them and, in fact, we're bringing forward some legislation that we see the importance of locally food being produced, seeing the importance of locally food being used in restaurants, potentially being used in the hospitals, potentially to be used in the restaurants for the all betterment of the economy of the province of Manitoba. *[inaudible]* great job that we do as a government from this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

Pembina Trails Human Rights Project

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): A few weeks ago, thousands of students, staff and teachers from 33 schools came together to complete what is perhaps Manitoba's largest piece of art, the Pembina Trails Human Rights Project.

The students met at Investors Group Field to place their individually created tile panels in a huge mosaic in the shape of the universal symbol for human rights, a combination image of a hand and a bird.

A year ago, Cameron Cross, the divisional visual-division's visual art consultant, invited every student in the Pembina Trails School Division along with some teachers and staff to transform a plain white panel of-into own-their own piece of art representing a human right from the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of a Child.

I was lucky enough to have the chance to participate and drew an image that represented a child's right to play. In fact, I've had the chance to participate twice, once now for the division-wide project, but also last May when école Bonnycastle first had the idea of working on an art-based project with all of their 600 students. Students, parents and teachers from the school have joined us here in the gallery today.

With the help of Mr. Cross, who is also in the gallery, Bonnycastle students have made their own tiles that formed the mosaic on the school field. This

pilot project went so well that Mr. Cross was able to proceed with the division-wide project.

The human rights tile project has been both fun community-building activity and a valuable learning experience and opportunity for students at Bonnycastle and across Pembina Trails. Before creating their panel, students spent a year learning about inclusion and human rights.

The human rights project will surely be a memorable school experience for all the students. Thank you to all the staff at Bonnycastle, Mr. Cross, and all the individuals and the other divisional staff for going that extra mile to make this project a reality.

Thank you.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, today marks the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. Today must be highlighted as a watershed moment in Canadian history, and must pave the way for dedicated future progress.

Mr. Speaker, the long-awaited report has collected over 1,350 hours of recorded evidence and 6,750 personal impact statements. Consisting of seven national events and a six-volume final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission participants and leadership of Justice Murray Sinclair must be commended for their efforts.

The report's findings and recommendations are essential for Manitoba. Our province is home to 200,000 First Nations people, accounting for 14 per cent of Manitoba's population and 15 per cent of Canada's First Nations population as a whole. As Manitoba was witness to 14 residential schools, the report's findings must be addressed here at home.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the report's release is timely, as Thursday's PMR is related to honouring and implementing Jordan's Principle ensuring that no First Nations children in Manitoba fall victim to government disputes.

As efforts related to reconciliation must ensure that all First Nations people living in Canada and Manitoba are provided essential care, supporting this PMR stressing the child-first health policy is an essential first step for the government of Manitoba.

The NDP have had multiple opportunities in the past to formalize, implement and honour Jordan's

Principle, but have lacked the political will to do so. The tenets of the truth and reconciliation report underscore the importance of our shared future, and we as Progressive Conservatives hope that the NDP will lend support for Thursday's resolution.

We are all treaty people, and we are all participants in the ongoing process of the reconciliation. In the words of Justice Murray Sinclair: The road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to truth and reconciliation, we are forced to go the distance.

The destination has been a long road travelled, and the end is not yet in sight. With this in mind, it is time to practise what we preach and work tirelessly, as the commission has, to ensure that the process of reconciliation is done to the fullest extent possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, today's an incredibly important day for all Canadians, and especially for the survivors of Canada's residential school system and their families. Today, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has released an executive summary of their findings and 94 recommendations. Headed by chief Justice Murray Sinclair, this commission has spent the past six years examining every aspect of the residential school system.

Aboriginal families have long known the damaging effects of residential schools, but those truths are now coming to light for the rest of Canada as well. While at residential schools, many children faced physical, emotional and sexual abuse. They were taught that—they were taught because they were Aboriginal, they were inferior to the children of European descent.

Assimilation was the government's solution. As the commission's report makes clear, the policies that were implemented to assimilate First Nations people, including the residential school system can, and I quote, "best be described as 'cultural genocide.'" Cultural genocide: two words that are now linked to our shared Canadian history.

We can still see the repercussions of these policies impacting people today. While many survivors have shown incredible strength and resilience in the face of institutionalized racism, instances of addictions, depression, intergenerational abuse, community and family breakdown and disproportionate levels of poverty can often be

tracked—traced back to the trauma of residential schools.

I, myself, am an intergenerational survivor of residential schools. On my late mother's side, my chapan, Edna; my kokum, Emma; and my late mother, Matilda, all survived residential schools.

My siblings and I are still living with the intergenerational effects of their experience. For example, our parents did not teach us our Cree language because they were conditioned to think it was wrong to uphold our culture. But I know from experience that our people are strong. We will continue to survive and keep our traditions alive. It is time for reconciliation between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people.

However, reconciliation will not happen simply because of a report. Reconciliation is a process and a shared responsibility. I look forward to working together with my fellow Manitobans to make this happen, and through education and leadership, we can take on this challenge.

I would like to thank the hard work and dedication from the TRC commission. And let us make sure we don't miss this opportunity to change our country for the better.

Thank you.

National Brain Injury Awareness Month

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, throughout Canada, the month of June has been designated as National Brain Injury Awareness Month by the Manitoba Brain Injury Association and the Brain Injury Association of Canada.

These organizations work to elevate awareness of the effects and causes of acquired brain injuries across the nation and offer information and educational programs in an effort to improve the lives of brain injury survivors and their families.

Acquired brain injury is defined as a nondegenerative and noncongenital insult to the brain that may result in a diminished or altered state of consciousness, and result in impaired cognitive, physical, emotional and/or behavioural functioning.

The devastation of brain injury goes largely without public attention, recognition and effective and possible preventative measures. In this way, it is considered a silent epidemic. In Canada, brain injuries are the No. 1 killer and disabler of people under age 44.

* (14:50)

Statistics also indicate that such injuries are twice as frequent within the male population.

The traumatic effects of brain injury can disrupt one's daily life in profound ways, but it can also be slow to develop through subtle yet significant changes of personality, capabilities and altered mobility.

This past Saturday, the third annual Brandon and area acquired injury walk was held at the Riverbank Discovery Centre. Donations were accepted and participants were treated to a great afternoon of fun, food and prizes.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to bring attention to the causes and effects of brain injuries in order to break down the barriers and social stigma attached to them and focus on prevention and treatment methods. It is my sincere hope that the rest of the House will join me in this endeavour.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

I'm trying to understand the rotation here. It's supposed to be three opposition statements today, not three government statements, so I'm going to—I'm sorry for the interruption, but I'm going to recognize the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) with the final member's statement for today.

Brant-Argyle School

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): The preservation of buildings is integral to the Manitoba history. On October the 5th of this past year, a beautiful Georgian-style school in the community of Argyle turned 100 years old. Brant-Argyle School was originally constructed in 1913 and only had two classrooms. It is now a multi-level learning facility for kindergarten to grade 8 students and has an illustration—illustracious history in the community.

Brant-Argyle School was named Provincial Heritage Site in 1999. It is one of the last brick school buildings in Manitoba. The exterior of the building cannot be altered through renovations, which will preserve its authenticity.

The school features several characteristics that designate it as a heritage site. From a tin roof to original hardwood floors to dark-stain wainscotting,

the building exemplifies an architectural culture of the province in the previous century.

The Manitoba Historical Society past president, Dr. Gordon Goldsborough, is working on a project to transform vacant and underutilized buildings into useful community spaces. He also aims to analyze historical buildings in an attempt to integrate their unique design elements into modern structural designs. He maintains that by analyzing conditions existing at places where former schools are still well used, such as Argyle, we might learn useful lessons that could be applied to buildings elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, it is thanks to the good work of Dr. Goldsborough and many other fine Manitobans that Brant-Argyle School is one of the province's 12 historical buildings. May these buildings be protected for the decades and centuries to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Mr. Caldwell: Point of order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Caldwell: Yes, yesterday in the House, Mr. Speaker, in confirming that the Kirkella visitors centre is open and the Trans-Canada Highway visitors centre is open, I was praising the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Piwniuk) and disparaging his staff in a paragraph. I'd like to withdraw that, please.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Minister of Municipal Government, while I believe that—and I recognize the honourable minister's apology to another member of this House and thank him for that, I have to rule that there is no point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Now, we're concluded members' statements. It's now time for grievances. No grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: We'll move on to orders of the day, government business.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan). The title of the resolution—of the resolution is Winnipeg Pride Festival and Human Rights in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one brought forward by the honourable member for Minto, and the title of the resolution is Winnipeg Pride Festival and Human Rights in Manitoba.

* * *

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

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, could you please canvass the House to see if there's leave for the House to sit until 6 p.m. today and tomorrow to allow for extended sittings of the Committee of Supply?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House for the House to sit until 6 p.m. today and tomorrow to allow for the extended sittings of the Committee of Supply?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no, so leave has been denied.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, can you resolve the House into Committee of Supply to sit in three sections, the Chamber, 254 and 255?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

We'll now resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Will the Deputy Speaker and the committee Chairs please take their respective places.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)****HOUSING AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

* (15:00)

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

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Housing and Community Development.

As previously agreed, questioning for everyone's favourite department will proceed in a global manner.

I understand that the minister has some answers available to questions that were held over from yesterday. So if everyone's in agreement, we will start with recognizing the honourable minister.

Hon. Mohinder Saran (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Just a—Mr. Chair.

Yes, there was one question, number of applications for rental housing construction tax credit: there were 14 applications and all of them were deemed eligible; and question No. 2: estimate of annual cost pursuant to—for the Bell Hotel initiative, \$175,000 estimated in 2015-16, 542 units which calculates to \$347 per unit per month; actual operational funding provided to the Bell Hotel in 2014-15 was \$164,647; and number of applicants for the rooming house program, that was the question and also the question was rest of successful bidders for renovation projects in Winnipeg. Those to be provided at the later date.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Given those answers and the—all other lines of questioning, I think we're prepared to go to the vote.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department.

Resolution 30.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$80,974,000 for Housing and Community Development, Housing, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 30.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,312,000 for Housing and Community Development, Community Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 30.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$136,000 for Housing and Community Development, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 30.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 30.1.

At this point in time we thank the minister's staff very much for their time and expertise with us, and, as they exit the head table, the floor is now open for any questions on the resolution at hand.

Mr. Wishart: I move that line 30.1.(a), be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$1.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), that line 30.1(a) be amended so that the minister's salary be reduced to \$1. The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the minister's only been in his position for a short period of time, but there's a long-standing series of issues with the care and condition of Manitoba Housing, in particular as we explored to some level his problems with—the ongoing problems with bedbugs which has certainly caused a lot of people a lot grief, and the maintenance thereof and turnaround times are—leave a lot to be desired.

So, accordingly, I think we've taken the right action.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further comments or questions? [*interjection*] I'll take that as a—

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): I want—I'd just like to comment on the fact that I think that the minister has done a remarkably good job in a very short time. I think he's got a good grasp of this portfolio. I think that he's done a good job as far as the bedbug file and moving a lot forward. And so I personally think that

he's stepped up to the plate and we should be proud of what he's accomplished in the very short time moving the ball forward.

I would also like to say thank you to the staff because I think this is a staff that's managed to do and accomplish great things in spite of what's happened to the federal money. So I'd like to compliment them very much.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further comments or questions, is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, I heard a no.

All those in—but they all said no. There was a no, yes—all right, all right.

The motion is accordingly defeated, everyone around the table said no. So that concludes consideration of that motion.

And I just need the last resolution and we will complete our considerations in this department.

So resolution 30.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,562,000 for Housing and Community Development, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes consideration for the Department of Housing and Community Development.

What is the will of the committee? Should we take a brief recess until the next section is available to start? [*Agreed*]

All right, let's—I'll even give you five minutes. We are in recess.

The committee recessed at 3:08 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:15 p.m.

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates for the Department of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank all of the folks in the room that help make this possible, everything from the clerks, members of the Legislature, my critic, everyone here that's part of the process. It's very important that we gather to discuss these things.

I would also like to thank my staff that will be joining me: my Deputy Minister Karen Herd, and as well—the ADMs, Nardia Maharaj and Jean Cox. So—and all the other ADMs that are a part of, again, the team that helps this department do what it does and looking after Manitobans the way they do. So I would—again, want to thank them for the dedication and their commitment.

Mr. Chair, you know, some governments across the country have chosen cuts and premiums in their approach to their health-care budgets this year, and I'm proud to say that Manitoba has chosen a different path. Budget 2015 includes an increase of 5.1 per cent to support vital health-care services and to recognize the excellent work of the health-care professionals who care for patients in every part of this province. This investment will help us to keep building a better, more accessible, health-care system.

In the 1990s, doctors and nurses were fleeing the province. Today we have record numbers, and I would like to talk about a few of highlights in my term as Health Minister, including the announcement that I was thrilled to make just a few short weeks ago to welcome 107 new medical graduates to the province.

In November I was pleased to announce the creation of a new Winnipeg cancer hub. And these hubs are virtual clinics which provide expert advice, psychological support and navigation services to patients with a diagnosis of cancer. They also provide support to health professionals working in the system to help them ensure that patients are referred quickly and appropriately to the services they need. The Winnipeg cancer hub will be linked to Winnipeg emergency rooms to support diagnosis and treatment for patients without a family doctor.

* (15:20)

Later in November, we recognized physician assistants and the work they do in areas from primary care, emergency medicine, to mental health and acute-care services. I'm proud to be a member of the government that brought physician assistants to the province and created the first-in-Canada education program at the University of Manitoba. It's this kind of innovation that is representative of the approach we have taken to providing better care for Manitoba families.

Better care is the principle behind the My Health Teams as well. And three new teams were announced in December in Seven Oaks-Inkster, River Heights-Fort Garry, and St. James-Assiniboine South. These teams provide a co-ordinated, inclusive and comprehensive approach to care. It's a way for the health system to wrap its arms around a patient to make sure they get the primary-care services they need. And to complement these teams, we have opened and announced new QuickCare clinics in St. Vital, Seven Oaks and Southdale to give families access to services outside an emergency room.

The Grace Hospital is obviously a priority for me and, in January, upgrades to the nuclear medicine site were announced at the Grace. And we know that health-care delivery is enhanced when health professionals have the right tools. To complement the state-of-the-art equipment, I was at the Grace again recently announcing the construction of a new MRI suite as part of the redevelopment of the Grace campus.

But building doesn't stop at the Grace, however, and I want to take a moment to comment on the construction of new personal-care homes in Morden and Lac du Bonnet, which will add to the more than 1,000 personal-care-home beds and supportive housing units added since 1999.

A new 10-bed health centre in Notre Dame de Lourdes will provide emergency and urgent care, as well as access to high-quality diagnostics to the residents of that community in both official languages, as well.

Construction on the new Women's Hospital is scheduled to be complete in 2015, and other projects will be coming as well, including the completion of a new landing pad for the STARS helicopter to make access to emergency care even quicker. This is in sharp contrast to the 1990s, when the government cancelled new health construction, a decision and a legacy that is still being felt today with our aging

health infrastructure in need of upgrades and replacement.

New services are being added as well, with the new Telestroke capability in both the Thompson and The Pas. And funding for home care is also creased in the—increased in this budget to support more home-care workers and extended home-care hours. This is complemented by more hospital home teams, prescription drugs that are less costly and more effective and a Home Cancer Drug Program that has saved families more than \$17 million, as well as saving lives.

And let me be clear that providing services to Manitobans in their home is good for all of us. Manitoba was a leader in the country when we introduced home care 40 years ago, and we remain committed to making sure our home-care program remains universal, exists without fees or copayments and provides excellent care to thousands of families right in their homes.

One of the things we have done to promote stability in the drug program is to make additions to the formulary on a regular basis, rather than ad hoc timing. So patients and pharmacists know that there is a regular review to put new medications in their hands. Our Pharmacare program is a universal one with an income-based deductible. It is one of the most comprehensive in Canada.

We are able to add new products by reinvesting savings reaped through our successful generic drug policies and by taking a joint approach to achieving low prices for generics in collaboration with other provinces. Some of the new drugs announced in the last rounds of additions to the formulary will help Manitobans with cystic fibrosis, MS, diabetes, mental health and cancer, as well as many other conditions. Since 1999, we have added over 4,000 drugs to the Pharmacare program.

Mr. Chairperson, I want to spend a bit of time talking about nurses and doctors in Manitoba. As a result of the new four-year agreement signed with doctors in March, Manitobans will have better access to quality care. The agreement will support improvements to primary care and continuity of services, while keeping Manitoba competitive with other jurisdictions. It will help us recruit more doctors, as well as keep more in the province. That was not the approach of the opposition party when they were in government, when doctors were driven to arbitration, forced to strike and the number of doctors allowed to practise was capped.

Key components of the Doctors Manitoba agreement include an annual general increase of 1 per cent each year for physicians over the term of the contract; additional targeted increases to several priority areas, including services in rural and northern communities, as well as services provided by psychiatrists, geriatricians, palliative-care physicians, pediatricians, pathologists and others; requirement in special tariffs for primary-care physicians, such as a new comprehensive care tariff for patients over the age of 50 and for those who have been diagnosed with one or more chronic diseases; development of pilot models of emergency service delivery in identified communities in rural and northern Manitoba to address specific service delivery challenges; commitments from doctors to work with Manitoba government regional health authorities and other health-system stakeholders to look at ways to enhance the sustainability of the health-care system through work to realize efficiencies of \$50 million over the next four years; plans to look at ways to improve access to patient care across the province, which may include increased access to telemedicine services and commitments for fee-for-service physicians in regional health authorities to engage and better integrate fee-for-service practices in each region.

We are at an all-time high for doctors practising in the province, and I believe we have done that by restoring medical seats, respecting the work that doctors do for patients in Manitoba, and working to enhance a system in which doctors practise by providing new equipment, access to teams and collaboration with other health-care professionals, and an open ear when doctors raise concerns that need to be dealt with to provide better patient care.

Our new Family Doctor Finder has already connected almost 30,000 Manitobans with a family doctor since it was launched last year. However, while doctors are obviously a key part of our family doctor commitment, this plan is about a much broader vision of sustainability, accessible health care for Manitobans, and it keeps Manitobans healthier by taking the pressure off our busy hospitals.

Another part of this strategy will maximize the role of nurse practitioners, physicians' assistants and all health-care professionals as we bring teams of caregivers—bring together teams of caregivers to make sure that people get the right care at the right time, including the My Health Teams and health-care

professionals to work in doctors' offices to help doctors take on more patients into their practices.

Nurses play a key role in this strategy, and I'd like to recognize and talk about the number of nurses practising in Manitoba. Manitoba families are benefiting from having more nurses providing front-line health-care services as the number of nurses working in the province continues to grow, reaching an all-time high of 17,806, a net gain of 3,714 since 1999. When we released the annual nursing labour market supply report this spring, I noted that we were going to see more nurses choose to retire which has made the recruitment of new nurses into the health-care system even more important. I'm pleased that our training, recruitment and retention efforts have allowed us not only to replace the nurses who have chosen to retire, but also increase our nursing workforce to record levels.

As a part of the renewal of the collective agreement that was signed with the Manitoba Nurses Union in April, we will continue to work to optimize patient care and support long-term sustainability in the health-care system.

And there is so much more that I would like to add. I haven't even got half way through the list of the things that we'd like to accomplish, but I'm sure that we can address those in Estimates.

So I thank the Chair for the opportunity to wrap up my opening comments.

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

Does the opposition critic have an opening statement, recognizing the honourable member for Charleswood?

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Chair, just a few comments, and I would like to start out by thanking, first of all, the department staff for the work that they do in handling the many challenges before them in the health-care system. Certainly, it is obvious that there are a number of challenges in health care, and it can't be a particularly easy time to be a departmental staffperson having to address some of them.

And we know that with the baby boomers aging and that—the demographic changes, there are some huge challenges coming down the way, and I am somewhat concerned, in fact probably more than somewhat concerned, that I don't think our system here is going to be ready for those challenges.

I would also like to acknowledge front-line health-care professionals at every level. I know the challenges that they work under. I'm hearing from a lot of them on a very regular basis. A lot of their concerns I will be bringing up during Estimates because they are the ones on the front lines of health care having to deal with some of these many challenges and concerns. And I've always believed, and maybe because I was a nurse for 23 years, I do believe that there are voices there that really need to be heard, because those are the voices of knowledge and experience and expertise. And I recall that when I was a nurse working on the wards, there were many times where those on the front lines did have the answers to the problems and were just never asked, and I hope that we can take better advantage of utilizing that expertise that is out there.

I welcome the minister to her first Health Estimates, and there will be a lot of questions. I know that she is going to, you know, have to answer to in the next several days as we go through the Health Estimates.

* (15:30)

We are dealing with many challenges, and, in fact, there are crises now in Manitoba in some areas. And I would note that, although the NDP got elected in 1999 by saying they were going to end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million, what has actually happened now is we have a full-out ER crisis, and it has certainly gone in the wrong direction.

There will be a lot of questions about this because I think this is where we see the greatest failings going on in health care right now, and when you have those failings you have people falling through the cracks. We have everyday Manitobans that are struggling and we are hearing about them all the time. And my office gets a lot of calls, a lot of letters, and we will be bringing those forward during the Estimates to see what can be done to try to improve on these many situations.

I would just tell the minister, and I know she wasn't here at the time, but when the NDP first formed government, the first NDP Minister of Health actually complimented the Filmon government and said that 90 per cent of what the Filmon government did in health care he could support and that they'd done a good job. I think that is pretty high praise, coming from the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak). He was very knowledgeable about health care. He had been in the position of Health critic for

a number of years, and to me I thought that was a very high and public health-care praise coming from the member at the time because there's not going to be any government in Manitoba or across Canada that is ever going to reach the 100 per cent approval rating.

So I still remember that. I remember when he said it, and I respected that he brought that forward. So, although the minister just liked to make reference to what was happening, like, 16 years ago—which I still think is quite irresponsible of this government, that they can't take responsibility for their own actions and have to keep looking back—you know, I give him credit for the comments that he made.

So, despite the comments that the minister had just put on the record, there are glaring gaps, there are challenges, and we will certainly be pointing them out. And I would also make one point in the opening remarks because I think it's causing concern all across Canada and the minister made reference about sustainability. And her comments actually were quite naive because what is happening today and led by the direction that this government is going, it does not support a sustainable health-care system. And yet her rhetoric certainly went in the direction of, you know, talking about sustainability.

And, you know, as doctors and nurses are telling me right now, the challenges are there. They're concerned with the, you know, the number of changeovers of Health Minister in the last number of years. They are saying that that is affecting and slowing down a lot of the processes that need to change in health care. They do not believe there's enough expertise in these ministers to help the system become stronger, and so they are coming forward with a number of concerns.

The government, despite the comments from the minister, are going to have some very serious sustainability issues, and you can keep throwing money at the system, which is what they've done, but what we're seeing is that the outcomes are not reflective of the amount of spending that goes on in the system. So—and I've always believed that you can keep throwing money at something but it tends to prop up the status quo, and if you don't measure you'll never find out where you can make improvement. So you could spend more but you don't always get more. In fact, sometimes and oftentimes you get less.

The other troubling aspect of what is happening in health care right now is the lack of transparency

that we see, and how some of the reports that the government puts out choose to torque their information so that information that might've been gathered five years ago isn't the same as is being gathered now and there is a serious lack of transparency. And, when you have a lack of transparency, you have a lack of accountability by a government.

And, you know, I can see why a government that has been in power so long wants to, you know, to hide information or hide results because not all of it is very good. So a lack of transparency is certainly not to the benefit of patients in Manitoba.

So, with those few opening comments, there are a number of questions that we do have to ask, and I think that we could just get right into that.

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

Under Manitoba practice, just for the committee's information, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department while we are in the Committee of Supply. So, accordingly, we will now defer consideration of line item 21.1.(a) contained in resolution 21.1.

With that said, we invite the minister's hard-working staff to come up to the front table, and, perhaps, after they settle in, Minister, you'd be kind enough to introduce them to members of the committee.

Ms. Blady: I would like to introduce my staff to the committee. To my immediate left is my Deputy Minister Karen Herd, and we also have the ADM of Administration and Finance and CFO Nardia Maharaj, and then opposite, around the edge-corner of the table there we have the ADM of Regional Policy and Programs, Jean Cox. Very happy to have these strong, bright, energetic and compassionate women on the team as well as the other ADMs. They are great leaders within their field, and I rely on them and their knowledge quite extensively. They're—it's very nice to work with them.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for that.

Quick question for the committee: Do you want to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mrs. Driedger: I think, in keeping with Manitoba direction that we've had over past years, we would get through this much more quickly with a global

approach, and I do understand that that's Manitoba practice.

Mr. Chairperson: A global approach has been suggested. Is that acceptable, honourable Minister? *[Agreed]*

So, just for the record, it's been agreed that questioning for this department in the Estimates will proceed in a global manner with all the resolutions will be passed once the questioning has concluded.

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

Mrs. Driedger: It sounds like the Chair is probably going to be the most peppy of all of us at the table, but good; it'll keep us animated.

And just—I would just like to welcome the departmental staff here and acknowledge that having the biggest department in government cannot be easy on any given day, and I'm sure many challenges cross your desk and I'd just like to acknowledge the good work that we see coming out of the department. And often, when I look at what's happening across Canada, I do see that Manitoba often tends to be ahead of others in many different areas, and that is something that I think you should take a lot of credit for.

And, also, I would just add that, you know, I'm open to moving things around if some staff aren't here and we can't achieve an answer. So I don't want to hold a lot of people here waiting for a time I might ask questions. So, however, I can help to accommodate that. I'm more than happy.

The first question—and they're just a number of one-off questions that have just been, you know, sitting on my desk for a few weeks and I would just like to ask a number of them now just to try to find out what is happening in a number of these areas.

* (15:40)

I was at a tour of the birthing centre a number of weeks ago, and I heard that the government had stopped funding prenatal classes that were given through the birthing centre and, in fact, had stopped funding, according to what I was hearing, funding of prenatal classes by government.

Can the minister indicate when that would have happened?

Ms. Blady: Well, I'd like to thank the critic for the question.

The Birth Centre is a wonderful place and it does amazing work. I know that it's impacted the lives of many folks, including some folks around this table. As someone that had the benefit of having a midwife attend the birth of my second child previous to the existence of the Birth Centre, I know how much it would have meant if I had had something like that to access, myself, and in terms of the kinds of programs that are available there. Because that's the other thing; we call it the Birth Centre, but, really, I mean that's about one moment in the entire process or several hours, shall we say, in the overall larger process of welcoming a child into the world. And it is really a modern hub of maternity services to support mothers.

And in terms of our support of that centre, again, the birth—the Women's Health Clinic ran 163 programs and events out of the Birth Centre, 376 counselling appointments, and other community partners held an additional 250 programs and events at the Birth Centre.

And, to my knowledge, there has been absolutely no change in the funding for programs there that—so if the critic has any particular information that can be investigated more closely—because at this point my understanding is that everything is operating as planned and that the programming that's there is supporting women and families. So I would be very interested to find out if there is something else going on, because, again, everything that—my familiarity with it—and, again, its recent use by friends of mine tells me that everything is up and running.

Mrs. Driedger: I will certainly—I'll go back to the midwives who actually gave me the information. But they had under—they had been told that the government had stopped funding prenatal classes there and that women that had been accessing that there were now to go and access that prenatal care through private services that were offered in the community.

So, you know, certainly, if the minister is able to, you know, check into that herself through a call to the Birth Centre and bring back some information tomorrow, that would be most helpful because there was a lot of concern, you know, being brought to my attention and I know the minister will have full access to that—you know. And I'm sure if this is not the case, then there needs to be some information passed down the lines, because what midwives had been told was that these prenatal classes had been

cancelled. And there was a lot of concern because they weren't sure how, you know, for instance, women in poorer neighbourhoods or people that couldn't access and pay for services would be able to get the services.

So, if there was something that she could bring back tomorrow, that would be great.

Another question that came up, and it was one that really jumped out at me from the Brian Sinclair inquest, and it was one that really bothered me and it was a recommendation. And the minister had come forward indicating that it was going to take nine months to create a procedure for addressing vomiting in the ERs, and she went on to say that it was a complex process and that it was going to take that long. As a former nurse and as a former nursing supervisor in an ER, I was absolutely taken aback when I heard this because that is just plain basic nursing care.

Can the minister explain why, in her view, that recommendation was made and why in the world would she even accept it?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the critic for the question.

First of all, in relation to the previous question, yes, we will look into the situation because the last thing I want is any kind of a misunderstanding or artificial sense of crisis created if there is some concern regarding the availability of prenatal classes to women, especially women who are in at-risk populations. So I can assure her that we will get in—we will look into it and get back to her with that information.

As to the Sinclair inquest, I can tell you that the implementation strategy that was requested was broken down into short-, medium- and long-term windows, and those meant they had to be resolved within a period of nine months—not that it would take nine months, but resolved within nine months. And I—in terms of that particular recommendation, again, it's within nine months. And, again, Judge Preston's report, it isn't a checklist; it is a thoughtful look at how we can make health care in Manitoba better. And I do take that seriously. And I do believe that even short-term recommendations still require significant and thoughtful effort. So it was about undertaking policy reviews that require an assessment and documented policy at each facility, and it actually was about doing something that the member herself very much suggested. It is about

talking to the folks at the front lines, ensuring that they are consulted on what works best within their facility, what it is—what knowledge it is that they bring to the table and then ensuring that once we have consulted with those front-line folks that there is consistency.

So I do agree that it is something that does need to be addressed, again, in an immediate fashion. And I just wanted to clarify, I believe a misunderstanding around the acceptance of that recommendation and the timeframe that was given, that it's not that it takes nine months to solve the problem, it means that it needs to be done within nine months. And I do agree it can be done in a shorter term manner.

And, again, I can say that in having recently visited Health Sciences Centre and having been in the emergency room as part of that visit, seeing that there have been remarkable changes and very prompt response to patients, including some who have dealt with that very issue of being physically ill at—upon being triaged and entering into the emerg. I know that the front-line folks in emergency departments, whether it's HSC or across the province, are providing phenomenal care and that the Sinclair inquest report gives us tools to keep building on changes that have come about already since the tragic loss of Mr. Sinclair.

Mrs. Driedger: I understand that a provincial committee has said it will take regional health authorities four months to review their policies on vomiting in hospital ERs. Can the minister explain why it would take four months to review a policy on vomiting in hospital ERs?

* (15:50)

Ms. Blady: Sorry, I was just trying to—I didn't want to take any more time actually thumbing through the individual pages of the report there because I do believe that one of the things that, again, in relationship to the critic's question regarding the timeline, I think what can be best said is that if we take a look at what happened in the tragic events around the incident with Mr. Sinclair, that immediately changes were put into place and the inquest proceeded afterwards, and then further changes are to be made.

This is a similar situation that we are spending time reviewing policies to make sure that it is across the province consistent and that all of them, as I said before, are reviewed and factored in. That does not mean that changes cannot be made if they have not

already been made. That's the other part to indicate as well is that this doesn't mean changes either have not already occurred or cannot continue to occur while a policy review is in place. These, again, are things that can be actively done. I have to say one of the things that I'm very pleased to see in ERs throughout the province is exactly these kinds of front-line responsive approaches where if somebody's got a good idea and it meets the needs of the patients that they're looking after, that innovation is encouraged and brought about and it does not have to—is not always contingent on waiting for a report like this or recommendations and their review to be followed.

So, again, as I've said, the HSC has been very responsive as long—with other emergency rooms, so the—it's the review process that will take that long for the purposes of thoroughness. But a review does not prevent movement on change and improvement of services.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us why a policy is even needed to address vomiting? That is a basic nursing reaction to patient care, that is delivering good patient care. Why would there be a policy needed on how to address this? That seems absurd to me because, as a nurse, that is just something that you would be doing. Why do we need a policy?

Ms. Blady: Again, I'd like to thank the critic for the question.

And I do agree; this is, as you say, part of the sick nursing, and I also believe that it is—goes to best practices and nurses wanting to ensure that they do give the best care and that they are highly trained. And, having had the privilege of having nurses within my family and as some of my closest friends as well as having had the opportunity and privilege, again, to train nurses within the joint baccalaureate and diploma nursing programs, again, I know the high quality of training and the high quality of care that they provide. And, while it might seem interesting that we would need to have a policy, again, it's about ensuring both consistency around that because, while I know that all nurses do want to give the best quality of care that they can, I want to be able to ensure that, regardless of where someone presents for emergency care, that they are getting the same kind of care, regardless of which emergency that they present at.

So, again, it's about making sure that, you know, basically, a policy to reflect best practices, and what I know that nurses already want to do, are—and more

than capable of doing, and, again, I really thank them for the work that they do, and I have to say that, like I said, as someone that only had the opportunity to train them, I don't—I know I personally lack the intestinal fortitude to do the job that they do. So I'm very grateful and I want to make sure that we're supporting them in the best way possible.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister not think it is somewhat insulting to nurses to put forward a policy that is going to tell nurses how to address vomiting in an ER?

Ms. Blady: Again, I'd like to thank the critic for the question and in, I guess the—what I would like to sort of clarify is that this is not about the imposition of a policy on nurses that it has to—there is no governing policy within the department on this. This is about following the recommendations which asked for a review of any existing policies within the RHAs and where it fits in, so, some—in some cases this might be embedded within triage policies, it might be under standard operating procedures, other kinds of things where—or just within emergency department policy. So it's a matter of finding out what policies already exist and, again, it's following the recommendations to review them and it's basically about making sure that, again, there is consistency. So there is no desire for a top down imposition of a policy. It is about following the recommendations that, again, suggested that these things be reviewed.

So this is really about a system-wide and health-care-wide inventory and ensuring that best practices are the standards that everyone aspires to, which, again, I know nurses always strive to do and that they very much lead the way in ensuring that patients in Manitoba are given the best of compassionate and the best of competent care.

Mrs. Driedger: But I guess I would ask the minister why accept a recommendation that says you have to develop a policy on what to do when there is vomiting? I mean, that doesn't even make sense as a recommendation.

You know, as a nurse that's worked in the ERs for many years, and a nurse that's worked anywhere, for somebody to have a policy put out there that tells a nurse what she needs to do when a patient is vomiting is absolutely ludicrous and absurd, and I just wonder, like, why couldn't the minister have just stood up and said that and said, you know, our nurses don't need that. What they need is better nursing staffing for instance, in the ERs.

What we've got is probably a patient that was vomiting, but there was not enough staff in the ERs to look at that patient. I saw what the nursing staffing was like at the time that Brian Sinclair died, and, in fact, that's where the problems lay, is in the inadequate staffing, the no staffing, the junior staffing positions that might not have been filled because somebody was sick. Nurses would do their job if there were enough of them to do it.

Why wouldn't the minister have just, sort of, you know, jumped on that recommendation and just saw it, you know, through the eyes of a nurse, and said we don't need a policy on this? Just give us a hand to do our job and we'll do our job.

* (16:00)

Ms. Blady: I hope I have heard the member's question and comments correctly in terms of her reflection on the recommendation and that particular recommendation. When I take a look at the inquest report done by Judge Preston, and the breadth and scope of that work, the involvement of so many people, the intensity of that process, and everything that was undertaken, as well as the work that he had to do to compile all of the different—first of all, to listen, but to compile all the information and make assessments and recommendations, I'm very much thankful for the work that he did and I take each and all of his recommendations seriously as someone that has built a career that has had involvement in a number of areas, which is included the work as an ally with—as a non-Aboriginal ally and decolonization scholar working partnership with First Peoples in this province, as well as someone that has had the benefit and again the opportunity to work in the training of both health-care providers in the form of nurses and also social workers. I looked at the inquest and all of the recommendations as the opportunity of what can we do to move forward.

So, in looking at any and all of the recommendations, for me it was about how can each one of these recommendations work towards social justice and the decolonization of the health-care system as part of a larger discussion around decolonization in general, and especially today on such a historic day where we have finally had it put on the public record the cultural genocide that has occurred to, you know, to our First Peoples as a result of I would argue not colonial process of the past but ongoing colonial processes. These recommendations, while they are directed towards health care, really do represent a great move forward

in terms of the recognition of evolution within health care and again how we can decolonize the health-care process.

And so, in terms of the recommendations that were brought forward by Judge Preston and the work that he again put into this, and again the heartfelt and often painful involvement of family and other health-care providers into this tragic event, I take each and every recommendation seriously and do not see any of these recommendations as things that can be cherry-picked out.

And, in terms of the specific recommendation that the critic eludes to, it was definitely looked at with the idea of how do we work with health-care providers, how do we deal with those front-line people to ensure that the health-care professionals and those on the front lines are a part of the solution, how is it—so this is not about imposing anything on anyone, it's about how do each of us in each of our roles within the health-care system work together to ensure that all Manitobans receive the highest quality of health care.

So this is again about partnership with our health-care providers including our nurses, and respecting the work that has come out through this inquest report.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what Judge Preston said about the nursing shortage during the three to four days that Brian Sinclair was in the ER?

Ms. Blady: I'm presuming, again, I'm—and hoping that I've understood the question correctly and to which recommendation the critic is referring to. I hope that it—I believe she's referring to—it's the recommendation on page 130, recommendations 30 and 31, that the RHAs identify staffing demands in all emergency departments and strategically plan to supply adequate staffing for all emergency departments, and that an ongoing review of staffing ratios for all emergency departments be undertaken by all RHAs to match supply to demand. I just want to make sure that I'm understanding the correct recommendation, if she could clarify that that's the recommendation she'd like to discuss.

Mrs. Driedger: Yes, that would be one.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Ms. Blady: Well, again, in reviewing this—again, it has been a while since I've sat down and, as you can

see, gone through it with my highlighter as I'm often wont to do.

Again, I appreciate the testimony that was provided and especially Dr. Innes and his insight into the situation as well as the emergency physician, Dr. Minish, who, again, discussed some of the issues as they understood them to be, and the staffing situation at the time including the benefit that Dr. Innes saw to the overcapacity protocols, discharge planning and matching staff to demand which would include elective and surgical work. I can tell you that in terms of the ER flow targets that, you know, the WRHA has learned a lot in past years, and they, you know, remain committed to meeting targets, to making changes. And, again, we've taken—they have made—a number of new measures have been brought in to take pressure off the emergency rooms. It's included the ER wait times for patients and families being accessed in real-time waits online as well as, again, some other options that have been opened up into new ERs and into the ERs. And I know that this—there's these screens—again, saw them at the HSC when we were there, and to see how that technology is being used.

Other things that take pressures off the ER is opening of the Mental Health Crisis Response Centre which sees over 500 patients in a month. And I know that the QuickCare clinics are making a huge difference in terms of their staffing and their ability to see over 100,000 patients. So, we've also done things to impact the emergency room arrivals with things like EPIC programs, the Emergency Paramedics in the Community, which identifies a number of very frequent ER users and treats them at home, often allowing them to avoid a trip to the emergency room all together. So these things are helping with that aspect of the flow.

And, again, in terms of the recommendations that the RHAs identify staffing demands and strategically plan—actually, I wish I had the article at hand with me. I had a wonderful article that was done about the JDT analysis model being used in Australian emergency rooms and the different staffing models that can be used and the difficulty that was identified in this research on how to best manage matching staffing to flow considering while some aspects of flow might have certain patterns that it is always an in-the-moment thing.

* (16:10)

So, no, I do appreciate both the recommendation and the fact that for RHAs and individual emergency

rooms, how to anticipate staffing and how to best staff emergency rooms is an ongoing challenge, and that, again, I look forward to working with the RHAs and the front-line practitioners to see how we best ensure that our emergency departments are always best staffed to meet the needs of Manitobans who need and use emergency departments.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what the nursing shortage is in the ERs in Winnipeg ERs?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the critic for the question. I'm just trying to ascertain if we have on hand, because, again, that is a rather specific request in terms of the—any vacancies.

One thing I can say about any vacancies that may exist within any emergency department is the fact that those vacancies mean that we want nurses there and that we are working to train, recruit and hire more nurses. And so that means that there is money on the table to ensure that we can get a nurse there.

And I have to say that I'm very happy to have worked with so many wonderful nurses, including the fact that we've been able to put together a new contract that respects nurses and that nurses voted over 90 per cent in favour of this new contract that demonstrates a respect for them, because we do want to enable them to provide the best patient care to families. And it's a contract that also commits to addressing a number of important issues expressed by front-line nurses, including reduced use of overtime in agency nurses, a better balance of full-time and part-time positions and a focus on workplace safety and health.

So I can get for the member any vacancies that might exist, but, again, to assure her and all Manitobans that if a vacancy exists, it's because we do want a nurse there, and we're looking forward in, regardless of which RHA, which ED it is, to make sure that those positions are filled and knowing that there are wonderful nursing students coming out that are looking forward to filling those positions.

Again, the Nursing Strategy that was announced several years ago, 15 now, in fact, included five targeted goals, and what's been really—whether it was the increase in supply of nurses, access to staff development, improve the use of nurses and working conditions, increase the opportunities for nurses' input into decision making, that we've pursued all of these. And it is wonderful to see that we have now a record number of nurses, over 17,800, as a result,

which is, you know, I believe about 3,700 more than, you know—that's how many it's grown in the past 16 years. And that's really wonderful to see, the fact that we've been able to see the steady growth in registered nurses and nurse practitioner categories especially.

And the one thing that I have had great comfort in and been quite thrilled to hear about is the number of folks who were not familiar with nurse practitioners, but their first encounter and subsequent encounters with nurse practitioners was definitely positive. We've—I've received many thanks and congratulations to share with our department, to share with the university who's trained them and with, again, all the folks that have had a part in bringing nurse practitioners to the province.

So, again, as I said, I can get the member the—any vacancies to indicate the staffing levels that we would like to have, but I can tell her that I am quite happy with the fact that we've been able to train and retain more nurses than ever before.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the minister indicating that she does not have those numbers of the ER nursing shortages for Winnipeg?

Ms. Blady: I'm indicating that I do not have them at hand amidst all the binders and pages immediately in front of me, but that I can get that information to the member.

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister make a commitment to have that to me by tomorrow?

Ms. Blady: Yes, the department assures me we will do the best to get that information. I just want to clarify that it's for all of Winnipeg that you'd like—the full WRHA?

Mrs. Driedger: For the ERs—the ER nursing shortage, Health Sciences, St. B., Seven Oaks, Grace, Vic and Conc.

Ms. Blady: Yes, okay. I just wanted to make sure that we were getting all of the right information and that the full scope was addressed. Thank you for the clarification.

Mrs. Driedger: I understand that the implementation of the recommendations from Judge Preston was put into the hands of 23 senior bureaucrats and they were told to report back within 90 days. Can the minister indicate who those 23 people are, who's chairing this and if indeed there will be a report back within 90 days, which would make it about June 23rd?

* (16:20)

Ms. Blady: Sorry. It's—it is quite an extensive list of some very wonderful folks, including some who are at the table here. It is being headed up by the Deputy Minister Karen Herd, and involves other folks, other ADMs, including Jean Cox, the—Regional Policy and Programs; Bernadette Preun, the assistant deputy minister for Provincial Policy and Programs; Avis Gray, the ADM for Public Health and Primary Health Care; Beth Beaupre, the ADM for health workforce; Barry Mathers, executive director, Aboriginal and Northern Health Office; Brie DeMone, executive director, Acute, Tertiary and Specialty Care; Lorraine Dacombe Dewar, the executive director, Continuing Care; Tony Kwong, senior policy analyst for Acute, Tertiary and Specialty Care.

Along with that, we also have from the WRHA Lori Lamont, the vice-president and chief nursing officer at the time of this appointment. We also have folk from Southern Health-Santé Sud: Kathy McPhail, the chief executive officer; Cheryl Harrison, the executive director, mid sector; Marianne Woods, the executive director, north sector.

From Prairie Mountain Health, we have Penny Gilson, the chief executive officer; Shaun Gauthier, the chief medical officer.

From the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, Brenda Neufeld, the chief nursing officer.

From the Northern Regional Health Authority, Joy Tetlock, vice-president, planning and innovation; Ingrid Olson, the executive director of clinical services in The Pas.

And from Diagnostic Services Manitoba, we have Paul Penner, the chief operating officer, and Aileen Chmeliuk, director of client services.

From CancerCare Manitoba we also have Venetia Bourrier, the director for quality patient safety and risk.

From Selkirk Mental Health Centre, Danah Bellehumeur, the chief executive officer.

And from the Regional Health Authorities of Manitoba, Monique Vielfaure Mackenzie, executive director.

So within that there is also very strong representation of health leadership and from a

spectrum of health experiences. So, again, it's a very strong team that I think brings a diversity of experiences and perspective as well as—I can't even imagine the decades of cumulative work experience, knowledge and understanding of the importance of compassionate care, balanced with competency in making sure that Manitobans get the best care they can.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether or not she expects them to report back to her within the 90 days? I understand that that was the directive she gave them. Is she expecting a report back around June 23rd, and what is she actually expecting of them to do? I understand it was implementation of the recommendations. So is it just a strategy, then, for how to go forward, and will that come forward within that 90 days? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Ms. Blady: Okay. Yes, well, actually, the 90 days was counted from that date in November. So, in fact, the report came back to me in the 90 days back in March, and that information was actually made public back in March, if the critic would like to check the public sources that are available.

There was a news release dated March 19th: Manitoba government releases provincewide plan for implementing recommendations from Brian Sinclair inquest: strategy sets out timeline for moving forward to prevent future tragedies."

So I did receive it within the 90 days, yes.

Mrs. Driedger: Is that report fully public or was it just a news release?

Ms. Blady: Yes, in fact, the full report is—has been made public, and so it is at www.gov.mb.ca/health/bsi_report.html.

Mr. Chairperson: That was easy.

Mrs. Driedger: As the minister has far more staff than I do, I wonder if she could provide me with a written copy of that report tomorrow as well as a list of the 23 senior bureaucrats involved with that.

Ms. Blady: Yes, that is something that we can definitely make available. And if I remember correctly, I do believe the report itself actually includes the names of the folks involved with this process.

And, again, I really want to thank them for the work that they do because, as I mentioned before, this is a wonderful cross-section of folks, that, again, have a breadth and a depth of knowledge that I know that in addressing these recommendations, and the plan, and the report that was put together, that they are providing a very thoughtful insight, and, again, bring years of experience.

So, while they may currently occupy positions which the member has identified as bureaucratic in nature, that really what they are, are health leaders, including those that have a great deal of nursing experience. For example, we know that Kathy McPhail and Penny Gilson, for example, two of our CEOs are nurses. And, again, so to have them in this role, yes, currently they have job descriptions which have them as CEOs of regional health authorities, but I know that when they look at these recommendations, and when they look at the report itself and moving forward and how to best do this, I can't imagine either of these wonderful women taking off their—the filter of seeing these things and seeing these recommendations as nurses first. That's something that I have to believe that, you know, that when you think about a profession like that, that it's not something that one can merely take off one's nurse's hat at the end of the day. And, to see that, you know, both Kathy McPhail, Penny Gilson, you know, are joined by Laurie Lamont and Monique Vielfaure Mackenzie, Loraine Dacombe-Dewar, someone from within the department again. These are nurses. So I know that the concerns that the member has expressed around the recommendations how they move forward and the impact that they will have on the nursing profession, I can assure her that the very concerns that she expresses about how nurses will be impacted and how nurses' knowledge can be brought to the table, is a passion that is shared by these health leaders.

And, again, we also have doctors around the table in terms of Dr. Shaun Gauthier. So, again, I know that front-line health-care professionals and those who have trained as health-care professionals being a part of this, while, again, they may have job descriptions that one could characterize currently as being bureaucratic, that it really is about folks that, again, have a broad range of experience in the caring professions in health care and to bring that—their—again, their doctor and nursing experience to the table will be first and foremost, that I'm sure that much of what they will be doing will be going through that. And, I mean, it's such a broad scope

that it even includes the pharmacy experience, the pharmacist, Venetia Bourrier, is also, again, at the table.

So, again, in putting this together, this was not about putting together bureaucrats, this was about bringing health leadership together around a very important inquest report and about making sure that it was looked at through a number of filters including the current positions that these people occupy in health leadership, but also knowing that their roots in health care and the heart of what they really truly do is grounded in the very health-care professions that started them on to the path to these particular positions that they currently occupy.

* (16:30)

Mrs. Driedger: I understand that the committee had indicated that within six months, regional health authorities will have a work plan for setting deadlines for moving ER patients who need to be admitted onto a ward.

Is that already part of that report she's been talking about that's already been made public?

Ms. Blady: Yes, I just wanted to assure the member that in referencing the report and wanting to find a specific aspect of the report, I, like her, do not currently have a hard copy with me, and we're finding that in going to the website and trying to pull it up on BlackBerrys, it's not going as well as we'd like. So, again, for all the wonders of 21st century technologies, so if you would just bear with us I can take a look at that or, if it's something that you would like to, you know, pursue tomorrow when we are both looking at a hard copy, if that would facilitate the process for both of us, that's something that we can revisit.

Mrs. Driedger: It still doesn't address the question I had, and I'm looking at an editorial that had been written by the Winnipeg Free Press in March, and part of that editorial had indicated that this committee of—and they called it—it's not the language I'm using—but they called the committee 23 senior bureaucrats, and so within that first report, that was 90 days. But then it also goes on to say that the committee said that within six months regional health authorities will have a work plan for setting deadlines for moving ER patients who need to be admitted onto a ward.

And I'm just wondering, then, that work plan sounds different from that first report, and that would have been a May date then if it was six months from

when that was released. So I'm wondering, is the minister in possession of some kind of a work plan that sets deadlines for moving ER patients who need to be admitted onto a ward?

Ms. Blady: Again, I'd like to thank the critic for the question and the clarification around that.

Again, that, as stated earlier, the implementation report that was put forward out in March categorizes each recommendation as either short term, again within a nine-month window; medium term, within a 10-24-month window; and a longer term, something that may take longer than 24 months. The implementation report will be kept on the Manitoba Health website, as I had indicated, and it will be updated annually with the progress that has been made on each of the recommendations.

So I can assure her that we are getting updates on it, you know, and that they will be posted and made public.

I can also indicate this relates to the idea of, I believe, recommendation 43 is what is being referred to here in your question, and that is that the RHAs review the feasibility of creating a process for admitting a boarded ED patient to a hospital bed where deemed appropriate. And, again, this is part of a provincial approach, and that the actions that are currently under way—again, it's the recommendation will be merged with and incorporated into actions being undertaken for proceeding recommendation No. 41, and that the Provincial Medical Leadership Council is developing a feasibility assessment work plan and it will make those recommendations for future action.

So, again, this is one that is within the medium term, meaning that the work plans will be completed within six months, and those recommendations will be provided—recommendations for future action will be provided within a 24-month window.

So, again, this is based on a timeline that would see a feasibility work plan, and, again, within a medium term is again, it will be updated annually with progress that has been made on each recommendation. So there will be an annual update to that recommendation.

Mrs. Driedger: So, just to be clear, then, the minister has indicated that there is, you know, even though we're past the six months now, that there is no work plan that has been made public for setting the deadlines for moving ER patients who need to be

admitted onto a ward? Is that what she just said, that that work plan is not yet made public?

Ms. Blady: I think there's been a misunderstanding around the timelines. The report was sent out, as I indicated, on the news release date of March 19th, so that is, in fact, when the clock starts counting. So, in other words, it would be six months from March 19th, a day which we have not yet reached.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister just indicate what her reference was in regards to 24 months?

Ms. Blady: Twenty-four months means again, in terms of the work plans, again completed within six months, and, again, the future action must be—in other words, the task must be completed within the longer term medium, basically a goal of 10-24 months for each recommendation, for that particular recommendation.

So, again, the implementation report categorizes each recommendation as either being short term, meaning it needs to be satisfied within nine months; medium, within 10-24; and long term, longer than 24. And, as indicated, what that means is a work plan within six months and action within 10-24.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what this committee is, the Manitoba Planning, Accountability and Enterprise Risk Management Council?

* (16:40)

Ms. Blady: I'd like to, again, thank the critic for the question.

That particular entity that she described—and it is one heck of a long name so I will spare the committee the repetition of that—but I can tell you that it is one of several provincial councils that we have and that it has membership with—from folks within the department, from the RHAs, from Diagnostic Services Manitoba and from CancerCare Manitoba, and its focus is on performance measurement and risk. These key corporate functions—and what it really is about is the development of community and that these folks can come together and talk about and work on community practices with their experience—discuss experience and their experiences within the health-care professions. It's about best practices, so it's really, again, about bringing health-care performance leaders around a table and what they can bring in terms of leadership to particular ideas as they relate to these key corporate functions, and then

how that can be shared within the health-care professional community.

Mrs. Driedger: In the 2004 ER task force, one of the recommendations had been to ensure that every ER in Winnipeg had a fast-track stream.

Can the minister indicate whether that happened in any of the ERs?

Ms. Blady: One of the things that I have to say that I'm really pleased to see is the work that has been undertaken by the WRHA and all the RHAs regarding ER flows and what can be best done to look after folks when they present at an ER. And one person that I would particularly like to thank, especially considering she has just recently stepped down from her position as the president and CEO of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, is Arlene Wilgosh. The work that she has done has been phenomenal, and that—I know that her commitment to health care does go back to her days as a nurse as well as being the first woman and first nurse to be not only a deputy minister of Health, but also a president and CEO of a regional health authority here in Winnipeg.

So she's been a great mentor as well, and I know that many here within the department as well as within the RHA and, again, the type of committee and council tables that I discussed earlier, many will miss her. One of the things that I have to say that was very nice of her to do and was—I think reflects very well on not only her work, but the work being done in emergency departments across the province, was the article that she provided that she published in the March-April 2015 edition of Wave magazine, and she talks about the progress that's being made in terms of targets and in terms of emergency departments.

And so, again, as she mentions here, and I'll just quote: As readers of this column will know, we here at the Winnipeg regional—Winnipeg Health Region believe that we can reduce emergency department wait times by enhancing the flow of patients throughout the hospital. Readers also know that we have established key targets to measure our progress in achieving this goal. While we still have a ways to go to meet our overall targets, there is reason for optimism. Recent trends at Grace Hospital, as outlined in the chart below, explain why, and she goes on to—there's a wonderful chart here. But the details that are there, she talks about the leadership at the Grace. Kellie O'Rourke, the COO of the region's west Winnipeg integrated health and social services,

which includes the Grace Hospital, and the implementation of a number of measures to reduce wait times for patients once they have been registered and triaged. And this includes things like the nurse-initiated protocols, the rapid assessment zones and, again, two examples of the great work and the changes that are coming together.

And, in fact, she indicates that her—that O'Rourke has indicated that the team has introduced more than 15 major changes in a bid to enhance patient flow throughout the hospital. And so one of the things that Ms. O'Rourke is quoted as saying here is that there's been much more focused attention on the role that every single member, from housekeeping to physicians to nurses to labs, plays in patient flow, not just within the emergency department but within the entire campus.

So I would really like to commend them both and all of the front-line providers, as well as, again, the staff that range from housekeeping to physicians to nurses and labs, in looking after Manitoba patients when they come into an emergency room anywhere across the province, but, again, specifically those in the WRHA and the great work that's happened in my own neighbourhood with the Grace Hospital emergency department.

Mrs. Driedger: Despite all of the comments that the minister just made, she didn't answer the question. She's just trying to burn some time.

And I would ask her again, the ER task force had indicated that there were supposed to be fast-track streams set up in every hospital, and that recommendation was made in 2004: Have the NDP government moved forward on doing that? I imagine our ERs would be in better shape than they are now.

So my question to her is: Which of the Winnipeg ERs have these fast-track streams?

Ms. Blady: Again, I can—what I'd like to offer the critic and—in response to her question is yes. In fact, the Emergency Care Task Force has made—did make a total of 44 recommendations to improve the quality of emergency care, and, to date, all but one of these recommendations has been fully implemented.

The one that has not yet been fully implemented is the health information system project, HISP. Components have been implemented at St. Boniface General Hospital and clinical documentation has been implemented there, as well as at Seven Oaks General Hospital, and further rollout will be—has just

begun and will be completed at all emergency departments before March 31st of next year.

And an alternative solution has been implemented for recommendation 44, which is the physician staffing model, and the number of emergency department physicians practising in Winnipeg has increased, and more students are enrolled at the University of Manitoba's faculty of medicine, and that physicians hired by the WRHA's program can also be reassigned to community hospitals experiencing temporary staff shortages to ensure sufficient coverage. So physician assistants and nurse practitioners have also been introduced into emergency departments to complement the physician staffing.

So, again, the recommendations have been moved on.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister explain how these fast-track streams, then, work in the ERs?

*(16:50)

Ms. Blady: First, I'm going to address something that came up in past because that—I just want to address one of the needs that the critic had requested, and I actually have for her—we were able to get it sooner than anticipated, you don't have to wait until tomorrow—a hard copy of The Provincial Implementation Team Report on the Recommendations of the Brian Sinclair Inquest. So, again, that was the 90-day report that was submitted on March 12th, and it provides an introduction that does a number of different things. It also provides a mandate of the provincial implementation team as well as the membership of the provincial implementation team, those folks that—whose names I had mentioned before.

So that is there available for her on page 3. It goes into the scope of applicability. It gives—it references the different emergency departments per region in phase 1. It also gives a determination of recommendation actions, and then what it does is starting around page 6, but definitely by—clearly at page 7, it walks through the recommendation implementation plan. And what it indicates with each recommendation is it gives what the recommendation is. It is followed, then, by a—it says what the approach is, in other words, is it a provincial or an organizationally-based approach. Then it talks about the actions that are under way, and, again, it identifies a timeline as to whether

it is—has been identified as a short-, medium- or a long-term timeline as was discussed earlier.

So it will go through all of the recommendations, and it gives a breakdown of each of them and where it fits in that timeline, and it does go through all 63 recommendations followed by a short concluding note. So if I could ask one of the pages here to provide that to the critic as opposed to me getting up and walking around the end of the table, that would be wonderful.

And as to the question that was most recently asked, it—again, and I respect the member's background as a nurse, and it sounds like the—again, I want to clarify that the question is being asked that has a very clinical nature to it; it would speak to having a clinical background or clinical training. And in wanting to provide an answer for the member, I want to make sure that I'm able to give her as fulsome and accurate an answer as is possible to prevent any potential either misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the situation.

And so, she has indicated earlier that if there were need to have specific staff come in that she would be accommodating to that, and this is one of those situations where I would like to, for the—to ensure that I can put the best information out to her and on the record, request the opportunity to bring in staff with a clinical background to make sure that I get her the best answer possible. So, if that is something that she's willing to accommodate, that's a question that could possibly be better answered tomorrow when I have staff with that particular clinical background with me.

Mrs. Driedger: Actually, what I would find really helpful, based on that recommendation from the 2004 report, is actually if she could provide a written description of how these fast-track streams are working in all of the ERs. I think that would be very helpful, you know, in terms of how they work, because I know there was discussion of nurse practitioners being part of it, and it would be a way to divest some of your, you know, easier ER cases down a fast-track stream than going into the other stream. So if she could do that, that would be helpful.

I do have one question, and, you know, it is a question—well, it's an issue that concerns everybody, and that is that the Grace Hospital ER has the longest, the worst wait times for patients to see a doctor in all of Canada. Can the minister tell us, you know, because she must have asked the question, why has this happened? It's not like it's the worst in

Winnipeg; it's the worst in Canada. Can the minister tell us what she's done to investigate why that has happened?

Ms. Blady: Okay. Well, yes, into—as to her—the member's request for a written description of the fast track and how they work, yes, that can be accommodated and we will get that for her in written form.

As to the Grace, again, I refer back to this wonderful article by Arlene Wilgosh, and what's—what I guess what I find unfortunate is the description of the Grace provided by the member opposite in the sense that I know that the Grace has so many wonderful folks that work there, and this article itself would indicate that there have been progress in—there's been progress in so many areas at the Grace and, in fact, in March of 2014, that there were significant changes that have—or things have evolved. And what is interesting is that—again I will just—I'll just quote from the article here: One of the key targets is to ensure that 90 per cent of patients who are not admitted to hospital can get in and out of emergency in less than four hours. In March of 2014, only about 24 per cent of patients of the Grace were able to do so. By December, that number jumped to 38 per cent. That's a gain of about 58 per cent, a significant improvement.

There's been other—progress in other areas as well. The Grace has recorded improvements of three of the four patient-flow indicators between March 14th and December 14th, even as emergency visits jumped from about 1,900 a month to 2,300 a month.

So, again, actually there has been great progress made, and I think the phrase that I heard most recently was that the Grace is on the verge of greatness.

I also note, too, that in terms of the folks at the Grace, the fine work that they do, that they are very much committed and that, again, the work that has been done by Kellie O'Rourke and her team is quite phenomenal, and that I've had many folks come to me in recent past that have talked about the phenomenal care that they've received at our beloved Grace.

And I believe the member opposite was also at the Grace gala, which was the day after the announcement of the MRI and the sod-turning and the construction starting there, and the Grace Hospital is—it really is a phenomenal place.

And the emergency department there—as indicated, it deals with a lot, and that to see that their numbers actually improved in these three areas: they improved in the ability to treat and discharge 90 per cent of non-admitted emergency department patients within four hours; it improved in the area of the ability to find a bed for 90 per cent of emergency departments who've been admitted to hospital within eight hours; and that no patient admitted to hospital or not is to remain in an emergency department longer than 24 hours. All of those numbers improved. And the only number that went in—I guess you'd say in a way that was opposite was, in fact, the number of non-urgent patients visiting an emergency department should not exceed 20 per cent of total visits, when, in fact, that number was up in the 40 per cent range.

So what is interesting is that the Grace Hospital, despite increasing volumes of non-urgent patients, actually brought their numbers down and were more successful in treating them than they had been in the past.

So I would like to commend everyone at the Grace Hospital, because I do know how hard they work and I know what a value they bring to the community. I also know that the investments that we are bringing to the Grace Hospital campus are going to support those professionals in doing so much to improve care. It's one of the reasons that, in addition to the ACCESS centre that has been provided and built—and, again, the wonderful work that that's doing and the partnership between the folks at the ACCESS centre on the Grace campus with those of the Grace Hospital as well as the new diagnostic imaging that has come to the Grace, as well as now the new MRI—to have all of this come together with the new emergency department just means that, again, I very much see why various folks have referred to the Grace as being on the verge of greatness—that this commitment to a new emergency department will do so much for the neighbourhood, and that, again, the work that is being done by those on the front lines—you know, I've had family that have actually worked in the Grace emergency department, and I know the commitment that that took in the time that they were there—and the fact that this new emergency department will do so much to support them, it was wonderful.

I guess it's almost two years ago now since the open house and public consultations that the WRHA and Grace Hospital hosted so that people could see the plans of both the new MRI and the new

emergency department. It was wonderful to be able to talk to the architects and the design team and see how much they worked with the front-line medical staff to ensure that this design—

Mr. Chairperson: With respect, the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

FINANCE

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Jim Maloway): I will now resume consideration of the last item, resolution 7.1 of the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

Resolved—that's Resolution 7.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,714,000 for Finance, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2016.

Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed—[*interjection*] Oh, there was a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the resolution, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: Those opposed to the resolution, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

Mr. Chairperson: This completes the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Chairperson (Jim Maloway): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Does the committee wish a short recess? I guess there is.

Okay, we'll have a short recess to allow staff to come to the front of the room.

The committee recessed at 3 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:02 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: We will now proceed with the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I'm very pleased to be able to present the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. And, if I was to sum up the basic theme of the Estimates, it's that this is a very ambitious agenda that's part of our government's ambitious agenda for Infrastructure and Transportation, which includes, of course, the transportation side but also Emergency Measures.

I want to stress again that we're well on the way in terms of our investments, in terms of our infrastructure. Our \$5.5-billion, five-year plan is very much being implemented; we're anticipating a very significant increase year over year in terms of construction as we ramp up. And I want to commend everyone in the department that's been part of it, and quite frankly the support we've received from other departments in government and my colleagues in government.

I want to stress that, on top of that, we have significant order-related infrastructure investments and, of course, through the department of local government, significant investments in municipal roads, clean water and other municipal infrastructure that, again, part of our very ambitious plan.

We're on track to spending \$706 million on roads and bridges and \$42 million on water management infrastructure for \$749 million, that's 2014. And I don't know if this is something that ministers do take credit for, but we're actually exceeding the target by spending \$758 million and, I'm going to put a direct quote in here because this is in the prepared speech from the department; I think it sums it up: A monumental accomplishment. If you consider what we are talking about here, and year over year this is an incredible achievement for everyone that's been part of it, so a very significant improvement.

And I won't spend my entire 10 minutes on specific projects, but I will stress, I have to mention today, Highway 1—I can't say that we are able to shorten the distance west of Winnipeg to Saskatchewan border and vice versa, but we can shorten the travel time because we have just raised the speed limit to 110. And I know I was raising this with the opposition critic, I was ahead of my time. Actually, we just did it as of today officially. So I look forward to him benefiting from a safe but slightly faster drive home.

We're moving ahead with the 59 and 101 interchange. We're anticipating construction will be under way this year on a very ambitious project, one of the biggest investments in the system.

Highway 75, we're well on the way in terms of fully upgrading that, many sections of which are already 110, and also in terms of the flood side.

But we're doing major work on the Perimeter Highway. We're doing major work on Highway 12, 75, 1, 1A. A highway I know well, Highway 6–16, 10, and one of the largest investments this year, 280, which will continue to next year.

On the water infrastructure side, flooding has been a significant challenge in 2011 and 2014. We had 18 provincial bridges that were either destroyed or suffered damage in 2014. And we made it a major priority working with communities throughout the province, particularly in the southwest, which was hard hit in 2014.

We're well on the way in terms of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin outlets. I point out we do have the emergency outlet up and running, for a second time, and we're well into the design work for the options where we're proceeding, of course, to permanent outlets.

We've identified the need for work and other parts for assistance, particularly at Portage Diversion and the Assiniboine River dikes. And again, we're into significant design work.

A lot of work done on provincial drains, and, again, this is part of our historic investment.

In terms of flood preparedness, I think we're recognized across the country, but across the continent, in terms of our preparation, and we have put in place significant investments in recent years, in terms of sandbag machines, barriers, mobile pumps, steamers, et cetera. And we're continuing to focus in on that.

The 2000 flood task first report, we received it. Many of the recommendations are already implemented. Many others have been put in place. We're working on enhanced community individual flood mitigation programs, including a number of recent announcements which will particularly benefit southwest Manitoba, again, hard hit.

We're moving along in a number of areas to convert temporary to permanent dikes, and I can, in the detailed Estimates, get into some of the specifics, both in terms of the individual flood-proofing initiative and the financial assistance for cottage owners. Again, we're, I think, probably the only jurisdiction that have ever done anything for cottage owners in terms of flood mitigation and what happened in 2011 in terms of coverage.

Brandon flood mitigation, I'm sure my critic will have some interest in that. We're continuing to work on implementation of that. Again, a major step forward, and, again, permanent dikes were constructed in 2013 to protect 18th Street corridor. Again, this is part of our historic investment in flood mitigation in, of course, our second largest city.

We had heavy rains in 2014, which did lead to significant flooding challenges. We have had a significant DFA program; 118 municipalities were impacted, over \$37 million in claims. So, again, it was a very significant year. The cost of the 2014 heavy rain DFA program is now estimated in total to be about \$178 million. So flooding and inclement weather-related events, very significant impacts.

I do want to again note the excellent support received from the Armed Forces who, again, on a very short notice, played a key role.

I want to stress on the 2011 flood, 524 thousand—524 million dollars, pardon me, has been paid in terms of DFA coverage and there are many stand-alone provincial programs and other provincial expenditures that are significant. To give you some scale: 2012, \$1.1 million on heavy rains in June; 2013, \$8.2 million; again, 2013, a further program of 2.6. So there's been some significant impacts. And in 2013 we had northern flooding, \$479,000.

*(15:10)

So, again, flooding continues to be a major focus for us. We're also, through EMO folks and other emergency responses, we had a natural gas service disruption which was very significant. And we're

moving ahead more broadly, working with not only municipalities and individual Manitobans, but also other departments of government, working with Conservation and flood protection, evacuation and restoration in our parks system. We've dealt with train derailments, an issue that continues to be of significant focus across Canada, and, certainly, we've been working with the federal government in terms of that. I want to stress that we continue to be very active on the Motor Carrier Division.

I do want to stress on the transportation side, by the way, that we're moving significantly with other jurisdictions to come up with consistent approaches to regulation across the country. Some significant initiatives coming out of our policy division, very proud of the work we've done in terms of improving situation for both cyclists and motorists in terms of emergency vehicles parked on the side of the highway. The highway construction zone—now, there are a lot of highway construction zones, and we significantly moved to protect workers in that environment. The reduced-speed school zone regulation—we, again, recognized the key role of municipalities, and across the province we're seeing reduced speed zones in school zones—a very important aspect.

And I want to stress, as well, that we've been moving in terms of a more streamlined process for short-term variations of highway classification, which is important, especially in and around the spring and other events, which is important for the trucking industry. The fact that we now prohibit passengers over and above the number of seat belts and also prohibit the carrying of passengers in the back of vehicles in cargo areas in terms of pickup trucks, and we've improved the seat belt safety requirements. Again, this saves a lot of lives, and this just continues that work.

The work—and now working very much on renewing the overweight permitting process for commercial vehicles. Again, we've been working very close to the trucking industry, and the carrier profile systems review, again, an important initiative from our department.

I do want to stress there's a number of other important initiatives, York Landing to War Lake and Ilford, all-weather road access, this extension of 280, and that is continuing as we speak. The Red River Valley transportation study, again, that's very important down the—up and down the Red River.

We've been working with the Capital Region. I want to credit Capital Region municipalities for the Manitoba Capital Region transportation plan. Very involved in working with the active transportation policy development, very proud of the fact that the 59 and the Perimeter will actually integrate active transportation right into a major project.

And, if I was to sum up the year, it's that we have been very, very active on the infrastructure front, very active on the policy front, and much accomplished; more to do.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Thank you to the minister for his opening statement. Interesting numbers there that he went through, and we'll have to read in Hansard as he flew through them and see which ones we need to question on.

I, too, would like to compliment the Armed Forces on their work in Manitoba. They are a tremendous group that we use in times of emergency, and thrilled that they continue to be present in Manitoba in both Winnipeg and in Shilo. They are a great part of our community and nice to have—very nice to have there when we have emergencies, of course.

Interesting, I guess the minister did comment that he jumped the gun a little bit on Highway 1, 110, announcing it, I think, last weekend, the week previous that it was actually enacted. And I did drive it both last night and this morning and saw some of the changes, but I do have to dispute that it is not 110 from the—from Winnipeg to the Saskatchewan border. That is, perhaps, not true. *[interjection]* No, it's actually not, Mr. Minister. There are several parts of it that are not 110, so perhaps we can talk about that in a little bit of time. And I'm sure we'll get through why it is and where it is and whether they're quite ready for the 110 as the construction continues as we go along there.

I've had several comments from people about the highway speed changes in regard to emergency vehicles and highway staff that are on the side of the road. And there is, of course, legislation in place that the minister referred to. Most people don't know what the speed is supposed to be. And we see in other provinces that often we see signage that when you're passing emergency vehicles or provincial

vehicles that—what you're supposed to slow down to. So I think there's a bit of concern there that people aren't aware of what the legislation says. They aren't aware of what the speed is that they should slow down to, so perhaps that's something the minister could take under advisement and put in place so that people are informed in Manitoba. They do want to follow the rule of the law, but they can't if they don't know what it is, and when they're pulled over for speeding when they don't know what the speed is supposed to be going by an emergency vehicle, that can be a bit of a concern. And as I've said, that is present in other provinces, so we can learn from the good things that other provinces do, and in—we can continue to do some good things in Manitoba.

I am encouraged by the minister's statements on his staff. There have been some dramatic changes in his department this year, and I spent some time in Finance trying to track and figure out from that particular minister what was moving from this department to that department and who would have responsibility for what particular issues, because I know full well, were I to come to this Estimates and ask questions about some of those areas that are no longer here, the minister would instruct me to go and ask questions in Finance, which, of course, that area of Estimates has been completed and we'd have to wait for concurrence. So we'll try to track those changes, and I'm sure the minister will be able to guide us through that, so thank you.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on a minister's salary is the last item considered for a department on the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 15.1.(a) contained in resolution 15.1.

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

Mr. Ashton: As they make their way up, I'd like to introduce Deputy Minister Lance Vigfusson, ADMs Leigh Anne Lombard, Doug McMahon, Lee Spencer, Esther Nagtegaal, and Executive Director Ron Weatherburn.

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

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Chair, since we don't have any emergencies at this point, as we did in past years,

perhaps we could take a global attack this time, and we'll try to make it as efficient as possible with the staff.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. It's agreed, then, that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister provide us with a list of all Cabinet committees that this particular minister serves on?

Mr. Ashton: I am on the Planning and Priorities Committee.

Mr. Helwer: And can the minister provide us with a list of all political staff, including their name, position, the full-time equivalents and whether they are full-time, part-time?

Mr. Ashton: I can read into the record the—this is minister and deputy minister's office staff, which I think is often—which includes, obviously, you know, staff that are a ongoing part of government. And I'll just sort of highlight the minister's office versus other staff: Shirley Frank in the minister's office here, along with Robert Pontanares; Donna Kildaw's the executive assistant; Darryl Livingstone, special assistant.

And I have the list of deputy minister's office staff. I don't believe the—does the member want the deputy minister's office staff? [*interjection*] I could provide that: Wendy Van Loon, Debbie Draward, Carly Hildebrand-Dyck, Rachel Almero, and Pamela Spence.

In terms of executive support, that's Robert Spencer [*phonetic*], Nancy-Anne Cribbs, Michelle Delisle, and there are a couple staff on either leave replacement or on maternity leave. And there are other staff as well in terms of Chris Pawley, special adviser; I mentioned Darryl Livingstone already and Robert Spencer [*phonetic*].

So that's the basic configuration of the department currently, and, again, that includes some staff that are minister or deputy minister offices. They're not directly related to the political side.

* (15:20)

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister—other than the minister, did any staff take a leave during the NDP leadership campaign and, if so, could he let us know how many and who?

Mr. Ashton: There was staff—I'd want to check the exact details because you have to remember I wasn't the minister responsible for the department during that period. I did step down during the leadership race. So, in order to get fully accurate information, I'll make sure that I get that information probably later on today or I can get it first thing tomorrow.

Mr. Helwer: And, if those staff took leave, did they return to the department in their position they held before, or in a different position, or were they paid out as some of the other government staff were to move to another area of the government or leave the government altogether is something he can check on as well.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can indicate there's been nobody that's left the employment of government in the department over the last few months.

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister provide us with the number of staff that are currently employed by the department?

Mr. Ashton: What I'm going to say, I'll say it again, it's standard practice while we're getting the exact numbers rather than have dead air time. I will get that and we'll give sort of a running tally as we go along. So the number—the total number of employees we'll have in probably a few minutes.

Mr. Helwer: While the minister's looking at that, there have been dramatic changes, I guess, when we look through the books here, and if the minister can tell us what the staff reduction has been from last year to this year as there have been—as I understand it, several staff have moved from the Department of MIT to Finance and the accommodation division. Is that the correct term? So if you can tell us the numbers that have moved across there.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the member is quite right, and I know he asked some detailed questions and Finance may have determined some of the answers there about the specific elements. But there are sections of the department that are in the process of being moved over to Finance. Of course, that will take place over the next period of time, you know, in this fiscal year, but I can certainly also give the member a summary of the impacts on employment. It does impact employment and budgets, obviously, you know, so some of the numbers you're going to get are going to be reflective of that transition.

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister provide us with the names of staff that have been hired in the current

year, including whether they were hired through competition or appointment?

Mr. Ashton: I'm assuming the member's interested in by appointment rather than—you know, we—I can get the member a list, but we have lots of staff including seasonal. It would probably take some time to gather it. I'm not sure if that's what he's particularly interested. I'm assuming it's probably more to do with technical appointments, and if it is, I can provide a list of that once we assemble it.

Mr. Helwer: Well, we had some discussion of the changes in staff in terms of ones that are moving across. I imagine there have been a number of positions that have been reclassified. When I go through the numbers, there's been considerable changes there. So we would be looking for a description of positions that have been reclassified and I imagine there have been some done with all the moves that have been happening.

Mr. Ashton: And I've read that information too.

Mr. Helwer: Last year, we did have some discussion about staff years and things of that nature. And can the minister provide us with some information of the current vacancy rate? What type of staff years that are currently filled? Do you have vacancies, some ideas of those numbers.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'll—when I read in the specific numbers I'll also read in the vacancies as well.

Mr. Helwer: And, again, Mr. Chair, last year we did have some discussions on vacation time, and the government expected everybody to be busy over the last year so that there was some changes that showed up in the numbers, vacancy rates, and so have there been impacts on the department as the result of that change in vacation time and results of the vacancy rates?

Mr. Ashton: The member's quite correct in terms of the busy nature what's happened; in some cases, the impact, of course, has been on consulting engineers, which are all part of the project costs. I do want to put on the record that the consulting engineering committees has really stepped up time and time again. Every time we ratchet up the investments in infrastructure, they have provided the support we need, and it is, obviously, a competitive process.

I note also the degree to which it's primarily Manitoba firms that have been very much a part of the solution. So I can, again, identify the total number of staff positions and also the current

vacancy rates, and if it would be helpful, I'll make sure we get the comparative information for the previous year as well.

Mr. Helwer: There, obviously, were some projects that were delayed or not completed as a result of weather last year, and I assume, and perhaps the minister can tell us in detail, if there are any projects that were delayed as a result of the vacancy rate.

Mr. Ashton: Delays because the weather, yeah, but if you look at what's happened in terms of overall projects, I wouldn't say projects would have been delayed because of staffing decisions. Where we've had priority projects, we've been able to assign the resources. I don't want to understate the accomplishment. We have, year over year, as a department with such a significant increase year over year, people in the industry will tell you and people with experience in this field will tell you that it's quite a remarkable increase.

We did it by streamlining some of our processes. We did it by working co-operatively with the Heavy Construction Association, some very good input there in terms of how we could improve on what we had already improved on several years ago in terms of early tenders, and I think quite a few jurisdictions now are looking at the Manitoba model in terms of that.

So impacts from inclement weather—absolutely, but in terms of staffing we were able to put in the team to get the job done, and, as I said earlier, we exceeded our target in terms of construction, which is a very significant issue.

Mr. Helwer: We had some discussion of contracts and how they're ordered, various—through tenders or through direct awards, and I'm just wondering if the minister can guide us through, perhaps, the number of contracts, let's say, over \$25,000 that were issued as a sole source as opposed to a tender, and if he could give us some details of those contracts.

Mr. Ashton: I know that information has been made available before. First, in terms of the percentage, I do want to stress in this department you will see some situations, obviously, where, you know, you're in an emergency situation and you have single providers of goods or services where you do have other competitive but non-tender-related processes. I'd stress when it comes to, for example, engineering service provision, we do have in place quite a competitive situation, but it's often not competitive in terms of price strictly. It also looks at qualitative

factors and other factors, but I can certainly provide updated information in addition to what's already on the public record in terms of tendered versus untendered contracts.

The percentage of tendered contracts is by far the highest percentage. It's the exception rather than the rule in terms of untendered contracts, but there are several categories of situations where you do have to move particularly floods, you know, directly, but I can certainly provide summary information and whatever other information we have available.

*(15:30)

Mr. Helwer: Well, one of the areas of sole-source contracts that we found through recent access-to-information requests had to do with signage, and I understand that often the signage seems to be a sole-source contract. The highway signs that were changed to 110 were a sole-source contract, and this is something that has been in the works for well over six years, so should not be a surprise that signs were going to be changed. But can the minister give us some indication of why that particular contract went sole-source as opposed to tendered? What—shouldn't have been a timing issue. The minister himself, I think, knew about this several years in advance, so what is the issue with the sole-source contract on those particular 110-kilometre-per-hour signs?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, that was an extension of an existing contract that went through full process in 2007, and we are going to a contract now in terms of that. So it did—it was really an extension of an existing contract, not a new one, but we are going to be going to tender in terms of that now.

Mr. Helwer: So, as the minister said, this is a contract from 2007. Is it usual practice that the minister will continue to renew contracts of that age when the tender may have indeed gone through an expiry? Or is it not something that should be retendered with new potential bidders on it? It is something that the Auditor General brought up in detail in one of the reports.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, well, first of all, it's not the minister that makes those decisions. It's an operational decision.

And again, it was a five-year contract initially—was extended. And we'll be going to full tender now. Important to note that, you know, in any given year, there's not a significant number of new signs that are required, so the department obviously made the

decision, in that case, to go with the existing contract. But again, we will be putting it out for tender actually fairly soon this year.

Mr. Helwer: So that was a 2007 contract that was extended for five years. That brings it up to 2012 and then extended again and yet again and yet again?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the extension is 2012, so it's three years in this particular case. It was a five-year contract initially, so it was a long-term contract.

Mr. Helwer: And were the extensions for each year or was it extended for three years at that time or five years at that time?

Mr. Ashton: Well, essentially, it was extended on an as-needed basis, based on the original contract which was through tender. And, again, we are now moving to a fully tendered new contract. So it was on an as-needed basis—it wasn't extended for a further five years; it was extended on an as-needed basis. So it will be—there'll be a new contract out for tender this year.

Mr. Helwer: And, as part of that new contract, will the specifications for the highway signs change? I understand there's reflective changes in other jurisdictions, provinces and states, and Manitoba is one of the last that holds on to its current reflective signs.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, our practice follows whatever the standards are—the national standards—and it will follow the national standards, yes.

Mr. Helwer: Well, this one. With the changes into Finance, I imagine we'll have some discussion over time on this one, in terms of relocation from rural or northern Manitoba into Winnipeg in terms of positions or other portions of the province. Have staff moved into Winnipeg from other places or from Winnipeg outside as well? And is that something that we'll have to explore in a little more detail with the changes to Finance?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think it's important to note that a lot of the functions that will be transferred outside Accommodation Services are very site-specific. So, you know, if it's a provincial building in Thompson or Brandon, you know, obviously the work is in Thompson or Brandon. And it certainly doesn't inherently involve any shift of employment. It's really a shift of the existing functions, whether it's Accommodations Services, Procurement Services, Vemer [*phonetic*], the Materials Distribution Agency and it's really part of the internal effort here.

I think the feeling here was there may be some opportunities to get some further efficiencies from this. And I point out we did amalgamate Liquor & Lotteries, for example, I think, quite successfully. And the—on the gaming commission side, as well, we've had—that side of it to regulate. So it's not a moving-jobs-from-one-area-to-the-other situation. It's really—it's going to be the same sections of the department. The only difference now they report to a different minister.

Mr. Helwer: So, in the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, were there any positions that moved from Brandon or Thompson to Winnipeg?

Mr. Ashton: I can certainly track that down. Again, there are individual decisions made, you know, within the department. I can certainly track down—Thompson, Brandon, and I wonder if there's other communities. Some cases, it's on more of an individual basis, if there are specific issues, why people would want to move from one location to another, and they can still function. But I'll certainly track that information down.

Mr. Helwer: Is MIT, then, still responsible for the air fleet, the travel of the jets—the—anything of that nature that government staff would travel as part of their job on?

Mr. Ashton: Yes.

Mr. Helwer: All right. Well, then, is there any travel by the Premier (Mr. Selinger) or a delegation led by the Premier that was paid for by a particular department? And were any of those trips taken on any of the government planes?

Mr. Ashton: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Mr. Helwer: Can we get a list of the flights taken by MLAs and ministers on government planes over the past year?

Mr. Ashton: I can certainly see if I could track that down. That would probably take some time to assemble. Not that there were a significant number of flights, but just that there are a lot of flights that take place, a lot of movement that's got nothing to do with anything other than, for example, air ambulance, fire suppression, et cetera. So I can certainly document that, yes.

Mr. Helwer: And can the minister provide us with—I guess he had a little gap there in terms of being minister—but how many out-of-province trips this particular minister has taken in the past year and the purpose of those trips, dates, who went, which

department paid for it if one of the Manitoba departments paid for it or another body and what were those costs, and also of the period of time with the previous minister, I guess, if that information's available as well?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I guess that includes the previous, previous minister, because that's me, and the previous minister. I can track that down. I'm not sure what happened in that period. Now, for some reason, I was quite concentrating on Manitoba between December and March, so zero trips there.

I'm trying to recall last year, in terms of ministerial conference and things, about the only time there would have been any out-of-province travel. So I'll have to go back to track that down. You know, I'll certainly check if the previous minister had any out-of-province travel at all.

Mr. Helwer: Well, looking through the numbers, as I said, there's substantial changes there, and I see a lot of changes for allowance for staff turnover. The numbers are dramatically different this year. So I would anticipate that there have been some changes in terms of retirements, and can the minister provide a list of staff who retired from the department in the last fiscal year?

* (15:40)

Mr. Ashton: I certainly can, and it's fairly significant. I mean, I sign every one of the congratulatory letters and certificates. We've had people upwards of 44, 45, 46, 47 years in the department, which is quite remarkable. I certainly want to thank them for their service. And you really see, actually, we have multi-generational families where people—in the department for—or in government for many years. So it's a fairly extensive list, but I'll certainly see if we can track that information down. It might not be possible to do it during the Estimates time, because, again, it's something we wouldn't normally keep. But, you know, there's a fair amount of turnover, and it's one of the challenges of the department, quite frankly, is succession. And it's standard across the department where there's technical, you know, professional side or, you know, on our highways side; every aspect of what we do, we rely a lot on some quite experienced senior employees been—you know, around for a number of years, have been in their career for many years. So succession planning is a key part of it. We're actually very actively working right now on getting engineers, techs, operator—trades people into the system. This is—as we can certainly provide,

there's a lot of retirements that require us to make sure that we're able to recruit replacement employees.

So I'll aim to get the list, and, again, it is one of the bigger challenges facing the department.

Mr. Helwer: So continuing that discussion, is this one of the larger years that we've seen as retirements or is it kind of we're in the middle of a bubble of retirement? Obviously, you must have an idea of forecasting for replacements over the next five years, and are we—have we peaked in terms of retirements or are we still yet to hit that peak, and then when do you see things stabilizing?

Mr. Ashton: There's two managements. One is the demographic situation, which, if you look at it, average age in the department has been going up fairly significantly, similar across government, similar in, you know, other private sector scenarios, you know, where you have similar situations. Couple of key things I want to stress, quite frankly, is we do see a lot of the solution in really reflecting the diversity of the province, and we do have a—we have one of the youngest jurisdictions in Canada, significant number of young Aboriginal people, and there's been a lot of work done in the department to really work on the opportunities available for Aboriginal people. Our department has also worked very co-operatively with foreign-trained engineers, the U of M program, and in terms of plugging them into the EIT scenario. So, again, there's some potential solutions there.

But what is interesting, and I can't say for sure this will show up in the stats, but we are getting a fair number of employees who are, I would say, probably extending their career because the opportunity to be part of a historic investment in infrastructure. You've got a lot of projects that are really significant where you have people that might otherwise take retirement are now seeking to extend their, you know, their time period.

And also people are maybe junior or mid-career, particularly, on the professional side, who—maybe are staying with government because they have the opportunity to be engaged with projects that would've been considered, you know, something they wouldn't have the opportunity for just even a few years ago. And, for example, bridges, I mean, a number of significant investments we're making in bridges. But all the way through we're building, you know, some significantly enhanced highways. There's a lot of challenges that, you know, on the

water side, you know, flood operations, flood mitigation. So I would say we're seeing probably a slowdown, maybe a bit of a reversal of some of the, you know, the career end scenarios and, quite frankly, the last few years, it wouldn't show up on our retirement statistics, but in the last three major floods, '09, 2011, 2014, we had a lot of retired staff that actually came back, and were absolutely invaluable in those, you know, very critical situations.

So there's general demographics. We're not through it yet. Challenges, opportunities, you know, for bringing young workers in, and I think one of the big challenges for us as a department is to make sure we're offering a competitive work environment, and, you know, a—professional challenges, we've certainly had no difficulty on the professional challenge and we are working on the competitive work environment. So I tend to think, if anything, it's slowing down at this point in time, but there's still a broader demographic situation where there are significant retirements in any given year.

Mr. Helwer: Of those that have retired in the past year, have any of them come back on contract, you know, on some of the projects?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, that would include staff that have retired in previous years. I can provide a summary or a list if the member is interested, particularly during the floods, but not strictly.

We had a significant number of—you know, I would call them not even retirees because I find nowadays there's a lot of people, you know, you really shouldn't call it a retirement do; it's sort of end of one career, movement to another. And we've seen a lot of people in that category, people that perhaps took retirement, you know, quote, unquote, continue to be fairly active in the workforce, and when we've needed them they've come back, which, I want to put on the record, provided us with invaluable information and a tremendous workforce. At one time, I think internally we dubbed them as sort of the army of the retired, because there were significant numbers and, boy, did they deliver for us.

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister provide us of a list of all fees charged by the department and what those rates might be?

Mr. Chairperson: Minister of Finance. I mean, Minister—Honourable Minister.

Mr. Ashton: Freudian slip by the Chair, maybe it should be asked to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar).

I mean, it would take some time to assemble that. This is pretty micro information. There are a variety of fees, charges, et cetera, and if you really got down to it—I could probably undertake to see if we can provide that information, but it would probably go beyond the Estimates time to pull it together. But, if the member is interested, I'll certainly—can do it.

And if it could be narrowed down, again, I don't know if the member wants every last fee, but if there's specific areas that he's interested in, I could prioritize that and we could more than provide a summary. It might take some time to assemble it, probably after Estimates, but I could do it in writing.

Mr. Helwer: We'll see if we can narrow it down a little bit. I guess one of the interesting areas would be if there's been some dramatic changes and increases in fees, that would be one area. But I'll try to provide the minister with a little bit more direction on the fees as well.

In terms of advertising, I mean, there was quite a bit of discussion about some signage that was provided, came through the minister's department and started out as core infrastructure signage and then seemed to dramatically expand across the province for things that were perhaps not core infrastructure but still used the same type of signage.

Can you give us—me an idea of if there's other type of advertising that comes out of the department other than those particular signs that I'm referring to?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, well, first of all, you know, government does have a consistent visual identity. In terms of signage on our highways, we're consistent, again, with the broader visual identity. It's probably a little less political than it was; ministers' names no longer appear on the construction signs.

But in terms of other—I wouldn't necessarily call it advertising, we do public service as well; there's the Emergency Measures, we can certainly track that down; job postings that originate from the department.

Again, we don't do our own signage in terms of the broader, you know, government messaging. We do purchase signs, obviously, for direct highway purposes. But I can provide a summary of that, yes.

Mr. Helwer: And can the minister remind me of what the definition of core infrastructure would be for the current year?

Mr. Ashton: Unchanged. Part of our five-year commitment, and municipal infrastructure clearly identified—I mentioned that earlier, even though it's not under this department—and roads, bridges, drainage, flood mitigation, that's the prime component.

It's not to say that there aren't other areas of infrastructure, you know, in terms of health infrastructure, education infrastructure, but that's not part of a commitment. We made a commitment to invest in core infrastructure and it is part of our current five-year plan.

And I mentioned earlier we're not only on track, we're actually ahead of schedule in terms of meeting the very ambitious targets that were put in place.

So it's, as I said, it's not all of the infrastructure in government, but we've specifically segmented out the funding for it, again, from, you know, from the PST brought in a couple years ago and specific.

* (15:50)

Mr. Helwer: Well, there was a lot of discussion of different areas there. Could the minister be a little more specific about what is included in the current year in core infrastructure?

Mr. Ashton: Well, it's just what I referenced earlier: roads, highways and bridges, flood protection and municipal infrastructure. That is the core infrastructure investment. There are other areas of infrastructure not involved with our five-year plan, separate, not defined as core infrastructure under the five-year plan, so it's very clear: roads, highways, bridges, flood protection, municipal infrastructure.

Mr. Helwer: So the health infrastructure that the minister mentioned is not part of the core infrastructure? Could the minister give me an indication of what might be health infrastructure as opposed to superstructure?

Mr. Ashton: All the investments we made in the Brandon general hospital. It's part of health capital, not part of the core infrastructure. And I think that's—it's not to say that it's not an important investment, but I think Manitobans were very clear they expected clear delineation of what core infrastructure is, and we're—we would allocate over what period of time people wanted. And it's part of our plan to have the ability to have carry-over, so if there's, you know,

inclement weather or flooding that delays the capital program in any given year, it will carry over. It's roads, highways, bridges, flood protection, municipal infrastructure.

Mr. Helwer: Then, to break it down a little more in the municipal infrastructure, is there anything in that area that is not roads, highways, bridges, water, sewer that would fall under the municipal side in terms of buildings or structures?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, and I—and, again, it's probably best answered by the member's colleague from across the way in Brandon as the minister directly responsible, but the municipal roads and bridges clearly a key part of it; water and waste water, very significant. I was very pleased in Thompson recently when we announced, along with the federal government, we're cost-sharing a \$36-million item as well. We've got Winnipeg rapid transit and also the Building Canada plan, so it basically focuses on key municipal infrastructure, and I refer the member to our five-year plan. It's outlined, I think, in pages 10 and 11 in some greater detail.

Mr. Helwer: Are golf courses included in any of that municipal infrastructure?

Mr. Ashton: You know, I'm not the minister responsible for municipal affairs; probably best to direct it there in terms of more detailed information. What I can say, again, is the general description of municipal infrastructure, I think, is very consistent with our provincial jurisdiction. Roads—again, we cover roads—roads and bridges, actually, at the municipal level, water and waste water and rapid transit along with the specific infrastructure. But, I mean, we've been very upfront, as well, about our intention to provide funds which will enable us to get full benefit from federal infrastructure dollars. I announced along with Minister Glover in Thompson recently, a \$24-million federal-provincial cost-share of a \$36-million waste water project. So it's, again, very much part of what our plan was right from the start.

Mr. Helwer: Are splash pads included in municipal infrastructure?

Mr. Ashton: No. I think there were some splash pads I announced, you know, initially, and there was some sense that this was part of it. I think we made it clear that's not what was the key focus here. Again, I can speak from—I said my department doesn't fund anything other than roads, bridges, the flood mitigation, drainage, et cetera.

We're also not actually the department that is involved with the federal-provincial infrastructure programs. I'm really just, you know, providing contextual information. So, basically, I think it's pretty clear what most Manitobans would see as core infrastructure is what we're investing in: roads, bridges, flood protection and—you know, and water drainage, you know, and retention. So, you know, that's, I think, what most Manitobans expect in the way of investment in core infrastructure and we're delivering.

Mr. Helwer: Is there any community housing under the—covered under the municipal infrastructure?

Mr. Ashton: Again, I'm not the minister responsible for the municipal portion, but there's certainly no housing funds coming from this department. It wouldn't be consistent with our mandate either. So we don't fund housing through this department, either at municipal level or in any other way.

Mr. Helwer: Well, the minister brought up Winnipeg rapid transit and there's—some of it has been completed, some of it is in still the planning stage. And are there monies that will be advanced to that project in this budget year?

Mr. Ashton: I happened to speak to the Canadian rapid transit association this morning, and I could certainly reiterate that we're committed to rapid transit. We're committed to transit, quite frankly. We reinstated the 50 per cent operational funding that benefits my community of Thompson with a bus service, Brandon, Flin Flon, also Selkirk now which has transit system along with Winnipeg. We certainly allocated funding for rapid transit. The first leg I was actually minister at the time, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs at that time, and we were, again, part of the solution.

In terms of specific budget questions, the minister of local government is the minister directly responsible for transit and also for the various infrastructure cost-sharing programs. So I'll defer to him in terms of the detail.

But, absolutely, we're committed. There's been some progress just in the last week or so. There's certainly a mayor in Winnipeg that's very committed, and signs certainly the federal government has really increased funding from transit from zero to something fairly significant. So just in a general sense, I think you're going to see some very significant movement on rapid transit, particularly on that corridor. And I think the mayor and the City

have already identified the intention to broaden it as well. That was always part of the broader vision from the beginning, you know, getting a network within Winnipeg, and, quite frankly, the other option is called traffic gridlock. And it would impede the growth of the city which is now on track to have one of the highest growth rates, certainly, in western Canada. So we see both the service side of it and, you know, it offers some significant benefits there. But also, on top of that, it's important for the continued growth of the city of Winnipeg, so we fully support it.

And, again, I'm sure the minister of local government will be more than pleased to provide details in terms of where it's at and where the provincial commitment is.

Mr. Helwer: So is there any actual money coming from MIT to Winnipeg rapid transit or flowing through the department or is that part of other departments?

Mr. Ashton: It's part of local government. Yes, nothing comes from this department.

Our jurisdiction is strictly outside of the city of Winnipeg. It is not within Winnipeg. It's rather a different situation say, than Brandon where the department is directly responsible for highways, roads and main thoroughfares in Brandon itself, and every other municipality. But, in the case of Winnipeg, anything within Winnipeg is through local government, and transit is funded through local government as well.

Mr. Helwer: So then MIT is not, neither in that case involved in any of the planning for Winnipeg rapid transit?

* (16:00)

Mr. Ashton: No, that would be the City. The funding, obviously, from the Province, is important, you know, as well. But the specific site locations, and there's been, you know, a fair amount of detailed work done on that in the last period of time. I'm sure the member's, you know, more than aware of that. That is the jurisdiction of the City and certainly we respect that. But we are certainly fully supportive of the need to move on rapid transit and have put in place the funding. And, in fact, when it's put in place, the funding, if you go back to the original agreement, probably back in 2003, I believe, we were prepared to fund it at that time with the former mayor, Glen Murray. Of course, there was a change in direction with the election. When Mayor Katz was elected,

who did move on the first rapid transit leg, somewhat later on, but we've always been there in terms of funding. No different than what we were doing with broader municipal infrastructuring, and not through this department, but Plessis Road is a good example where, you know, our money's been on the table. And we've been active parts of the solution.

Again, we can't control the actual construction schedules. That's all City of Winnipeg. Anything within the city of Winnipeg, not the Perimeter, because sometimes people confuse the two, anything within the city of Winnipeg is entirely the responsibility of the City of Winnipeg. They manage the projects, they fund it. Our role is in terms of cost sharing.

Mr. Helwer: So maybe we'll move a little bit onto the topic of the day here, which is Highway 1 and the changes to the speed limit there.

Can the minister tell me if there were any studies done on the changes to the speed limit in terms of the impacts to commercial truckers, the impacts to safety or anything of that nature?

Mr. Ashton: First of all, in terms of the backdrop, this went to the Motor Transport Board a number of years ago. They did look at a variety of factors, the department did, and certainly in looking at the submission.

There's a variety of factors involved, but it's important to note that this—the first one is upgrading the highway. It required a significant investment. We've had that significant investment, not the least of which is the four-laning from the Saskatchewan border in. It's now completed. And you'll see, for example, on Highway 75, where we have moved to 110 speed limits; it's only in the upgraded sections. It requires a full upgrade. So that's the necessary starting point.

The approach at the time—I wasn't actually minister when the initial approvals went forward—has been very much based on studies that have been looked at. You know, simply increasing the speed limit by 10 kilometres doesn't mean that everybody increases their own speed by 10 kilometres. Actually, the information has actually been quite different. You know, I've talked to a lot of Manitobans who've said, well, people are going 110 anyway—some truth in that, and there is a bit of a tolerance factor, you know, that is built in place.

But while there might be some impacts of the increased speed, there's also clear evidence that the

actual—obviously, the upgrading itself does provide benefits, including for the trucking industry. So it really is difficult, and again, I'm—the decision was made by the Motor Transport Board to suggest that there's any, you know, one-sided negative effect. There are pluses and minuses on various different situations.

And to my mind, the key element on this one is the upgraded highway creates additional safety. And I wouldn't underestimate the degree to which we've focused in on Highway 1. I mean, I've got the numbers here, and you'll see, you know, huge investment over the years, \$446 million, and that's basically just from our time in government.

So the key issue, to my mind, is the most important element is the investment in infrastructure creates improvements in terms of both safety, but also it does help reduce fuel consumption by, you know, the improvement in the surface. You do, perhaps, lose a bit on the other side by increased speeds, but if I go—I'm going by memory again in terms of the original decision—but I think the indication is that the average speed doesn't go up by 10 kilometres; it's about 3 or 4 kilometres.

So the actual operational impact is less, and obviously, the trucking industry, there are trucking firms will continue to operate at lower speeds. Even with the current 100, there are trucking firms that operate at 90-kilometre speed, and again, with a four-lane highway, you are able to accommodate that.

So I do know, again, it was an arm's-length process, and I actually wasn't minister at the time, but the Motor Transport Board did look at this. And they felt, on balance, if the safety improvements were there, the—if the investment was there that we could move to 110, and really, what's happened is we're now getting to interstate standards, if you want to use that comparison, in a lot of ways, and that's why we're able to increase it to 110.

Mr. Helwer: So can the minister point to any particular studies where—that were commissioned by the government on the benefits or failures, I guess, if you want to look at it that way, on increasing the speed to 110?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we did—we've done our own study. We've polled to get a lot of information and it was again deemed and approved by the Motor Transport Board, which is arm's-length to be appropriate to go to 110 because it met all of the

design standards for a highway at that level and we proceeded accordingly again with the approval of the Motor Transport Board.

Mr. Helwer: Changes of this nature have occurred in other provinces as well. Saskatchewan changed as well as BC within the last year, I believe, and did the minister's department look at the impacts of those changes in those two provinces and how those results might be applied to Manitoba?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there was a consultant that looked at a variety of factors, and, again, on balance the feeling was that we, with the major upgrade, were in a position to go from 100 to 110.

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister provide us with the name of the consultant and the firm and anything that—any studies that were produced by that individual consultant?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'll provide that information.

Mr. Helwer: So, when I look at the changes to the roads in terms of where the signage is, I did notice today that it was 110 up until the—travelling from west to east, 110 from Brandon to Carberry, and then slowing down before the tracks there to 100, and that continued to Austin, until past Austin, it was not increased to 110 again.

Can the minister tell me what the rationale is for the 100-kilometre speed limit between Carberry and Austin?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I'll maybe give a quick summary of where it's not 110, and I think the member will see. Signals at Brandon, obviously, slowing down for, you know, traffic signals; the Carberry rail crossing; the signals near Portage and around the bypass, again, when you have that situation; the signals at Elie; and, of course, Headingley, which is, you know, a built-up area. Everywhere else where you have a standard highway scenario, is 110 and a lot of the signs—actually, I was out today around 1 o'clock and a lot of the signs had been unveiled, actually I think it was about 11:30 this morning. So I guarantee that the member on his way home he will see a lot of those 110 signs with the occasional variation due to specific traffic locations.

Mr. Helwer: I think they were mostly unveiled this morning, and I did see staff out there doing that. But there was one particular sign between Carberry and Austin travelling on the eastbound lane that was 100 kilometres past the Carberry turnoff, so I'm not sure if that one was missed. If that 15 kilometre

section perhaps was supposed to be 110 and just hasn't been upgraded yet in terms of the signage or what the reasoning was for that. Obviously, there's a lot of wildlife through that area and—but I don't imagine that would be a reason to keep it to 100.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I read the list of exceptions, but if there's anything out there that's posted at 100 that should be 110, I'd ask the member to pass that information on. I'll make sure that we follow-up on that. The intent, by the way, is to have as much consistency as possible. There are some exceptions, you know, again, where you have level crossings, when you have traffic lights, you have to make exceptions, but apart from that, everywhere else from, basically, Headingley on, you know, west of Winnipeg through to Saskatchewan with the few exceptions I listed is 110, and we're going to be doing the same sort of thing on 75. There are sections already that are 110 on Highway 75 and we will be increasing the remaining portions once they're fully upgraded.

* (16:10)

Mr. Helwer: And I noticed that the Province is building a turning lane coming from the west onto No. 16 to the north, working away on that. And are there other turning lanes that will be created over the next year for other areas such as the CWE-B terminal or other areas along there?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'm not sure if the member's asking in a general sense or if there's some specific areas of concern, but generally speaking we look at site-specific scenarios. There are evolving scenarios when you get a new development or, you know, significant shifts in traffic flow, so we would certainly look at it.

There've been a—quite a few enhancements, you know, in terms of turning lanes the last period of time, you know, various different highways. So the simple answer is it's an ongoing process. So there may be, you know, some areas that we will be looking at. Again, it's part of the overall commitment to operating the system.

And I wouldn't underestimate the degree to which it does put challenges on a department. There's been a fairly significant shift just even in the last few years and, you know, in terms of traffic, so that's the case.

Now, by the way, in terms of the study to look at increasing 110 kilometres, it was iTRANS consultants that conducted the consultant's report.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you for that information, and is that possible to receive a copy of that report?

Mr. Ashton: You know, I can look into it. I—you know, it's a pretty technical document. I don't know if it's been released. I can certainly look into it. I don't think there's anything that we wouldn't provide, so I'll look at it.

Mr. Helwer: As—moving ahead with this type of access, is the minister looking at changing access to No. 1 Highway? Obviously, there's been dramatic changes in the Headingley area as frontage roads have been constructed. When we look at interstates in the United States, there are often frontage roads travelling for a considerable period of time before there is a crossover. Is that the long-term intent for No. 1 Highway between Winnipeg and Brandon—or Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan border?

Mr. Ashton: Maybe I'll broaden it, because I think it might be useful to the member to include the Perimeter, and that's certainly a key part of the planning.

When you build or significantly upgrade a highway, you build to current standards, and that's very much a part of that standard. That would be part of any configuration around 1 and 16, for example, but also throughout the Perimeter we're trying to rationalize cars and trucks entering and leaving the highway for very obvious reasons, No. 1 being safety.

And it's important to note that you've had certain types of access in the past, but, you know, 1950s versus 2015, a very different traffic configuration. So, generally speaking, yes, and, in fact, as the member's quite aware, there are sections already on Highway 1 where that is already, you know, the case.

And it actually is—it's not an easy situation to deal with in each situation. You have to be very careful you don't end up with, you know, very negative consequences for producers or for companies that rely on access. But our department spends a lot of time, our engineers spend a lot of time trying to minimize those impacts even where you are, you know, restricting access that had been previously in case, and the solution is, as you pointed out—as the member's pointed out, is very much related to that.

So, in a general sense, on all major parts of our highway systems—four-lane, which is Highway 1, 75 and the Perimeter and other highways as well, sections—that's a key part of the design area, limiting

the on and off, but doing it within reason. That's how you keep traffic able to move at the posted speed limits, but I think anyone will tell you that—and we're going through a lot of design work right now, and 59 and the Perimeter's a good example. A lot of work has been done there to accommodate local traffic. We certainly value input we have received. But there's no doubt, when you move to major unimpeded flow on 59 and the Perimeter, which that intersection—or that interchange, pardon me, will do, one of the key elements is you have to reroute and control local access as well.

So simple answer is, yes, that's very much part of the engineering standards that are put in place with any of these major upgrades.

Mr. Helwer: Well, if we can just try to focus down to No. 1 for now to keep it kind of defined there, from Headingley to Brandon, there are a number—or past Brandon, actually, Headingley to Saskatchewan border, there are a number of interchanges controlled by lights at level crossings, and I know there have been plans that have changed over a lot of years. I'm very familiar with the Brandon plan because one of our buildings was impacted by the last plan but not the current plan.

Highway 16 and No. 1, there's been lots of discussion there about whether there's space between the rail lines, indeed, to have a cloverleaf or a diamond interchange.

Can the minister tell us, for those level crossings that exist on No. 1 Highway between Headingley and the Saskatchewan border, what sort of timing we're looking at to put in those types of bypasses or overpasses?

Mr. Ashton: Now, I think the member's identified, certainly, 16 and 1, some of the issues. There were a lot of issues in terms of access that could have been very problematic for producers in the area, particular businesses in the area, so a lot of the initial work we had to basically go back to the drawing board on. I mentioned 59 and the Perimeter, by the way, because that's another example where that work's been completed. Construction will take place.

Again, a lot of the concerns were about local access, so I—you know, there—16 and 1 is a bit of a different situation in the sense that, you know, in principle, it's been identified for moving away from a level crossing. I mean, you've got two sections of the Trans-Canada Highway, it's obviously a, you know, significant issue, but given some of the design

issues and the fact that we've been focusing on other parts of the system, including other parts of Highway 1, it's still an active project, but it's certainly not something we're looking at in the upcoming construction year.

You know, in the US, the reason why a lot of those flyovers exist is pretty straightforward. It's significant federal funding for state and local roads. North Dakota, State of North Dakota gets upwards of \$2.20 from the federal government for every dollar it pays in gas tax, and that's why you will see structures that, under our standards or virtually any other standard, wouldn't be built. And in the US, you particularly see—you know, it's rare to see those kind of level crossing situations. You'll often have a county road where you have a flyover, and, again, it's very much funding-based.

We don't have that luxury, and I'm not going to dwell on how much we do or don't get from the federal government. It's improved over the last number of years, but I would say probably the banner year for us would have been 50 cents on the dollar. I'm talking about what they actually take out in the way of gas tax, not even including, really, GST. You know, just the federal government does, you know, have that element which we don't on gas tax. Gas tax here is a straight per-litre charge. Unlike Ontario and many other provinces, we don't charge the PST on gas. So that's the real difference.

So, in an ideal design world, would we move to—move away from those level crossings? Yes, but there are other priorities we're working on right now more actively, so the simple answer is, yes, active projects, but not, you know, in the upcoming year, not on the immediate construction horizon.

Mr. Helwer: I have had a couple calls from people that live east of Winnipeg as well, along No. 1 Highway towards the West Hawk area, and they've asked me about, in their words, busywork that's going along—going on in the ditches and that type of thing. To me it sounded like the work that was done to move the brush back and the trees back along No. 1 Highway between Brandon and Winnipeg in preparation for the speed limit changes.

Is that the type of thing that, long-term, is going on east of Winnipeg as well?

* (16:20)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there's been a significant upgrade east of Winnipeg. So you meant surfacing, which has been, I think, very obvious. There is some widening

taking place right now. It's into the shoulders to bring them up to standard.

One of the key things we've been able to do with our increased investment in infrastructure throughout the province is do a lot of work on both ditching and the shoulders, and there's two reasons why. One is the obvious reason, you know, which is apparent to most people, it's the drainage aspect, but it also involves, you know, an increased margin of safety as well. I mean, I had—a family I knew very well, they lost their son-in-law in what was, you know, listed, probably pretty accurately as a single-car, you know, collision; cause was driver error. But I remember saying at the time it was pretty clear to me, having driven that section many times on Highway 6, the lack of a ditch was, you know, the lack of a margin of error, and I don't think there's anybody that doesn't, you know, if you drive, you periodically will make, you know, even minor errors. The difference with decent shoulders is you got more of a margin of error if you happen to go off, you know, end up in the ditch. So that's the reason.

There is still the remaining 17 kilometres, which would allow us to four-lane to Ontario. When Glen Murray, yes, the same Glen Murray who was mayor of Winnipeg, was the minister of transportation, he was here at the national ministers meeting two years ago, and there was a great deal of interest he had—he had not forgotten Winnipeg and the connection here—to upgrade Highway 1, really, you know, east of that point. As the member knows, you know, I do know Thunder Bay quite well; I used to go to university there. I do get down there periodically. Highway 1 is not four-laned in northwestern Ontario, and there's been some improvements, passing lanes, et cetera, but, you know, we did discuss at that time, you know, a fairly significant impact. But, you know, there are a lot of land-use issues in and around that area, particularly on the Ontario side, so it's not a simple process.

My view, though, is it's a matter of when, not if, Highway 1 will be four-laned all the way to the Ontario border. And I would certainly encourage the Province of Ontario to look at some upgrades to the highway. Quite frankly, there are trucking firms, and I talked to truckers, that detour through the States to go from east to west. And two reasons, really: One is there are some differential trucking rules. I mean, if you actually talk to anybody in that industry—and I know you do; the member talked to the trucking industry—there's certain configurations that are not consistent between western Canada, where we've got

a fair amount of symmetry now, and eastern Canada. But it's also the condition of the highway. You know, a lot of people are choosing to go through interstates in the US, and I do believe, by the way, as we come up for the 150th anniversary of Confederation, and it's probably easy for us to say it here because we have done a lot of work on Highway 1, but there needs to be a discussion of a renewed focus on Highway 1. Yes, there's been a lot of upgrades, mostly from provinces doing it, want to say alone, some cases with the federal cost sharing, but I can tell you we don't get regular cost sharing of operating. We get nowhere near full cost sharing of capital. The number of people I talk to who assume that the federal government is responsible for Highway 1; it's quite remarkable. It's the transprovincial highway in actual jurisdictional sense, and I would like to see, I think, our department would like to see, some significant focus on further east. Again, there was some interest in the Ontario government. We're hoping that will be pursued. But that is, to be realistic, a longer term reality.

But, in the meantime, we're upgrading fully, and within a couple of years, we should have all of the four-lane section fully surfaced up to highway standard, which, again, is a pretty significant achievement for the department.

Mr. Helwer: So, then, is the intent for east to Winnipeg to go up to the 110 as well or that will be determined on a safety study?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, down the line, not immediate since—because we still have some work to do there. But we've finished west; we're continuing to focus on east.

Mr. Helwer: Then, when we look to the other north, south, east highways, No. 16, No. 10, the work that's being done there is a similar broadening of the shoulders, some passing lanes is the direction that those highways will continue with. I imagine there's no plans for twinning anywhere around that type of a structure?

Mr. Ashton: That's correct. There are some highways where there are pressures. We're seeing Highway 10 north, obviously, the passing lanes. Highway 16—and I meet with the municipalities and Yellowhead group fairly—well, I used to meet with them fairly often; I actually meet with them less now because there's been so much progress on Highway 16 that a lot of the issues just really aren't what they were a few years ago. In—I think universally, people

have praised passing lanes. We're also looking at passing lanes elsewhere in the system, Highway 6 being the best example. And six and-16 and 10 are good examples of where you have significant traffic flows but not necessarily at the point where you would trigger a four-lane highway.

And our experience, and, again, the engineering advice we find is quite instructive. By bringing in passing lanes, you get a significant bump in improved safety where you have that degree of traffic flow. It—you don't really get that much more of an improvement in safety if you go to four laning because, again, it—what the passing lanes allow is to—you know, is that separation periodically of faster-moving and slower-moving traffic that often causes people to be impatient. And, you know, the traffic engineers will say that, you know, that's one of the biggest causes of accidents; it really is impatience. And, you know, you can—one thing you can't change is human nature. You can design around it. And that's where the passing lanes make a huge difference. It's made a real difference in northwest Ontario as well where they have made some significant improvements. So our—yes, I—we're not looking at expanding on a four-lane highways sense, but we are looking at more use of passing lanes.

Mr. Helwer: I guess having driven a lot of those highways with passing lanes—and I do recognize that it does increase the safety and the impatience of some people is reduced. What I've often found is when you have someone that's, say, not travelling the speed limit, it's—I would assume often a confidence issue because once we get to the passing lanes, they have a little more space; they're more removed from the traffic if they go over to the right side and they'll speed up to the speed limit or beyond. So it's something that—I've watched the traffic time and again, and you see a level of frustration where they think they're going to get by this individual, but, indeed, that person passes up and then, you know, traffic flows a little better anyway, so it meets a lot of needs there, I guess. I don't know if the minister has a comment on that.

Mr. Ashton: No, and I think the member's identified a very important point, and that is, you know, there are people that will pass, and some people will not pass at all. And it's not that it's prohibited; they just don't feel the confidence to do it. And dare I say, when I'm headed home to Thompson, driving home on the weekend, you'll often find a different sense of speed limits. And I'm not suggesting I would speed,

not since I've been minister of highways, I guarantee you that, but I've seen people, you know, local traffic moving a lot slower than long-distance traffic. You know, if you're living, you know, in Lundar and you do 90 kilometres, that's an extra three, four minutes. You know, if you're doing 90 kilometres an hour going to Thompson, just do the math, right? It's—that's an extra 50 minutes. So you do get—you get some very significant differences there.

One of the other things we're moving, though, on passing lanes is also you do get roads with significant numbers of trucks that have increased and once in a while, I get somebody says, well, why don't you take those heavy trucks off the road? And I'm going, like, yes, you know, if you look at what's kept the economy moving, it's trucking; 85 per cent of goods are moved by trucks. And a lot of the diversification—rural Manitoba—a lot of the, you know, shipment of grain and other agricultural products. Again, it's all trucking. But often, again, that provides a safety valve if you've got a passing lane because I hear this; you know, it's probably the No. 1 frustration. You get a 90-kilometre-an-hour, you know, speed limit from the—from trucks and long lineups. And does it result in improved safety? Absolutely. It's quite remarkable if you look at it, just what a difference those passing lanes can make when you get to certain traffic flows. So we're going to continue to use them.

* (16:30)

Mr. Helwer: Well, one of the other issues I've run into—it—I haven't seen it for probably about a month now, but is, of course, the low bridge on Highway 1A west of Brandon there before we get to the No. 1 Highway. And I know that the minister's department has tried a variety of different things to get the attention of truck drivers that are not familiar with the low bridge, and every month or two there seems to be somebody that doesn't pay attention and hits the bridge. Having met with the rail line and with producers in the area, obviously, the rail line is concerned about damage to the bridge, and it's a tremendously resilient bridge for the number of times it's been hit, but they are concerned about the one time it might be taken out and they might not, if there's hanging track, they won't know until the train gets there unless someone reports it because it will still be a continuous track.

There's lots of discussion in the area about, you know, closing it to truck traffic, but then you get truck traffic going along the gravel road by the

elevator there, which is a level rail crossing and safety of that regard is not improved. Can the minister give us any guidance on sort of what can be done to—short of closing that to truck traffic, what we can do to try to prevent that being hit again? And I know it will be hit again.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I certainly appreciate the question. It's—you know, there are some similar situations in the province. I do think it's improved somewhat. You know, we've worked with the Trucking Association. We're trying to get the word out there, but there's always somebody that miscalculates, which always surprises me, because, you know, long-distance truckers are trained to recognize low bridges. They know about routes. You know, when we plan the improvements to highways, we work around that. A good example, you know, of the kind of factors we're taking into account, you know, the clearances, why we're looking at, on 59 and the Perimeter, putting the active transportation corridor at ground level and putting the traffic over, it's because that way you don't run into high-clearance issues for—there's some RTM production in that area, you know, which create huge problems for, you know, for one of the producers of RTM homes and structures.

So we are working elsewhere in the system. I can certainly undertake to get back to the member in terms of this specific scenario. It is—the reality is that intersection of road and rail is a national challenge. The federal government did vacate even the minimal funding that it had for dealing with level crossings. I think it's important to look at reinstating that. In urban areas, which, of course, are not this department's direct jurisdiction, maybe some opportunities to relocate rail lines and rail yards, and, certainly, we've been working in terms of that.

And we are, of course, working at a high level in terms of extending the Brandon eastern access to the west. That's one of the—that's long-range planning, but it's one of the areas we've moved quite significantly in the last number of years, so we are looking at some long-range planning that would deal with that. But the difficulty, you know, when you're dealing with that road and rail intersection is we have many of those locations will be quite costly and disruptive as well. You know, we have to keep the rail lines functioning as well as the road, so it's—there's often not the immediate fixes, but I'd certainly make—I'll make a point of perhaps following up on this maybe, you know, responding in writing to the member on this specific circumstance.

Mr. Helwer: Well, it certainly is an issue that hits the paper and the local blogs every once in a while. That's usually where I find out about it, on the eBrandon or something, you know, another truck hit the Kemnay bridge, and people seem to be enthralled by that. I mean, I've travelled that route a lot of times over the years and I know that there's drainage issues on the roadbed, that the roadbed has itself been elevated and that's been perhaps part of the problem is the clearances and what it once was, and people may remember that. Plus, you also have the ramping effect, I guess, of the road going down and pinching the trailers when there's not enough clearance between the two sets of axles.

So a lot of issues there, and I know the minister has been dealing with them. Everybody wants a solution, but as the minister said, it's not a cheap solution. And the bypass, if it happens earlier than that, would fix some of that. We'd probably guarantee you that we'd still have a truck hit it because they'd try to go down that way, and there is no real reason for a truck to come into the west end of Brandon from the highway as opposed to going down 18th Street, really. There's no deliveries from the west that come there. The grocery chains mostly deliver from Winnipeg area, so—but, again, you talk to the local producers and they don't want to see it closed to truck traffic because they have their semi-trailers that go out to their fields as well, and they know which ones can fit under there. But it's the traffic that's not familiar with the area that causes the problem.

And then a little further east of that, as we get closer into the city itself, I noticed that recently the speeds have changed a little bit, as you get into the Riverheights Terrace area there, and the Fowler dealership. There are a lot of access points there where you come down from 100 to 70, and then eventually down to 50, and the local businesses have asked me if there's an area there that we could look at even reducing it a little bit earlier so that it might be 50 from the Riverheights Terrace area to 36th Street, as opposed to moving—so moving the 50 out a little further, because they're having people driving in and out of those access points that people come down from highway speed, they don't always get down to the 70. So, as you know, coming off a highway, it sometimes takes time to reduce that speed.

Not wanting to, you know, throttle everything down, but that is one of the questions I've had from businesses in that area is: Is there any traffic studies

that would be done in the future there in terms of speed limits?

Mr. Ashton: We can certainly look at it. Again, it goes through the highway transport board for the actual adjudication of that, but we can certainly look at that. And it's not uncommon for the board and, you know, department recommending to the board to have changes that reflect significant traffic in that area. And we're certainly aware of that, and I'm certainly aware that, you know, in an ideal world, everybody slows down, follows the speed limit, but you do have to be, you know, very cognizant of what happens in practice. So we will—we'll certainly follow up in terms of that. And, if there are specific concerns from businesses in that area, they—I suggest they probably contact the region, or if the member wants to forward that on to my office, we'll make sure the region is aware of those specific concerns.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I just want to pick up on some of the minister's comments there, and he had talked about, you know, moving product around rural Manitoba. And I just had a meeting just briefly with the previous minister of Infrastructure and the current deputy, and we talked about kind of the lack of the RTAC roads running north and south. So we've got a bit of an issue there in terms of sort of the western side of the province and south-central part of the province where we want to move, you know, products primarily in the spring, and we're having little access getting them north and south.

I know we're working on No. 10 Highway. Certainly, No. 5 Highway is a bit of an issue north and south, especially look at Carberry and the McCain potato plant there and, of course, moving seed potatoes at—in the spring up to a lot of the agriculture area there.

So I'm just wondering if we get a sense that something might be done in that stretch of the road.

Mr. Ashton: So I guess I can blame it on the previous minister, then? But, of course, I'm the previous-previous minister, so I better watch out with that one.

But, you know, in a general sense, I can indicate that we've made significant progress on RTAC routes. One of the key things we were looking at really part of our mandate was the increasing number of RTAC routes that we were putting on road restriction reflected just a lack of capital. And our focus has been on retaining that. We've been able to

expand in some areas, as well. It's certainly something we do look at.

We have improved, as well, our management of specific spring road restrictions, et cetera, important in the member's area of the province where we moved to a, you know, a system that's not as insensitive as before. We look at, you know, road conditions, weather conditions. So it's been a lot of work to work with our road restrictions in a way that's consistent with Saskatchewan that's important in the oil industry, for example. And also there's a lot of agricultural focus.

So we're still focusing in on the existing RTAC routes. One of the big issues we're dealing with, actually, is bridges, to be able to maintain existing RTAC routes. And often, the key challenge where you're dealing with routes that aren't RTAC is the degree to which you have to focus on the bridge side. So, yes, maintaining the RTAC and improving the RTAC network is a specific priority for us. But I do acknowledge, again, there will be areas where you don't have full RTAC, the, you know, goods that perhaps could be moved, you know, in greater quantities where RTAC was available. And, again, the more funding we have for investment infrastructure, the more we can tackle those kinds of challenges.

* (16:40)

Mr. Cullen: Part of the conversation I had with the previous minister, too, was specifically Highway No. 5. And, actually, it's an pretty important north-south artery, and it's adjacent to Spruce Woods Provincial Park. And I know there's some studies being undertaken there in terms of how we deal with that. Obviously, any development there is going to have an impact on the park itself, and if we do elevate the No. 5 Highway there it's going to have an impact on—in terms of the water flow, on the Assiniboine River there.

So I just wanted to make sure that the minister, you know, had that on his radar there. It's certainly important. But I think the important part here is that we all have to work together and make sure we realize the implications moving forward on any work that is done in that specific area in regard to the highway, in regard to landowners and in regard to what the implications are for Spruce Woods park as well.

Mr. Ashton: You know, I appreciate the question, and we are working with Conservation on a

significant upgrade with the park itself. And I want to stress that we are doing this at a number of other locations as well, but we certainly view Spruce Woods Provincial Park as being a significant asset and some potential with our significant enhanced capital budget to assist in providing a major upgrade to that road. And I know it gets a lot of use, and our intention is to significantly upgrade the park road as well. And we have been doing some improvements on Highway 5. The member is quite correct, you know, where the other areas we're moving on, Highway 10, some major work, you know, over the last period of time on Highway 10. So we are working on some of the north-south connections in the southwest.

I have to tell you, just in a broader sense—and a lot of it is, you know, flood-related as well—I think probably the highest investment of any region in the province right now is in the southwest. A couple of major bridges, a couple of other—actually, several other bridges that we've targeted, some major highway upgrades. So we're very aware about the—some of the challenges, some of the years come from flooding. And I'm talking more broadly, including the Arthur-Virden constituency. You know, I realize that the member's constituency has got some other issues as well, but it continues to be a major, major focus for us.

Getting back to the previous situation, let me put on the record the—just recently out at the Two Borders municipality, and we did something different, you know, in the 2014 flood, we really went to the communities throughout the southwest who were impacted and we asked them what the priorities should be. And it's very much been the influence over the department of what we should be prioritizing. More work to do, yes. Some ongoing challenges with bridges, but the goal there was to get back to normal, if there's been anything normal in the last few years, and we are involved with some significant upgrades.

Mr. Cullen: And yes, there has been some extra traffic on No. 5 Highway there, too, of course, of the new casino there just north of Spruce Woods park as well. So—and hopefully with the redevelopment of the park we're going to see people coming back to the park as well, and hopeful that will increase the traffic along there as well.

And I should note, too, that No. 5 Highway south of No. 2 is quite a mess. I think your department staff are well aware of that, but it

certainly is cause for concern and I have had a lot of complaints on that particular piece of highway.

I do want to talk about bridges and flooding too. And the couple of bridges I have in mind actually go back to the 2011 flood. And there's one bridge, and, sorry, I don't have the number of the highway, but the one that comes to mind, first of all, is the one bridge, it's an older structure right beside the village of Wawanesa over the Souris River. And, basically, the department has said that, you know, it's kind of a—it's a no-go zone right now and not even open to pedestrian traffic. But there is a business right across the river and there is a number of homeowners there, and this bridge would provide access right to the community, it's a matter of, you know, 100 yards versus, you know, probably a three mile trip for the businesses and for those residents. So I'm just wondering if the—that particular piece of infrastructure is on the radar with the department and what there might be able to be done in terms of, you know, even allowing ATVs on that particular structure there just for access to people and businesses in that area.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'm going to ask for an update on that specific bridge. I know it is one of the bridges that was significantly impacted and it is restricted, and certainly there is a lot of use on it.

So it's certainly on our radar screen, but, of course, we have been focusing on restoring major routes, there's been, you know, major bridges, major routes that we've had to do a significant amount of work. Weather is co-operating this year as well, thus far, so hopefully we'll get some significant progress. But certainly I'll keep the member posted on that specific bridge as well too.

Mr. Cullen: I would appreciate any studies that have been on that particular bridge so that we can sense, you know, maybe where—how bad that structure is, so that we can get a sense of, you know, what might—what the options might be down the road. If the minister would do that I would sure appreciate that.

Mr. Ashton: Where I was going to suggest I can offer a briefing on it, if the member wants a briefing on that or any other, you know, bridges or highways in the area, it's—perhaps if I, you know, if I could narrow it down particularly flood-related stuff might be easier than providing some technical documents that might not be all that useful. So I'd be more than happy to arrange that with our staff after Estimates are over.

Mr. Cullen: While we're talking about that too, I'm going to put the bridge that's near the community of Treesbank on your radar as well. Again, that was a bridge that was taken out in 2011, and, you know, there's been real no indication from the department whether that structure will ever be replaced or if there may be some other options there available to us, even something, you know, that may not provide year-round access, but at the same time provide the agriculture community there some ability to move equipment back and forth across there. So if the minister would give that some consideration maybe at some point in the future we could get together and discuss it.

Mr. Ashton: Absolutely.

Mr. Cullen: The other thing too I want to raise is the Assiniboine valley producers, you know, primarily north of Brandon. Obviously there's some downstream of Brandon as well. Is your department looking after the claims for that particular area?

Mr. Ashton: The—well, there's two types of claims; one would be through our normal agricultural programming which would be Minister of Agriculture, and there are claims related to the statutory coverage for artificial flooding which has been co-ordinated by the department. Yes. So there's two different types of claims.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I guess I'm thinking of the agriculture component here, obviously there's been a number of producers impacted just about every year for the last four or five years now, and to some degree or another, and, you know, clearly there's some legislation in there that talks about artificial flooding and whatnot, and clearly a lot of the producers weren't happy with the approach that was taken and then, you know, potentially the offers that were made. So I'm just seeking some direction here in terms of whether it's your department or through the Minister of Agriculture who's actually dealing with those particular claims.

* (16:50)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the Department of Agriculture will deal with sort of ongoing agricultural programming. The issue of artificial flooding is a very separate issue.

We certainly would acknowledge there's been some significant flooding over the last number of years, but there's been significant flooding all throughout the watershed. The issue becomes twofold. If there was artificial flooding and if it

impacted in a way that had an impact on producers—we're talking here, obviously, about agricultural production, not structures, so it's not about damaging a building. You know, it's really on the production side—it obviously—the coverage doesn't apply if it's already covered through existing agricultural programming.

And have there been some debates back and forth about what is artificial flooding? I would acknowledge that, not unlike other areas of the province. But the coverage is strictly for artificial flooding, and that, you know, certainly means the scenarios where you have significant natural flooding or flooding that took place and didn't have any particular impact on putting a crop in, for example, or, you know, the rest—there isn't coverage, so we do have an ongoing liaison, as well.

I'll be very upfront; there are very differing views on the management of the Shellmouth structure. I think the member's more aware of that. You know, from recreational through to immediate agricultural production, through to water supply further downstream on the Assiniboine, because it's critical in dry years, which we haven't had much of the last few years, to maintain a water supply. And there's often disagreement on the water-management issues as well, and I want to acknowledge that. There has not been a consensus nor would I expect a consensus given some of the competing views there.

So this department is involved both on the management of it, including the liaison, and also on the claims-side for artificial flooding. The rest is Agriculture. So actually questions are appropriately asked if it's strictly the artificial flooding to this department.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Chair, I appreciate—so the Ag side would be your regular crop insurance—those sort of situations.

You know, clearly, the producers with the low-lying area that have been flooded, of course, in their view, it's artificial flooding. And another department can make that decision: What is artificial flooding, or not? But it is EMO through the DFA program that is—well; I guess it wouldn't be through DFA, though, it'd be EMO that could be administering that program, but it would be the Province there that would actually provide the funding under the artificial flooding regime.

Mr. Ashton: That's correct and it's very similar to what was put in place for the floodway. There is

coverage there for impact on market gardeners, for example, that can and are artificially flooded. So it's statutory, and our department does basically implement that program.

And it—again, it's very specific under statute. It is—for—it has to be artificial and as—have had documented impact. So, if you had artificial flooding, and you're unable to put a crop in, that's the kind of classic scenario. I have to tell you, it's a lot more complex, too, than people on the outside might realize, whereas producers would more be aware of it. Because you have—will have scenarios where there might've been a shift in the water patterns, exact same flow but, you know, with a difference of four or five, six days when it started, you know, under the controlled structures or the artificial. So I realize there may be some people disagree with the adjudication of what is artificial. I may disagree with the claims, but we do try and deal with it fairly.

I do want to acknowledge as well, too, some of the delays for this programming related to adjudicating what was artificial flooding and that was very much because of the fact that every last resource we had, for example, after 2011 and '12, and subsequent years, was put into dealing with live flood situations, so I do want to acknowledge there were some concerns and are some ongoing concerns in that area.

And one thing I do want to look at is actually the operating rules for the structure. We've been moving to operating rules reviews elsewhere, and the Portage Diversion being a good example. We've been consulting quite actively—it's the first time since the Portage Diversion was opened that we've actually had a review, and I was really pleased we were able to engage some, you know, significant technical staff—a former MLA for the area, David Fauschou, who I recall quite well, and when he was critic always seemed to know one, you know, one little bit more than I did about the Portage Diversion. So he certainly has some expertise there, living in the area as he does, right next to it.

So I do want to look at the—on the Shellmouth as well, because, again, this structure has been there for 40-plus years without a review of the operating rules, and I think the member can sense where we're headed in terms of I was actually looking at a bit of a review on that as well. I think it's interest of fairness not to prejudge the result any more than we're going to prejudge the Portage Diversion operating review, but, to my mind, a structure that

was built 30, 40 years ago, it's probably appropriate now to look at reviewing the operating rules with, you know, the same kind of process we have with the Portage Diversion and, quite frankly, with the floodway. There's been a review of the floodway and the operating rules that's been up and running, you know, for some time, and we've actually formalized on the floodway summer operational rules, which wasn't the case before. They were done on an ad hoc, as-needed basis. So we will be looking at that as an option over the next few months in terms of the Shellmouth.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the minister's comments on that.

Just to switch gears a little bit, or at least in area, provincial roads 415 and 416 in the Interlake apparently have been closed for some time. Is there any plans from the department when those particular pieces of road, that I understand have been flooded out, when they may be opened or if there's any plans in place to alleviate some of the high water that's there?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's an issue I'm certainly more than aware of. I've been out, you know, on site. It's problematic, the Shoal lake, you know, area is—has been dealing with chronic flooding, and there's no simple hydraulic solution. It—not unlike other—some other areas of the province as well. And this has been historic problem in that area.

We have been able to—we were able last year to reopen some of the highway access in the area, but I can get a full update for the member. I'm cognizant of time here, so I—what I suggest, I'll get the member a response, perhaps by next time we go into Estimates.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, just maybe if the minister would be—I think there was some studies done in that particular area looking at some options in terms of how to reduce the water that's there. Is that in case—is that the fact?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, they are—the issue with Shoal lakes, to my mind, is the lack of options that don't involve releasing water further downstream that can create further problems for other areas. And that's the general principle with all these type of scenarios. You know, you can't solve a problem in one area by moving it to another. The Grassmere, for example, is often seen as, you know, as a potential option, but it's not as simple as that, and it doesn't even necessarily fully mitigate the problem.

So what we've done there is we've been very involved with buyouts, Shoal lakes significant buyout of agricultural land. That was something that was a major concern in the area, and it's certainly something that we've supported. I know it's been something advocated by both opposition and, certainly, the MLA for the Interlake, now Minister of Conservation. And what—you know, on a site basis, you can actually mitigate fairly significantly.

So there aren't—you know, some of the years, there's—there aren't the easy hydraulic answers, so you have to look at other elements, and highway access being one of them, buyouts being the other.

Mr. Cullen: Quickly, I wonder—obviously, there's been a lot of discussion about Whitewater Lake in the southwest. Has that been brought to the minister's attention, the—any proposed development there?

Mr. Ashton: I'm aware of the situation, and I think we're almost out of time, so if the member wants to continue this next time, I can provide an update then.

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

*(15:00)

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 proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

I believe there was a question to the First Minister at the end of last day. Does the First Minister wish to provide that answer or should we move on to a question?

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I was just going to use the opportunity to congratulate our Clerk, who, as Chair of the Editorial Board of the Canadian Parliamentary Review, should be commended for the work that her group does, and the magazine they produce is very—is very interesting and very—this particular edition, the last one, was a fine read, but I enjoy all of them, and I just wanted to congratulate our Clerk on her work on behalf of parliamentarians across the country. Thank you.

My question, I'll just revisit it without the preamble, and just say it was just to ask the Premier what he thinks of the current leadership selection process. I know there was some debate about it. This is for his party's leadership selection process, of course, I'm referring to—quite a bit of discussion about it. I understand there was discussion during their convention as well. I know there are a lot of Manitobans who've asked me and asked my colleagues on this side why it's structured that way, in particular, the concern about allocating blocs of votes to heads of certain public sector unions and so on.

Is it his position that that is a system that needs to be changed?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): There are currently processes in place to review the processes that lead towards the selection of a leader, and I always think that the processes can be improved and made better, and I look forward to the debate on that.

One of the things that has been looked at for a long time is a one-member, one-vote approach, but there are many methods across the country, including ones used by the political party the member opposite belongs to.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I am a member of a couple of political parties, but, just for clarification, it's the federal party that uses a different system. The provincial party uses the one member, one vote.

What would the Premier's preference be? I know he's respectful of the process, and perhaps doesn't want to say because his influence on the process might be rather profound, but I'm curious as to what his personal views are on the needs of the current system to change, or what ideas he might advance as part of that process.

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the member's acknowledgement that it's a process that involves everybody in the party and that it's important to listen to all points of views.

I think the process can be better, as I think it can be in any political party. All the systems I've looked at have shortcomings as well as strengths. I think the kinds of things we want to look at when we look at a process: Does it involve a wide cross-section of Manitobans who want to be involved? Does it allow them to participate? Does it allow them to inform themselves of the issues at hand? Does it allow them to interact with their fellow citizens and/or members

within the political party and wider members of the public?

So those are just some of the criteria that I think should be looked at as we review these different systems and find ways to move forward on this, and I do think that there will be a serious look at it by the New Democratic Party, as I think other parties also review their leadership selection procedures.

So I look forward to that discussion, and those are some of the criteria that I would apply in reviewing the different alternatives.

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the Premier's comments. I think it is a particular anachronism, if that's the right word, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Chair, for the party opposite to use a structure which gives such weight to the public sector unions. I think we were talking the other day, I think the Premier (Mr. Selinger) had estimated as much as a quarter—as many as a quarter of the delegates at the leadership convention were chosen through a method that he had said he wasn't fully apprised of or aware of in terms of how they're selected. So that makes the system cloudy, certainly.

The other apparent conflict is the issue of government itself having to negotiate compensation with those same unions and to go to the bargaining table with those same unions who have played such an influential role in leadership selection process, I think.

Does the Premier understand the perception of conflict that is created as a consequence of that system?

* (15:10)

Mr. Selinger: Again, all systems have their limitations. For example, I'm aware of a system of, if I understand it correctly, the federal Conservative Party, I recently read about it, where it selects delegates based on the proportion of members that vote for those delegates at their delegate selection meeting, but it doesn't make a difference whether it's 100 members voting for those delegates—there's a total number of delegates, let's say 10; if 100 members vote for 10 delegates and five are dedicated towards one leadership candidate, they get five delegates. If 1,000 members vote for a total of 10 delegates, and five vote for one member, they get five delegates. So there are disproportionate influences in that system. Under constituencies with smaller numbers of members, they get the same number of delegates based on the proportion of those

smaller number of members that vote for it, which is the same proportion on a larger number of delegates.

So there's a weighting in there. And, when you have that weighting, that could have an influence on the outcomes in terms of which leadership candidates are selected. It could also have a determination of where resources go in the future potentially. But the point is this. There are no perfect systems. And, in every system, there has to be safeguards put in place to allow as much inclusiveness and participation as possible.

Now, perhaps the member could explain to me the selection process for when he was selected for leader, and how that worked, and whether he thinks that's the right process, or whether he thinks that there could be improvements in that as well.

Mr. Pallister: I'm not exactly sure what the Premier's referring to. If he's referring to the 2012 process where I was the only entrant in the contest, of course, I wasn't happy about that. I like a contest, so I would have appreciated other people entering it. Maybe he could clarify, is that the one he's referring to?

Mr. Selinger: I'd be interested to know how that process worked and whether he thinks there's any flaws in it and how it can be improved so we can have more than one candidate.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the number of candidates isn't something that I have a lot of control over. I declared as a candidate and other people have to make their own decisions, just as a number of his caucus members have made the decision to rebel against his leadership and others have decided not to run again. Each has to make their own decision.

But what we're talking about here, and the Premier has raised, inaccurately, by the way, the federal process of the federal progressive—of the federal Conservative Party as an example. The stark difference between that process and the one his party uses is that his party gives power to interest groups. He is referring to differential effect of more members or fewer members at an individual level in various ridings, but I'm referring to the differential impact of interest groups within his party.

When he gives—when his party, not he—when his party gives 25 per cent of the delegates for union bosses to assign, and then subsequently, as a government, negotiates with those same unions, this creates concerns. We talked yesterday a little bit about some of the concerns of the MGEU in respect

to the influence that may or may not have been—the Premier (Mr. Selinger) says there's no evidence to his knowledge, but certainly the perceptual concern is very real of the MGEU that the Health Minister owed some favours to the firefighters because they helped her get elected. That's the kind of conflict, that's the kind of perceptual problem that arises as a consequence of this process. This is why I raise this and why I raised it with Ovide Mercredi as well, because I think it's in all our best interests to have a process that's seen to be fair and that is transparent as can be.

So I'm asking again for the Premier to, you know, address, in a specific way, whether he would support a one-member, one-vote process.

Mr. Selinger: And the member, I think, has entirely missed my point.

Every system has its own weightings within it. For example, the federal system for selecting a leadership candidate, because five delegates can be selected by as few as 50 members or five delegates could be selected by as many as 5,000 members or more, has a weighting towards smaller constituencies. Most of those smaller constituencies are in areas where there's less population, so a disproportionate voice is given to areas with smaller populations, with smaller membership. And that is a weighting against, for example, other areas where they have large populations and large memberships, and so there's a tilt that comes out of that. And that could, according to this theory, have an influence on how resources are allocated when decision making occurs. And that might mean, for example, that some of those smaller constituencies are in, say, rural constituencies, for one example, or northern constituencies, for another example. And so there could be a problem with that, and so there's issues with that. And, in the system that we have, it's based on the historic founding partners of the political party and it has been in place for a long time and then it's being reviewed to look at how it could become more inclusive and more open.

And, as I've said, some of the criteria that should be looked at when you're reviewing a leadership selection system is: Does it include as many folks as possible; does it allow for informed discussions; does it allow for participation; does it allow for people to get to know each other and build a sense of community in the province and within the political party itself? All of those factors, I think, are

important factors to consider as we look at the various systems, and none of them is more important than the specific systems that we have in place and how those systems have within them tilts in one direction or another, and then, when it comes to the perception problem, I mean, we have to be always be very careful that we serve the public interest. And that's why we banned corporate and union donations in Manitoba.

And the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba was opposed to banning corporate and union donations at the provincial level, and that became a perceptual problem for them. We banned those corporate and union donations; some of the organizations we were discussing yesterday are not affiliated with the New Democratic Party. So they don't have any specific voice there, and others that are affiliated have a relatively small voice in relation to some of the other folks that are represented there. And, in all cases, there is over 75 per cent of the delegates are selected by the constituency associations based on the number of members each of them have.

So I've looked at the different systems, and I see the shortcomings, the pros and cons, of each one, and I say to myself as we look forward to renewal and as we look forward to reform, we have to balance off all of the pros and cons of those different systems to address the questions that I've put on, in front of the members today.

Mr. Pallister: Well, yes, there's opportunities for improvement, I would agree with the Premier's observation, very likely in any system of choosing a leader, but there are more opportunities when some systems than with others.

And, certainly, with the provincial NDPs, there are tremendous opportunities to improve it when you, he referenced less than 25 per cent, but the initial delegate amount that was allocated to unions was 691 delegates, and it was estimated that would represent 30 per cent, if filled. So that's 30 per cent, not less than 25; it may have ultimately resulted in a lower number because of unfilled delegates. But the point isn't that; the point is that the power was allocated initially, potentially to almost a third of the selection process was allocated to union bosses.

I want the Premier to explain again; I want to be sure I'm not anything but clear on this: CUPE, for example, with 288 delegates, does the Premier understand how CUPE goes about filling those spots?

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, presumably they fill those spots based on those among their members who are also members of the NDP.

But I say to the member opposite, he thinks some systems require more reform than others. How does he possibly justify a system that can't generate more than one candidate for a post? Is that because there is strong influence by the backrooms, by special interests there that discourage other people from running?

Out of the last three leaders we've seen in the Progressive Conservative Party in Manitoba, two have not been contested. And that leaves the door wide open to wondering how any decision is made over there and who makes the decision, who's deciding these things, where is the transparency, where is the opportunity for an average person to be able to run in a leadership contest and to have the resources to do that, to compete against others that have more resources.

So I ask him again how he would improve his own system and how he would make it more transparent, and answer the questions I raised, how it would encourage more participation, how it would encourage more informed decision making, how it would encourage more inclusiveness and how it would encourage more opportunities for—to people to participate in political life?

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

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

Of course, we're seizing every opportunity to involve more Manitobans in our party and, as a result, are raising quite a bit of money from Manitobans. About 90 per cent of our money, I understand, that's raised is raised in small donations of less than \$200, so we're doing that. I understand that the Premier's not having a lot of success with that.

*(15:20)

I also understand that we're reaching out and bringing members to our party. In fact I believe the last numbers I saw were in excess of 20,000 members, so we're reaching out and we're endeavouring to grow the party in that way.

And I would remind the Premier (Mr. Selinger), of course, that numerous leaders have been selected over the years without a challenge. In fact, Roy

Romanow would be one that comes to mind, Danny Williams another. There are numerous occasions where leadership contests don't result in a contest. I agree with him that it would better if it did but it's not infrequent that it doesn't. So to try to disparage my party as he just did with a reference to backroom influence is pretty bizarre, frankly, and unjustifiable. I assure him that in the process of the almost 10 months that I was pursuing the leadership of our party, I was always mindful of the need to reach out, and continue to be, and that I was always competing with others, because potentially at any point in time someone else could have chosen to enter the race.

Now, that being said, this doesn't—this assertion the Premier's attempting to make shows a bit of a sensitivity to the point I'm making I think, that nothing he has said changes the fact that in his government, which he heads, now has to negotiate with CUPE, which had an inordinately large amount of influence in causing him to be in the chair he's sitting in today, the same with UFCW, the same with Unifor, the same with the firefighters we spoke about yesterday and others.

So, again, I think, quite frankly, in the best interests of his own party, it would be wise to pursue a change as soon as possible because the perception that is left, quite rightly with most Manitobans observing the leadership selection process of his party, is that the power to select a leader rests in the hands, not of the grassroots members of the party at all, but rather in the hands of a few key people, such as the leaders of these unions I've referenced.

Mr. Selinger: I read into the record earlier when he pursued this question, that members make their own decisions; the secret ballot is the best protection of that. The leaders themselves acknowledge that they hope they would vote for certain people but there was no guarantees of that.

And I say to the member opposite, he seems to think that an uncontested leadership is fine. He could have done more to encourage more participation. He could have refused to run until there was competition. He chose not to do that. He could—he chose not to do that and he likes to laugh about it; he seems to think it's laughable. And I carefully listened to his question, and now he wants to interrupt when I'm answering the question. So it's just—it's laughable that he considers it laughable, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, because it demonstrates a disregard for the democratic process, and that disregard is manifest in some of the things that he's said and the behaviour he

is displaying in this Estimates procedure this morning—this afternoon.

I say to you this: There is no perfect system. Systems should always be looked at to be how they can be improved, particularly with our diverse population in Manitoba. We have people from many backgrounds, many different parts of the province, many experiences and we always want to find a way to include them in the process. And I saw a lot of that in the recent experience I went through and I've seen it before. But I think it can even be stronger. But one thing I do know is that when people get the opportunity to have a vote, they exercise their own judgment on that, how they're going to vote. And that is something that they vote in secret, through a secret ballot. And I think that's important, Mr. Speaker. That's the greatest protection of people's ability to make their own decision.

The member opposite also wants to talk about whether or not there's undue influence. What is the role of senators in provincial elections? Is it his view that they should be involved or is it his view that they should not be involved? That'd be helpful information as well.

Mr. Pallister: Well, if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has such esteem for the secret ballot, why did he, as part of a government, take away the right of union members to have a secret ballot on the ratification of their unions? Why would he remove the right of a secret ballot from grassroots union members, the rank and file, my former brethren and sisters of the union movement, why would he take that right away from them if he holds the secret ballot in such high esteem as he as claimed just now? I'm puzzled by the contradiction.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member didn't read the court judgment on that. The court judgment ruled that the legislation the member put forward when he was in office was ineffective and unenforceable. And the judgment said very clearly that it's the responsibility of the Legislature to make any decisions with respect to budgets and money bills and that's what the judgment said. The member knows that. I'm assuming he read the judgment. It was one that he personally intervened in and lost. So he needs to be aware of the outcomes of that judgment.

What we did do is we did listen to Manitobans. We went out and canvassed them all across the province and asked them what the priorities should be. And what they told us was was that we—there

really needs to be very significant investment in infrastructure in the province, first of all, to protect communities from floods, and we're proceeding in that regard and have made very significant investments there, both at the individual flood protection level, both at the community level in terms of ring dikes and other barriers, and then on the strategic level with different channels and different temporary channels being made permanent channels. So that is something that we put in place.

The second piece was they asked for strategic infrastructure that will continue to allow for good jobs to be created now and to grow the economy in the future. And that includes investments in strategic assets like CentrePort, the highways that connect CentrePort to various markets to the east and west of us and to the south of us. And the third thing they asked for was investments in infrastructure that includes the quality—improves the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. And we acknowledged those priorities and have invested significantly in those priorities, and the member opposite has voted against that and said he would repeal the resources that would allow those things to happen.

So we've tried to be sensitive to the realities of Manitobans and the Manitoba economy and the risk to Manitobans through major events like the 2011 flood, and he will recall I let him know that before that budget we had a very significant report that had a very strong recommendation that we needed to spend over \$1 billion on additional flood protection in the Assiniboine valley and all the communities in that area as well as up through Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin to make some long-term investments that would protect those communities from the catastrophic experiences that they had in 2011 flood. And we're proceeding to do that, and we've already made investments that have made a significant difference. For example, when I go to Brandon now, and I go down the major artery where we had the super sandbags, where the Daly Street bridge is, I see a much higher level of protection now and a much greater degree of security in that community than we saw in the 2011 flood.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think the Premier missed the point of the question, and so I encourage him, as he claims he's listening to Manitobans, he might listen to my question. I asked him if he had such respect for the secret ballot, why did he pass a piece of labour legislation that removed the right of union members to vote on ratification of their union, removed their secret ballot right, took it away? If he

respects the right of the secret ballot, why would he do that?

Mr. Selinger: I gave him the answer on that straight up. I told him that that was struck down by the courts the mechanism that he had put in place as being unenforceable and ineffective; and the reality was is that that's what the courts ruled—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Point of order. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: I don't mind the Premier (Mr. Selinger) ragging the puck; it's his custom. But don't repeat back to me something about a court ruling in respect of the PST, again, because I didn't ask a question about the PST court hearing. I twice asked the Premier the same question, and I'd like an answer to it. And my question is about the changes his government brought in in respect of eliminating the right of union members to vote on the ratification of their unions in a secret ballot. That's the question.

So, just for clarification, I'm pretty sure I was going to get the same answer to a question I didn't ask for the second time. So this will be my point of order, Mr. Chairman: We should try here to at least appear to answer the questions that are asked.

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Is there any comment in response?

Mr. Selinger: Simply submit it's not a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): All right. Well, this is clearly a dispute on the facts, and just a dispute on the facts is not a point of order. So I, therefore, find that this is not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier was answering. I just hope he will answer the question I asked, Mr. Chair. That's all.

Mr. Selinger: It's the member's frustration. The member seems to think he can control all aspects of the Estimates process. He gets to ask the questions he wishes; I get to answer the questions in a way that I think makes the point that needs to be made. And I was making a very simple point to him, that the court

case that he brought that cost the taxpayers a significant amount of money was lost.

* (15:30)

And even in the judgment in the court case, it said, I'm—as I am satisfied the PC Party has no legal capacity to bring it, this application, and as the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), although he uses his surname, has failed to persuade me there is any basis for the court to grant the relief he is seeking, I am dismissing the application. And so it was dismissed in its entirety.

And I know the member doesn't want to discuss that, but that's on the record now. That's part of the public record and it needs to be acknowledged by the member opposite that that legislation was ineffective and unenforceable.

Now, he's asking other questions about union certification procedures. Union certification procedures have been a long debate in Manitoba. People have the right to have a secret ballot. They also have the right to do a card-check process at a higher level of threshold, which ensures a greater level of involvement in that. And if the member wants to change that, he should go on the record and say he wants to change that and we can have that discussion about it.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'll ask the Premier again, then. His government passed labour legislation which removed the right of working men and women in labour unions to vote secretly on the ratification of a union within their workplace.

And I ask him again, if he had any respect for the secret ballot, why did he bring that legislation forward and support it?

Mr. Selinger: He obviously missed my answer. There is provision for a ballot in those circumstances. There's also provision for a higher level of threshold to certify, subject to the ratification of the Labour Board, and there's a long history that is involved in that, and the member knows full well what that history is. If he wishes to change that, he should go on the record and say that he doesn't agree with that approach and then we can have a discussion about that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, the Premier misrepresenting the facts of the case, because he knows full well—he knows full well—that he removed the right to a secret ballot from working men and women in this province with his labour legislation.

And he knows that to be a fact and he's now trying to obfuscate and claim he did not, but he did. And he, at the same time in the same breath, claims that he respects secret ballot which he removed from union members.

So how does he explain that obvious contradiction between his stated principles and his behaviour?

Mr. Selinger: The member obviously didn't hear the answer the first two times I gave—provided it to him.

There is provision for the secret ballot. There's also provision for certification at a lot higher level of support for a certification application which has to be ratified by the Labour Board, and the member knows that. And the member is misrepresenting the nature of the legislation—not a surprise. If the member's opposed to it, which it sounds like he is, let him confirm that and we can have a discussion about that.

The member seems to be—have a tremendous hostility to labour unions from the get-go, regardless of what level of support they have for what they do, and if he wants to confirm that or deny that, he is free to do so.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) confusing my hostility towards his non-answers with other hostility he claims I have.

I'm a former union representative, the son of a 42-year union member and I'm a proud supporter of collective bargaining in unions in our province and will continue to be. So I don't appreciate the misrepresentation he just put on the record at all. That being said, I am getting used to it.

Now, in speaking of contradictions, here's a press release from April 30th, 2008. It says here, Province proposes stronger balanced budget legislation. Talk about code words, Mr. Speaker. This is the one where the government brought in a balanced budget law that would actually take the teeth out of the balanced budget law, but they said it was stronger in the same press release. This would remove the penalties that ministers would have to endure if they failed to balance the books. This removed any potential of this legislation for the government to have to pay down debt and—but it's all according to the government's communications strategist, a stronger balanced budget piece of legislation.

And here's a quote from the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger): With this legislation, we are

completing the implementation of the long-standing recommendations from the Auditor General that we commit to summary budgeting in law. Okay, I see a little bit of a contradiction now.

Why is the government moving away from summary budgeting this year when they committed to it and said it was a strengthening of our financial recordkeeping just a few years ago?

Mr. Selinger: First of all, I'd just like to say the member seems very, very sensitive about his blatant hostility to the labour movement in the way he makes his remarks and talks about labour bosses. He totally does not acknowledge the backroom influences within his own political party, yet he doesn't even acknowledge that reform is necessary when they can't even generate more than one candidate to run for a leadership race. He thinks that's absolutely fine.

Now, that's a double standard, a completely undemocratic process where nobody stands for office but one person with no clear idea who's influencing those decisions within the party, and he thinks that's fine? And yet he thinks he can hold himself out as a judge of the selection processes for leaders of other political parties? It's a bit rich, and I do put the emphasis on that expression.

And I go forward and say the following when he wants to question the issue of balanced budget legislation; it was his political party that wanted to retain the old balanced budget legislation where budgets were balanced on the operating budget. Is he changing his position on that now? And is that a contradiction?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I've been pretty successful in my life, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not going to apologize to the Premier for that or anyone else.

But I grew up in relative poverty and I'm not going to complain about that. One thing I learned from my family was to be truthful, and I'm encouraging the Premier to do that now.

I have asked him a simple question. Why is he departing from what he said was an improvement, a commitment that he made to summary budgeting. Why is he departing from it now? In this year's budget he has made no such commitment, refuses to even let the public know what the projections are for non-core items. So why is he departing from the principle which he said he upheld just a few years ago? I'm puzzled by that. I think many are.

Mr. Selinger: In my time here, there's always been information on the summary budget as well as the operating budget.

The members opposite voted and opposed the move to summary budget legislation. They said that there should be reporting on the operating budget. If the member doesn't want to apologize for that, I completely understand the double-standard approach he takes to all these matters.

He says that he's a strong supporter of the labour movement but he votes against safe workplace legislation. The bill we brought forward to make greater safety in the workplace, health and safety legislation, they voted against it. How does that support working people in Manitoba? Could he answer either one of those questions?

Mr. Pallister: Me too, because his government is not a government that has any integrity. It ran on three major commitments. It's broken them all. And I'm wanting to address one of them with him now, and that's the departure from summary bookkeeping. He said in this quote that he would commit to summary budgeting in law and he goes on to say the new law will ensure government uses one set of books that will provide Manitobans with the most comprehensive budget presentation. Now, why is he departing from that stated principle now? It's a remarkable departure and it's frankly one that he refuses to defend which should alert anyone watching or paying attention to this proceeding that he's—there's something he's hiding here.

Why is he trying to depart from a stated principle and abide by a different principle today? Is it a matter of convenience or a matter of obscuring facts from Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: Neither, Mr. Speaker. We have always said that one of the most important things we want to do in government is to protect core services to Manitobans and to ensure they're provided on a consistent basis without events beyond our influence forcing major cutbacks in them.

The members opposite seem to think that they can cut \$550 million out of the budget without any negative impacts. We disagree with that. We think that that's a significant problem. If they think that they can do that, let them explain how they can do that. They haven't.

The member opposite says he supports working people, he votes against balanced budget legislation. The member opposite says he supports democracy,

but he's completely comfortable with uncontested leadership races with totally non-transparent selection procedures. The member says that he supports democracy, but his political party is against the banning of corporate union donations. Those are just several examples of a double standard. I can enumerate more for him if he wishes.

Mr. Pallister: We have touched a nerve here with these basic questions about how the government makes its books public or obscures the facts from Manitobans, and that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) is quite sensitive to addressing the issue I've raised. But I would encourage him to do that because, again, he's departed from a stated principle, something he says he holds high. At least he said that in 2008 when he rewrote this balanced budget law to take the teeth out of it but left in the referendum component.

Actually, that's interesting too, Mr. Chair, because the very thing the government went to court on was the thing that they had left in the balanced budget law in 2008, as you may recall, Sir, and it was that there be a referendum right given to Manitobans. The government then went to court under the Premier's guidance to make sure that that right was taken away. In fact, they went to court to make the case that the law, which they wrote in 2008, was not a good law, that it contained a provision which was not one that was supported by the law.

* (15:40)

Nonetheless, it was a provision in the balanced budget act which many Manitobans put faith in, and many in the business community put faith in. Business recruiters, for example, have told me that they appreciated the fact that there was a referendum requirement before major taxes could be raised, because when they were recruiting they could say, yes, under the NDP Manitoba does have some of the country's highest taxes but, no, they can't go up without a referendum.

So they were able—that assisted them in recruiting others to consider coming and investing in Manitoba. Yet the government went to court to say that no, that was not a guarantee they wanted to honour, even though they had run on the promise to honour it. The Premier decided to go to court and eliminate it.

So I'm asking him because this was his legislation in 2008, of course, which did alter the previous balanced budget, debt elimination act and

taxpayer protection act, if he was so sure that the referendum should be—should have been included then, why was he so sure that he could eliminate the right of Manitobans to vote in 2012 when he introduced the—in 2013 when he introduced the PST hike?

Mr. Selinger: First of all, I just have to say the member's wrong on the facts. We did not go to court; he went to court and the government had to respond to that. And when he went to court he lost on all the points that he raised, every single one of them. And so he needs to acknowledge that.

We brought forward legislation that we thought was in the best interests of Manitoba during a period of recession, recovery from the great recession. And the legislation we brought forward was to make timely investments in infrastructure that would protect communities from flooding based on independent reports we had received, based on further information that the global economic recovery was fragile and that there was a real need for government investment in infrastructure to ensure the growth of good jobs in the province and to allow young people to have opportunities to train and skill up to do those jobs, and we followed through on that after carefully listening to Manitobans in terms of what their priorities were.

The member knows all of that. I hope he will acknowledge that it was him that decided to go to court and use taxpayer resources to do that and put the taxpayers at expense for doing that, when he knew full well that the chances of succeeding in court were not very strong. I'm sure he had legal advice to that regard and if he didn't I'd like him to let us know one way or the other whether he had legal advice that he could win that court case because nobody else thought he could.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that's really an interesting contradiction because it's the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) legislation in 2008 that enshrined the right of Manitobans to vote, so he must have got some legal advice when he wrote the legislation. Did the Premier get some legal advice at that time that told him that there was no case to be made, that this was an enforceable law that he put in place in 2008?

Mr. Selinger: I asked the member the question whether he had legal advice on the fact that he could continue to perpetrate that unenforceable and ineffective law that was put on the books by him and his political party in the mid-1990s, Mr. Speaker, and was retained until it was—until we brought it forward

in terms of budget changes necessitated by strong 'recommendations' to ensure that we invested in flood protection for communities.

And we looked at our experience in that regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we saw what we did when we responded to the 1997 flood when we came into office and launched a major program of rebuilding the floodway to a higher level of protection, taking it from one-in-99 years to one-in-700 years, at the same time as we proceeded with a very positive dike program for communities in southern Manitoba, as well as an individual flood-protection program for folks that were outside of those ring dikes to build up their homes onto higher ground. And that experience we found served us very well as we moved forward in future years when we had other major flood 'fletts' in the Red River Valley—2009, 2011 come to mind, but other threats along the way.

The return on that investment was dramatic; billions of dollars of avoided costs, untold and uncalculable costs of avoided suffering for people and the ability to keep the economy moving strongly. Those recommendations came forward when we returned to office by this independent committee that we should invest in these things. We saw the value of doing that, that value was highlighted by the experience of the people in the Assiniboine valley and in the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin area, very important experiences for those people, very traumatic experiences, some of whom have not yet returned home yet. Why was that? Because when the original diversion channel was built there was no protection offered those communities in the upper end of Lake Manitoba and in particular in the Lake St. Martin area. That was not even considered. And there had been litigation going on for years for all the suffering they'd experienced from high water.

This time, with that unprecedented level of water flowing into those areas in the—after the—during the 2011 flood, it seemed appropriate and necessary to invest in protection so that they would not be put in that circumstance again. And we decided to do that in the best interests of Manitobans, and we are proceeding to do that in the best interests of Manitobans.

And the investments we've made up to now have already proved their benefit. We've already seen communities along Lake Manitoba be better protected. We've seen that the emergency channel reduced flood risk by up to three feet. We've seen that the investments in Brandon have made that

community a lot more secure. And we've seen investments in individual flood protection throughout the Interlake, as well as the program we're offering this year in southwestern Manitoba, will make a very large difference in the security of those families and those communities.

Mr. Pallister: Well, if the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) priorities were so firmly lodged with strategic infrastructure investment, or at least infrastructure investment, I'm puzzled as to why he was underexpended in Infrastructure for the four previous fiscal years in a row. Every other department in his government overspent its budget. The only department in government that did not was the infrastructure department, was underspent by a total of \$2.2 billion over that four-year period.

And now, coming into an election year, the Premier would have Manitobans believe that infrastructure is the top-of-mind issue for him when it hasn't been for half a decade prior.

So I'm puzzled about that, and I'd like the Premier to clarify that. Maybe Manitobans could understand why it was that infrastructure wasn't a priority for him for the previous four years and now is such a big priority for him.

Mr. Selinger: I'd be happy to do that, Mr. Speaker. When we came into office, the members opposite had raised gas taxes and actually cut infrastructure spending.

When we came to the 2011 flood situation, our level of spending on infrastructure had been steadily growing year over year up to \$700 million. Some of it was lapsed because of conditions beyond the control of the projects, weather conditions, late-early freeze-up, late springs, et cetera and other unforeseeable delays. But the money was rolled over to ensure those projects continued. No projects were cancelled, but circumstances beyond control in specific situations required some projects to be rescheduled. But the level—the trend line on investment in infrastructure is positive and growing on every single year.

I've explained this to the member before. I'm sure he will recall that I provided him data on that as well as charts that demonstrated that. If he wishes me to bring that material back in to the Estimates, I'd be happy to do that.

But the overall trend line was up in terms of investment. He knows that, and he also knows that projects weren't cancelled. They were rolled over and

done as soon as they were able to be done, given the circumstances that each specific project was being challenged by.

So that's my answer to his question.

Mr. Pallister: That's an interesting claim the Premier's making, because the amount of spending below budget on infrastructure in four fiscal years in a row approached half a billion dollars. He claims that no projects lapsed. He claims that weather caused the underexpenditure. That might've been true in the first year, but based on his theory, it was also true in the second, the third and the fourth years as well, and that's a difficult claim to make based on the facts.

Now, I want to go back for a second here, because I do think it's important for the Premier to understand something, and I encourage him to address this. When he chose to go to court and fight for the—to make the case that he had the right to take away the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum because he needed that money, and he also went to fight for the right to claim that the legislation which he had modified and which he passed in 2008, that it was not supportable by the courts, he admitted several things. He admitted that the civil rights of Manitobans were secondary to his need for more revenue. He certainly admitted that the legal counsel that was sought or not sought was inadequate back in 2008 when they tabled the bill that they put in force.

* (15:50)

He also admitted that he did not respect the right of Manitobans to actually participate—as he alluded to before, he believes in these civil rights, but he did not support that thesis by allowing Manitobans to participate in the process of debating the change because it was so urgent. Yet—now, so urgent—and he claimed the other day it was urgent because he had to invest in infrastructure so rapidly because of a report which wasn't out for a year thereafter. Now, I'm curious as to if this was the case, why is it that he never made the case to spend money on infrastructure for months after? In fact, he waited nine months to table a report from the Conference Board—nine months later, changed his story. His story, initially, was splash pads, if you remember, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Chair, and a number of other little projects—hundreds of them, in fact, announced all over target areas of the province.

But then, a few months later, he tabled a report—nine months, if I'm not mistaken—from the

Conference Board claiming that you could spin straw from gold if you just took enough money away from Manitoba taxpayers. Now, why, if the case was so centrally focused on infrastructure, wasn't it made in the early months after the budget was tabled and the tax hike was tabled?

Mr. Selinger: The member's spinning nonsense by ignoring the facts, Mr. Speaker—Deputy Speaker. He ignored my previous response where I said that we had a consistent trend line of increased spending on infrastructure all the years we were in government. I provided that evidence to him last year with charts that showed that. The trend line was up overall. There were fluctuations year to year for a variety of reasons, some of which were weather, some of which were project scheduling, some of which were specific to that project in question. And I indicated that to him already, too, and he forgot that. So the trend line was up.

In contrast, when the member was in office, the highways budget was cut every year. In 1995, it was \$167 million. In 1996, it was \$161 million. In 1997, it was \$152 million, even after they raised the gas tax. So the reality was they were cutting infrastructure investments. We had investments in excess of those numbers every year we were in office for our infrastructure programs in Manitoba and continued to take that to higher levels of commitment to make sure that we were fixing up infrastructure all over Manitoba. And much more remains to be done.

There's so many other things that have to be done, and it's an important time to do it, because we're seeing with climate change greater risks in North America. North America has been one of the hardest hit continents on the planet for unforeseen, unpredictable, intense, severe and damaging weather events, and we've seen that in Manitoba, but we've seen it in all other parts of North America as well. And the time is right to do things that will mitigate the risks of natural disasters, and we are proceeding to do that in a way that Manitobans have told us was a priority. And we know it will have long-term benefits of greater security and greater economic prosperity for the communities where we make those investments because we've already seen those benefits from the previous investments we've made.

And the member tries to suggest that somehow we did not follow up with infrastructure investments. We made increases in infrastructure investments every single year that we were in office, with

variations on an annual basis. But the trend line was up and we did that; we didn't hesitate to do that.

In the 2011 flood, we made specific announcements in that flood period for individual flood protection that went well beyond what the disaster financial assistance program that was made available by the federal government permitted. For example, we made money available for structural improvements for cottagers not eligible under the federal government. We made money available for people to fix up their homes that were exposed to these natural disaster threats in the 2011 flood that went beyond what the federal government was prepared to cover. We made money available to help producers move their animals to higher ground. We provided feed subsidies. We did a whole variety of things that responded to the requirements of providing people that were impacted by those situations with resources.

In the Brandon area, we had a complete—I think it was in excess of \$20 million—the announcement that we made very soon on the conclusion of the 2011 flood experience so that they could build their dikes to a higher level. So we didn't hesitate to move forward on these things, and we never have. And then we brought out a more comprehensive infrastructure program that addressed what Manitobans told us. They said, not only flood protection. They said, in addition to that strategic infrastructure. And we had already started on that path with our announcement of the CentrePort legislation, and it started working on investments in that regard, CentrePort way for example.

But they asked for additional investment there, and that's why you're seeing commitments to Highway 75, Highway No. 1 east and west, Highway No. 10, Highway No. 6. All of those major arteries are seeing significant investments in them to allow the flow of people, to allow the flow of goods and services. And you've seen significant investments in northern infrastructure as well, where communities had never seen a paved road or a road that didn't have massive dust storms following the people that are driving there. And those folks need safe highways as well.

So we're doing that all throughout the province and we rolled it up into a five-year infrastructure program and announced it in the subsequent budget to have a more complete approach to how we were investing that money and show how those dollars were matched by infrastructure investments.

Mr. Pallister: Well, back to the topic, Mr. Chair. The Finance Department's refused to release any documents forecasting deficits or surpluses for the so-called summary budget, and I'm curious, again, as to why the Premier would depart from his stated principle here of committing to summary budgeting in law and ensuring government uses one set of books and so on and so forth.

Why is he departing from that principle? Could he explain that, please?

Mr. Selinger: I gave that explanation in a previous answer. I'm surprised the member didn't hear what I said. I do reiterate that he was opposed to summary budgeting. He wanted budgeting—his political party wanted budgeting on a core basis.

We have said that we want to ensure that any method that we have for legislation in this regard ensures that core services are protected and that unforeseen events do not put—or surprise events—do not put these core services at risk. And we think that's important component of providing stability and security in the lives of Manitobans, and those are the factors that we're considering as we look at whether the balanced budget legislation should be updated.

The other factor was the court judgment. The court judgment said certain things were unenforceable and ineffective, and it's worth reading that court judgment because it makes many points about the constitutional obligations and whether or not certain instruments could be used to abrogate those responsibilities of the Legislature, and we have to take those into account as we move forward.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, the Premier just talked around the issue. I'm curious as to why the government is departing from summary budgeting and moving away from that stated principle that the Premier said he supported. And, also, I'd like to expand a little bit on the question. Since he has avoided answering that question, maybe he'll answer the supplementary aspect of it.

The documents that would allow us to see what the forecasted deficits or surpluses are—oh, as unlikely as any surplus would be with this government—those documents—the Finance Department has refused to release those.

Could the Premier commit today to releasing those so that Manitobans can see what the forecasts are for their money?

Mr. Selinger: The member, I've answered his question three times now about why we're considering changes: (1) is to protect core services. I hope he has finally heard that. That's the fourth time I've answered that. Secondly, I've said that the court has informed some of the decisions we need to make; and, thirdly, we've seen governments all across the country change their balanced budget legislation, if they had it, in order to respond to the great recession in order to respond to the urgent needs to keep the economy going and to keep people employed and to provide resources that will allow for effective demand to be generated in the economy by consumers and by government investments and by infrastructure investments in order to ensure that with that recession we didn't have some of the really negative growth experiences that occurred in other countries around the world. And Canada did relatively well in responding that way and people came together to do that, and many other jurisdictions changed their legislation to do that and we were not alone in that regard. Now we're moving forward on that. So I've given him a straight answer to that.

The member also suggests that we've never balanced the budget. We balanced the budget 10 times and we didn't do it by selling off any of our Crown assets, which is the only way they balanced their budget. Now—after they said they wouldn't. They said they'd never sell the Manitoba Telephone System. They went to the doorstep, said they'd never sell it. Right after getting elected, they sold it. Did they do it for public benefit? Did they do it for the public good? No. The benefits of that privatization accrued to private individuals. They are the ones that got the shares at a very good price and then realized appreciation of those shares and were able to literally make money off that. So it's a very different scenario.

* (16:00)

Our scenario was to protect the public interest and keep the economy going and keep Manitobans working. Their scenario was to break a promise they made on the doorstep for private benefits, many of which now accrue to owners of the shares outside of Manitoba, and with higher rates, among the higher rates in the country, Mr. Speaker. We've kept our rates low in our Crown corporations to benefit all Manitobans. We independently verify that every second year. So there's a big contrast there.

Mr. Matt Wiebe, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

How do we achieve our surpluses? By growing the economy. By growing the economy, we put over \$800 million aside in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and we didn't do it by selling assets, as I indicated earlier.

We put aside over \$800 million and we used that Fiscal Stabilization Fund to stabilize the economy during the rocky economic times of the recession and coming out of the recession and we've used it prudently in that regard.

So we've balanced the budget a record number of times. We've put money aside during those times in a Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and we've used that to smooth out the economy, to allow Manitobans to continue to grow their economy and see employment growth and see infrastructure investments and protect core services. That's what we've done in Manitoba as we've moved forward, while keeping Manitoba one of the most affordable places to live in the country and to do that with an eye towards making sure that Manitobans have a good quality of life.

Mr. Pallister: Government's trying to defend the indefensible, because he knows his government has a horrible record on performance, especially on social programs.

But my concerns are about public awareness of what the government is doing, and the documents that the government is hiding from Manitobans which forecast deficit spending and would normally be available to them, they are refusing to release. So what Manitobans get now is a government that commits, it says, to protecting core services while hiding expenditures outside of core areas of the government. These documents would be available to people who reside in other provinces in the country, but they are now not available here.

This is particularly relevant given the fact that the government is—this Premier (Mr. Selinger) has committed to balancing the books not this year but last, and then backed away from that target, moved it forward and forward again. Now we understand the government is committing to balance in 2019, but only in core. Now, that means that what we're not including here is public agencies and Crown corps like Manitoba Hydro and MPI and so on.

And I'm giving the Premier an opportunity to explain why he would exclude from public view the forecasts on these important areas of taxpayer interest.

Mr. Selinger: I've answered the question four times. If he wishes me to answer a fifth, I will endeavour to do that.

I said we're looking at changes based on our desire to continue to provide and protect core services to Manitobans, such as health care, education and family services and other essential services, and that also we're informing ourselves based on what the courts have said and we're taking a look at it. And I also indicated that all other jurisdictions changed balanced budget legislation as a result of the great recession.

The federal government didn't have balanced budget legislation, but they had a solemn vow never to run a deficit and they promised they would never do that. And they decided that they had to move off that because of the conditions that were facing the global economy, and those conditions were impacting on our Canadian economy. And the federal Conservative government decided that they need to move away from their promise. The member would describe it as a broken promise if it applied in Manitoba. They moved away from that promise and ran a deficit in order to make sure the economy stayed positive and continued to grow, even though it flattened out for one year, there was actually no growth, but it didn't dip into a major depression.

There was a recession, for sure, and we're now seeing recession in some other parts of the country this year because of the dramatic change in oil and gas prices. And so we have to be cognizant of that. The first quarter of 2015 was zero growth, essentially, in the country. The member needs to be aware of that. So these are still fragile economic times that require us to stay alert to how we make sure the economy stays properly growing and that we provide opportunities for employment for Canadians, and in particular, in this province, for Manitobans. And we are doing that.

The member knows that, and I've explained to him why we're doing it, and he's heard it now for the fifth time. If he doesn't want to hear and understand it, that's entirely his choice.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we have a petulant Premier today, who isn't answering the question, and the question is, again, how are you proposing to protect core services while at the same time hiding from Manitobans what happens in the summary budgets? You're not releasing forecasts on the summary budgets.

How is not releasing information on the summary forecasts protecting core services?

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) can keep repeating the answer but the answer is illogical and an embarrassment for him.

I ask him again: Why will he not make public the forecasts for the summary budgets?

Mr. Selinger: And the summary budget is reported on, has been reported on and will be reported on. We've indicated that we're focusing on the core budget to protect core services.

Mr. Pallister: Well, then, why is it that the Finance Department, if the government—if the Premier represents the views of the government, he's just stated that they will releasing the documents which forecast deficits and surpluses, yet the Finance Department has refused to release the documents which forecast deficits and surpluses beyond 2017 for the summary budget.

So who's right? Is the Premier—if the Premier's accurate, the Finance Department is not right and not responding to the request for that information.

Which—who is right?

Mr. Selinger: Okay, then, and we always have reported on the summary budget and we will continue to report on the summary budget. We're focusing on the core budget to protect core services. That's what I've said to him—seventh time, I think.

Mr. Pallister: He's playing silly here, Mr. Chair, because I'm asking about the forecast on the summary budget, and he is—continues to repeat that they've always reported, but they are not allowing the forecast on the summary budget to be made public. So I'll ask him again, for the seventh time.

Why is he hiding the forecasts on the summary budget?

Mr. Selinger: In previous answers, we're endeavouring to make sure that we protect core services. Those things that we can clearly have some measure of control over in terms of revenue and expenditure, not entirely, of course, because we don't control the economic growth entirely within Canada—or entirely within Manitoba. We can influence it, and we're trying to influence it with our infrastructure investments and job-creation investments, because we think that will help grow the economy. And we're seeing good results on that.

I've indicated to him that, on the broader summary budget, we will report on that and have reported on that and are reporting on that and will continue to report on that. And he knows that. But the focus on the core budget is to ensure that we can protect those core services. And I know the member likes to interrupt when I'm giving an answer even though I listen to him when he's asking his questions, and that level of rudeness is not unexpected from the member opposite. So I—he calls that petulant. I would call that petulance on his part; he doesn't want to listen to the answers.

We're ensuring to protect core services, very different from when the members opposite—when he was in office, he was attacking core services. He was reducing infrastructure expenditure even though he raised revenues to do that. He was laying off teachers. He was laying off nurses, and he was cutting core programs at a time that people needed them. For example, they—after the '95 election, they entirely cancelled the health capital budget, which created some very significant crises in facilities within the health-care system. They reduced the number of people that could enrol in the medical school; I believe it was 90. I think it was taken down to 70, and that started shrinking the supply of physicians that were educated and recruited in Manitoba, which created a crisis we've been working on for many years. And now we have over 645 more doctors in Manitoba, because of additional training spots in the school of medicine. We've taken it back to 110, because of recruitment and retention initiatives throughout Manitoba. And we now have more doctors on a per citizen basis in Manitoba than any province west of Quebec.

So we're making significant investments that improve and—the quality of life in Manitobans and we're working towards ensuring that those supports for those investments are stable and sustainable going forward. And I ask the member to appreciate that.

Mr. Pallister: I'll ask the Premier again. Why is his government refusing to release the forecast on summary budgets? Is it because of the incredible mismanagement that will be on display because of the deficits that are projected to be run in various Crown corporations?

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Mr. Selinger: If a Crown corporation, and we saw this a little while back, such as the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, has a bad year because of

weather conditions, and even though they've put money aside, they have to spend more money than they took in that specific year, that will be recorded as an operating deficit in that Crown corporation. And, if the member insists on changing his views, which he has not acknowledged he wants to change it—he was always so supportive of the core budget approach; if he's suggesting that you have to balance the budget in a year when Manitoba Public Insurance corporation has losses because of events beyond their control, then that would imply that core services would have to be cut to offset that. We think that that's a bad idea. We think that you have to manage the core budget, let MPI work on rebalancing itself over a period of time and providing the services that they're committed to doing that, and when they have reserves, to be able to draw on them, even though that might mean some shortcomings in revenue—in expenditure versus—revenue versus expenditure in that given year.

So those are the kinds of things that we're trying to look at as we go forward. And, again, the member knows that it's important to protect these core services in Manitoba because when he was in office, they did the opposite, and we're still facing the legacy of recovery from that period of time. That's why when we came into office, there were no plans to upgrade the floodway in Winnipeg. There was no budget commitment to doing that. Resources had to be put in place to do that, and it has made a gigantic difference. In doing that, we had to put additional resources in place for community diking programs and to buy out some people that were in areas that were at risk and could not be protected, with some of the changes that were being made in infrastructure.

So all those things require resources, but there's a very strong payback on that. Those investments generate very strong returns and avoided costs going forward, and those avoided costs save Manitobans money, and they, more importantly, save Manitobans from grief and suffering and allow their economies in neighbourhoods and communities to stay stable. So we've seen good results from that. I do recall, actually, when the national insurance organization came to town, they made the point that Manitoba was one of the few provinces that takes disaster mitigation seriously with investments they make in infrastructure. And they commended us for making those investments.

Mr. Pallister: And, when Moody's came to town, they gave us the first negative outlook in 28 years.

Now, I'm concerned not so much about—and neither is the Premier (Mr. Selinger)—about the consequences of failing to balance the budget; he hasn't done it in his term. So pretending that it's somehow that he has a concern about definitions at this point is pretty far-fetched. What I'm concerned about is the secrecy here. Why is the government not tabling the forecasts for summary budgets?

Mr. Selinger: And I provided the member the answer to that: because we want to ensure core services are protected, and we will report on summary budget outcomes; have in the past, will in the future, and are currently prepared to do that. And that's something that we are committed to doing and will do because that will provide the whole story of entities outside of the direct control of government and conditions outside of the direct control of government that impact them.

Even within the core entity, we have a disaster financial assistance program that we cost-share with the federal government, and the federal government has unilaterally changed the rules on that. You now have to have a natural disaster in Manitoba of—in the order of about \$19 million before you're eligible for federal cost-sharing. That, over the last decade, retrospectively going back, would've cost us at least another \$50 million in Manitoba. So, when the western premiers met this week and the premiers met last summer, we're all concerned about the change in this disaster financial assistance formula because provinces that are going through difficult times with natural disasters now have to pick up more of the burden at a time when their economies are the most affected by these natural disasters.

We don't think that's the way the federation should work. The federation should be there for each jurisdiction, whether it be a territory or province, when they're going through a difficult time with a natural disaster and should have that support there. That will change from year to year. Some jurisdictions will have natural disasters this summer. Some will have them in future years. Sometimes there'll be flooding; that seems to be the trend these days. Other times it will be fires, and there could be other things that occur in terms of natural disasters. But, when they occur, the federation should be there with the formula that allows the jurisdictions most negatively impacted to have the resources they need to recover and support people as rapidly as possible.

We're actually seeing the opposite of that. We're seeing a withdrawal of those supports, but we look

forward to having that dialogue with the federal government and seeing what we can do to change in that regard and, more importantly, to look at ways we can prevent future disasters. And we are proceeding on that basis with our own program, and we look forward to working with the federal government on other opportunities to do investments in infrastructure that will protect communities going forward. And we will report on that both on a summary basis and on an operating basis. But the key thing right now, with the fragile global recovery going on, is to protect those core services and not to put those core services at risk.

And I can remind the member opposite, his members of his caucus are up every day asking about health services. They're up every day asking about infrastructure investments. Those are the things they seem to make as priorities. They seem to be very different priorities than the member opposite that wants to focus on the details of balanced budget legislation and spend his time in court pursuing that.

Mr. Pallister: I'm actually pretty concerned because I think Manitobans are pretty concerned about the Premier (Mr. Selinger) hiding facts from them, and I think that merits an honest answer, which I have yet to receive. Particularly ironic given the fact that the Premier tries to make the case for his economic capabilities by forecast—he relies on forecasts, quotes forecasts. Can't quote his record, so he quotes forecasts again and again and again. Makes his whole case based on the future.

John Kenneth Galbraith said that economic forecasts were created to give credibility to astrology. And the reality is that the Premier is using forecasts to make the case for his capabilities, but he won't let Manitobans see the forecasts for the summary budget. He keeps talking about it will be reported.

And let me ask him—will be reported—when will the severance payments be fully reported?

Mr. Selinger: We've talked about that and we've indicated that we'll report them according to the balanced budget legislation, the public sector accountability requirements on that, and we will do that, Mr. Speaker. We've reported on a global basis and we will do that.

But I remind the member opposite, he—in this Committee of Supply on May 26th, he said, we haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and have been totally transparent about that. A review of the public sector accountability legislation

shows that it looks like severance payments were paid out to members of his caucus staff. Their salaries went from—for example, in '11-12, one PC policy analyst received \$60,358. The next year after leaving work after only six months, they received \$76,123. Is the member being completely transparent about whether severance payments were paid out, and is he prepared to correct the record where he said, we haven't paid any severance to our departing staff? Severance was paid according to the records here. Will he now correct the record?

Mr. Pallister: The Premier misses the question. The question was ad hoc and the answer was no. We don't make ad hoc payments. We make statutory payments of severance, and he understands the difference between the two.

And I'm asking about the ad hoc payments that were made to the six departing, and I'm asking him when those will be available to the public in full detail. And I don't need another obfuscation, I just want to know the date.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: —him the dates. I've said they'll be reported on as required under the legislation.

But that's not what he said. He said, we haven't paid severance—severance—to any of our departing staff, and I've been totally transparent about that. Apparently not.

Let me give him another example: In 2011-12, another caucus worker received \$55,614. The following year they received \$60,732, but only worked half the year. That's not transparent. That was severance that was paid out. The member said no severance was paid out. Would he like to correct the record on that today?

Mr. Pallister: The fact that the Premier's quoting it proves it's transparent.

What I'm asking him is when he's going to be transparent and reveal the numbers of the severance that were paid. Is it going to be true or it is not true that the severance numbers, in detail, will be released with the public accounts in September of this year? Or is he hiding someone's severance for another year thereafter? Could he explain that?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said, we haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and been totally transparent about that. Committee of Supply, May 26th, 2015, in the House, that was the statement he put on the record.

He didn't qualify that—he didn't qualify that. That was the statement: We haven't paid any severance.

I'll give him a third example of where severance was paid out: In 2011-12, a PC researcher received \$65,202, and the next year that individual received \$76,789 even though that individual did not work the for—full year. That was not disclosed by the member opposite. That was not put on the record by the member opposite. That was not declared by the member opposite. He said it wasn't paid. It was paid. He said it wasn't paid. Would he like to correct the record on that?

* (16:20)

Mr. Pallister: And the issue's transparency. And, again, the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) quoting transparent numbers, and I'm asking him again: When will his numbers on severance be made transparent? When will his numbers on severance be transparent?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I answered the question for the member on more than one occasion in previous sessions, and I'll answer it again today. According to the rules of the public sector accountability act, these numbers were revealed here not by the member opposite. He said: No severance was paid and they have been completely transparent about that. Apparently not; severance was paid. It was reported in the Public Accounts in the same way future severance payments will be reported in the Public Accounts. The member did not declare severance was paid; he said no severance was paid. He said that we and—we haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and have been totally transparent about that. That's what he said in the Committee of Supply, in this room, on May 26, 2015. I've given him three examples where that is not the case. I offer him the opportunity, once again, to withdraw his statement and correct the record.

Mr. Pallister: I'll offer the Premier the opportunity to explain again why is he covering up the severance payments and not making them transparent. Why is he hiding the summary budget forecasts from Manitobans? Why is he running away from transparency?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the double standard is glaringly obvious again. The member demands of others what he's not prepared to do himself. We've seen this on so many examples, and I've given three more—I've given three more—examples today of the double standard that the member practises on a

consistent basis. He pursues questions about individuals, saying he won't discuss any questions about individuals on his staff.

He says that they haven't paid any severance, but they've been totally transparent about that. I give him concrete evidence recorded in the Public Accounts of severance that was paid out. He said it wasn't paid out. He doesn't even want to take responsibility for correcting the record on that. He doesn't want to apologize. He demands apologies from everybody else when something goes wrong. He hands out buffaloes, and buffaloes people when they're not performing according to way—the way he wishes. But, when it comes to actually being accountable for his own behaviour, completely ignores it and deflects it and tries to go somewhere else. Examples are very clear here; I've put three on the record today where severance was paid out when he said it wasn't paid out. Will he apologize? Will he correct the record today?

Mr. Pallister: A glaringly pathetic example of a Premier who's hiding. And here we go again. Won't release the summary forecasts for the people of Manitoba to have a look at. Hides behind secrecy.

Is the Premier planning on using the profits from non-core departments to appear to be balancing the books of the Province?

Mr. Selinger: You know, the member is, again, trying to avoid being accountable for his own statements in the Committee of Supply here, and that's not surprising. That's the double standard we see from the member on a consistent basis. He sits there, and passes judgment on everybody else in this Legislature. But, when it comes to being accountable for his own behaviour and for his own statements, he avoids it like the bubonic plague. He tries to deflect and move away from it as rapidly as possible.

The evidence is very clear. Members of his staff that were being paid wages by the public received severance. He said, nobody received severance. No severance was paid. And they've been transparent about that. The transparency is wrong; there was no transparency. He did not disclose the severance that was being paid. He did not even acknowledge that severance was being paid. He said it wasn't paid, and, when the evidence is plainly put in front of him, he tries to deny it. He tries to be cute and say that it was reported on, that there was transparency. He didn't report on it. No member of his government reported—of his political party reported on it. No member of his caucus reported on it. This was

researched by other people—reported on in one of our major newspapers in Manitoba.

So he has the opportunity to correct the record now. I ask him to do that. I ask him to apologize.

Mr. Pallister: Pretty surprising that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) doesn't understand the difference between a statutory payment required by law and an ad-hoc payment that is done just to buy silence. I'm very disappointed in the Premier's response—or lack of a response.

And, again, I'm asking him: Is he planning on taking profits from the non-core areas of government that he is not disclosing in future and moving those profits as was done in the past in his administration, moving that money over to the core area to make it appear that he's a better manager than he is?

Mr. Selinger: So, Mr. Speaker, the only political party in government that ever sold a Crown corporation and used the profits of that to balance the budget was when the member opposite was in government after he said they would not do that, after they promised not to sell off that Crown corporation.

Back to the issue at hand here, Mr. Speaker. He raised the issue of severance in this Committee of Supply, and now he wants to skate away from it. He tries to make an invidious distinction. He said, no severance has been paid to any of our departing staff, and I—and they have been completely transparent about that. We've given him compelling evidence that severance was paid. He denied that severance was paid. He said it wasn't paid. Evidence suggests it was paid. The evidence completely contradicts the statement he put on the record. He has the opportunity to correct the record now. He will not do that. He will skate away and go to some other issue now. He was the one that raised severance in this Committee of Supply hearing, and now he wants to avoid accountability for the severance that was paid out to staff members that departed from his staff. That is unacceptable.

If he wants to hold people to that standard, he should hold himself to the same standard unless he believes double standards should apply to him, unless he has some special entitlement that puts him above everybody else. He demands accountability from other people; he won't be accountable to himself. I ask him again: Will he correct the record on the evidence that has been presented here in the Committee of Supply today?

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the petulance of the Premier, and I appreciate him practising up on questions too. It isn't my understanding that's the nature of this format, but I appreciate it; I do. And I welcome his questions. I encourage him to keep practising like that.

Now, on the issue of hiding, he is hiding—he is hiding—the summary budgets, the projections on the summary budgets from the people of Manitoba. The Finance Department and the new finance—rookie Finance Minister back there are refusing to release the forecasts on the summary budgets so Manitobans can have a look at them. And he, again, has refused to say why. He says it's to protect core services, but how is hiding projections on a summary budget so Manitobans can have a look at the projected deficits or, in some imaginary world, maybe surpluses with this government, how is hiding those numbers from the people of Manitoba protecting anybody except the government?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the member displays his own arrogance in his responses and then he tries to disparage other members of the Legislature with his adjectives that he uses on them, as if somehow they're lesser than him, as if somehow he has ever done a better job. He's never been a minister of Finance, never will be. And the reality is this, Mr. Speaker. He said, in this Committee of Supply, on May 26th: We haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff, and I've been totally transparent about that.

I did not raise that today until he raised the issue of severance. He wanted to go back to the issue of severance and then, when the severance issue was put on the table, he wanted to avoid his own accountability for severance payments that were made. And I read three examples out of the Public Accounts where it was reported, not by him, but it was reported by the Public Accounts. I read three examples into the record where people worked half the year and received more salary in total, more benefits in total, including severance, than when they'd worked a full year. I read three examples into the record on that. His statement that no severance was paid to departing staff is contradicted by the evidence of the Public Accounts.

Will he take responsibility for that? Will he correct the record? Will he consider apologizing for putting that misinformation on the record? Perhaps he wasn't aware of this. Perhaps he didn't know about this. He could at least acknowledge that and say that

the new information was something he wasn't aware of when he made that statement here in the Committee of Supply on May 26th. He has the opportunity to do that now. He tries to hold other people to that same standard. I ask himself to hold himself to the same standard he demands of others unless he believes double standards apply to him in all cases.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I see the petulance remains. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) had just alluded to the fact that I have not been a Finance minister. Actually, I have chaired the House of Commons finance committee. It was a pretty useful experience. I have gained a little bit of experience over the years. I've also balanced a budget, which the Premier has never done as a premier—never done as a premier. I repeat that, Mr. Chair.

* (16:30)

So I know the Premier has a degree from the London School of Economics. I also know it is not in economics. I also know that when the Premier was asked about this level of financial acumen just prior to becoming the Finance minister of the province, he said it was low. And I think that he should be careful if he wants to cast aspersions on my financial acumen. But that's up to him. That's up to him. *[interjection]* I'm hearing comments from members alluding to my garage, and I'm curious, I'm curious because—actually, Mr. Speaker, where I come from is a 500-square foot house. That's right.

Now this is the Premier who doubled our debt in the last six years and now he doesn't want to tell Manitobans what his projections are on the summary budget, that's a pretty serious bit of chicanery in my estimation. So I'll ask him again, why is he hiding the summary forecasts from Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, what we've just seen is a display of arrogance on the member opposite, he likes to—

Point of Order

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): Point of order.

An Honourable Member: I believe it was the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), it might have been the member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) who just the other day—Tyndall Park, was encouraged not to use the word arrogance in this House. I'm hoping the Premier would want to abide by the same rules as the Chair applies to other

members of the House, and I would encourage him to bring the level of debate up a little and try to be civil here.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): On the point of order raised, I'd just like to remind honourable members in the Chamber to watch their language and to remain parliamentary with regards to their language I hear today. I recognize at times discussions in this committee can become heated, but, if we can keep our remarks temperate and worthy of this Assembly and the office that we hold, that would be very much appreciated.

And I would rule that to be not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Selinger: Can I just clarify, Deputy Speaker, did you rule that as not a point of order.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): Yes, I did.

Mr. Selinger: Okay, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I say again, the member opposite likes to cast aspersions against other people and then when there's any aspersions cast against him he takes it very personally, again, another example of the double standard.

He consistently puts people down all around this Chamber, both informally and formally, both in his tone and in the language he uses, and we see this all the time. And there's a kind of bullying quality that we see to his behaviour in this Legislature on an ongoing basis with the way he treats others and it's been commented on many times by members of this Legislature, the tone he sets and the atmosphere he creates with his attitude and his tone and the language he uses.

I simply say to him, on the record on May 26th, he made the following statement: "We haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and have been totally transparent about that." And then I read into the record research that was done on caucus—government-funded caucus positions where people were paid a higher amount including severance for working less than half a year than they were the year before when they worked an entire year. Severance was a part of their departure. Those are the facts. Those facts are completely contradictory to the statement the member put into the House on the Committee of Supply on the date that I've mentioned. I've asked him to correct the record on that, he may not have been aware of that, he may not have known about it at the time, I'd be interested in his

explanation for why this evidence contradicts what he said, but I do ask him to correct the record on that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we've already established that the government did release the information on Mr. Liam Martin, but refused to release it on the other six and covered it up using a misinterpretation of FIPPA, which when one reads it clearly says there is no invasion of privacy if one releases the benefits, or salaries, or the amounts of optional payments, or discretionary payments, I believe is the wording that's used in the act.

So the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) argument that he's disclosing is not right, he's actually covering up the amount of the severance payments made, except for the release of a global number. And I'm curious as to how many of the severance payments that were negotiated, were negotiated after the April 1st date, because those amounts would not be made public until 2016, I believe, in September of 2016, the Premier could correct me on the specific date. How many of the severance payments were not signed off until after April 1st of this year?

Mr. Selinger: We've had discussions in this committee, in previous meetings. The member, again, is avoiding accountability for his own statements in this committee; he's not being accountable for them. And he did say, we haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and I've been totally transparent about that. He doesn't want to discuss that. He wants to discuss other matters. He wants to deflect away from his own statements in this Committee of Supply, which is part of the House.

I gave him information that was provided in the Public Accounts, when it became available, and not provided by the member opposite or any member of his caucus opposite, at any time. It only became public when it was researched, and it was only available because it was on the Public Accounts.

And I indicated, in one case, in '11-12, a policy analyst received \$60,358 in pay. The next year, they only worked half a year and received \$76,123, including severance. I gave another example where, in '11-12, a caucus worker received an annual salary of \$55,614. But the next year, they only worked half a year, but received \$60,732. That was reported in one of our major newspapers. I gave a third example where, in 2011-12, a researcher for their caucus received an annual salary of \$65,202. But the next year, they did not work the full year and received \$76,789.

The member opposite raised the issue of severance, but he doesn't want to be accountable for his own statements that no severance was paid out and that they've been totally transparent about that. They were not—he was not transparent about that. His caucus was not transparent about that. The Leader of the Opposition was not transparent about that. That had to be researched in the Public Accounts.

I offer him, again, the opportunity to correct the record, explain why he put misinformation on the record—but an opportunity to correct the record.

Mr. Pallister: And I've addressed that several times; I'll do it again. There's a difference between statutory payments and ad hoc payments. The Premier knows that and he's running away from that.

And I'll ask him this again: How many of the severance contracts, which he's hiding, will he be hiding until 2016?

Mr. Selinger: Well, the member's trying to avoid accountability for his own statements. He said, we haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff—period—and have been totally transparent about that—period. And now he's trying to take a different tact on that and trying to avoid the accountability for that statement. And then I read into the record the research that was done through the Public Accounts, when it was made available, according to the laws of the public sector accountability act, about the amount of money people received when they work less than a full year, including severance. And that contradicts 100 per cent what the member said in the Committee of Supply. And he knows that—he knows that. And that's a very significant departure from the facts. And I asked the member to correct the record on that; he refuses to do that. He wants to move to other subjects. He always wants to move to another subject. He always wants to make somebody accountable for a standard he himself will not meet. Perhaps he could start meeting the own standard he set for himself and correct the record, and then he'll have more credibility when he asks people to meet a different standard that he himself has not presently met and has not ever indicated that he wishes to meet or will meet in the future.

So we see this double standard. We see it all the time from the member opposite, and it's becoming a very strong characteristic of his behaviour in this House. And it's something that needs to be noted for the record, because that double standard influences so many of the approaches he takes, where he demands very high standards from other people but

very low standards from himself in terms of accountability and transparency, even when the record is very clear about what he said, and the evidence is very clear that it contradicts what he said.

So I ask the member again: Will he consider correcting the record in the House today?

Mr. Pallister: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) speaks about accountability and transparency, but won't answer a simple question. I'll ask it again: How many severance agreements won't be made public until 2016?

Mr. Selinger: The member asks the questions, but he won't answer any questions. He won't be accountable for his own behaviour. He won't be accountable for what he actually said and how the evidence contradicts that.

I've indicated to him the total amount. I've indicated to him how it will be reported, and I've indicated to him the advice that was provided that suggested that's the way it should be dealt with.

*(16:40)

The member opposite has not indicated any of those things. He never indicated these amounts of money. He never indicated the severance was paid out. He never indicated that it was on the record. He never indicated it was in the Public Accounts. He said it wasn't paid and that they'd been really transparent about that. The facts contradict that. The facts contradict that. The facts suggest that the statement was inaccurate. Was the member unaware of it? Was the member not clear that that money had been paid out? Was it not reported to him? Did somebody not give him full details or information?

Perhaps he could explain this enormous contradiction between the evidence on the public record and his statement that's on the public record. That would be helpful to overcome this perception of a double standard that he practises with everybody that he encounters in this House.

Mr. Pallister: How many severance agreements won't be made public until 2016?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member doesn't want to deal with the question at hand. He doesn't want to deal with severance. He raised it in this Committee of Supply. It was him that brought the topic to the table, and when people ask him to be accountable for the same topic he himself raised, he avoids it. He does everything he can to not deal with it even though the evidence is 100 per cent clear. The

evidence is 100 per cent clear that severance had been paid out to departing staff members from his caucus, and that completely contradicts the statement that he had on the record: We haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and have been totally transparent about that.

So how can the member then ask other people to be accountable when he himself is not prepared to be accountable? How could he demand of others a higher level when he himself is not prepared to meet that same standard? How can he say that he aims higher and then meet a lower threshold than he expects from everybody else? Could he explain that to the committee today?

Mr. Pallister: My responsibility is to hold the Premier to account, and I'll do that again by asking him: How many severance agreements will be kept secret from Manitobans until 2016?

Mr. Selinger: And the member says his responsibility is to hold somebody else to account but not himself. No accountability for himself, no accountability for what he says, no accountability for how the facts contradict that. That is lamentable, to say the least, and unfortunate. But that's what we're seeing on a consistent basis here. I've given him very, very clear evidence to that regard with respect to severance for departing members of his own caucus. He won't acknowledge that. Would he at least acknowledge that the severance was paid out to these departing caucus members? Would he at least acknowledge that today?

Mr. Pallister: How many of the severance agreements won't be made public so Manitobans can see how much the Premier paid those staffers who opposed him in the leadership race, until 2016?

Mr. Selinger: I already indicated all that will be made public in the same way that these were made public, according to the rules and the legislation that we have here. But the member opposite seems to be in denial that this information was made public. He seems to not want to deal with it even though he said that we haven't paid any severance to our departing staff. And I've been totally transparent about that. I've put on the record the information that was available in the Public Accounts. I've indicated that that information will be reported in all cases for people that have departed government that were part of the government payroll or the caucus payroll.

The member knows that, doesn't want to deal with it, doesn't want to acknowledge it, doesn't even

acknowledge that these severances were paid out. He may not have known about it. He may not have been informed of it, but the facts suggest and the facts demonstrate that the severance was paid out for people that worked less than a full year; they made more money in that year than when they—than in the previous year when they worked a full 12 months. The member won't acknowledge that, but he demands to know information from everybody else. He demands a higher standard from everybody else. He demands accountability from everybody else, but he doesn't want to be accountable himself for what he says and what happens in his own situation.

We made the number public; the member didn't make his number public. This information had to be dug out, by other people, of the research. Our number was made public on a global basis; his number was not made public on a global basis. It didn't even meet that standard, that test.

Mr. Pallister: Well, what you're seeing here this afternoon, Mr. Chair, is graphic evidence of why so many of the caucus opposite did not support the Premier (Mr. Selinger), nor will they continue to.

Now, here's a quote from a transcript of a press conference on November 3rd of last year. It says: For some time now, it has been increasingly difficult to do our job because the Premier stopped listening to our advice.

Well, you know, that's what we're getting today. We're getting lectures about conduct that's coming from a man who refuses to say how many severance agreements will be made public in 2016 that he signed this April. And so, you know, I just want to ask the Premier: How many severance agreements won't be made public until after the next election?

Mr. Selinger: Again, all—the global severance number has been put out there. It's very similar to the number that was paid out in '98-99 when people were departing from the executive branch of the government that the member was a member of. And it was—their severance payouts for seven key staffers were about \$650,000; severance paid out this year was \$670,000. The difference was that global number was not reported anywhere that we could detect. If the member says it was reported, maybe he could let us know where we can see that information. It was very similar. The specifics are probably different, but the global number was roughly the same. The member has not disclosed this information here. He said it wasn't paid out, and, in fact, we have

evidence that it was paid out, and he doesn't want to be accountable for it. But he wants to ask people to be accountable for other things that he is not himself prepared to be accountable for.

We put the number out. We did not detect that the number was put out in '98-99. He was a member of that government. We did not see any transparency in that regard, but he expects people to live—support a higher level of transparency. He suggests that somehow the number was untoward, even though a very similar number was paid out during his time for another seven key staff members.

There was a difference. Those—some of those staff members were involved in what was examined during the Monnin inquiry where there was vote-rigging that occurred in Manitoba. Some of those staffers were involved in that. It seemed okay to make severance payments to those folks, but now it's not okay to make severance payments to people that were not involved in those kinds of activities. So there's another double standard that is becoming clearer there.

Double-standard today on people that have left the caucus during his time as Leader of the Opposition, double standard in the past in terms of the amounts on a global basis, double standards in terms of the differences in behaviour, and we see that on a continuous basis from the member opposite. And it's not surprising, but it is consistent.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier talks about what's becoming clearer. I'm going to read a quote from the transcript, November 3rd, last year. It says: "It has become clear to us that he's increasingly being driven by his desire to hold on to his leadership rather than by the best interests of Manitobans."

How does it serve the best interests of Manitobans to hide the detail of these severance payments? How many of these payments will not be known to Manitobans until 2016?

Mr. Selinger: Again, they'll be reported on the same fashion that the reports were made with respect to departing members from his caucus in the past and in the present. He wants a different set of rules for that, he should say so. But it's clear that he wants a different standard on this side of the House than he's prepared to follow on their side of the House. We've reported the global number.

Yesterday, the member followed another double standard. He tried to suggest, with respect to paramedics, that somehow we were, to use his

expression, ragging the puck, when in fact we were following the recommendation made by the health professionals advisory committee. The only person—or the only political caucus that was disagreeing with the recommendation of the health professionals advisory committee was the leader opposition and his caucus. They wanted to move beyond the recommendation. The recommendation said regulation should occur after sufficient consensus has been built, and it's the obligation of the Paramedic Association of Manitoba to build that consensus. He disagreed with that. He wanted regulation to proceed directly. He actually wanted to politically interfere with an independent and impartial committee. He tried to accuse us of interfering in that when, in fact, the only interference was coming from the Leader of the Opposition by disagreeing with the recommendations and demanding that one view be taken before a sufficient consensus has been built.

I was reflecting on that last night, and I wanted to put it on the record today, because it's another example of a double standard being followed. It's okay for him to intervene and take a partisan position on a report that was prepared independently and impartially by the health professionals advisory committee, but it's not okay. And he suggested other people were interfering when, in fact, they just followed the recommendations and actually went beyond the recommendations in terms of ensuring impartiality by asking the health professionals advisory committee to play a role in building that consensus and that dialogue.

Today, we see an example where the member wants specific information about specific individuals to be put on the record, which he's been demanding, but refuses to do it himself. We see an example where he says there was no severance paid out and that they've been transparent about that. And, when evidence is put on the record that contradicts that, it shows that those—that his statement was, in fact, inaccurate and misleading. He doesn't want to correct the record about that. One standard for him; a different standard for everybody else. That's indeed unfortunate.

*(16:50)

Mr. Pallister: Well, I suggest the Premier (Mr. Selinger) reflect on this tonight, reflect on how Manitobans would feel watching a Health minister in the province walk the firefighters' guy over to support him in the leadership contest and then,

thereafter, we find out that she's been sitting on a report that would be germane to his decision for over two and a half months. That might be something he'd like to reflect on.

He talks about a double standard. Let's talk about this double standard. When Liam Martin—when we FIPPA'd for Liam Martin's information, it came out; we got it. When we FIPPA'd for the six others, it doesn't come out; we don't get it. Why don't we get the six when we got Liam Martin's? Isn't that a bit of a double standard?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, first of all, I have to say that the facts described by the member opposite with respect to the role of the Minister of Health are inaccurate; it didn't happen. And so for him to create that fiction is another form of him putting inaccurate information on the record. I'm sure he will not want to correct the record, but I ask him to correct the record in the same way I ask him to correct the record about his statement that we haven't paid any severance to our departing staff. That's another example of him misleading the House in terms of what actually happened. And now he's got two examples that he can correct the record on. Will he do it? I'd be 'pleasantcy'—pleasantly surprised that he did.

I've explained to him in the past that we've taken legal advice from our HR people on what's the best approach to deal with these matters, and we have followed that. I've indicated to him that in '98, '99 seven staff members left from Executive Council. In today's dollars, they were paid out about \$650,000, very similar to the \$670,000 that was paid out. I'm sure the specifics are different in that regard. That was not disclosed in any place that we can ever find a record on that. The member claims it was. I'm not avail—aware of any specific disclosure in that regard to those seven individuals. I ask him to provide that today, to clarify the facts based on what he said or to correct the record.

So we got three things he could correct the record on: the fact that he says we haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and been totally—and have been totally transparent about that—not the case. The evidence completely contradicts that. Ask him to correct the record on the fact that the role that the Minister of Health played—not the case, didn't happen. The member teems—seems to try to assert that as if he was there; he wasn't. He seems to have a greater interest in those proceedings than in the proceedings in his own political party.

We ask him how he can make improvements to leadership selection processes when there's no—nobody stands for office other than one individual two out of three times, when they ran for leadership. He has no ideas on how that—those processes can be improved, but he's got many ideas on how other political parties can improve their leadership selection process. There's another double standard. No ability to reflect on what's happening in his own backyard, very highly critical standard for everybody else to meet, according to his judgments where he wants to play judge, jury and prosecutor.

Mr. Pallister: Now, in FIPPA, section 17, subsection 4, it says, when disclosure is not unreasonable—and it says, despite subsection 2, and that's the subsection that's cited in the non-response to this, the other six—disclosure of personal information is not an unreasonable invasion of a third person's privacy, and then it goes through a few examples. And it says if the information is about the third party's salary or if the information reveals financial or other details of a contract to supply services or if the disclosure reveals information about a discretionary benefit of a financial nature.

So, in other words, what the FIPPA act says is that disclosure is not unreasonable if these previous conditions are met. So the information we asked for with Liam Martin was the same information we asked for with the other six. And the FIPPA people there, on the other side, decided that it was not an unreasonable disclosure and didn't hurt privacy to release Liam Martin's numbers.

The act is pretty clear that that is—was a correct interpretation of the FIPPA rules, because it says, and I repeat for the Premier (Mr. Selinger), when disclosure is not unreasonable if the information is about the third party's salary, if the information reveals financial details of a contract to supply goods or services, or if the disclosure reveals information about a discretionary benefit of a financial nature. I'd say that would describe the ad hoc payments that the Premier negotiated with those departing non-supporters of his.

So, if it was not an invasion of privacy for Liam Martin, I just need some clarification from the Premier on why he would hide the information from the public and—I've asked him this before, but I'll ask him again—how many of these severance ad hoc payments that he paid are going to be hidden from the public until 2016?

Mr. Selinger: If the member wants to quote FIPPA in terms of disclosing the information, the first and obvious question is, why didn't he disclose it himself for the departing members of his own caucus? He actually said they received no severance payments. He's in complete denial that they received severance payments. He didn't follow the FIPPA legislation which he likes to quote in the House right now. He didn't do that for people that have departed since 2011-12 and certainly wasn't done for the people that departed in '98-99. So, again, a double standard: one set of rules for everybody else, a different set of rules for himself. We've seen numerous examples of this now in front of the House today, and it's unfortunate and it's lamentable that that continues.

But that's what we're seeing: one set of rules for everybody else, a different set of rules for himself. Double standard goes on; we see it perpetually over and over again. Has a chance to correct the record on the misinformation and misleading information that was put on the record. Doesn't want to correct the record. Wants to move off to somewhere else and discuss other matters. When you bring him back to these obvious contradictions and errors between what he says and the facts, doesn't want to acknowledge that, doesn't want to deal with that. That's extremely unfortunate and not particularly transparent, even though he says, we have been totally transparent about that. Well, it's not transparent. There's no transparency there whatsoever. If he has this FIPPA standard that he wants others to be upheld to, why didn't he uphold his own behaviour to those standards? Why does he not follow the same standard he expects of everybody else? This is the question. This is the issue of double standards that keeps coming up over and over again, with respect to the member's opposite behaviour.

Mr. Pallister: Well, on November 3rd of last year, the members—the former members of the Premier's own Cabinet said—the member, I guess, in this case, it was the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard), said: To do their jobs, ministers need to be able to speak up honestly in cabinet and disagree with the Premier at times without fear that speaking their mind on some points will mean their voices are ignored on the things that are important to Manitobans.

I'm not afraid of the Premier and I am—want him to understand that personally attacking me is fine, because it—I don't mind. I've been attacked by lots of people in my life. Doesn't bother me. What it shows

is a weakness on the part of the person doing the attacking, and so what the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has revealed today in his conduct is his total unwillingness to make public the summary projections for his government. And what it also reveals is a total unwillingness to let the public see the severance payments that should be made public that were made by him to these staffers that he has dismissed following their support for the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) in the leadership race. That's what I'm seeing today. I'm seeing a lack of willingness to come, in a straightforward manner, to the facts of the issue, to be transparent and to disclose. And I find that his willingness to drop down to personal attack is rather revealing.

And I appreciate the fact that, and I hope he does, that I'm gradually finding my support for him and my sympathy for him eroded as a result of that, because I was greatly sympathetic to him when this happened. I didn't think that it was fair to him. I didn't think that it was fair to his family. But I'm starting to see, with his conduct today, why it's happened, and I'd encourage him to reflect on why it happened. Because, you know, simply attacking me and refusing to respond to repeated questions that are in the interests of Manitobans, quite frankly, as the

member said in her departing statement when she resigned Cabinet, again, "ministers need to be able to speak up honestly and disagree with the Premier at times."

Well, we can agree to disagree without the personal attacks, sir, and so, you know, without fear of speaking their mind on points will mean their voices are ignored on the things that are important to Manitobans. I do think it's important to Manitobans to know the information I've asked. I do think it's important for Manitobans to understand what the summary projections are for the government. And I fail to understand, and the Premier has failed to defend, why he's departing from traditional bookkeeping and management practices of the government, positions which he himself said he held dear just a few short years ago—

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): 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 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 2, 2015

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