

First Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, June 17, 2016

*The House met at 10 a.m.***ORDERS OF THE DAY***(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS***(Continued)***COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY****(Concurrent Sections)***(Continued)***EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee—of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Good morning, everyone.

So I forgot a couple of things; I apologize for that. But I'd like to kind of just start exploring some of your—some of the First Minister's mandate and vision in respect of women for Manitoba.

So, if we could begin, if I could ask the First Minister, in respect of his mandate letter to the Minister of Status of Women, why there was no mention of women in the mandate letter?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I think we cultivated this field quite a bit the other day. But one should not confuse the mandate letter, which has reference to a few topics, with the overall agenda of the government, which has reference to many.

So I would just encourage the member to understand that the—if she would wish to raise a certain specific issue, I could respond better, I think, but in general, in a general sense, the purpose of the mandate letter was to focus each minister on a couple or three issues, principally, and was in no way should be taken as exclusionary in terms of other priority items or other agenda items. So it was designed to highlight certain items of urgency, immediacy and that was the intention of those mandate letters.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for the answer.

I do, just to be clear, I do explicitly understand what mandate letters are for.

And I guess I would juxtapose that with that women, Manitoba women, as we know, represent more than 50 per cent of the population of Manitoba. And the issues that women face on a daily basis are varying and in many respects are critical to, actually, survival in a very real way. We are talking every day in respect of some women in Manitoba that their very lives depend on the work and the acknowledgement that we do in this House.

And so I appreciate the First Minister's response in not taking it in any offence. In—respectfully, I would say that not even having mentioned women once in the mandate letter to the Minister of Status of Women is a little disheartening, whether or not it was meant intentionally or not.

So I would ask the First Minister specifically in respect of what his mandate and vision and responsibility is to the women of Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Thanks to the member for that.

I know the member has had extensive experience and has done extensive amounts of work on behalf of women in the province. And I actually think it would be more fruitful, rather than me talking in generalities, because that's essentially what the member's asked me to do, for the member to share some of her perspectives, ideas, with me, with other members of the committee. I think we'd benefit from that. And that'd be helpful. I'd welcome that.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

Okay, so I guess I would ask in respect of the First Minister's roles and responsibilities as the Premier of this province: What is his plans in respect of advancing women of colour in Manitoba? Role—right.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think that the overarching goal, because the member's again asked me for general comment, I would say the overarching goal we should all share is for equality of opportunity for all our citizens. And I think that that is a noble goal.

But I would reference that, and I hope the member, in referencing the mandate letters, would

understand that the words alone are not enough. And I think that there's—she knows that there've been words of commitment coming, not just from the previous administration, from many government administrations over many, many years, in terms of certain actions that they would take to achieve these goals.

* (10:10)

I—this is why I asked her what specific initiative she might suggest or recommend. I'm very open to hearing from her in that respect, you know, someone who has spent some time on, you know, a subset of the number of initiatives that the member herself has engaged in over a number of years.

I have been most impressed by the commitment, not solely in women either, of course, but of others who have worked with women to advance the cause of equality of opportunity, and so I am very sincerely interested in what the member might advocate in terms of actions.

Ms. Fontaine: So I guess—I mean, let me just put this out here. I'm—as a woman, as a First Nation woman, as a woman of this—of the Manitoba Legislature, what I'm trying to get at is, I mean, I'm left with really no sense of what the First Minister's commitment is in respect of his rules and responsibilities, as the Premier of this province, to women. So to women of, you know, women of colour, to Muslim women, to indigenous women, to women with disabilities. So I'm just trying to gain a greater understanding of what the First Minister's, you know, mandate and vision, and perhaps, you know, the minister—the First Minister talks about equality of opportunity. Well, what does that mean to the First Minister?

I'm using my opportunity, this opportunity in a really intimate, almost one-on-one—save for everybody else—but one-on-one opportunity to gain a greater understanding of what the First Minister's understanding of women's rights are, and the reality that the vast majority of women face in this province, which I will recall yesterday—in yesterday's discussion the First Minister spoke about the vast diversity in one First Nation community; that's a reality. And so if we were to then look at women of Manitoba, the diversity and the range of experiences and narratives and journeys is so varying, and so that's what I'm attempting to do right now is just to gain a better understanding of the First Minister's perspective onside really.

Mr. Pallister: Well, thank you very much for the question and the comment too.

And I think we were talking yesterday—I think I was referencing a comment by the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) yesterday in respect of some of the issues the member's alluded to, and saying that I believe there are—is real opportunity to put our ideas forward together as opposed to using some of these issues for partisan purposes. I've worked, as the member knows, for some time on the mat property issue, which is not something I introduced and is a problem for decades, frankly, for—facing women on reserve and men, too, actually, and I learned a great deal through my interaction with First Nations women, but also with others who were very strongly supportive of them and building—part of building a network across the country and then taking to Parliament initiatives that ultimately were finally adopted to assist in setting up rules for when relationships break down that protect the parties involved, because there is a structure there as opposed to the strong person gets what they want and the weak person gets nothing, and I know that I learned a great deal through that initiative. So that's what I was alluding to.

I guess my earlier comment was on specific things because I think you can tell more about a person's conviction by their background and what they've done probably than what they pronounce. In my experience in politics over the years, I've heard people of all parties make great pronouncements and not deliver on those.

So perhaps I could just say that I could give the member a better perspective maybe of my background, that might be helpful, and then that would show her the influences in my life, maybe. I don't know if that's a helpful thing. I'm willing to do that.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm totally good with that. One of the things that, of course, we're all getting to know each other, I have this crazy quirk that I'm, on top of being fascinated by people's stories, I have this crazy thing that I'm always asking people how their parents met, and you'd be surprised how many people don't even realize how their parents met, but I'm fascinated by the way people meet. So, if you would know me you would know that I'm fascinated with people's stories and that it's a really good way to gain a more deeper understanding of that person's perspective and their narrative. So, absolutely, I would love to hear you share that.

Mr. Pallister: I'm—same page. I, actually—I, sometimes in breaking the ice with people I've just met, will ask that very question, you know. If it's a couple, you'd say, well, how did you two first meet? I think it's a great way to get into—if it's a small-business person, I'll often say, you know, how's business? And that can get a whole series of comments going from the small-business person.

So I'll go back in time to—beyond my lifetime and because I think this will help the member understand better the things that have influenced me most. In my life it would be very likely my mother, though my grandmother did a lot of the child rearing in our family. After I was about 11, when I left the farm, when they—when Duff Roblin consolidated the schools, that's how far back this goes, this story, much further back than that, if I tell you about my grandmother.

But I was raised by two women who would never have called themselves feminists, who were. My mother was born into poverty in a community near Roblin, Manitoba, northeast of Roblin. Her mom passed on of pneumonia when she was—when my mom was 12 years old, and so my mother was the parent, which wasn't easy—sorry.

So, she had to raise her brothers and sisters, and she did. She had to look after her father, who had a breakdown after mom died. The school, when she could get there, didn't go past grade 9, so she—to continue her studies when her younger sister was old enough to look after the kids, she went and worked out, and she put herself through grade 10 and part of—took some courses by correspondence to get her grade 11. Then she came in to Winnipeg, having saved a little money from her job. And these are not—I'm telling you not a unique story. I think many Manitobans have had parents who struggled but it's a powerful example, I think.

She put herself through Kelvin High School, actually, working as a nanny for another family—you know, a family in that area of town and got her grade 12, and then she wanted to continue her education and she works through the summer, saved up and she entered a thing called normal school. And I think Normal was the name of the founder, but we always teased mom about that. We said who needs to go to school to be normal, mom, and she would look at us and say, you do. So, she was a lifelong learner.

So, to continue with this tale, she then got her—in those days you went to normal school and you became—you got a teacher's certificate. And of course

we're very short of teachers in the '40s and '50s. There were—the baby boom was beginning and not a supply of teachers out there, and she got a job teaching in a rural school and she was teaching, essentially, the whole—you know, all the grades. We talk about class sizes. The class sizes in the—she went from Mill Creek, it was called, near—north of Oakville, in that area, to Thunder Creek; the second year in—north of Russell and then back to another school and so on and so on. I won't tell you all the country schools, but the challenges of running those schools with all those grades was enormous.

* (10:20)

And she often talked about the Christmas concert. The Christmas concert was a big deal in these country schools. You had to—the pressure was on to have everybody's child in something. Everybody had to be in one of the pageants or the, you know, those recitations or songs or something. Every child had to be in that concert, and the whole school was dedicated to the preparation of those concerts. And it was onerous—sorry—

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, but the member's time has expired.

Ms. Fontaine: Please continue.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Chair, you're getting very proficient at this job, I notice.

Anyway, to—not to give you all unnecessary detail, but just having taught for a few years, I get to the point, I guess, of how my mother and father met. My dad was a farm boy. And that farm had its century celebration a few years ago, and his grandfather started it—very small farm, also modest financial circumstances.

And he and his brother were having an outing in Portage la Prairie, and it was 15 miles away from their farm, a big deal in the 1950s, and Mom was walking down the street with a girlfriend and my dad and my uncle drove by in their truck, and they—then they drove by again. Then they drove by again. I think it might be borderline harassment today, but in—at that time, they finally met the eyes of the young women, pulled over, and it turned out there was a dance that night, and that was the day they met.

So going on from there, then, of course, two years later they're married and two years later a scrawny son emerges and a couple more kids, and Mom had a time away from teaching. But because

the farm was struggling, she needed to return to teaching, and something my little brother resented.

And so—sorry—there were—they—she shared with me one time she was at a UCW, the United Church, one of those big organizations—much of it remains, but in rural Manitoba—a big collegial thing for women, you know; it's a social chance to get together, share ideas and so on.

And she shared with me she went to a meeting, would have been about 1960. She had returned to teach because we needed the money. And a couple of the women cornered her at the meeting and said, you know, Anne, it's not right; what you're doing is not right. And she said, how do you mean? They said, it's not right that a woman should have children and be working. Yes, it's not right that a woman should be trying to raise children and work at the same time. I said, what did you say, Mom? She said I didn't have the heart to tell them, dear; I've been doing it since I was 12. Right? You know, so her inspiration to us—we often talk about Mom now. As kids we didn't realize, you know, just kids—didn't realize. But all three of her kids are, you know, have many of those qualities.

And I don't mean to sell my father short in this, you know. He—Dad came from polio. He had polio when he was 12. He had to actually learn how to walk again. So if you want to know my heart for people who live with disabilities, who struggle, you know where I come from a little better now. This is, to me, regardless of mandate letters, the role of government is to support vulnerable people. That is the best definition of the best governments, in my estimation.

Ms. Fontaine: How old were your parents when they met, and how long were they married for?

Mr. Pallister: So, in '52—well, they met in late '50 and they were married in '52. My—I got into the insurance business in 1980, and my mom wanted to help me, so she said, well, I need some insurance. She said—she sold me on her needing insurance. Until that time, I never knew how old my mother was. It was always a secret, and I found out why when we filled out the form. She's actually three years older than my dad, and she never shared that with anybody. And I'm telling you now that she's passed, and I think she'd be okay with that, but that was our secret, of course.

They—so they were married in 1952. My dad passed in—I was elected in 1992; dad passed in '93,

just before their 40th anniversary. And mom got ripped off because she had taught all those years and she had retired the year before and then, with real hopes that they would get some travelling and do some things together, and then lost her husband the year after.

So she went on. She continued to volunteer. She suffered from arthritis—debilitating arthritis. She was in a wheelchair the last 15, 16 years of her life. But we would occasionally get calls from people warning us that she shouldn't be out and about with that wheelchair so much, you know. She never stopped being active. And though her health deteriorated, she continued to take a tremendous interest in her family, continually looking for signs of improvement in her middle-aged son.

She always was a teacher, always encouraging study, learning, giving gifts—teaching gifts. Her last night that she passed—the night before she passed, technically, she went to my niece's graduation.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I say miigwech to the First Minister for sharing that background. As a mom to two sons who I absolutely obsess over and love my sons more than anything, it's always nice to see sons who love their mom and reflect fondly on the teachings and the unconditional love that mothers give their children. And so I just want to honour that and I want to honour the spirit in which it was shared with us, and I say miigwech for that.

I'll use this opportunity just to share a little bit with the First Minister in respect of my own background, and I share it in respect of, you know, oftentimes individuals will say to me over the years, or I'll hear people say about me, oh, she's so passionate about women and the work that she does. And I know that it's meant to be a compliment, but in some respects, I actually don't like when people say that because the way that I talk about, you know, women's issues and the realities that, you know, women face, it is— and the spirit in which it's done, it is actually merely a reflection of, again, as I stated earlier, the critical state that many women and young girls are—that face every day.

* (10:30)

And it is borne out of my own experiences. And so, you know, you talk about your grandmother. I talk about my grandmother and I talk about my great-grandmother. My great-grandmother was Louise Spence. She had 18 children in the Sagkeeng First Nation. The first of those 18 is Agnes Fontaine,

who is actually the mother to Phil Fontaine, and the baby of the 18 is my grandmother Nora Fontaine, and we're not entirely sure how this happened but Agnes Fontaine actually had 12 children and then her partner passed. And my grandmother was in residential school and somehow—and she's too old now; she's not entirely sure how it happened—but they were able to pull her out, and they pulled her out at grade 3 to help raise Phil and his brothers and sisters. And so the family is incredibly close. There's lots and lots of Fontaines, like it's crazy how many Fontaines there are.

My grandmother went on to have five children, one of which is my mom. She is the second youngest. My grandmother was sexually abused as a young girl. When she married my grandfather, Henry Charles Fontaine, which I shared in my inaugural speech, was a POW in the Second World War, and when he came back from the war he was disenfranchised, right? Most people know that in this country if you were First Nations and you went into the war you became disenfranchised. You lost your status, and so when he married my grandmother, they were actually among the first families to leave the reserve and move to the North End, and they had their children.

My mom was also sexually abused. Early on my mom was raped at the age of 12, and then very soon after that at the age of 13 my mom, like many individuals who faced such horrible trauma, decided to try and escape that and so she ran away at the age of 13, and, you know, there's obviously predators out there and from the age of 13 was sexually exploited all across Canada. And so when she met my dad—*[interjection]* Yes, continue? So when she met my dad, she was very young; she was about 16. I think she got pregnant with me when she was 17. That relationship didn't continue for very long and my whole childhood was one of abuse, both physical and mental and sexual, but it also was growing up.

Probably at the age of four my mom started to leave me alone because, of course, she was sexually exploited all across Winnipeg, and so pretty much from the time I was four, I've raised myself, and I saw very intimately the abuse that indigenous women go through. I grew up in that abuse.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave of the committee to have the member from St. Johns continue until she's finished instead of interrupting her?

An Honourable Member: Absolutely.

Ms. Fontaine: So you see it within your own family, you know, my grandmother, my mother. In fact, my mom shared a story with me once about, you know, she was out and had been, you know, solicited by this individual who actually ended up almost killing her that night. And I always think about this story because my mom—if you knew my mom, she was incredibly beautiful. She was so beautiful; I mean, men would just stop and stare at her and she was so—she was the antithesis to me. I'm, you know, aggressive and I demand my space, and my mom was like just a little—she was just a fragile woman and like a child because, you know, her—she had this arrested development.

And when I think back about her, it is in the context of that whole colonial context in which indigenous women live. So ultimately—fast forward, blah, blah, blah—my mom ended up—was addicted to heroin and a myriad of other drugs and actually spent the last 11 years of her life on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and she actually died of a heroin overdose in the bathroom of a SkyTrain. And she died alone; she died on the floor of a bathroom.

The work that I do is firmly situated within this reality. My mom's story or my grandmother's story is only one of thousands of indigenous women and girls that, to no fault of their own, are pushed and pulled within a myriad of mechanisms in just trying to survive.

So when I ask, you know, when I ask the First Minister, you know, what is his vision and his, you know, what I construct as a sacred responsibility towards women in Manitoba—you know, in particular, indigenous women—so that he better understands, it is because I've lived through that. And I have survived that. And there are a myriad of other indigenous women that have survived it. But there are a myriad of other—there are thousands of other women that have not survived it. And not only have they not survived it, their last moments were immersed in just savage violence that is perpetrated against their bodies, their minds and their spirits.

So I want the First Minister to understand that for me it is very personal but, more importantly, it is something that I understand my role and responsibility as somebody who has survived everything that I have survived, to be that voice for women that do not have that voice.

So I hope that, you know, and I hope that everybody is okay with what I've attempted to do

with the First Minister, is just for you and I to better understand each other, my perspective and your perspective. And so I will leave it at that.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you. That's—that, to me, that's eloquent and honest, and I really appreciate the sincerity and the openness that you demonstrated this morning. And I'm looking forward to, in a better venue, getting to know, you know, all of our new members better, frankly. We have the most new members of the Legislature, I think, in a long, long time. And I think that the more that we can get to know one another and learn from one another, the better job we're going to do.

I remember when I first came to the Legislature and about the same length of time that, you know, you've served here. You come with much more personal experience and connection to the processes than I did. I was a small-business person and a community volunteer who didn't—had been in this place when I think I was in school trip once when I was in grade 9 or something, right. That was it.

But, you know, when I came, it was in '92. There was much to learn, as there always is—it's a lifelong thing, right—but I remember that the, you know, the normal manner of doing business in our Legislature that we see quite frequently, lots of yelling and aggressive behaviour. And I engaged in that. I'm not proud of that. But it was the culture in the building and some days it descends to that now. And I'm not—I'm no saint and I'm not pretending to be one.

But I've enjoyed occasional sharing of personal points of view with the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) in our experience over the previous three years very much. I think this is the thing I would like to see more of in our provincial Legislature.

Federally, I've worked with others to try to make sure that formats like this, committees, were much less partisan. There are times of partisanship, of course, in this job. But they don't have to exclude times of non-partisanship. And so we can do both. I think that's important to understand.

*(10:40)

When I was in opposition for a time in Ottawa, one of the responsibilities I had was to be the critic for government-run enterprise, Crown corporation, that type of thing—Canada Post and the Royal Canadian Mint and these types of things. And, of course, the federal Liberal government had made it—made those places a home for retired politicians in

some respects, and so I was on that vein of questioning in QP, a fellow named John McCallum—not our Manitoba John McCallum, of course, but John McCallum, a former banker and minister now in the federal government, and peppering him with questions and—on a daily—almost daily basis.

Then, when we took over as government, I became the chair of the Finance committee, and who was sitting on the Finance committee as the lead Finance critic for the new opposition but John McCallum. And as we're travelling around the country doing our hearings and the consultations that the committee does—did until this year, we stopped one night as a group to have supper together. It was fun, and I caught John looking at me, and whether it was because it was his—you know, he was just more relaxed—I'm not sure, but he looked at me and he said, I just don't believe you. And I said, I'm sorry; what do you mean? And he says, you're so fair. I said, well, John, I'm the chair of the committee. You must be fair, right? You must be fair. It was a different role when I was the opposition critic. I think, sometimes, in the critic—with the critic cloak on, we get captivated by it and forget about the benefits of discussions like this and forget about the benefits of openness.

A moment for me that opened the door to that greater openness was when my dad passed and I remember very sincere offers of condolence, not just from my colleagues at that time but also from the people in the NDP caucus, in particular, who expressed heartfelt sympathies. At a time of vulnerability, especially when people need support, it's an important thing to do that, to give that support, and I think the member has given all committee members some very good insights that are worth reflecting upon.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech again. Okay, well, let's get down to the nitty-gritty. So I'd like to know from the First Minister who is advising him on issues facing Muslim women in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: I would say, in the first instance, that I'm going to be placing, in this learning curve time that we're all in, a tremendous amount of faith and hope in people in—within the government service who have spent a good long time addressing issues of importance, not solely to Muslim women but to women generally, and to those issues which pertain not solely to women but, of course, to all of us. And so that would be, I guess, in the early days where I'm going for research, counsel, guidance.

In addition, we have a group of newly elected members of the Legislature. I've asked the member and others, not solely of our party, to also be forthcoming with suggestions, ideas. I'm very—I'm not ever going to be one who pretends to have all the answers, but I do have a great interest and willingness in asking the questions, and my hope would be that there are mechanisms we can explore together as people who care about issues very much. That's why we're—we chose this walk of life, I think, because we want to make a difference, because we believe in not just the process but we believe in the possibility of better outcomes; that's why we got involved. And my belief has always been that people—well, there's an adage my grandmothers used to use that was, if you and I trade a dollar, we still just have one, but if we trade an idea, we each have two.

Ms. Fontaine: I was going to ask the First Minister, line by line, each question, but let's—I'm just going to ask it all at once.

So I had asked who would be advising you on Muslim women. I'm going to ask: Who will be advising you on women with disabilities? Who will be advising you on women—indigenous women? Who will be advising you in respect of women within the LGBTTQ community? Who will be advising you in respect of newcomer women? And then who would be advising you in respect of other ethnicities of women?

Mr. Pallister: I'll just share some of the perspectives that we have. I think that the goal, the larger goal, is to see, within government—and we'll talk about the human resource side for a minute, and not so much the programming side, but on the HR side, needs to represent the genuine face of the province of Manitoba. So that is a stated goal.

More can always be done, but there are some examples where this is happening. The deputy ministers under our government, now, are approximately half women, eight of 17, just about 2015, and I want to summon up Justin Trudeau's reference there in terms of the number of female deputy ministers, but also in terms of recognition that diversity is a compelling aspect of achieving excellence in the civil service; that's an ongoing challenge.

There's—the Civil Service Commission is charged with that responsibility in terms of employment equity obligations. In terms of achieving those, obviously there are different aspects to

that recruitment, of course. To demonstrate the movement towards or the achievement of that goal, recruitment is an essential aspect in terms of enhancing skills within the civil service to offer opportunities for advancement too.

* (10:50)

It's not enough to say, you know, as in the past, you know, half the—half our employees are women when they were all doing the entry-level jobs and the men were doing all the senior executive jobs. So there's a training aspect to this, as well, that's, I think, a component.

And I think also in respect of retention strategies, too, having a little bit of experience with my small-business experiences, I know that retention of employees is a critical part. It's said in a lot of the business training materials that the hardest part of running a small business is HR, and I think it's no different within government. And retention of the people that you recruit is obviously a critical aspect as well. There is an HR deputy minister's committee that looks at diversity issues and, on an ongoing basis, continues to address the advancement of minorities within the civil service, the male-female balance within the civil service, as well, the LGBT components. So there are various initiatives to—and I need to learn more about them, as well, of course. In this last few weeks, I've—well, I've been here most of the time, I think.

Ms. Fontaine: So I did talk about who was advising you but I'm going to get back to that because I just want to follow up in respect of your answer just now—or the First Minister's answer.

So, out of the eight DMs that are women, how many are indigenous, how many are Muslim, how many are women with disabilities and how many are of Euro-Canadian descent?

Mr. Pallister: Thanks for raising the question. I'll just—I'll offer up, too, that when the Civil Service Commission comes into Estimates, I think they'd be better able to give sufficient detail than I can. But I can say that we have increased, in our government, increased the number of indigenous deputy ministers, but it's now at three of the 17. And—but I should also mention that it—there are some privacy aspects of—I'm not a privacy lawyer, so it would be the right of those people to declare their—I don't know what the right word is, their ethnicity or race, in respect of the question the member's asking. I don't think I can answer adequately, I guess, until I know more about

the privacy. I don't want to say something which I shouldn't say about a person.

There, certainly—we're just talking right now about deputy ministers but, again, if you wanted more detail, Mr. Chair, I would—I'd suggest when we get to the Civil Service Commission, they'd be able to provide better breakdown than I can today.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, miigwech for that.

So I do just want to either seek clarification or point out that the three deputy ministers—indigenous deputy ministers—were there previous to—okay.

So I want to get back to my first question in respect of who will be advising you in respect of Muslim women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, women within the LGBTTTQ, newcomer women and other women, I suppose.

Mr. Pallister: Well, perhaps I could—I think I've endeavoured to address, in part, the question the member raises.

I'm going to go to some specific initiatives now and maybe that'll help. We're looking at three major initiatives—several, but three major, inclusive exercises in what I call deliberative democracy. One of them is a performance review of government programs; the other is a regulatory review; and the third is a sustainable health-care review.

In each of these processes, they are to be more clearly—as we talked about at another sitting—they are to be more clearly defined. But I appreciate the member's interventions because it reminds all of us of the importance of inclusion in these exercises, something that I have as a general goal, but something that I am very interested in making sure is achieved in reality—not just in pronouncements or in theory, but in reality.

And, so, as the member highlights certain groups that are in the minority in the Manitoba population, it would be very important for me and, I think, for all Manitobans, to make sure that the perspectives of groups she mentioned, and many others she did not yet mention, are included in the consultative process, that they are heard.

I'm very open to that, and I want to make sure that the processes that we design for outreach are effective at opening up those channels of input so that people can be heard. So the member asked who's advising me. I guess, in a general sense, I would say, you know, Manitobans are, but it's important to make sure there's a structure where they can, and I'm very

open to making sure—and if the member has ideas on how we do that better, I am interested in hearing them, because I think—I have seen, in the past—for example, actually, with the previous administration on things like prebudget consultations where it was, largely, an exercise in going out with an opinion so people could ratify the opinion. And, too often, that—to me, is—that's not representative of a genuine attempt at consultation. That's not deliberative democracy as it was envisioned by people in the, you know, in Norman times, or Greek times when democracy was in its infancy.

I think the real kind of consultation lets people come and share, as we've done today, and I think as a positive thing.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

Just so I have a little bit more clarity, would the First Minister mind just advising me in respect of the performance, regulatory and sustainable reviews—exactly what each and every one of those are and what they entail.

Mr. Pallister: I can't do that, because I don't know yet. I know the general goals and outcomes that I'd like to see. I know the participation I would like to see, but I don't presume to have the exact detail. That's why I offered to the member a moment ago, suggestions are welcome.

But I do think—and I do think we, all of us, share the desire to get it right. You know, using the regulatory review as an example of that, something I had some experience in, you know, 20 years ago in an exercise that I co-chaired. You know, I learned a lot from that, as we do from our experiences, and I learned what—some things that will work, some that didn't work as well. So I learned from that.

* (11:00)

We also have examples throughout the country now that other provinces have served up for us of their experiences; some finding progress, finding improvements to the system, better outcomes, less time wastage for people involved in the civil service and in small and medium businesses. So we can learn from each of those.

So right now what we're doing, it's in the developmental stages, I guess, is the honest answer. We're looking at how we can take the best practices of these other jurisdictions and use them to effectively have the best process possible.

But I am ambitious in respect of this. I want the process to be one where people feel safe in sharing their perspectives, sharing their views, sharing their ideas. And part of this is why I haven't—it was an issue a couple weeks ago. You might—the member might remember about saying some of this has to be private, because there are people who, for whatever reason, may feel that they don't want their names in those reports and—within the civil service or elsewhere, for that matter—and so I'm cognizant that if those assurances aren't given, some Manitobans would be reluctant to be part of these kinds of processes.

I know that Don Drummond in Ontario headed up a process commissioned by the Liberal government there a few years ago now, and one of the areas he felt that could have been better was in getting the perspectives of people who work within government, in particular at the front line of government. And so we want to learn from that and make sure that everyone feels confident that if they give their input there are no repercussions, negative repercussions, for them in the workplace or in any respect.

Ms. Fontaine: Can the First Minister advise how these reviews will ensure that there's a gendered lens, and obviously a racial lens, as well, just applied to it?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think I've touched on this a little bit. I think the participation and the outreach in terms of the participation, if that's what the member's referring to, I think is very important. I think there's—it's critical that we establish the parameters for discussion more clearly than I am able to do today so that those who have perspectives are ready to share them. But it's also critical we do the outreach necessary to make sure that people know they have that opportunity. In the absence of that knowledge, you won't get those perspectives.

So I think it's important to gather a broad range of perspectives, that is the intention, and to encourage people to participate as best we can—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chair, if I could, I think there's a member disrupting the committee's discussions. Should I name him, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairperson: That's okay.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

Earlier when I had asked you who would be—or earlier when I asked the First Minister who would be advising him in respect of the myriad of diversity of

women in Manitoba, the First Minister had indicated that it would be within government services.

Would the First Minister be so kind as to explain precisely those government services that he would be seeking out that advice?

Mr. Pallister: I think I would just answer the question this way, that there—I value diversity. I want a government that does, I want our services to reflect that, I want our processes to reflect that. I value excellence. I think it's well understood that in—certainly it is in the civil service literature that I've perused and in the growing business research and business literature as well, that a diverse workplace is a healthier workplace. And so these are goals that we all share, but I think as far as the specifics of staffing is concerned, I think I would go back to—my suggestion, I think, is that for the detail—I could give global—we could find a global number. But I think the civil service would—commission would be able to provide in their Estimates more of the specific detail the member might be looking for, like by department and departmental position, that type of thing.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm not looking for a specific, you know, number. I'm not—I—what I'm trying to get at, and what I'm trying to gather, is who will it be, who will be advising you on these issues. And I believe that you've said it today or—who knows; everything's a blur now with all of these Estimates. But, quite obviously, we don't know everything. And, clearly, you know, men don't understand women's issues or the vast, diverse amount of issues, as women do, right? That's what I'm saying. I know that there's a general sense.

What I'm trying to get at is: Who will be advising you on these women's issues? And when I had asked that question previous to the First Minister, you had said—or the First Minister had said that he would be receiving that advice from within government service. So I'm just trying to seek out and understand where that advice in respect of the direction for Manitoba women will be coming from and to be more specific.

So not on the numbers. I'm just trying to figure out where that advice will be coming from because that advice that's provided to the First Minister from within government service, as the First Minister indicated, has a fundamental impact on the lives of women. It informs government policy. It informs government bills, it informs 'government'—government programs, and so it has a very tangible effect on the lives of women. And so my question is: Where is the

First Minister getting that information and that advice in respect of all of those things?

* (11:10)

Mr. Pallister: Miigwech for the question. I think I've tried to—I don't want it to be misrepresented, and I know the member didn't intend to, but that I would only be getting advice from the civil service because, of course, we've spent some time talking about some other processes which would be outreach, you know, that would be looking more broadly. And I guess I tried to address, I think, the concern the member has about advice by referencing those processes, because I believe that and I know that members of our public service don't think they have all the answers either.

So it's—this is why I emphasize this outreach and the processes of outreach, because I've seen them work. I know that many members have, in their lives, seen them work. When we reach out and ask for advice, you can get it.

I remember back in the '90s when I was the minister in charge of Government Services, which my friends joked was, actually, I was the minister of an oxymoron, they said, my friends, a contradiction in terms. I said no, it's not at all, because I know so many people within government that want to do a better job of seeing services delivered to people who need them, and I don't agree.

And then I engaged in an outreach effort, and we put out comment boxes in various places, and it sounds funny, I guess, but I thought it was a useful exercise. We got a lot of gum wrappers, but we also got some really good suggestions from people.

I don't start with the—I'll just allude to one thing the member said. I don't start with the assumption that only women are qualified in respect of these things either, anymore than I would say that only men are qualified in respect of other advisory categories. I was embraced by women as I joined with them in the cause of fighting for women's rights, something we did better together, I think, than we could have done alone or separately. And so I always believe that it's important to try to involve others in a cause that is a noble one, right? So I wouldn't want to leave the impression that I'm—you know, I'm trying to get a certain number of women involved so I can say I've got a certain number of women involved or something like that. That's not at all what I mean.

And I'll go back to the statement earlier about deputy ministers. Yes, symbolism matters; it does,

but it's important when I say half the deputy ministers are female that we understand that they're equally skilled, gifted people, dedicated people, to any man. These roles are roles they're undertaking not solely because they're women; they weren't given these roles because they were women. They were given these roles because they're capable, competent and caring people. And so I recognize and I understand better, and I hope the member understands better my background, and I understand a little bit more too about hers.

And I recognize the—and I don't—and I wanted to go back to an earlier comment she made about passion. I admire passion in people. I think it's a tremendous quality. I will not—I would hope the member would never feel that it was a negative to be passionate about an issue. I think that's a tremendous quality in people.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I'd like to just follow up in respect of the First Minister's last comment in respect of passion, and when I had spoken about it in—and absolutely, I think that, you know, passion and dedication for any issue is what propels and motivates people, absolutely.

In the context in which it's been said about me, what I meant was is that often it's used in respect of describing a woman so that in some respects it's dismissive of what women say, as if what women say—well, she's just—she's so passionate about her issue. So, in some respects, it's been said and it's been meant as almost a dismissive comment. That's all I was referring to.

So I just want to get back in respect of—and I'm superpleased that the First Minister spoke about outreach, because the first initial comment or question that I had posed in respect of where was that advice coming from, the only thing that the First Minister had said at that time was, from within government service. So I know that now the First Minister just referred to outreach. Beautiful, I think that that's beautiful.

So my question to the First Minister is, specifically, where in the community, and does he—and does the First Minister have any plans to meet with the vast women associations in Manitoba and indigenous social service organizations that work with women? Will the First Minister be seeking out those relationships with those organizations and seeking their advice and their recommendations and their vision in respect of their particular women?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, if the official opposition will ever let me out of Estimates, that's something that's high on my list of things to do.

I and my ministers, of course, are looking for outreach opportunities and are ambitious about that. There have been a number of those undertaken already. One of my—actually, my first day—first meeting after the election was with Grand Chief Sheila North Wilson and had wonderful sharing of ideas and thoughts with her, so I continue to be very open and very interested in those things.

I would say, though, in terms of the passion issue as well, I've—as—I'm not one who's ever thought that that should be used as a criticism, I—and I wanted to mention—and it's certainly not to me a quality that one should use as criticism for anyone.

Two of the people I've met that are tremendously passionate that come to mind, Hugh Segal on Mincome, on the minimum income thing, it's just like a dog on a bone. The guy is just—absolutely believes so strongly in this and he's been pushing for some time, as the member knows, for advances on this concept, eh? And Gerry St. Germain, who's a senator, co-wrote a report called A Hard Bed to Lie In about matrimonial property rights for indigenous. Gerry is Metis, but a tremendously passionate person and who works so, so very hard to reach out, to gather information, to compile evidence, to help show people how important this issue was to be addressed, and that it was not being addressed.

And women were caught in this—call it a no-man's land, almost, you know, between provincial and federal legislation, neither of which was protecting them. And he did so much outreach and much of it in partnership, of course, with indigenous women, First Nations women, on reserve and off, frankly because many had left their communities with nothing; they had lost everything they had and they had stories that needed to be heard. And you want to meet passionate people, you're going to meet people who care, I think, and that's an admirable quality.

Ms. Fontaine: As I'm sure the First Minister can appreciate, there are numerous questions I would like to pose, which I will get back to.

I would like to give my sister, the member from Kewatinook, some time today, so I will just delve into the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

And so, just so that the First Minister and I are getting to know each other a little bit more, you know, the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls is something that I've been personally working on for the last 18 years. It is something that is literally something that I do in a variety of different contexts almost every single day. From the first time that I—from when I wake up, there are emails or Facebook messages from families across the country. And so, I want to start my line of questioning in respect of where will the First Minister be getting his advice and recommendations in respect of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in Manitoba.

* (11:20)

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I think the answer would be the same as was offered previously. There—when I first responded in respect of the member's question about where I would get advice, I was working on the assumption she was asking about government-related programs. That's why I said within government, so I just wanted to be clear on that.

On the issues around murdered and missing women, they're very—and I congratulate the member for her long involvement in this struggle. This is a deeply personal issue for a great many Canadians, and for me it is as well. And in the same week that Jennifer Catcheway went missing and we were searching in Portage la Prairie, another young woman as well disappeared, named Amber McFarland. And Amber's parents are—live in the house that was built by John Pallister, the house I was raised in. Amber slept in the same bedroom.

And talking with families is heart-wrenching, but it is important to understand the level of pain that they feel. And the level of desire for answers and for action is so, so high, and I get that. And, we—you know, our party supported the government's call on this, adopted a resolution in support three years ago, will continue to work with the federal government to see positive outcomes and a process that works.

At the same time, it's important—and the member's already alluded to it in different ways—it's important to make progress while we are studying. These things can't be—one can't be used as a deferral of action on the other side, as the member well knows. So these are national issues of importance. I was—backing up a few years, I was proud to be in the House of Commons when the Prime Minister rose and offered the apology on residential schools. This

is a—some said—a gesture, I think an important one to make. I think this is an exercise that can have beyond good healing opportunities—those are important; those are very important—but, beyond that, can also have good outcomes in respect of research and form intelligent, constructive action and progress.

Ms. Fontaine: So miigwech for that.

I'm sure that the First Minister knows, quite obviously, that—perhaps not the exact date—but in November of 2010, I was appointed as the special adviser on Aboriginal women's issues for the Aboriginal Issues Committee of Cabinet.

And up until, perhaps, early last August, my position—which, as I'm sure the First Minister knows, was an order-in-council—was the only position of its kind across Canada. And it developed in result of the former government's commitment to the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. And I know that I don't need to remind the First Minister that, in fact, the former minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Eric Robison, was also very committed to this issue and, in fact, was one of the first indigenous men, and one of the first elected officials that stood by the Helen Betty Osborne family in respect of their lobbying to get justice.

So we know that it's been—in this House, it's been a long issue. And so, my role and responsibility as the special adviser on aboriginal women's issues was multi-faceted, but one of the things that I was charged with doing almost immediately when I came on was developing a provincial strategy. And, so, for many, many years, Manitoba was actually the only province or territory that actually had a bona fide strategy on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. And the way I had constructed the strategies was that, you know, it was phase 1, and then we went into phase 2 and phase 3, and I can share with the First Minister the myriad of work that we did in each of those phases.

And—for instance, in phase 1, and I know that everybody around the table would know that when you're travelling westbound on Portage and you're coming under the CP Rail, you'll see that mural. That was actually just one component of phase 1. That phase 1 was really about deconstructing the way indigenous women—MMIWG—missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, the way they are constructed within a broader discourse and societal views. And it's something that indigenous women and families have been doing for many, many years.

But part of that was, kind of, deconstructing, and that ensuring that people understood that, you know, these are our daughters and our sisters and our mothers, and I always share—every opportunity that I have—that, in fact, Manitoba has one of the oldest women to have ever been raped and murdered. Her name is Beatrice Sinclair. She was 69. She was raped and murdered and thrown under a bridge, and so, you know, understanding that there are grandmothers, as well, you know.

In that first phase, we had the first ever provincial summit on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls which brought all the stakeholders, so social service agencies, the RCMP, the WPS, you know, DOPS along with families and indigenous women that had been working on this issue. And out of there came a variety of recommendations.

Also in phase 1, we went into Wiping Away the Tears, which is an annual gathering that is specifically for families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and, in fact, that first year that I came on, the first WATT, as we call it—Wiping Away the Tears, hosted about 43 family members, and by the time I left, which was—well, I guess just a little while ago, but our last WATT we actually hosted a national families gathering. We brought families in from across the country, every province and territory, and we had over 250 participants from across the country.

I know I've, like, 30 seconds left. Unless I can get leave to go on?

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Ms. Fontaine: Thanks, miigwech.

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me. Is it the will of the committee to give the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) leave to continue? *[Agreed]*

Continue.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech. So, just prior to the writ falling—or, you know, we were in phase 4 of our strategy. And I will share with the First Minister that, again, across the province and territory we were the only one with a strategy. There were other provinces and territories that, of course, are doing work, but it wasn't a bona fide strategy and, in fact, we know that Ontario, and I'm sure that everybody has seen this, have been really, you know, substantially

committing dollars to violence against indigenous women and girls.

So, there—in this, and in all of that, my primary role that I worked almost 24/7 was establishing those relationships with families, which, of course, I came into the position having already had many of those relationships.

But, recognizing the need for families to have someone within government that could help navigate them through the myriad of different systems—and I'm sure that I don't need to share with the First Minister how difficult it is for families in the midst of such trauma, then, to navigate through policing or health or judicial or CFS systems. And that is the reality, is that families—not only are they dealing with this just enormous amount of trauma. Families, like many indigenous people, are still dealing with all of the colonial legacies, right?

* (11:30)

And so it's not as if family—MMIWG families are only dealing with, you know, the loss or the disappearance of their daughter or their sister or their mother. They're dealing with literally not even having enough food to eat. They're dealing with, you know, the manifestations of their trauma through addictions or violence.

And so, when I ask the First Minister in respect of who will be advising, it is because it is such a complex situation that families find themselves daily. However, what's happened, as the First Minister knows, we are in the process of now going through a national inquiry. We all know around the table that it is—it—within days of the federal government announcing what the structure, the mandate and the composition of the national inquiry will look like.

Families will need an enormous amount of support: emotional support, physical support, financial support to navigate through that. And they deserve that support to be able to have some semblance of justice and, if ever, some sense of closure.

So, all of that to say, you know, I ask the First Minister, in respect of what is the plan for his administration as we go through this process to ensure that MMIWG families are protected, 'represented' and obviously, quite obviously, included in everything that goes on.

Mr. Pallister: So what was phase 4? Was that the plan? Did the member develop a plan that is—that I

will be able to read that is left behind after her leaving that role? Is there something that can be reviewed? I haven't been briefed on any report or recommendations, but I'm very interested in learning more.

Ms. Fontaine: So, and miigwech for the question, so I think the other thing that I need to preface it is that every phase that I had done with the provincial strategy was actually done in consultation with family and social services, so it's not like the member from St. Johns said, oh, I want to do this. I want to do this. I want to do that. In fact, that's the antithesis, right?

So phase 4, we were actually just in the process of starting to navigate because, of course, we're in a different system right now as we go forward in the national inquiry. Part of it was, you know, we had looked at—or we did—we hosted the second national Round Table on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Part of that development of phase 4 was hosting a national Justice Practitioners' Summit, which got recommendations from policing, from justice, a myriad of different things. So these were mechanisms that we were putting in place in preparation for the national inquiry, which included that sixth annual Wiping Away the Tears to solidify the support among MMIWG families.

Mr. Pallister: So sorry to keep questioning. I know this is supposed to go the other way but—so there would be a report or some type of structural recommendations that's been established in respect of where this would dovetail with the—maybe that's part of it, how this works best in combination with the inquiry, something that I—we could review?

Ms. Fontaine: We were literally in the process of developing that, right, because we don't know what the federal government is coming up with and what their mandate, structure and composition will look like. But what I can share with the First Minister is that, you know, all of that, to say that, across the country, Manitoba is looked at as a leader in respect of MMIWG, particularly in the work that we did with families. And in that context, the families that we have here in Manitoba have so much agency and are so active and are so engaged in really, you know, lobbying and developing that justice for their loved ones,

And so what I would suggest to the First Minister is that there is a core 'corhort' of MMIWG families that would be more than willing, once we understand what the national inquiry is going to look

like, to work in developing the response and the needs to move through that process in the national inquiry.

Mr. Pallister: I'm—I appreciate the comments of the member and her passion around the issue, of course. And I'm hopeful that I'll have a chance, and have not yet, to review the—sort of the—to get up to a certain level of understanding of the—the member's given an overview of the work, but to get an overview is good; it's a starting point, but to actually get the data and the information and the contact information and so on and so forth.

So I'm hoping that I'd be able to get that from departmental officials and have a review of it, and I'd be better able to, you know, have an exchange of ideas with the member than I can today.

Ms. Fontaine: So what I also want to share with the First Minister is that, in preparation to the—for the national inquiry—so not only are, you know, MMIWG families in Manitoba super active and engaged along with indigenous women and indigenous organizations that are super engaged in this issue, there really is this movement across Canada to—from MMIWG families and sister organizations and indigenous leadership—to make sure that the national inquiry is executed in the best way, in some semblance, for families.

And so what I want to share with the First Minister to put this in perspective in its historical importance is that, if you imagine that—in fact, I'll use Jennifer Catchway. In fact, I've worked with Jennifer Catchway's families from the very beginning. In fact, they had called me when the Portage RCMP had—they weren't having a lot of luck with them. At that time, I was the director of justice for the Southern Chiefs' Organization. So, literally, by day two, I was working with the family. And literally, tomorrow, I attend their annual fundraising barbecue in Portage la Prairie that they have every year.

Imagine that you're Bernice and Wilfred Catchway and your beloved daughter, who's just turned 18—still, there's nothing. And I suspect that most—and I would hope that most people around the table, including the First Minister, would know that Bernice and Wilfred, every spring and fall, go—they go searching for their daughter. And they search dumps and they search bush, they search rivers, they search everywhere. And there's no closure for Bernice and Wilfred. It's not as if, one day, you can

just turn it off. Their daughter is not home. They don't know what happened to their daughter.

This national inquiry, while it will not bring their daughter home and, perhaps, will not give them the information that will give them any sense of closure, it is a fundamental opportunity to have Jennifer's name and their journey as part of our historical record, all of us as Canadians. And so provinces and territories have such a vital role to play in that. And there are legal—indigenous legal scholars who have produced a document which I will get for the First Minister's office in respect to the legal frameworks that provinces and territories have to put in place in order to fully participate and co-operate with the national inquiry, which I remind everybody, again, may be the only opportunity that some families will ever have any semblance of justice.

So my question to the First Minister is: Is this First Minister committed to Manitoba fully participating and co-operating with the national inquiry?

* (11:40)

Mr. Pallister: Absolutely. I went walking, like many from around the province, not exclusively Portage la Prairie, in search of both these young women. And it was a tremendous shock, I think, to the families, but also to the community and to the people who know these families, which are many, as you know—as the member knows.

And to have Amber and Jennifer, you know, go missing within literally hours of one another, in a horrible way, actually served to bring together indigenous and non-indigenous people in a common cause better than so many other tragedies would, because it just showed that it doesn't matter, you know; it's a loved one that's missing. People in those walks commented to one another, and still do, that they were united, united in the pursuit of answers.

And the family is, I don't think haunted is too strong a word, both families. It's—and they—they're, at the time, they're—where Amber was living is, like, a half a mile from Dakota Tipi. I mean, they're right down the road from each other, you know. I don't know if anybody's ever determined if they knew one another at all. I don't know if they did, if their relationships were ever established between the two of them. But their families certainly know each other now. And for Scott and Lori McFarland, it's, like for Bernice and Wilfred, it's just one of those things that will—well, I guess I shouldn't say will never be

resolved, I shouldn't say that. I guess there's an element of hope, and we should have that hope, you know.

But I would just—I want to just say, in respect of the—of these tragedies, that it had the effect of uniting people in a common pursuit of a common cause, which would be safety for all of us.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): I represent Kewatinook. It's comprised of 14 First Nations and two towns. Our population is largely indigenous. Indeed, the whole northern population of Manitoba is largely indigenous. The ridings of Kewatinook, Flin Flon, The Pas and Thompson comprise the North. And they're located in Manitoba.

May I hear you acknowledge that these indigenous people are therefore Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: I have no trouble acknowledging that fact.

And I want to congratulate, again, the member on her election to the Legislative Assembly and welcome her here and say that I am confident that she will bring her great capabilities admirably to her new role.

Ms. Klassen: Thank you.

The Manitoba Legislative people work on behalf of which Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: First, I guess I would ask the member which legislative people she was specifically referring to, but I think she wants me to say, and I should say, that everyone here, all MLAs, all staff, all of us, are charged with the responsibility of doing what we can for all Manitobans and never forgetting that we are part of a Canadian family and a global family in the process.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The Acting Chairperson (Sarah Guillemard): The honourable member for—Keewatinook.

Ms. Klassen: Just—thank you, Madam Chair; is that the title? Just think of Keewatin, your street, and then add the nook.

Okay, and so in the processes so far, I have always heard—you always mention what's best for taxpayers. And so I'm wondering: What is the income threshold one must achieve before they are able to pay taxes?

Mr. Pallister: First of all, I can't, with all respect, accept the preamble of the member. I most certainly do occasionally refer to Manitoba taxpayers, because they are in my mind and heart, but I recognize that many in our society who do not pay taxes are also deserving of consideration and quality services, protection and the various social supports that we can offer. Plus, if they do not yet pay taxes, they very likely would like the opportunity to do so. If they're young and healthy and able to work, they would like to work.

So I'll—I guess I'll leave it at that and let the member go on with her line of questioning.

Ms. Klassen: Thank you for the answer.

In regards to your—Premier's enterprise team, I'm wondering what per cent—or if there's going to be any—indigenous representation?

Mr. Pallister: I'm just trying to make sure that I get an answer to the member's previous question of when do you start paying taxes.

The basic personal exemption is less than \$10,000. I'm trying to remember the exact amount. And I—as if—as it—I'm in danger of jeopardizing my licence as a chartered financial consultant right now because I should know this off the top of my head, but I believe it's \$9,700, in that area, but I'll get the exact number for the member. But that threshold must be met with income before one pays taxes. The member knows, with our budget, that we've actually undertaken a very significant public policy initiative with this budget in beginning to index tax brackets to the rate of inflation, so that amount would go up, depending, of course, on the rate of inflation every year.

It's \$9,135. I stand corrected.

Ms. Klassen: Thank you. I appreciate that answer.

And, yes, you had answered where I was going was I wanted the acknowledgement that there are a lot of people that don't pay taxes, and it's simply not only the fact that we're exempt but also the fact that locally, down south here, well, we're stuck down here. We would if we could get the employment opportunities. But it took me to have a bachelor of commerce degree, honours, from the U of M to finally get my foot in the door in an interview.

And so, understanding that kind of frustrations, you know, for a regular person who only learns to read in grade 3, coming up through the First Nations system where we're direly underfunded, you know,

adds to the challenge of them trying to seek meaningful employment. I appreciate that.

So my next question: How does the Premier (Mr. Pallister) view his relationship with First Nation people? We hear Prime Minister Trudeau talking about nation-to-nation building. Is that what your goal is as well?

Mr. Pallister: I grew up next to Long Plain First Nation. Our farm's southwest of Portage la Prairie. My grandfather's name was Harry, Harry Pallister. And his good, good friend was the chief at the time of Long Plain. His name was Angus Merrick.

Angus Merrick was a true elder, as—and he was chief for many years, but he was always reaching out to build relationships among people, always believed that—and he got attacked for it, sometimes, by even friends of—young friends of mine who were very—I think, frankly, now they might respect Chief Merrick. My grandfather always called Mr. Merrick chief. Even 25 years after he was chief, he was always the chief, and Mr. Pallister, that's how they referred to one another. But he—Angus was criticized by young indigenous activists from Long Plain, sometimes, and called an apple Indian. I think it was rather harsh, misguided criticism, because what he would do is he would go out and try to explain indigenous culture, indigenous way of life, treaties, the history of the relationship and before. He was a tremendously knowledgeable man.

* (11:50)

My mother was a—*[interjection]*—a teacher, I know. Like—people like to tease me because I say that, but she was a teacher; what can I say. And she had—she asked Chief Merrick to come into the classroom on numerous occasions. He was glad to do it. And she introduced—through him— she introduced greater awareness and understanding of the shared lives that we live. So, when I'm asked by the member, what is my plan, well, my plan is to continue to build relationships of trust and mutual benefit with my neighbours.

And I see those opportunities in abundance in Manitoba, and we will do—we will endeavour to do our best to make sure that those relationships are built, but more than the relationship, the constructive progress that we can achieve together, I think, is the goal. And I think that Manitoba stands to benefit more from these types of initiatives than perhaps any other jurisdiction in the country.

Ms. Klassen: So I just came from a meeting from my four chiefs. I'm from the Island Lake area, so they provided me with a whole bunch of questions and so I'm trying to read through them as I go.

They're really worried about the east-side road, not that ESRA has been dismantled; that part, they're like, okay, fine, whatever. But they want to know, through MIT, they still want the road. That's their primary goal, is to get the road for the benefit of lowering our food costs, and they're fine with it being any department. You know, the goal is to get our groceries lower so that we can have healthier children.

And so I had asked a question in House: How many kilometres of that East Side Road will be built?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the—I'm glad to hear, and I did hear on my recent visit to your home community—I believe, St. Theresa Point, correct?—that they were not at all concerned there about our commitment that we ran on in the election to eliminate the unnecessary overlap in respect of the East Side Road Authority. That pleased me because I don't think that people should be made fearful by something that would eliminate waste and wasteful red tape and wasteful time-consuming processes. And so, I'm particularly pleased to hear that your community understands the benefits of that.

I think it's important to understand, and we had a fairly detailed discussion the other day about how we can do a better job of dealing with priority infrastructure. The member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) had some thoughts on that issue in respect of how we can do a better job with the dollars we spend. I think we're all concerned about that. We've seen too much money wasted in terms of the processes that have been utilized in the past, not exclusively in Manitoba, but in other jurisdictions; there's been lots of research on how things could be done better here and in other jurisdictions.

And we're going to be adopting practices to get better value for the money, to get more roads built and maybe fewer signs put up, to get consistent investment done year over year so that companies can participate in the bidding process, upgrade their personnel, their training, their capital investments, their staff, their gravel contracts and asphalt-production capabilities and various and sundry other things that will allow the private sector to do what it wants to do, which is to have a chance to profit and create jobs as a result.

This is the kind of model that we need to explore ambitiously in Manitoba, but it has not been the case that the government in the past managed infrastructure this way. They underinvested in infrastructure year over year, year after year. It was the only department, frankly, of government they didn't overspend in. And so what happened was then, the year before the election, there was a significant effort to prove to Manitobans that the PST was building roads. The government decided to throw out a number of contracts for road building and other infrastructure projects, not least of all bridges and some drainage initiatives, but virtually no repair or maintenance contracts. So what they had was a lot of ribbons and a lot of signs all in one year, which takes the form in many people's minds, including the people in the heavy construction industry, of an advertising campaign more than an infrastructure investment.

What we want to do is strategically invest in infrastructure systematically over time, and we think that this is the way to get a better value for the taxpayer dollar. It's also a way to get better value for the people who need to use those roads and bridges because in investing intelligently and properly, we can get more projects built.

Ms. Klassen: Thank you for the answer. I only have, like, five more minutes, so I'm going to go to the one on children.

There's a lot of children in care, and what we want to do is start to—like, we acknowledge that the CFS mandate was to remove a child from an unsafe home. We acknowledge that. But with—now, with over 10,000-plus kids in care, the system is broken. The CFS workers that I've spoken to personally, you know, my heart goes out to them because they were only enacting on what was the law. And so, now that there are other models being developed such as the one in Nelson House where the family gets the intervention as a unit without breaking up the family, what are your—has anybody broached the idea of customary care with your team, anyone on your team, and is that something you guys are looking into?

Mr. Pallister: I—first of all, I would suggest to the member these are great questions to ask in Estimates of that minister better than me. I don't claim tremendous background knowledge and I'm not as knowledgeable as the minister would be on this topic, but my understanding is that customary-care avenues are being explored, yes. I know a little bit

about, through reading and conversation with people in this area of public service, that there's a deep dissatisfaction with the system as it manages now, and that is not limited to the people delivering the service. That is the recipients of the service too, who are growing very weary and very frustrated with the lack of progress that's being made.

I would encourage the member, though, to ask these questions of the minister because I think that she will be able to get better detail than I can provide her with. I have heard it said, and I believe it to be true, that despite a very similar demographic with our neighbouring province, Saskatchewan, they have significantly fewer children in care of the state. And there are reasons for that we need to explore. Clearly, no one here is advocating that children not be apprehended when their safety and their health is at risk. We're all concerned for the safety of our children in this province. What we also must be concerned about, though, is that we don't, in the consequence of providing short-term respite or short-term relief from a situation that is a danger, that we do not create an even greater danger longer term by breaking the bonds that can exist within a family and that are fundamental.

We know from the instructive, hard lessons of the residential schools experience how breaking those bonds can have not only short-term consequences that are damaging but can have inter-generational consequences that are damaging as well. And so, it is vital that we move forward ambitiously. These—it is interesting to me, having been the Indian Affairs critic for close to three years in Ottawa and learning so much from travelling to and speaking with indigenous people in their communities, and we all know the linkages between the high number of children, high percentage of children in care and indigenous, so I don't think we need to be worried about the old fear that public servants and elected people used to have. If I mentioned indigenous and children in care in the same sentence 20 years ago, I'd be pilloried for being a racist. I don't think so. I think we're all past that now, and we can talk honestly with one another about the reality of the situation. Not all children in care are indigenous, certainly; we all know that. But, certainly, the majority are, a significant majority. So let's be honest about it.

* (12:00)

So, you know, when in Ottawa and in the communities, travelling the communities, there were

tremendous ideas out there. This is now a decade ago, but there are tremendous ideas today too, I submit. But front-line people did not feel they were being listened to. They did not feel and, I think, in too many cases, do not feel they are being listened to now either. I think there is a real opportunity here, not exclusively in Child and Family Services, but in other departments of government, for us to reach out to those who do this work on the front line and this—I don't limit this to the public sector either. I think there are tremendous opportunities to learn from people who use government programs, who depend on government programs, who are not in the employ of government too. If we're willing to listen to them, we'll find ideas.

I'm confident in the undertaking of the outreach exercises I've outlined in the past in this committee, whether it be the regulatory review, whether it be the performance review, whether it be the front-line sustainable health-care review, that we can benefit by genuinely going to the people who deliver and receive the services. And this is not to exclude in any way, shape or form academic experts, senior public servants with years of experience or just interested people in the general population. I think it's too often the case that we make an error of exclusion sometimes.

I'll share with the member on the—oh, I won't share with the member anything at this point, but I will share with the member later, if given the opportunity, as my time is about to elapse.

Ms. Klassen: Thank you for your answer.

One of the things I recently came across was the statistics for oral day surgery between the RHAs in Manitoba. And I was, yet again, saddened to see that the average for—like, first southern was 13.4 per thousand for children to have oral day surgery; our northern RHA, 115 point something. That's a whole 100 on top of what southern people face. And so that's a grave concern because, you know, you go up North, you see all these kids that don't have teeth. And, you know, there's so many health implications, and, you know, there's so many side effects from poor oral health. It affects you from that day forward onto adulthood.

For myself, personally, you know, I still have to take daily iron supplements because of the malnourishment that I went through as a child being located on a remote northern First Nation. And so one of the things—there are certain things that we can

do without a great cost to the Province that can be undertaken.

So I'm wondering if there's a way that you can start looking at them today because the more days that go by, you know, I could literally count—I'm getting the statistics from all the communities, I only have the Kewatinook, but there's an attempt of suicide every seven minutes in the communities that I represent, and that's just astounding. And you don't hear it in the media. People are largely embarrassed. They don't want to bring it out. You know, they're trying to combat this silently, and it's because they've never really felt they had somebody in the Province to go to with these sad statistics.

And so I'm wondering what assurances can I take back to my people.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think the member raises a number of issues.

The dental issue I've read a bit on, and I know is extremely concerning, and it does have ramifications. I want to say that, on the one hand, I think it's critically important that the federal government, where it has areas of constitutional responsibility, step up to the plate and fulfill those knowing that we're inheriting a billion-dollar deficit that we've got a deficit—a debt in our Province that's tripled over the last number of years, knowing that interest rates are not likely to drop and knowing the additional burden that will impose on our province.

All of these things make me cognizant of the fiscal realities we face, so it's important that we not be put in a position, as a Province, of bailing out the Trudeau government in Ottawa. I'm not blaming the Prime Minister for this, specifically. I think there has been a history for some years of federal governments not necessarily being fully cognizant of their obligations to indigenous Canadians. So we will work diligently to make sure that the federal government is aware of its responsibilities.

That being said, that—Jordan's Principle, and the importance of it, I think must be recognized as well. We have situations too often where people have fallen between the cracks of governments and, then, are not only feeling neglected, they are neglected. And, so, this is a principle which says that we recognize in the equity of services for all persons and that—particularly for those who are the most vulnerable. And this is critical.

We're committed to working with the federal government to make sure that the human rights of

First Nations children are respected, and they're not caught in this gap where they are not getting care, whether it's child welfare or health services, education, you name it. I think it's important, and I emphasized to the member from St. Johns earlier, that we recognize we have allies here it is not—when I was working with my colleagues in Ottawa—from all parties but driven by the Conservative Party—to push for matrimonial property rights was interesting because I spoke about it on a local radio station in my riding and then I went in to get somebody back into my car, long story short, I'm at the MPI office, right, in Portage la Prairie and the gal who's there, she's about five feet tall, anyway she's looking—looks up at me and she says—she whispers and she says, I heard you on the radio talking about First Nations women needing equal rights, and I just wanted to say we're right behind you, we're right behind you.

And I looked down at her and I said, why are we whispering. Right, she's not indigenous. She said I didn't feel that it was appropriate for me to talk about indigenous women's rights. Well, of course, it's appropriate. It's, of course, appropriate that we talk about minority rights it's—there's no reason for us to believe in some misguided world that we can't talk about indigenous people's rights if we're not indigenous, that we're somehow only equipped to talk about women's rights if we're women. These are misguided concepts that should be thrown away.

One of my good friends has been working very hard, he's past president of the Manitoba Dental Association—back to your point—and working very hard nationally to improve dental service availability by working with the dental profession across the country. Now, one might mistakenly argue that he should be indigenous to do that, and I would argue that's ridiculous. He's not indigenous, but he cares deeply about children having proper dental care.

I say these things because I think, too often, we create walls when we should be building bridges between one another in common pursuit of progress, and so, you know, I know the member does not do that but I've seen that too often become a barrier to progress among people.

So you may have ideas that would benefit somebody over six eight, I'd be welcome to hear those. It doesn't mean that you have to be over six eight. Someone at this table may have some great suggestions on ways to improve regulation that will benefit farmers; it doesn't mean they have to be a farmer to have the idea. We need to be much more

open in our pursuit of progressive thinking and benefit from it. And we do that in a share—a culture of sharing, like we're trying to create here as a government.

* (12:10)

The Acting Chairperson (Sarah Guillemard): As a result of an agreement between the House leaders, does the committee agree to recess at 12:15 with the understanding that, if the committee does not return by 12:30 p.m., it will be considered to have risen for the day? Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

Ms. Klassen: So, speaking of looking at other places for models, there is a situation in Ontario where it's actually their—the province picks up the bill for winter ice roads, and so, you know, with the understanding that the budget and the deficit, you know, there is understanding there, but hopefully we can get to that point where it's not our communities that have to spend their precious resources paying for these winter ice roads.

A huge factor—a huge chunk of their infrastructure money went to building the north-south winter ice road on their own, out of their own capital budget, and that route is the cheaper route for the people as opposed to going through the other direction through Norway House and then—the goal was, I believe, for Thompson to become the hub, and I'm pretty sure we all know why previous government wanted Thompson to be the hub, but our primary people get sent to Winnipeg. Our sick people get sent to Winnipeg. Our families are here in Winnipeg, and it's not like we abandon our family once they're sick, you know. We still have to—we still care for all our members of our families, so, hopefully, that's something we could look into for the future, copying that model where it's not the First Nation that has to build the ice road.

But the other thing I wanted to get into was the Bipole III, and I saved that for the last because my people—[*interjection*] Yes. My people need an answer. Are you thinking of rerouting the Bipole III?

Mr. Pallister: So I'm told that I have less than, like, a minute, so I can't really do justice to the member's question in respect to Bipole III, except to say that the previous government's partisan and unnecessarily intrusive and misguided decision, which flies in the face of all logic, all science, all research and all common sense, was deeply misguided and we will investigate, through Manitoba Hydro's auspices, how

we can correct this, if we can correct this. But perhaps it is beyond correcting.

That being said, I would hope that the member would understand that there are grave concerns that we have about the fiscal circumstances facing our Province, that we want to make sure that we do the maximum beneficial action, take the maximum beneficial action to protect Manitobans now and in the future. And I know the member comes from a cultural background which has great respect for foresight, speaks about seven generations and so on, and we understand too that by better management today, we will profit for our future generations and give them greater security, greater confidence.

Our goal is, of course—all of us want, you know, better services and a stronger economy and we want, also, lower taxes. This is a tall order and one that we can only deliver on by looking for the best possible ways to invest the money that taxpayers give us to invest, because although we consider all Manitobans critically important, we must remember that the people who pay the bills matter too. If our taxes continue to go up at the rate that they've accelerated in the last few years under this administration we'll continue to lose more people, and especially young people, to other provinces.

And right now, and for the last few years, we've lost more people than every other province has for our size, leaving, and the principal category is under 30, 18 to 30. So we're losing young people, young indigenous people, young non-indigenous people. The children of new Canadians are leaving and going someplace else. We have to arrest this circumstance and we have to arrest it now. Taxes is one part of that; better service is another. Most importantly, these young people need to know they can make their future here with a tremendous opportunity, an equal opportunity to find their true potential with good work, good jobs, good opportunities, well-paying jobs, secure, if possible. These—

The Acting Chairperson (Sarah Guillemard): The hour being 12:15 p.m., committee recess.

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (10:00)

Madam Chairperson (Colleen Mayer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume considerations of Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living. As

previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions; however, I believe the honourable minister has something to start with.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Good Friday morning to members of the committee and staff of the Legislature.

We'd committed to the honourable member for Concordia to return to him a breakdown by positions as the department lists them in terms of staff, so I'll provide that now.

In terms of nurses, and this would be collective of the various levels of nursing, 13,715; fee-for-service physicians, I think we provided the number before but it's still 2,508; community support, 4,997; facility support, 21,116; professional, technical and paramedical, 7,328; maintenance and trades, 372; physician assistants and clinical assistants, 126; and medical residents and interns, 570.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I appreciate the information that the minister has provided and I'm sure there will be a few more questions with regards to staffing, and we'll have a chance, I'm sure, to get to that a little bit later.

And maybe I'll give the minister a bit of an opportunity here. I know he's, as I said before, he's got numerous duties in this House, and he thought he maybe wasn't quite busy enough as Health Minister and Minister for Seniors and Minister for Active Living and thought it would make sense. He was also House leader, so I can appreciate that that's a very busy role for him to take on to balance all of those, but I know he's somebody that can do that very well. He's somebody that could take both those roles on and do them to the fullest of his abilities.

So, to get to the questions this morning, and I appreciate, again, the opportunity to ask some questions this morning. I just wanted to ask a little bit more about emergency transport, which I believe is on page 115 of the Estimates book, and just wondering if the amount that's listed there for emergency transport—I do see there's an increase this budget year—whether that's the increase to cover the 5 per cent reduction in ambulance fees announced by his government.

Mr. Goertzen: The member is certainly partly correct. The reduction of ambulance fees, which the

government was pleased to announce in the budget as a first step, recognizing it's not as far, as fast, as we'd like to move, but it's certainly a down payment on the commitment that we made to Manitobans to reduce the ambulance fees from, I think, an unacceptable level that currently exists, is contained within that subappropriation. But the vast majority of the increase relates to wage increases as it is required under contractual obligations.

Madam Chairperson: Member for Fort Garry-Riverview. He threw me, sorry.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): The minister will know that opiates are a significant issue not only here in Manitoba but globally, really, and, in particular, fentanyl has proven to be a very deadly drug. In my constituency, several young people have died as a result of addictions to fentanyl. We'd established a task force and, in addition to that, had worked to bring a parents' circle in as well. I'd be very pleased if the minister could just update us on the status of that task force and on parents of victims participation, not necessarily on the task force but in the larger circle of the activities in that regard.

Mr. Goertzen: The member asks a very important question, and I'm glad that he's raised it. There are a number of issues around opiates, and, you know, we have some experience in the Legislature around this with methamphetamine and the rise of methamphetamine that sort of came out of the Midwestern United States a decade ago or less, and there's a lot of concern about what impact that would have in Manitoba. I remember asking lots of questions at the time of the former government about methamphetamine and the strategy because there was almost nothing here in Manitoba in terms of information. I remember going down to Minneapolis to get information on methamphetamine because there was so little available here at the time and we were sort of trying to get ahead of it.

To the former government's credit, there was, then, a methamphetamine information program that began; it was given to parents, was provided to the schools. Early on, I was doing some visits to the schools in my own riding to talk about methamphetamine, and almost nobody had heard about the drug at that time. A couple of years later, after the program had started, I did another visit to a school and I was amazed how much more awareness there was about the drug.

*(10:10)

And I—it's hard to know why methamphetamine didn't become the same kind of issue in Manitoba as it did in some of the other Midwestern states, but I do think that the information had a significant impact. And I think that that was something that all of us as legislators could take credit for because it was driven not just by government and not just by opposition; I think everybody saw it as a concern.

Now, when we're talking about opiates and other prescribed medication, that concern exists as well. I had some brief discussions with some of my political counterparts in British Columbia where this is a—I don't want to use the word epidemic, but it's significantly worse than it is here in Manitoba, not to diminish the impact here because I do know from Addictions Manitoba and others, they would say that the cases are growing of opiate use and overdoses here in Manitoba, and they're probably somewhat under-reported in terms of the use.

So the Fentanyl Task Force, which was started previously and which is—I'm certainly supportive of, is continuing their work. I hope to have some more information about some of the recommendations in the fall. But there are others within the community who I'm looking to speak with. I'll mention Sel Burrows, in particular, who isn't necessarily a strong political ally of mine and hasn't always been particularly having great things to say about the members opposite either at times when it comes to justice, but I do think he has done good work in the community. And I have reached out and spoke to him, actually, on election night. He was part of an election coverage that I was part of. And I want to speak to him because I think he has good insight in terms of what's happening on the ground in some of the communities. Because it's not a political thing. I could care less if somebody is a political ally of mine or not when it comes to this issue and, in fact, most issues. If they're important, then we want to hear what is sort of going on.

And I understand from officials that the Department of Families has had—sorry, families, small-F families, have met with department officials to give their input into the task force, which is an important learning perspective because they'll have a better understanding than many, unfortunately, of how some of the drugs are getting into the hands of young people. But I want to hear more from some of the community leaders in terms of what they're hearing, because there sometimes is, you know, perhaps a concern even about over-prescription and

how that prescription is being done. So that's an important learning aspect as well.

Mr. Allum: Well, I'm pleased to hear the minister confirm that the work of the task force is continuing. New members will know that this is a harm reduction strategy at its core and—but the participation of parents is equally important, those who have suffered obviously tragic circumstances with the death of their own children, heartbreaking circumstance, and I've spent a fair amount of time with those families both as a friend but also as their MLA.

I guess my concluding observation for the minister is that if I can be of any service in helping to connect him to parents directly affected, I know that they certainly wanted to have conversations with his predecessors in our government, and if I can be of any service in that regard, I'd very much like to be. I think it's important for him to connect with community leaders. Mr. Burrows would be a fine example of that, but I also think it's important for him to have a direct conversation with parents, and so I would make that offer to him today. And any updates he could provide me that I could provide to those parents would also be greatly appreciated. And if he just would confirm for me now that he'd be willing to continue that dialogue, that would be very helpful.

Mr. Goertzen: I will commit to the member. I'll have a member of my staff or the deputy's office connect with the MLA, and we'll arrange to have a meeting which, of course, I'd like him to attend with the families post-session at some point. Let's not determine when post-session will be, but whenever that is then we'll arrange for it.

Mr. Wiebe: I thank my colleague for bringing up the issue of addictions, and it's certainly an important area. I think maybe we'll just spend a little bit of time—I do have some questions on it as well, so we'll take a little bit of time here.

Just wondering, on page 111 of the Estimates book, with regards to the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, I realize that the amount for this program is flat from last year, essentially very little increase at all. And I'm just wondering if the minister maybe could give me information on why that might be. What was the amount, maybe from last year, and I apologize, I just don't have it in front of me here, but what was the amount devoted towards the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba last year, and is it realistic

to expect that this number should remain flat this year?

Mr. Goertzen: So there's a slight increase from the estimate to the estimate, from last year, of about around 400 to 500 thousand dollars in terms of the increase. I don't disagree with the member that there could be more that could be done. And one of the things that I'm interested in hearing from the mental health and addictions task force that hopefully will happen in the fall, is, are there other ways that we can outreach with different organizations that are doing drug addiction and treatment? Obviously, there are far too many instances that I hear of, of young people, at the bequest or with the support of their parents, leaving the province and going to often private treatment facilities outside of Manitoba. I haven't sort of gotten a full scope of what the treatment options are, either private, public or otherwise, in the province, but I do think that we could do a better job, perhaps, of partnerships with the different resources that are out there, obviously, with the assurance that they're the right kind of provider, that they are credible providers and that they're getting results.

The—one of the—you know, criticism is maybe too strong a word, but maybe it's not. One of the criticisms that I had of the previous government is that we didn't really have much in terms of outcomes when it came to addictions, so there was money going in, and one could argue whether it was enough money going in or not, but there was money going in and we never really could get sort of a performance analysis of what was happening within the individual addictions facilities and what the outcomes were. Recidivism rates in terms of not reoffending with crime but the ability to actually remove somebody from an addiction, that's one indicator. Obviously, there are people who'll relapse into addiction for a lot of different reasons, and they aren't necessarily the program's fault, but I don't think there exist or has existed for a long time any sort of real analysis in terms of what's the effectiveness of the programs that we're supporting and that we're funding.

My fear is that there will never be enough money, that we'll always have less money than there are needs within the community, just by the nature of the way things seem to be going on the issues of addictions and the changing nature of addiction in terms of the drugs that are available. They're more deadly; they're more prevalent and they are more addictive, some of them, as the member

knows, on the first or second time that individual uses them. So I fear that there will never be as much money as needed for the unfortunate demand, but I do think we need to do a much better job of building partnerships with outside organizations who can provide some of that expertise and treatment, specifically, treatment, but also, then, do a better job of analyzing how effective that is of whether or not it's working or not. There should actually be some sort of results that come from the money going in.

So there is a slight increase from last year to this year, but I won't pretend that that will likely meet all the demand that exists.

Mr. Wiebe: What is the driving factor in the increase that did happen in the Addictions Foundation budget?

* (10:20)

Mr. Goertzen: As with a lot of the departments within Health, it results in collective agreements that have been negotiated previously. So, you know, it's one of the challenges we have is that, you know, so much of the funding is consumed by the fact that 70 to 80 per cent of the costs are driven by labour. There are agreements that have been negotiated and that, necessarily, had to be fulfilled. I wish that every time the member saw an increase in expenditures in the department, that he would feel assured that that was added capacity going into the system. Unfortunately, most often, it's not added capacity. It relates to funding of labour agreements.

Mr. Wiebe: I understand that the government has indicated they are interested in combining mental health and addictions service delivery. I'm just wondering if the minister could, maybe, just outline what would be included in that new entity or the new division and, maybe, just talk a little bit more about how he expects that rollout to happen.

Mr. Goertzen: So that might be one step further than we are actually at at this stage of the game.

The—what the government is committed to is to have a Manitoba health and addictions strategy. And we thought it was important that that strategy be done together because, statistically, we know that—and I'm going to go off my head here, so if I'm slightly off on the statistics, I hope the member will offer me some forgiveness, but I want to answer the questions as quickly as I can—the—there's about a 40 per cent correlation between addictions and mental health. And so the chances of somebody who's dealing with a mental health addiction—or,

mental health problem dealing also with an addiction issue is significant.

So the strategy that's being done within the fall is to ensure that we have those two areas looked at together and have them looked at in one—at one particular time, and then go forward with a comprehensive strategy.

Now, as it exists already, I think the different divisions, as it relates to mental health and addictions, are under the same branch already, but I'm not sure that the strategy in terms of how we deal with the issues have necessarily been 'interwined' in the same way that they probably should be.

Mr. Wiebe: What's the timeline for developing this strategy?

Mr. Goertzen: My hope would be that the group will be established later in the fall and then, you know, I'll certainly want to meet with them to see what their view is of what the appropriate time for a strategy would be. Clearly, we'd like it, you know, five years ago, and—but that's not going to happen. So, if we can arrange for the group to be established later in the fall and then, hopefully, they can bring forward a time frame that's reasonable and respective of the work that they need to do, but also the fact that we need to get on with some different ways of doing things, too.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister talk a little bit more about the structure, I guess, of the advisory committee or whatever it—I guess maybe he could start there.

In developing this strategy, who would sit on—around the table for developing the strategy and what would be the methods for collecting input from various interest groups and stakeholders?

Mr. Goertzen: Not quite there yet in terms of who will be sitting around the table. My initial thought process would be that, certainly, experts from the department, those who are involved within the department, but then also outside experts, potentially those who have expertise in other provinces. I want to have, obviously, a made-in-Manitoba solution, and so you want to have a Manitoba lens applied to whatever the recommendations are going to be. But I think it's also important to have people come from other jurisdictions who have different experiences because it's sometimes hard to learn new ways of doing things when the people who are around the table are necessarily the same people.

So I would hope that, you know, getting people from the current department, within the addictions system in Manitoba, also with those who are outside of the system in Manitoba. And then, of course, there are a variety of different organizations that interplay with mental health and addictions—Mood Disorders, for example, that could certainly be a group—and many others that we'd want to reach out to. But I'd also probably like to have some input from families, from those—and maybe those who have struggled with addiction. So it would be multi-faceted, but we'd want to have a lens applied that is both a Manitoba lens, and an outside perspective, as well.

Mr. Wiebe: So is it fair to say, though, that the group is being—that's going to be developing the strategy is being gathered from within the department, or from outside of the department within government, or from outside of government?

Mr. Goertzen: Probably all three.

Mr. Wiebe: And just to clarify on the timeline, the strategy would be begun to be developed later this fall, or it would be we can expect some kind of report or progress report at the very least this fall?

Mr. Goertzen: I'd want to have the group that's doing the strategy formed by this fall, and then I'd want to have some discussions with them in terms of what they think is a realistic time frame for reporting back.

Clearly, we don't want it to be three years, but I—you know, maybe three weeks after they form is too short, so some sort of compromise that they feel is workable to do the job that they need to do, but also to get on with the job that needs to happen.

Mr. Wiebe: Have—has the minister had any discussions, preliminary discussions, or feedback in any format from AFM, from other addictions organizations, from other mental health organizations, about the idea of bringing those two groups or those two strategies under one umbrella to develop an umbrella strategy?

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, we've had some brief discussions with the CEO of Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, and I've had some brief discussions with those in the mental health field, particularly mood disorders.

The feeling, if I'm—if I remember it correctly from the discussion we had, it was in the context of one of the walks that they were involved with raising

money. Certainly, at the mental health side, they thought it made a lot of sense.

I would expect, although I don't know that we talked specifically about the committee, that the Addictions Foundation would find it to be valuable in terms of having the strategy coming forward relating to both of those, and we'd obviously want both sides represented.

I do think from within the department there was a feeling that it made a lot of sense to do those two together.

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate the information, and certainly something that we're keen to hear more information about going forward. So I guess maybe we'll just move on from that particular line of questioning.

But just to say that, you know, we hope that this government will be transparent in how they're undertaking this—the development of this strategy. And any kind of updates or progress reports that are made available to the public I think will be helpful to give them a sense of where—what direction the minister is planning to go on this, and any input that he's getting, that it's shared with the public so that folks know where this is heading.

I just wanted to switch gears once again, go back. We kind of got a little bit off-track with my colleague asking about addictions and, again, as I said, a very important topic, but I was just starting the line of questioning with regards to emergency transport again on page 115.

And I just wanted to—I sort of got distracted myself, I have to admit, Madam Chair, with regards to the answer to the question that I had asked the minister, whether the amount on page 115 with regards to emergency transport, was that the line in the budget that captured the increase to the—in the amount required to cover the 5 per cent reduction in ambulance fees?

Mr. Goertzen: So the—just to re-emphasize, the vast majority of the increase has to do with staff agreements and fulfilling those contractual obligations. But the specific line where the funding for the reduction of ambulance fees is under the emergency response and transport services appropriation.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, and I appreciate that. So I think I'm on the right track, then, which is good, because I realize that going through these I'm not always—so

it's appreciated that the staff is here to help us stay on track with regards to that.

* (10:30)

So I understand this is a 5 per cent reduction this year. Can the minister talk about what the planned reduction for the following—I think they had—the government had committed to reducing the overall cost by 50 per cent in their first mandate. Can the minister talk about what the formula will be for the rollout of the additional 45 per cent of the reduction?

Mr. Goertzen: The member's correct in that the commitment, during the campaign, was to reduce the ambulance fees across the province by 50 per cent within the first mandate of the government. There's not been, to my knowledge, a specific formula established for next year. I think that'll, obviously, have to do a lot with the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, in terms of what the means are within government.

And I imagine that, you know, next year—the member will appreciate then, and I don't appreciate fully, how difficult it was to put together a budget in such a short period of time. Not to be overly mindful of the things that we've said in the past, but we certainly did call on the government to bring forward a budget—former government—prior to the last election. Because that didn't happen, our transition team and the Finance Minister, once he was appointed, were under quite the pressure to get a budget put in place, and I'm proud to say that they were able to do so in such a short time frame, and get moving in a step in the right direction in terms of reduction of ambulance fees. But I do expect that the work will continue, now, with the next budget starting, probably, already. So it won't be a six-week process but a one-year process.

But there isn't an established formula or criteria for the reduction of ambulance fees for next year, but I expect that the work will continue because it's already begun.

Mr. Wiebe: Has the minister looked at the total cost for implementing the 50 per cent reduction?

Mr. Goertzen: We don't have a hard number in terms of what that would be. I'm advised part of that is because there's, sort of, work ongoing with the individual regional health authorities, in terms of what the challenge will be in terms of defraying the costs, and the municipalities who are involved with—who currently receive revenues from the ambulance transport.

So there is significant work that's ongoing in terms of trying to analyze the defrayment of costs, and so there isn't a hard number that I can provide the member.

Mr. Wiebe: And I can appreciate that. It is a fairly complex formula, I understand, to—it's not straightforward because it's provided service and then reimbursement and all the rest of it.

But I'm sure that the department has done some work on this and so, I guess, you know, I can appreciate that they—he maybe doesn't have that number at his fingertips, but, you know, if it is something that's—maybe, the department, in their analysis, somewhere down the road has done, that maybe they could provide it to the Committee and just let us know what that total amount will look like.

And, you know, I can appreciate that costs change and, especially if we're looking now four years down the line at best, then, you know, that's—obviously, costs change and things change in terms of what the program will end up costing. But I think it's helpful to kind of understand what the overall costs would be.

I'm wondering if the minister has either—I guess this is a bit of an odd question because I'm asking it—I realize it's a campaign commitment, so this would, maybe, be some policy work that, maybe, he did as part of the campaign team, or maybe the department, then, could comment just on whether they've looked at any other ways at reducing—ways for reducing the costs for individuals, rather than an across-the-board 50 per cent reduction. You know, maybe a higher amount for low income—some kind of low-income threshold or some other kind of system of delivering cheaper ambulance fees to people.

Mr. Goertzen: It's not an analysis that I would have undertaken during the campaign or necessarily subsequently. I think that the feeling, though, during the election—and there was a number of different plans that came out from all the political parties. I think the good thing was that every political party recognized that this was a problem and that there needed to be some kind of a solution.

So I think that's a credit to each of the political parties during the election, because there's not usually uniformity in terms of campaign platforms or understanding what priorities are. Often political parties will look at their individual views of the world and come up with different things that they think are the top priorities of Manitobans, so it was

interesting that each of the three political parties, not to leave out the Green Party, but I didn't study their platform that closely; they may have talked about ambulance fees as well. And my 'fraind'-friend James Beddome will no doubt email me if he reads Hansard and I've left him out, so if he wants to email me with whatever their platform was on ambulance fees, I'd be happy to read it.

But I do know that the three parties, the three mainline parties, the Liberals, NDP and Progressive Conservatives, did all bring out ideas on reducing ambulance fees, so that is good. There was a uniform understanding that there needed to be something done. Now, it was not considered to be—the different parties looked at doing it in different ways, and so I know that the Liberal Party was going to limit the reduction simply for seniors. I don't remember it in any granular detail exactly what the New Democratic formula was; the member from Concordia might want to enlighten me. But I know that there was some type of a commitment made, and our party felt that it was the most equitable way at this stage to look at a 50 per cent reduction on ambulance fees across the board.

Now, you know, you make policy and you implement it and you get feedback on certain things, and I always call it the unintended consequence of legislation, where you bring in legislation, you think it's going to make a lot of sense, and then there's things that you didn't consider.

My favourite example of that was, as Justice critic, when the former member—former minister of Justice, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), brought forward legislation on armoured vehicles, to ban armoured vehicles in Manitoba. It seemed to make a lot of sense. You know, why would people need armoured vehicles? And then I got home and I got a constituency call from a person who lives in my riding who collects World War II tanks and displays them at military events, and I didn't even know that that was happening in my own riding. But he was quite concerned that he was going to be banned from participating with the veterans, and so we made an amendment—I give credit to the member for Minto—made an amendment to the bills to exempt or to allow this licence to happen for individuals who had this kind of a thing, because clearly he was not the target of the legislation; it was gang members and those who would be fortifying their vehicles.

But the unintended consequences of legislation are often real, unanticipated, and not with any kind

of malfeasance involved. There's no sort of ill will on anybody. So we believe this is the appropriate way to go, but, obviously, we'll analyze it as we go along. And, if it's found to some way not be as effective as we intended it to be, then we'll have to revisit it. But I do think that it was important that every political party, all three political parties, determined that it was an important way to move Manitoba forward and to bring more equity into the system for those who are dealing with ambulance fees, even if we approach it from a different way.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, and I mean I simply—just to get more information for myself to understand the subject better, to be perfectly honest, you know, just trying to understand the process, and, again, I can appreciate that the minister was probably thinking about other things during the election campaign and wasn't spending his days developing policy around ambulance fees, although I'm sure it's something that he's heard in his own constituency as well. But I can appreciate that's not something he probably would have spent a lot of time on.

* (10:40)

But I would imagine, within the department, there would be some thoughtful work done with regards to tackling this issue. And I guess I'm just wondering if there were any other ideas that have been proposed. And, again, getting backward—I'm just trying to get an idea of what the cost for the 50 per cent reduction might be, and I'm wondering if there's—I mean, again, this is a policy of a political party that was, you know, just elected not too long ago, but I'm sure once this party had won the election, this was probably a lot of very hard work that was done behind the scenes to try to understand how this policy now might be implemented because it was one of the more public policies during the campaign, one of the more populist, if I could say, elements of the election campaign for the Progressive Conservatives.

So I would imagine this would be something that, behind the scenes, there was a lot of busywork being done as soon as the government was confirmed and civil servants understood this policy was coming down. So I'm wondering if that work has maybe begun or maybe—again, just a ballpark figure could be presented to the committee. I could, you know, if the minister wants to take it as notice or report back at some point, I think that'd be fine. But just to give us a sense of what a 50 per cent reduction across the board, what that might actually cost.

Mr. Goertzen: Again, I don't have a figure here. I could endeavour to try to look for one. They might be fairly raw in terms of the analysis. I imagine one could try to determine how many ambulance rides happened in Manitoba. A certain percentage of them, obviously, wouldn't be charged if they're interfacility transfers, other reasons, and so that would be a reduction on that.

It's important to remember, of course, that in terms of analysis that happened on different ways of doing ambulance fee reductions, that may have happened under the previous government under the department. I didn't ask the department to provide me whatever was done with the previous administration. And, of course, I would not have had access to any of that as an opposition member, rightfully so. And so I don't know if there was different issues that were looked at.

But, certainly, since the government's come in, the transition team and then myself as minister, there's been good discussions and work with the RHAs and municipalities in terms of the costs that are involved and how this is going to be implemented in a fair way because one of the things we wanted to make sure—you know, and this sometimes happens, and maybe the member will inform me. It sometimes happens with auto insurance, right, where there'll be an announcement that there is going to be a reduction in rates in auto insurance of X percentage, and then you start getting calls from constituents, and they say, well, I heard there was going to be a reduction, but I got an increase on my particular vehicle. And then there's confusion about why a reduction was announced but there was an increase for an individual. And I think most MLAs have heard that instance, or they'll hear it at some point.

What often happens, of course, is that on the MPI side, there's individual assessment based on risk of types of vehicles and the costs of repairing types of vehicles. What we wanted to ensure with this is that every Manitoban would have seen a real reduction in an ambulance fee compared to what it would have been prior to the promise being made. And so that part of the work has already begun in terms of how do we ensure that when the policy, this particular portion, takes effect, that every Manitoban will see a reduction over what they would have paid—seen before the policy came into effect as opposed to what often happens with MPI in that there's a general rate decrease but some specific classifications or specific areas find themselves paying a little bit more

because of a risk assessment. So we're mindful of that, and that work is ongoing.

Mr. Wiebe: So I think I understood the minister to say that they'll try and get that number for me, if that number exists, which I think will be helpful to just sort of give us a baseline of where that's at. And, again, I could just imagine if we did—if we looked at the number from the previous year, looked at the increase. As the minister stated, there is a staff—a mandated staff increase that's within that budget line item. But I think if we looked at that, minus what the staff increase would be and then the 5 per cent commitment, and just extrapolated that out over—up to the 45 per cent, I'm wondering if that—maybe the minister would think that that's a fair way to look at that number to understand where it may end up if the entire 50 per cent were applied today.

Mr. Goertzen: So I will get the member to repeat the actual question part of that, because it was just otherwise focused. But I want to mention that, I mean, I think what we can provide the member might take a little time to collate—and it would be available through freedom of information as well—how much revenue each RHA would have received, and municipalities, from ambulance fees. And so that would give a baseline, I think, for the member based on last year's fees. So we can try to collate that. I think it is information that is publicly available, if asked, but I think we can try to put that together.

And then if he could just repeat the specific of this question.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, it was just—I guess, and, again, I'm looking for a kind of a ballpark idea here. I—as I said, I know it's in a very under—it's a very complicated formula that—to arrive at that number. But just if we're looking at just to kind of ballpark, it—as the minister stated, the staff—there is a staff increase component to that line item, so—and that's, you know, a mandated amount through the collective agreement, I would imagine.

So, if we could kind of take that piece out of that portion and then look at the 5 per cent increase and extrapolate that to, you know, increase it to 50 per cent, would that be a fair way to arrive at a ballpark figure of what it might cost?

Mr. Goertzen: That's a good way to approach the question, by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe). So my understanding is that the costs associated with the reduction for this year is \$2 million. I don't want to sort of comment on whether the extrapolation

would be accurate or not, because I don't know that, but that is certainly a starting point. So it would—the cost is \$2 million this year for the cost of that first step in the implementation.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so I think we're on the right track, then, and any other information the minister can provide at a later date to narrow in that number a little bit is appreciated, but I think we've got a general idea of what the cost would be.

Can the minister talk about the per kilometre rate? Again, this is something that he's—probably hears as a member with a rural component outside the big city of Steinbach who might be—some of his constituents might be affected by this. What is the per kilometre rate for rural Manitobans that's charged on top of the ambulance fees?

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the member for the question.

It ties in a little bit to the previous response, so each RHA, I understand, currently has a different per kilometre or surcharge rate that exists, and we don't have their individual ones. However, we are planning to, as part of the implementation of this policy, remove the surcharge rate so that there is more consistency across the board.

*(10:50)

And it goes a little bit back to the point I was making about the example with MPI in that members—or Manitobans will hear that MPI, on any given year, might be reducing rates, for example, or increasing rates, whatever the case may be, and they assume that that is what's happening consistently across the board, and then, when they get the bill for their vehicle and it's different—either it's an increase when they thought it was going to be a decrease or it's a decrease, happily, when they thought it might have been an increase, because of the general rate application—they wonder why it's not consistent.

And our fear, and my fear as minister, is that if there isn't—if that surcharge remains in place, then the surcharge can just vary. We can reduce the overall—the ambulance fee within the context of the government by providing support to reduce those fees or reduce the ambulance charge, but the surcharges might change; it might go up. And so people might ultimately see an increased ambulance fee if their surcharge has gone up when they were expecting something less than that.

So that would be the reason why the surcharge would be removed, and that was something that was

recommended, I understand, under the EMS review, that the surcharges be removed, because they're inapplicable—or, sorry—they're inconsistent across the province.

Mr. Wiebe: So, just to clarify, the minister is saying that the surcharge, per kilometre surcharge, will be removed by the government or they will be flattened across the province and made consistent across the province?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, the plan is to remove the surcharges so that we move to a consistent rate across the province.

That's part of the reason why this is taking a little bit longer than the member might like, that I might like, that Manitobans might like. And the reason it's only being implemented on January 1st is because we have to do it in a way that everyone sees a reduction and that is consistent across the board.

So it's not—it's a little bit—it's complicated, as everything is in life and in politics and in health, everything is complicated, and this is taking—this will take a little bit of time. But that's why it's taking a little bit more time is we want to ensure that the surcharges are removed and the inconsistencies are removed and that there is a reduction for everyone, regardless if you live in the north, south, east, west, Winnipeg, Brandon, Steinbach or Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: And I can appreciate that response and appreciate the good work that the folks in the department are, I'm sure, busy doing to make this all come to fruition. So I appreciate that clarification.

Is the amount for air transport included in this budget line item as well?

Mr. Goertzen: So my understanding is that the shock trauma air rescue unit, otherwise known as STARS, is housed, in terms of the funding allocation, in the Emergency Response and Transport Services line item, which is under 115. The member will know that there are other air transport services that are provided through Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living.

On page 87, under the Health Emergency Management line appropriation—or under the section, it's also paying for the Lifeflight program, which is historically the northern communities that are accessed, and then under the former item that I spoke about on 115, under Emergency Response and Transport Services, there are nonemergency transport done as well. So patients who are coming

from, for example, northern Manitoba to receive services in Winnipeg or in the south would receive support through that line item so that they could get that transport needed.

Mr. Wiebe: And does—can the minister describe for me what the costs to an individual is for, I guess, for each of those types of air transport? And, again, I'm sure the minister sees where I'm going with this, but wondering if that—there's any sort of a reduction for folks whose ambulance, so to speak, is air transport from remote communities or in other situations where they need that kind of transport.

Mr. Goertzen: The—there is no cost for somebody who is in need of a medically necessary transport through Lifeflight Air Ambulance or STARS, and so they do not receive a bill, and that would include interfacility transfers with STARS. I know that, you know, one could—sometimes it's done where there's a calculation of what the cost to the system is per flight when the different flight data comes out for these individual mechanisms; in particular, that's been the case with STARS. I know, certainly, the recent data that I've seen regarding STARS is that their flight numbers are up considerably, and that would entail both responding to on-call scenes, many of which happen in southern Manitoba.

* (11:00)

And I had the, I guess I'd call it an unfortunate experience of seeing them respond to calls in—that they're responding often to very critical scenes in southern Manitoba, but also fortunate that they were able to respond. So they are not—those individuals are not charged a fee, nor anyone—is anyone on Lifeflight or air ambulance where there's deemed to be medically necessary.

For the Northern Patient Transport Program, they're—they are not—we wouldn't want to call it charged, per se. If somebody needs to come to Winnipeg, for example, to benefit from a medical procedure, they would receive a subsidy for that travel. So, whether that—if they're deemed to be needed to go on a flight, then that would be one thing. If they are eligible to do that by driving, then that's another, but, regardless, they receive a subsidy for the cost, not a bill for the cost.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, I think that's clear and I've made some notes on that. I appreciate the minister clarifying that a little bit for me. We may end up coming back to that, but I feel like I'm more

informed now, so I appreciate his—the opportunity to spend some time on that.

I'm trying to look at my notes and my line—my next line of questioning here. I'm having a bit of a hard time keeping a common theme here, so I'm just going to jump around a little bit if that's okay for the minister. Just talk a little bit more about the Active Living portion of the portfolio. I'm just wondering if the minister can talk a little bit about the decision, I guess, first of all, to change the name of the department from Healthy Living to Active Living and what that means in kind of a real policy direction set.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm not sure that I've sort of undertaken to change a policy direction, per se, as a result of the name change. Maybe it was more to encourage me than anybody else to be more active in my living, which isn't always easy with the hours that the Minister of Health keeps, and I would suspect that's probably true for past ministers of Health as well.

But I do think that the department found that it was good to bring the—sort of the two legacy areas back together in that there's an inseparable connection between health and healthy living, and so much of the costs of health care could be prevented by prevention and by ensuring that individuals are living as healthy a lifestyle as they possibly can.

And so, you know, one could look at it two different ways. I imagine that the former government thought that separating the two departments brought more focus and attention to the parts that were separated out, but I think the argument could also be made that it's hard to separate those two functions, because of so much of the costs of health care could be defrayed and reduced through prevention, that it might actually make more sense to have them together so that those in the department can work a little bit more in synergy.

So, on this particular file, I wouldn't consider it necessarily just a cost savings, although our government hasn't been shy to say that there is a reduction of costs because of the reduction in the size of Cabinet and that necessarily means bringing some departments together, so there is that added element. And the member will see that there's a cost savings to ministerial salaries in that they're paying one minister, as opposed to two ministers, but I think it's more than costs. I think there's a good policy reason to have the two together, because the cost pressures on health are enormous. They're probably not going

to end anytime in the next decade, depending on how things move demographically, but nothing on the demographic projectory would indicate that the pressures are going to be reduced.

And so probably the greatest cost savings that can be found in health care have to do with prevention. And so Active Living and Healthy Living are probably both of those, no matter how you describe it. But I think that that was part of the reasons for bringing the two departments together.

Mr. Wiebe: I can appreciate that and I'd say I agree with the minister. I think, you know, the specific language that's used is maybe less important. I think I heard the minister just talking about prevention, and I think that's one of the key elements and the key ways to look at this particular department, so I can appreciate that the language is less important, although, again, I just—was sort of just trying to understand why the change in the name and whether there would be a—any kind of policy change that would be behind that or any other key initiatives that have been changed.

And so maybe I'd just ask the minister: Can he talk about what some of the key initiatives that he plans to undertake within this section of his department and sort of things that he's keen to move on—

An Honourable Member: So to speak.

Mr. Wiebe: —exactly, no pun intended—to move on and to get under way and potentially programs that are being changed or new programs that are coming online or new ways of looking at things?

Mr. Goertzen: It's a good question from the member. I'll acknowledge that I haven't set a specific policy direction in the last six weeks for that particular part of the department. In fact, you know, I find, as minister, that there's a temptation—and, of course, this is my first time serving in any ministry—but I think that there is a temptation to walk in to a ministry with the assumption that you have many of the answers to the problems that haven't been solved in the past and to try to set hard, clear direction in trying to solve those.

My approach isn't that—is that that's not maybe the best way to go, particularly in a portfolio where you yourself have lots of learning to do. And I don't mind to admit that I have lots of learning to do in the department. I think anyone who walks into probably any department, unless you have some sort of specialized background in it, is on a bit of a learning

curve. And, when you're on a learning curve, I think sometimes the best thing to do is to stop talking and start listening, which isn't always easy for politicians to do, but I think I've done far more listening than I have talking in the last six weeks when it comes to the department more generally, and that would include, obviously, the Active Living part.

Some of my initial feelings, however, in terms of from what I've heard from those who were in the department over the last six weeks, is that we do have to do a better job of reaching young people where they are. So there are good programs that currently exist within schools and within communities, and sometimes community centres. I think that those can be looked at for enhancement to do a better job of reaching young people and then reaching them with the right information, but not just the right information but sort of a—give—doing a better job of explaining why that information is there. I know from my own son, he'll come home from school and he'll often talk about things, whether they're issues around the environment or healthy living, and he's talking about things that should happen or that he wants to do and why he'd rather have an apple than a bag of chips. When he mentioned that—but it was more, I think because, you know, he was told that that's what they should do, but there wasn't always understanding of why. So maybe that's a bit of a—something that could be looked at in terms how do you provide broader depth in terms of some of the reasons why we're doing these things. And that could help educate, of course, parents within the system as well. So that's, you know, sort of an observation that I have from my own personal experience, and that I would like to look at it a bit more.

* (11:10)

I think that there is more work that can be done nationally, though, too. The—we mentioned yesterday in some of the discussions that we had regarding the drug programs and how we're reducing costs for certain drugs and not just for rare diseases but drugs more generally, and how that's been quite effective by having a pan-Canadian approach and having sort of the Walmart style of purchasing; you're doing it in bulk. That, I think, has been critical. I don't know that there's been enough discussion on the national scene, saying as a fairly new, probably the newest Health minister in Canada, if not one of the newest, so I don't plan to ascribe any sort of blame on anybody. But I'm not sure if there was enough discussion about how we can have more of a

pan-Canadian approach to preventative health care. And that would, obviously, include active living and healthy living.

But, if that sort of approach could be taken that, I think, would be somewhat helpful as well.

Mr. Wiebe: The member spoke briefly about schools as being solid partners in developing healthy and active living policies.

Can the—and this is just on page 100 in the Estimates book, under Expected Results, "Engagement of key stakeholders in the promotion of healthy weights." I would imagine schools would be a great partner in that. Can the minister talk about other stakeholders that have been engaged in the past or, maybe, ones that he thinks could be potential groups to reach out to, to partner with, to bring forward some positive change there.

Mr. Goertzen: It's a good question.

A lot of the engagement that happens, I understand, from the department goes through the various entities that the department is involved in funding and working with. And so the medical officer of health, of course, would have said, you know, a broader overall strategy in terms of how some of this would happen. But they would be, then, providing some of that information—direction to the public.

Health officers, those working within the regional health authorities, to decide where they best feel to provide some of that education, because the member will know that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority will have significantly different needs than the southern regional health authority, which will have very different needs than the Northern Regional Health Authority, and where that information is best relayed isn't, necessarily, in a uniform way. So I think that some RHAs and some communities have better ways of networking and providing information. Some of that's based, maybe, on the infrastructure within communities. A lot of that might be based just on the—how communities are dispersed.

So, as an example but not specific to the issue of active living, I often have a great—sympathy isn't the right word, but maybe it is—compassion for some of my rural colleagues who have very large constituencies and many, many small communities interspersed throughout those constituencies. Trying to not only stay connected to those communities, but

provide a uniform message to those communities is very, very difficult.

I have an entirely different scenario in that I represent a community of about 16 or 17 thousand people and, then, just a series of much smaller communities within a very small radius. I can drive anywheres in my constituency within 20 minutes, from one end to the next. And the member will have an urban experience, a similar sort of thing. But that's to say that the—how one communicates within very, very different RHAs has to be done differently, because they have different needs, they have different health populations and, thus, they have different ways to bring forward critical information.

Mr. Wiebe: So, and I'm sure this is something that will be developed over time, the—sort of a list of stakeholders or groups that the minister has a chance to meet with and work with.

And also, I would imagine with regards to the Healthy Together Now program, this would be something that the minister would—maybe he has some knowledge of, or maybe not—to sort of get a sense of who some of the stakeholders are out in the community. Folks who are working at the grassroots level to develop, you know, really solid programming within communities to promote healthy living and active living. And a great example of where government can sort of multiply their effects on the community, by partnering with local organizations and groups who are already doing some of this work and maybe have some great ideas and some great initiatives that they want to bring forward and are really just looking for that extra push over the top, some recognition of their good work and some recognition of their good ideas and a little bit of money to push that—those programs forward.

So, you know, this is something that I've seen work in my own community and across a number of constituencies, and I've seen some really positive effects come out of that group and the very small grants that are available through that program.

I'm wondering if the minister is aware of the Healthy Together Now grants, if he can maybe just comment on the value of the program and commit to keeping that program or strengthening it going forward.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I think the member makes an excellent point.

From what I understand, the Healthy Together Now program has more than 400 community projects

that are under way, and there's a great diversity among those 400 projects. He's right; they're often involving fairly small grants, but that is about, you know, leveraging partnerships within a community, and often it takes various small grants to excite and incite a great number of people to come together in a community. And so I think that that program and that method is quite important.

Engaging people within the community, on a host of issues that deal with health care, I think is going to be something that we need to continue to focus on, because we know the government can't do it all on its own. And that was, you know, seen at a very sort of macro level on the mandate, on the personal-care home beds, which will be very focused on engaging communities and partnerships but on a much more smaller level in terms of dollars but maybe not effect. Engaging communities in the Healthy Together Now program is certainly important and it's a good model to use. I haven't heard of all—seen all of the projects or heard of all of them, but I look forward to getting more information on them.

The member is right, in terms of meeting with the different groups and stakeholders, that's ongoing. In the context of session, that's been a challenge. I've certainly asked the department to prioritize those that I wouldn't want to say that are more important than others but perhaps that are just more critical at that particular moment than others. And, at some point, when things are a little bit more flexible, I'll have the opportunity to meet, I think, with more groups.

I—we have a pretty full calendar at this point. There are certainly some within the building who are interested in knowing what our calendar is like. And, when we decided to send them all of the meetings that we're actually having, they've decided to say stop, stop sending us all the meetings, because it's just way too many and we can't keep track of everything. So we are actively having as many stakeholder engagement meetings as possible, with the time that we've been given and—but this is certainly one of the areas that we want to explore more when the time comes.

And I thank the member for raising it, and I'm glad that he did, because it deserves to be highlighted and I'm glad he's done that for us.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and I appreciate the opportunity to spend some time on this, on the Active Living portion of the portfolio, because, I mean, one of the concerns that folks have is that the—with the

amalgamation of the two departments, and the minister has now referenced it a number of times where this is a large undertaking to sort of meet with all stakeholder groups, to reach out to all different, you know, communities, you know, to understand all the dynamics within the health-care system and the challenges that are present there, then, at the same time, to sort of carve out a few minutes in his day to spend some time thinking about prevention and active living.

And I think—or I would hope everybody around this table would appreciate the—how important prevention is becoming and thinking about health care and some of the great ideas that can be had by having a separate department and a separate minister who has, you know—spends all of their time thinking about new initiatives and new ways to look at programming and new partners within the community, and just thinking about prevention and sort of being on the leading edge of that. And, again, I mean this is not to suggest that the minister isn't doing this, but I can appreciate that the challenges that he would have in trying to find the time in a day, frankly, to spend time doing that.

* (11:20)

And, again, I appreciate there is also great folks within the department who, I'm sure, spend a lot of time thinking about these things and coming up with new and innovative ways of approaching healthy living within our province.

But, you know, prevention is sort of the next frontier, and we certainly believe it's something that can dramatically affect the pressures on health care and the outcomes with regards to health care, so it's certainly something we want to continue to focus on, and just taking a little bit of time here to talk about healthy living has been helpful.

Just a couple more questions with regards to healthy living: Has the minister—can the minister comment about the development of sustainable food supply initiatives with partners in northern communities?

Specifically, again, on page 100 of the Estimates book, can the minister talk a little bit about the need for ensuring that folks in the North have healthy food options and sustainable food options and some of the work that's being undertaken in the Active Living Department to accomplish that?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, the member's point is well taken.

And, you know, I'm sensitive to that fact that it's a large department and, you know, naturally, people are always attracted to the heat, right, and where the challenges are most prevalent, and that's—that'll be a challenge for me, for sure, to do my best to ensure that departments of the—portions of the department that don't attract as much, perhaps, media attention still receive the kind of attention that they deserve. And I appreciate the member raising that. It's not a thought that hasn't crossed my mind in terms of how that can be managed.

I don't know that there has been as much change as maybe I've even suggested. There were two ministers before, as I referenced earlier, but there was still only one deputy minister, I understand, under the department, still handling all of the difficult things that sometimes occur, and the department was still mostly aligned under the one department even though there was two ministers.

So he's right in that, you know, the additional minister was there to provide some amount of focus, but the department itself in terms of structure hasn't changed significantly.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that I do have a legislative assistant, though, the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield) is my legislative assistant, and he's quite active in many different ways, and where I'm not, he will fill in the gaps. And so he's been quite busy already going to many events and meeting with many people. And anything that I do wrong will fall to him—no, anything that I do wrong will be my responsibility, but he has certainly been incredibly active and engaged, and I think the people know that when he's there, that he has the ear of government fully, and that it's almost like having two ministers. He might wish that it came with some of the other things about being a minister, but he's certainly as engaged and as active and as capable as any member of the government. I'm glad to have him there.

In response in particular to the issue that the member raised regarding the cost of food in the North, the program, of course, still is being maintained and has had some success in reducing the costs of food in the North.

Just one example that I've been referenced to is the range of milk has been lowered by four—in a range of \$4.80 to \$6.40 for a four-litre container of milk. I think that there was at one point somebody in the Legislative Assembly who suggested that instead of milk somebody could have Cheez Whiz. I don't

remember exactly who that member was, and I won't point out specifically, if I did remember I wouldn't identify the individual, but certainly that the Cheez Whiz, as good as it might be, isn't a good replacement for milk.

And so there is the lowering of the costs of milk through the program. Obviously, I think there's always more than can be done—encouraging food to be grown locally. Encouraging that sort of sustainability to ensure that right on hand that there is good nutritious food is something that's important and is something that could probably be promoted even more, but the program does have value and it continues as it is at this point.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I can appreciate the minister giving a little bit of information there with regards to the lowering of milk prices in the North, and he'll know this was a topic that was front and centre for the previous government to ensure that at least that portion of the food bill for folks in the North, and I can appreciate the, again, complexity that I'm sure the staff, in dealing with that particular issue, had to undertake to work that out.

But I also—I will put on the record that I appreciate the minister also talking about new initiatives with regards to local food being provided and delivered in the North, and, you know, all political barbs aside, I think it's an important issue that I think the minister recognizes.

I am concerned, though, I will say, again going back to the budget books, and just having a close look here with regards to the Active Living section, and I see a very full list of objectives and expected results with regards to Active Living, and just a few of the ones that the minister has talked about this afternoon.

There's a number of initiatives and there's a lot of really good steps, and, again, this is something, you know, maybe it's his legislative assistant that he thinks will undertake some of these, but there are some really good initiatives that I think that, you know, there's room to undertake. But I'm seeing here, on page 101, with regards to the expenditures for the department, of course, there is an overall very small increase in money budgeted for Active Living and Healthy Populations, but the increases are all within the staffing component and everything else remains flat within the department.

Can the minister just comment on how—I guess, again, going back to my previous questions, and this

is simply because I don't have the budget books for last year right in front of me, can he let me know what the Estimates of Expenditures were for the 2014-2015 fiscal year for Transportation, Communication, Supplies and Services, Minor Capital and Other Operating, and also External Agencies, and can he comment on the fact that this year they're flat going from last year's budget to this year's?

Mr. Goertzen: The member was asking for the Estimates of Expenditures for '14-15. They were \$6.802 million.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm sorry, I'm trying to follow, you know, other conversations that are around the table as well. The 6.802 was the total subappropriation number?

An Honourable Member: Yes. Do you want a breakdown?

Mr. Wiebe: Okay. So I'm just—what I'm—the numbers that I'm most interested in are the Total Other Expenditures and the External Agencies' numbers.

Mr. Goertzen: So, in 2014-15, in the Estimates book, for Transportation, it was 35; for Communication, it was 327; Supplies and Services, it was 85; Minor Capital was 8, and Other Operating was 1,347, and the External Agencies was \$3,684,000.

* (11:30)

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, I think that's helpful. Thanks very much to the minister.

Okay, so, again, trying to find my next train of thought here and find the next line of questioning. This is, again, jumping a little bit around. But I just wanted to go back to a conversation we had yesterday with regards to the costs related to cancer drugs. And I think if I remember—maybe the minister can refresh my memory—I had asked for a list of those drugs that are on the formulary. Is that something that the department has available, or is it something that is still—it's going to take a little bit of time to get together?

Mr. Goertzen: So I understand that that is public information in terms of the drugs that are available through Pharmacare and through the Home Cancer Drug Program. Staff advise me that it would be slightly more than 11,000 items. So I could read those into the record for the member if he'd like, and

we could leave here in November, or we could provide the list. Which would you prefer?

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, that—I mean, that'll be helpful. Just point us in the right direction or provide the list would be helpful. So, if the minister has that list in front of him, I did want to just ask about one specific drug in particular and—with regards to costs and sort of the impact on the budget line that we see in the Estimates book.

And I'm probably going to get this wrong; I'm not good with drug names, but Imbruvica is what I have, and this is something I understand was recently added to the formulary. [*interjection*] That's spelled I-m-b-r-u-v-i-c-a. Imbruvica, I think. And I think this is a drug that was just recently added to the formulary in this past January when the notice went out.

Mr. Goertzen: So that particular drug, when the member gets the list, I understand it'll be on line item 11,199. The cost per unit per dose is just over \$99.

Mr. Wiebe: And, again, just because I'm new to this, the cost per dose is \$99. What is the usual dosage prescription that somebody would be on this medication or the frequency that they would use it? Is that something the minister knows or could look into and give me a sense of? I'm just looking at what may be a better way to look at this, like, what would be the cost per month or per year for an individual who's on this drug?

Mr. Goertzen: We will seek medical advice and provide him the answer. At the desk, you have one person trained as a—trained in the law and two people who are accountants, so we will get the appropriate medical advice.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister comment—maybe, again, this isn't something that's on the formulary or on the information he has in front of him, but how many users of the drug would there be since its come on the formulary?

Mr. Goertzen: We'll provide the info on Monday, in the committee, or, if this committee is not sitting on Monday, then within the rules provided.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, and that's fair, and we may come back a little bit then to that specific line item.

Again, going back to a discussion that we had yesterday, and I don't want to jump around too much, but I did want to ask a little bit more about the capital projects that we sort of delved into yesterday. And, again, I appreciate the minister's going to bring

back a list of some of those projects that are on a review list.

One question I had for him was with regards to the speech, the actual budget speech. And there was a mention there of two items with regards—under the heading better health care, one would be the funding that's—it says increase to funding that supports the St. Boniface and Fort Garry ACCESS centres. And those two ACCESS centres were specifically mentioned in the budget speech, and I'm just wondering what the funding exactly is going to support. Is that for capital projects? Is that a capital expansion that's happening at these two ACCESS centres, or is it a program delivery increase that's happening at those two ACCESS centres?

* (11:40)

Mr. Goertzen: That reference to the Throne Speech is that the St. Boniface ACCESS centre has opened recently, and the funding for the operations fall within the current budget, and so the Throne Speech was referencing that. And the Fort Garry ACCESS Centre, I understand, is well into construction, and there's funding within the budget to ensure operation funding for that.

Mr. Wiebe: So are there any plans to increase the services that are provided at these ACCESS centres, these ones or the existing ones across the province? Is there a plan to change the services that are provided there, increase them, or any kind of change to service deliveries that folks can expect at the ACCESS centres?

Mr. Goertzen: One of the things we're—that I'm currently doing is reading and reviewing a report that came out of the University of Manitoba, Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, that looked at ACCESS centres and those who use the ACCESS centres. I think it was an instructive report in that we didn't have good data necessarily in terms of who is using the different facilities and what sort of results were coming from the usage. So the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy research did look at it and analyzed the kinds of clients that are accessing the ACCESS centres as opposed to, perhaps, other facilities, the flow, the output that was coming from the ACCESS centres. So we just received that report within the last couple of weeks, so we're doing an analysis on it just to see if things can be improved or bettered based on the research that they did.

Mr. Wiebe: And I can appreciate, you know, a study into the QuickCare clinics. I know anecdotally, folks

will, I'm sure, around this table, will confirm that people seem to appreciate having health-care services in their neighbourhood, and having those ACCESS centres right in their communities has been helpful. I think it gives a point of access that wasn't available before to, you know, what is otherwise a very large system in their minds. And so, having those facilities right in the communities, I think, is something that's helpful, and it gives people a sense that the health-care system—and then we're not just talking about hospitals and clinics and sort of the point of contact that they're used to having but the larger system of health-care delivery, and that's all the people that work towards that who we would call front-line workers, I think everybody within that system. They're right in their neighbourhoods, and that gives them a—it gives them a point of access.

So, just to get to a question here, and I understand the minister has other duties and responsibilities. As I've said a few times now, he's—doesn't feel like he's busy enough, so he's always looking for more roles and responsibilities around this place. But I'm just wondering if within the ACCESS centres, again, going back to the capital projects that are under way, the Fort Garry ACCESS Centre is under way, but are there any other—I guess were there any other planned ACCESS centres to be built in terms of the rollout of ACCESS centres across the city and the province? Can he talk about where those other projects might have been and are they also, then, on the under review as part of the review of all capital projects?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and just to clarify to that point, because the member talked about a list of capital items under review, and I don't want to leave any misinterpretation.

As I indicated to him yesterday, I'm trying to find, and I have been trying to find, since I became minister, a list of all the different announcements that the NDP made prior to the election. My challenge is, and the challenge that I have in trying to do that, even for myself, is that some of them came out in news releases. Some of them were made in community halls. Some of them, seemingly, were made on the doorstep of individuals' homes. Some of them were written on napkins at the Manitoba Club. Some of them were delivered, seemingly, by pigeon courier to individuals. And, as I go around Manitoba, I'm hearing about all these different things that were committed to, and then I go and I look to see if something went through a Cabinet submission or a

Treasury Board submission, and I find out that it hadn't.

Even the announcement that was made in my own community regarding a performing arts centre, never was a government news release issued with it. It was dropped off in a letter on Christmas Eve at the City Hall. The minister at the time phoned my mayor on the way home and said can you meet me at City Hall, delivered him a letter on Christmas Eve, under a ministry that he wasn't responsible for, committing funds from a fund that didn't exist with no government news release, with no Cabinet or Treasury Board approval.

So I could put that, I suppose, under the list that the member's asking for, but I have absolutely no idea what status that is because it didn't go through any sort of government approval, or seem to have any sort of government sanction. So I myself am trying to develop this list from all the rumours and innuendos that Manitobans are giving us in terms of the commitments that may or may not have been made by the previous government. And, once I find that list and draw in the napkins, then I can try to determine which ones actually had any sort of government status, which ones went through Cabinet, which ones went through Treasury Board, which ones had any sort of approval, because what I don't want to be doing is suggesting that we're reviewing a bunch of lists that involve things like the Tiger Dam transaction that happened under the former government.

So, if the member is looking for a specific line-by-line item of projects, he's going to have to give me some assistance in drawing in those different napkins that some of these commitments were made on on the doorsteps of individual Manitobans.

Mr. Wiebe: So I recognize that time is very short here and the minister does have to run, but I'm wondering if he could answer the question with regards to ACCESS centres. So the rollout—this is not a campaign commitment, I'm not asking in a political way—I'm simply asking the rollout of the ACCESS centres across the city. And I know we, sort of, had an understanding from the departments, you know, we need one here, we need one there, we need one there, and that they, kind of, had an understanding of where those were going. Fort Garry, I understand, is under construction.

In the very small amount of time we have left, does he have that information on where the next one

was planned and if that's then—also, is that something that's going to be under review?

Mr. Goertzen: I'd have to take a look to see what, exactly, the former government's commitments were, and what the nature of those commitments were. I don't know in what form or fashion they took, whether they came as part of a news release, or whether they came as part of an announcement, or whether they came as part of a fair or festival or part of a dinner that someone was being held, so I'd have to take a look at that.

Not that I'm trying to cut this short, but I think I'm going to ask for a recess of the committee.

Madam Chairperson: Does the committee agree to recess with the understanding that, if the committee does not return by 12:30, it will be considered to have risen for the day? *[Agreed]*

FINANCE

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply is now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Crown Services. At this time we invite—Finance, including Crown Services. At this time we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

We'll now ask the members to introduce their staff in attendance.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I would like to introduce here at the table Deputy Minister Jim Hrichishen, who, I might be a little biased here, although I think is the best deputy minister a minister could ever have, outstanding individual, fine Manitoban, great Canadian, and I certainly appreciate all the advice and the sage direction we get.

Also the assistant—executive financial officer of Manitoba Crown Services, Chester Wojciechowski, who gives us very good financial advice, and we appreciate that he is here as well.

In the gallery also is the special assistant for Crown Services, one Mr. Cameron Bell, and the executive assistant for Crown Services, one Marian Jaworski, and I'd like to welcome all of them to the table.

I also have—there was a question raised yesterday and I have more information—

Mr. Chairperson: We'll just introduce everybody for now, Minister, okay. We'll just introduce everybody on the other side, too. Thanks for your introduction.

Can we get the honourable member for Tyndall Park and introduce their staff member?

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): We have—thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have Dan Lambert, L-a-m-b-e-r-t.

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

Mr. Schuler: Yesterday there seemed to be a little bit of confusion about some dates, and I want to put the correct dates on the record, and that is that a one Mr. Jim Rondeau, former member for Assiniboine, had his appointment to Manitoba Hydro revoked by order-in-council on April 22nd, 2016, and there was a second order-in-council, and that was one—the member for—Tyndall Park—I'm sorry, the member for Tyndall Park, because I'm not allowed to use his name because he's still a current MLA. The member for Tyndall Park had his appointment to Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation also revoked on April 22nd.

So I don't know if that's what the member was asking about yesterday when he said that people had been removed, and that—I wasn't quite sure what the question was, but I did want to put on the record that both of those individuals had their appointments revoked by order-in-council on April 22nd.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the correction.

Of course, I may have to correct the honourable minister about the impression that he was trying to make, that it was all a revocation. It was more of an act of courtesy on the part of the previous government to the incoming new government. It's not because of some incompetence on the part of anyone, but because it was an act of courtesy. And I hope that that sticks somewhere.

May I ask a question to the honourable minister: Who is Mr. Brent VanKoughnet? I'll spell the last name: V-a-n-K-o-u-g-h-n-e-t.

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member very much for putting that on the record, that he and Jim Rondeau were removed from the board out of

courtesy. And I struggle with that a little bit. I don't know what courtesy was extended because he asked questions about the other board positions that had also been revoked and he seemed to have some issue with that but wanted it put on the record that his revocation and that of the former member of Assiniboine was a courtesy issue and that it should have no reflection on their abilities.

And I would say to the member from Tyndall Park that he is absolutely right. We agree on that, that none of these positions are a reflection on anybody or their ability or what they did or how they participated or what their input was. That had nothing to do with it. And it's just there's an ebb and flow in politics, and people are brought in and are moved out because a new team wants to set a new direction, wants to go a different path, and people were removed from boards not because of any other reason than a new direction was going to be set, including the member for Assiniboine and the member for Tyndall Park. And I know the member for Assiniboine well. He's a good friend. Didn't agree with him on everything that he did. There were times in this House we got fairly heated and debated issues and went toe to toe in debates, and yet I always respected that what he did, he felt he was doing in the best interest of all Manitobans.

In fact, I would point out to the member for Tyndall Park that that kind of stand actually in the end cost him his job, because he took principled stands, because he stood up for what he believed in, and that's what cost him his job in Cabinet. And I, again, would like to point out to this Estimates committee that at no point in time did we feel that anybody was removed off of a board for any other reason than there was a new path and a new direction going to be taking place. So we want to be very clear on that, and, frankly, I'm glad that the member for Tyndall Park raised it because that's a very good point.

He also raised a name, and he raised the name of Brent VanKoughnet and asked who he is. And I would suggest that maybe the member would like to ask him—he's got substantial research staff, individuals sitting right in front of him, that maybe he could just tap them on the shoulder and say perhaps they could go on the website. There's this new thing Al Gore invented, I think I mentioned yesterday. It's called Google. And he can find out who the boards are of the various Crown corporations, and I'd like to point out to the member opposite that Brent VanKoughnet is a chair of the board of Manitoba Public Insurance

Corporation. Brent is an outstanding Manitoban. He is a farmer. He is one of those individuals who helps to feed the world.

* (10:10)

In fact, I'd point out to the member that often I drive out to Oakbank, and it's one of those, you know, great times, you drive out early in the morning and the crops in the field are maybe an inch high, and you drive home and they're, like, two and a half inches high. And you see the beautiful fields and you see the beautiful crops. And I always realize, and it's never lost on me, that our communities, our farmers, our province and our nation help to feed the world. And I think we should never lose sight of that.

And Brent is certainly one of those individuals, a very, very esteemed individual in Manitoba. And we are very proud and very pleased that he accepted the position of chair of MPI.

Mr. Marcelino: Besides being a specialist in soya bean cultivation, is there any other qualification for Mr. VanKoughnet?

Mr. Schuler: Besides sitting on multiple boards, besides having been involved in a lot of issues that impacted not just our province but our nation, besides being involved at the national level, besides being a business person, besides being a individual who runs a substantive operation, a farm operation, a business operation, besides all of that, he is a great individual who brings an amazing skill set.

He is a product of our province. And we believe that he is one of those individuals that has proven that, with hard work and determination, you can be whatever you want to be. And it's one of the things that we teach our children in our schools.

I know that River East school division, when I was on the board it used to be called River East school division at the time, and we had a motto, you know: Be Anything You Want to Be.

And the chair of the board of MPI is, certainly, one of those individuals, who has proven that you can, with hard work, move ahead. He is not adverse to getting involved in—and getting briefings and making sure that the Crown corporation is being run in an independent and a political-interference-free way.

I—we believe that he is doing just a fantastic job. There's a great board of directors that are working with him.

And we are very pleased that we got the kind of calibre we did in Sandy Riley at Manitoba Hydro, and Polly Craik at Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, and Ben Vanconance [*phonetic*] at Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

And we are very pleased in the work that they're doing and how they're going about it. And, again, we've achieved in recruiting individuals who are doing a great job at the Crown corporations.

Mr. Marcelino: And can the honourable Minister for Crown services please tell us: Is Mr. Brent VanKoughnet a political supporter of the Progressive Conservative Party? And how much has he contributed to the party?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for the question, because it comes to a point that I think we should be discussing at committee in what qualifies or doesn't qualify someone to sit on a board.

And I am under the impression that the previous board was not vetted by the New Democrats, perhaps, by the member himself, and I'm under the impression that they weren't vetted based on their political involvement, but rather on what they would bring to a board, what they would bring to a corporation.

And I can tell the member forthright that, at no point in time, was anybody's political affiliation vetted. It was not a question that was ever asked. I have no idea what any of these individuals voted in any election, I don't know. There is something called a secret ballot, and we uphold that right.

Yesterday, I spoke at length about the respect we have for our democratic process, for the respect we have for the secret ballot, and one of the reasons why we have to protect the sanctity of that secret ballot is some people do find that they're a little intimidated with our process. The member from Tyndall Park might know canvassing that you go door to door and you sometimes see houses with three or four political signs on the yard and you speak with the people and if, you know, they don't feel threatened, you will find that they—they're just not comfortable, they're not comfortable indicating their support.

So what they would rather do is they say they support the political process and anybody can put a lawn sign on their yard, and that, you know, I respect that. I mean that's how they like to exhibit their political leanings and at no point in time should that keep them away from or qualify them for a board. That—what lawn sign they have or what they've said

about a political party or what they may or may not have donated, I can tell the member I have no idea what any of these individuals have donated. At no point in time was any list put in front of me, neither from previous boards nor from this board do I know what they've donated.

I think in the past—there were boards in the past where an issue came up. I can tell the member that the previous board, I have no idea what they donated, nor do I know what this board donated or who they supported or how they voted or what lawn sign they had on the yard, because that wasn't the point. And I think I've—there are individuals on previous boards who are friends of mine who I think did a good job. I suspect they might have been supporting the NDP in an election that actually is of no interest to me. I would be interested in knowing that they did what was best for the Crown corporation and for the ratepayers and the taxpayers of Manitoba.

And I would suggest, you know, that the member would go to the Crown corporation, find out who the members are on the board and maybe he'd like to send each and every one of them a letter, maybe he wants to send them an email, and ask them, you know, how did they vote in the last election. And so far as their donations, he has the right to ask them how much they donated as well, that's completely his prerogative. He can ask them. I'm not going to ask them. I don't find that interesting. What I am interested in is what kind of work they're going to do for each Crown corporation respectfully, and I think that's what we should be talking about, and I appreciate the questions, but again that was not part of the process of vetting individuals.

We were looking for individuals that were going to help the Crown corporations get out of the political interference, financial mess that members opposite left the Crown corporations in.

Mr. Marcelino: Let me go back to the person or persons who are on the board of directors of MPI. Would this Edna Nabess—I'll spell the last name, N-a-b-e-s-s. Is she the same person who ran for the Progressive Conservative Party in the 2016 elections?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for that question because it allows me to talk about an outstanding woman, who I have an incredible amount of respect for.

*(10:20)

Edna Nabess is an individual that I got to know years ago. She used to have a store in Garden City Shopping Centre. She then moved it on to Main Street and now she's sort of on the corner of Main Street and where Nairn—not Nairn—where the Disraeli Bridge hits Main Street, and I'm—I'm struggling with the name of that street right now, but anyway, she's got the shop right on that corner. It's called Creations—C-r-e-a-Creations, and, but anyway, back when she used to be in Garden City Shopping Centre, because we have hardwood floors in the house, I was—we always found it very cold in winter, so we wanted the—the moccasins, and we went and we saw Edna Nabess, didn't really know her, but went in there, and she made us moccasins. Now this would be going back probably about 15 years ago, and made us moccasins for Christmas.

And everybody—everybody we knew, they'd come over and they'd say, like, are those ever gorgeous, and she'll make them whatever designs you want and however you want them, and Edna is an amazing businesswoman. She's a First Nations woman, an Aboriginal woman who runs a fantastic business. She's got her family involved. She's decided to move from Seven Oaks Shopping Centre to downtown. She is involved in so many—so many events that help the community. She's involved with all kinds of fundraisers for the community, and she concentrates so much of what she does helping other people.

If we were looking for a hero for young Native women, Edna would be one of those individuals. She's a businesswoman, runs a great operation, unbelievable quality, is a great woman of faith, a great woman who stands up for her community, who is an advocate for her community, and I—I just can't say enough about Edna.

We've, you know, gotten to know her over the years, always upstanding, always prepared to help out, always there with a kind word, always there with a smile on her face, just an outstanding individual. And in so far as what all her activities have been, they are too numerous to mention what she has all done for fundraisers, for charities and for groups looking for help. They're too numerous. They're too numerous, and if the member wants, I would suggest he go down to her store, call her up. She would love to have you in her shop.

Drop by, and say, you know, we were discussing her in Estimates, and what she does and who she is and the kind of work she does, and I would

recommend to members of this House, and I'll self-declare I have no interest in her business—I don't get anything for this. She makes outstanding products, whether it's mukluks—in fact, for Christmas she made my daughter a beautiful pair of short mukluks and my daughter got to pick out the colour and the fur.

And the other thing is, and I don't know if the member knows this, but all of the product that she puts in there, including the beading, is all Manitoba made, and I understand that some organizations now are going to China and having the beading made in China, and she makes sure all the beading is made here in Manitoba on the reserves, and she buys it off of them. And the kind of beadwork that you can get on your moccasins or your mukluks is just second to none. And I would recommend to everybody here, if they want to get a really great Christmas gift, I suggest you go early enough because one year we got everything on the 22nd or 23rd right before Christmas.

She runs a great business, does a great job, and I would recommend that they go early enough that they can avail themselves of her product. But she is an unbelievable individual and we're incredibly proud of the fact that she's accepted to sit on the board, and we know she brings an amazing skill set to the board that she is sitting on right now.

Mr. Marcelino: At this point let's move to the framework letter, so-called, which is not dated and not signed.

Do I take it that the copies that were sent to me, from the honourable minister, is genuine or not?

Why is it not dated? And why is it not signed?

Mr. Schuler: I have no idea which letters the member is talking about, but we tabled letters in the Legislature, of which he should have gotten a set. And they were signed and dated. I don't know which letters he received.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the short answer.

I will table a copy of this unsigned and undated letter. And I'm just trying to find a way around describing it.

My question to the honourable minister is that: Were these letters an afterthought after being asked about them? Or was it prepared prior to the appointment of Mr. Riley, Ms. Craik and the other, who appears to be chairing one of the boards or one of the Crown corporations?

Mr. Schuler: I don't know if that is a letter that perhaps the member ran offline, but I would be prepared to, if the Clerk would be so kind as to photocopy these, we'll get him a signed, dated—they're exactly the same ones he's got, and we'll ensure that he gets a signed, dated copy, if we could get photocopies of those. And we'd be more than willing to give him a signed, dated copy.

If there's one thing that we've been as a government, it's been open and transparent. Never before, never before in the history did a government ever, ever table a mandate letter for ministers.

And we're still waiting—the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), I take it he's got a whole series of them, and we would love to see him table them. *[interjection]* And he laughs about open and transparency, because he thinks it's a joke. For 17 years, he never came across it once, so why would it be something real today?

Because it is. We have tabled the mandate letters given to ministers, unparalleled in the history of the province. And, for the last 17 dark, dark NDP days, we never got anything.

And, more importantly, the framework letters that were given to Crown corporations were also tabled. And we will make sure that the member gets whatever form of letter that he would like. We will ensure that that's the case. And they'll be forthcoming. They are a very good read, because it sets out the tone of where we want to go in our relationship with the Crown corporations.

And I'd like to point out to the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), and this is very important, and I hope he pays attention, and even the member for Minto might find this, you know, revealing, because he's used to a completely different era and a completely different way of dealing with Crown corporations: the NDP went to each one of the Crown corporations and told them, or, as we would say, they 'voluntold' each Crown corporation that they were going to pay for a political staffer that was going to work in the minister's office. And that political staffer then ran interference in the Crown corporation.

That led to an awful lot of confusion. Exactly who was in charge of the Crown corporation? Was it the minister? Was it the minister's staff? Was it that person that was paid for by the Crown corporation? Was it the board? Was it the CEO? Was it a combination of all of them?

* (10:30)

And then there's no wonder why there was the kind of confusion and the kind of epic, epic failures in the Crown corporations that now we live with. And I mean by we, we mean by—the ratepayers and the taxpayers of Manitoba. Those epic failures are going to cost the working men and women for years to come because of the kind of meddling.

And the thing is, is that never once—never once—was it made public by the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), never once did he ever say that the Crown corporations are 'voluntold' to pay for a political staffer in the minister's office and then run interference in the Crown corporation. No wonder our corporations are under the duress they are when we—as when we took over.

And that's why it is important to have the openness. That's why the framework letters are so important. And I want to make sure that the member gets the copies he's looking for. We want to make sure that he gets a chance to read those letters because they lay out clearly for the Crown corporations where we plan on going as a government. And that is, we are not going to have the political interference and the kind of undermining of the professionals of the corporations like was done for the last dark, dreary NDP years of their last 17 years.

Mr. Marcelino: I defer the questioning to the member for Wolseley. I'll have to go—just go and puke.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Quick question: Has the amount of money Hydro has budgeted for construction of the Bipole III transmission line changed?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for Wolseley for that question. He's also been here for a while, knows this process well, and I welcome him to this process. It's a important process for the Legislature and it's one that we should all make as much avail of as possible. It's—I think it's a good process, and other countries should be doing the same thing, where the finances of the government are put to the test of the opposition.

I would like to point out to the member, and he would know this, over the years when I was critic for, I believe, all the Crowns at one point in time, and I would come into an Estimates process, and I would ask the minister, who was responsible for that specific Crown, questions like he's asking, very

specific questions on a Crown corporation, and I believe it was Steve Ashton, the MLA for Thompson, who was the one who put it the most succinctly, and he—the member from Wolseley would have to go into Hansard and search it, he could probably find it, and it was every minister, including his former leader, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) mentioned the same thing, that in Estimates we cannot answer questions that are specific to a Crown corporation.

There is a committee for that. It is called the Crown Services committee. Each one of the Crown corporations will be coming forward. They, at that point in time, will ask—answer specific questions that are asked. Having sat in a lot of those committee meetings, I've asked a lot of those questions, and that is where those questions have to be asked, because at this committee we do not answer specific questions about the Crown corporations because Estimates is about the finances of the Province of Manitoba and not about the inner workings of a specific Crown corporation. That's really what Crown Services—sorry, now I've dropped the name of the committee. It is called the Crown Corporations Committee of the Legislature. That's where the annual reports go and that's where those questions would be best asked.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank you for that.

A lot of things have changed, so it's just good to get that on the record, that process still in place. The minister had some interesting things to say about it.

I'm wondering if he could now describe, in the context of the Estimates process that we're in, what a non-political process would be for decision making when he's talking to the Crowns under his jurisdiction.

Mr. Schuler: The member for Tyndall Park asked a question, and I 'wanteded' to go back and just put some very specific items on the record for him, because he asked about the qualifications of Brent VanKoughnet. And I'd like to put on the record that the chair of the board of MPI has over 25 years' agriculture industry, farm management and consulting experience. He's an owner-manager of Agri Skills Inc., which is marketing—manage, develop and deliver customized agriculture training projects related to sales and customer service, agronomy, organizational team building, precision agriculture and market development.

He also developed and delivered consulting services in the areas of customer communications,

strategic planning, governance, conflict resolution and market development strategies. He also manages and executes replicated field-scale agriculture research trials through the farm-family farm, and up to eight other associate locations across Western Canada. He is also the contract executive director of Manitoba Wheat and Barley Growers Association. He also delivered five to 20 keynote presentations per year to conferences and customer meetings throughout Canada. He also was on retainer—is on retainer to Vancouver port authority, 1999 to 2010, providing stakeholder customer service, market analysis, business development, policy issue management. He also developed and delivered curriculum in sales and merchandising and practising the profession of agrology, in Manitoba, and University of Manitoba faculty of agriculture.

He was also agriculture marketing manager, Norwest Labs, up until 1995, where he designed and delivered a marketing strategy for agriculture, analytical services. He launched services, in Manitoba, after purchase of provincial soil and feed testing labs—also, coordinated budgets, pricing, sales projections and sales staff to meet corporate objectives; participated in the 'restruction' of the management team in a rapid and growing company.

He also has education, consulting and marketing, Assiniboine college. Up until 1992, he was dealing, obviously, with agriculture programs. Agrologist sales, special projects, Redfern Farm Services—he was involved with that; and grain merchant, Louis Dreyfus corporation.

He's been involved in numerous, numerous various business, helping out. And he's involved in—if the member wants, I could give him more of that, but I think we've sort of laid out that he is amply qualified. His professional associations: director, Canada Grains Council, now past; he's past chair of On-Farm Food Safety committee; he's past chair of research funding working group.

He's a member of MIA—was—he's the past chair now; member of CAMA, past events chair; and a member of CAAR, and—now he's a past member. In the community, he's chair of Community Council; an active member of Boyne Care, personal-care home building project team; past chair of Carmen and area foundation. He's a trustee on a local church board, and his interests are founding member of Animato! choral group. He's an amateur triathlete and an avid skier.

And we are very, very pleased that he accepted our request to sit on the board and take on the position of chair. We think it's important to have individuals who come with a varied background and, from what I've just put on the record, I think the member would also share with me the sentiment that he certainly has a lot of experience in a lot of different fields and comes to the board with a great skill set. *[interjection]* And he comes, as my colleague says next to me, and he comes with a lot of common sense.

* (10:40)

My—the colleague from Wolseley also asked how the interaction is—how we interact with the Crown corporations. I would be very—I'd like to be very clear that I interact with the board chair and with the board; I do not interact with the CEO or other staff. The CEO actually works for the board, does not work for the minister. If I have any specific questions, I work through the deputy of Crown Services.

Mr. Altemeyer: What are the timelines for those discussions around your party's pledge to implement a new DSM entity in Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for that question because that is a commitment we've—we made, and it is a commitment that was supported roundly by a lot of Manitobans and a lot of organizations across Manitoba. And that came from the Public Utilities Board as a recommendation.

Now, I am aware that there was a working group that had already done some work under the previous government, and certainly we want to review the work that was done. If there's work that we can—to build on, certainly we would. But we want to be very clear that this is one of our commitments. I would point out to the member that, you know, what couldn't get done in 17 years probably is going to take us a little bit more than the last month that—I've been Minister of Crown Services for about a month right now. And it's going to take a little bit more than a month, but I can assure the member, this is something that is definitely top of my agenda. It is something that we are going to work on, and it's got to be done carefully. We want to make sure that it is something that is complete. We don't want to put something forward that doesn't work or isn't going to be in the best interest of all ratepayers.

I would point out to the member—he will know this more than anybody—his party in the last few

years, I think there were three positions on this. It is quite an undertaking, and we are excited about proceeding down this path, but we're going to have to do it in such a way that it is fully consulted, that it makes sense, that it works for Manitobans. And, when we come forward, we will come forward with one position and not three positions like the government previous. And maybe that was one of the failings of a DSM under the previous government, because there was clearly not harmony on that issue within their own caucus. And what we bring forward, we will bring forward in—with one voice. It will be—I can guarantee the member, it will be something that will work for Manitoba. We will look what others are doing and what others have done, and we will come forward with a made-in-Manitoba solution. It's important. It's important that we do this and that we get it right.

The recommendation came out from the Public Utilities Board in June of 2014, and we think that now is a very good time to move ahead with this project.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Could the minister advise us, is he responsible for promoting and improving road safety in Manitoba?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the former Justice minister for that question, because as he knows, road safety is really everybody's responsibility. And I think he's speaking more about within government, it is a collaborative effort and it is not just one department. There are a lot of various stakeholders that are involved with promoting road safety. And that is something our government is going to continue to do.

If individuals see something unsafe, it can be all the way as widespread as somebody driving their vehicle and they see something that's not safe they can report it, and we know that there are very good initiatives that have been put forward by our Winnipeg Police Service and with other organizations. And clearly our Crown corporations, as in Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation is also a partner in that, and we would see that continue.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the minister.

And, yes, if any Manitoban sees somebody who is driving unsafely who is impaired, yes, there's a—we'd hope people would have a responsibility to report it.

I'm talking about whether the minister, though, has a mandate to promote road safety, which

includes taking on impaired driving, taking on distracted driving, trying to promote seatbelt use, trying to make sure that people drive safely around school buses, trying to get people to follow the right speed.

I'm just asking the minister: Is that within his mandate as the Minister responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the minister of Justice for that question, because it is an important question.

And one of the things that I think we should be very clear about is that when it comes to road safety, we are all, all responsible for ensuring that there is road safety, whether it's winter roads or children standing on a street corner waiting to get onto a school bus. And that is not one particular area, it's not one particular minister, we are all responsible because safety—we, as a society, value safety in our communities, and over the years, we've seen issues addressed.

For instance, member opposite, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) might remember the day when we used to drive around the city—and I come from a family, I have five siblings, and we all used to pile into the back seat of the car and nobody wore a seatbelt or that there was a baby bucket or a child seat or a booster seat—unheard of. Nobody wore seatbelts. And if there was an accident, they were actually catastrophic.

And there were individuals in society who started to talk about the interior of vehicles and how unsafe they were. And it was really a wide array of individuals that would look at these kinds of things. If you go back and you look at some of the old vehicles from the '50s and '60s, where the dashboard came to a point at about 50, 60 miles an hour you might as well just have had sharp knives in there because if you hit something, the damage to the individuals in the vehicle was substantial.

*(10:50)

So we have developed a system whereby we want to protect individuals and whether it's child-safety seats, and I know the member probably availed himself of it, and the seats that we had back then now would probably not be allowed in the vehicles, we've really moved ahead.

And he would also know when he took driver training, and he and I both at the same time that

would be probably about 10, 15 years ago for he and I, airbags were not even a thing then. And I can remember the whole debate about airbags and that, oh, my goodness, they were the most unsafe thing, and we can't have airbags in vehicles, they're going to be more harmful than they're going to be good, and I remember listening to this debate and thinking that's kind of an odd debate.

And years ago, I was hit downtown by someone who ran a red light, and 'alls' I can say is thank goodness for the airbags because there was very little left of the vehicle by the time it came to a standstill, and the airbags went off and kept me very safely in my seat. And I would say thank God I walked out of a vehicle that, in years past, you would not have walked out alive, with a bruise on my hip where the door hit me in the side. And that's, you know, we all have to be part of safety, and we're—we, as a government, are going to continue to promote safety. It's something that each minister has some responsibility because, clearly, whether it's the Department of Health, which has a definite interest in road safety, all of us should because it involves our families, it involves us, it involves our neighbours and our communities and we want to ensure that they're safe.

And, you know, again safety does start when you walk out the front door but, you know, as leaders in the community we've got to ensure that we have safety foremost in what we do and, you know, it started a while ago where workers had those vests with the neon X in the middle and now you see everybody's using it.

And this morning my son walked out the door and he's got his steel-toed work boots and he's got his vest and he's doing landscape work. And I asked him if he has to wear it all the time and he said actually it's only regulated on public land, if it's someone's private yard they don't have to, but he said they are recommended that they wear them all the time. Their company would prefer if they just wore them because you—it's just way safer that way.

So safety is everybody's responsibility, including mine as Minister of Crown Services.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for confirming, then, that he doesn't believe he has any more responsibility for promoting road safety than any other Manitoban.

I guess I'll get him just to focus in on one question, which I think will be easy for him to

answer. I'm presuming there is nothing in this minister's budget Estimates that specifically deal with promoting and improving road safety in Manitoba.

Mr. Schuler: Actually on the contrary, and I would like to point the former minister of Justice, there's the new initiative called SAFE Roads, which is sharing roads with workers during the busy construction season. As warm weather approaches, that can only mean one thing in Manitoba—construction season is upon us.

For the ninth year in a row, a group of community stakeholders are teaming up as safety partners to launch the annual SAFE Roads campaign aimed at raising awareness of the safety of road construction workers. As part of the SAFE Roads campaign officially launched May 15th, messages targeted at motorists—we'll be asking them to slow down and exercise caution when driving past road construction projects.

Soon you'll be seeing radio, billboard and transit ads urging motorists to simply slow down when driving through construction zones. This initiative is building on the SAFE Work Manitoba board, and is helping all of us branch out our safety message.

We're all motorists. We all have a responsibility to make sure those road construction workers, utility employees and emergency service workers within the public right-of-way get home safely at the end of each day. An open road can pose safety issues for anyone, especially when the road is your workplace and there are 2,000-pound vehicles rushing past you a few feet away. Motorists need to take precautions and share the road with those who are out doing their jobs.

SAFE Roads is a joint safety effort between the following community stakeholders: City of Winnipeg Public Works, City of Brandon Construction, Safety Association of Manitoba, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Manitoba Government Employees Union, Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, Office of the Fire Commissioner, Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Services, Winnipeg Police Services, Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba, and WORKSAFELY, MHCA.

And this was a document that was put out by SAFE Roads. I'm quoting directly from the

document, and it's clear in here that Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation are active participants and we feel that road safety is important. Certainly, as our young people get jobs and go out and work, they are sometimes not as vigilant as individuals who have been on the job longer than them, and we want to ensure that everybody is safe, that it shouldn't matter who you are or what job you're doing or what workplace you're at, that you have an environment to work within that is safe, that you come home to your loved ones and enjoy all the great things that we have here in Manitoba. We wanted to make sure that those individuals are safe from harm or worse yet, from death.

And so, yes, Crown Services is very involved in this through the Crown corporations, and we are pleased with the work that's being done.

Mr. Swan: I'm sure the member's aware that MPI is an active partner in trying to promote road safety. The member's probably aware that MPI pays for the cost of overtime and regular time for police officers throughout the year for various campaigns, check stops, often around Christmastime or around long weekends in the summer, other check stops or other enforcement periods to try and deal with impaired driving, distracted driving, other unsafe driving practices.

Can this minister confirm that MPI will continue to support these measures in a similar fashion to the way they have in the past?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for the question, and as I read to the committee just a couple minutes ago, we know that not just MPI but Workers Compensation and Manitoba Hydro and often Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries are involved in a lot of these programs. In fact, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries has the play safe and play responsibly, and I think they have drink responsibility. I think they're very—they run all kinds of public service campaigns and, again, I would caution the member. He knows; he was a Cabinet minister at one point in time. There is something called the Crown corporations committee and some of these questions are probably best asked at that committee.

* (11:00)

Our government has been very clear that safety is very important to our government, and it is important to Manitobans, and we want to ensure that Manitobans are safe, and we will continue to work

with all the stakeholders. We think this is the way to go. This is a good approach: that you work with various stakeholders, and everybody participates, and we keep our workers and our citizens safe.

Mr. Swan: I presume the minister is also aware that MPI advertises to promote safety throughout the year. The member's probably—or minister's probably available right now. There's a motorcycle safety campaign going on every year. There's a bicycle safety program. In the fall, there's school bus safety. Obviously, MPI's been engaged in texting and driving.

Can the minister simply confirm that MPI will continue to support these measures in, at least, the same way they have in the past?

Mr. Schuler: And, again, I point out to the former minister, he should, you know, be aware a lot of these questions are best asked at Crown Corporations Committee, because they go, specifically, to a Crown corporation.

And one of the things that we are very clear on, we're not going to politically interfere in the Crown corporations. We believe that there are good individuals involved in those corporations. We also know that they have—they are very safety conscience—conscious. They take what they do very seriously.

And the minister will know that MPI has a vested interest in safe driving, because it keeps our rates down. It keeps people safe. We all have family members and friends who are travelling on the roads, and to have these various programs are very important. And they're important on a social side. They're also very important for the businesses. It makes sense for them to be involved.

The specifics of each program, I would recommend the member come to Crown Corporations Committee and pose the questions on specific programs at that time. This is more of an overview here at Estimates. And I can, however, tell the member that we are committed to developing and putting forward programs that make our citizens safe.

And, while we're on the topic, one of the things that's going to be facing all Canadians is our federal government has decided that they are going to legalize marijuana. And we're going to have to bring stakeholders together and talk about how we're going to deal with safe driving, when it comes to marijuana and what kind of tests can be administered. And,

clearly, that'll—clearly that will have to be a cross-government discussion. And those discussions are already taking place. But, again, we will be involved in those discussions that are going to come forward.

We're still waiting for the federal government to bring down their actual legislation so we can see what's going to be involved. We don't know how proscriptive the legislation's going to be, if it's going to be on a regulatory basis, which then means we have to wait even longer. But we certainly are looking for some kind of direction from the federal government, because, at that point in time, we all have a vested interest in ensuring that individuals who are going to take part in marijuana use, that they refrain from driving while they're still under the influence. So there's going to be new challenges.

You know, when the member from Minto and I were taking our licence, there actually wasn't much cellphone use taking place and certainly not texting. And there was no such thing as a Twitter account, at that time. And, as things are developed and come forward, yes, it's important that government and all society—and the list that I read for the member, I'm sure he knows it, as most of us do, it's important that all the vested interest groups get together and that we plan for and that we get programs in place that protect everyone, whether it's behind the wheel of a vehicle or on a construction site, because we've got to make sure that everybody has their right to go to work and also has their right to come home safely.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm glad to hear the minister now seems to support the efforts that MPI has to try and promote safe driving.

I know some of his colleagues, in the past, criticized MPI for paying for police officers to conduct checkstops, to make our roads safer. I'm glad that perhaps there's been a conversion on the road to Damascus.

I'm also pleased now that the minister seems to support MPI's advertising campaigns. I know I had to answer questions from the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), who was outraged that MPI was paying for a program in the fall to try and make sure that children getting on and off school buses are safe. But I'm glad the minister's now confirmed that he believes those are worthwhile initiatives, and I think that's helpful.

The minister has chosen to lecture me on what Estimates can and can't do. I asked him a question a

few minutes ago about what exactly in his Estimates dealt with promoting and improving road safety in Manitoba. He read a press release which included MPI as a partner but not his own department.

I'd just like him to focus and tell me: What, if anything, in his Estimates actually deals with promoting or improving road safety in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to point out to the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) that I've already made it very clear that everybody has a responsibility for safety. And whether it's a Manitoba Hydro that clearly has some responsibility—has a lot of responsibility—when it comes to safety. They're right now building major construction projects, and safety has to be on the forefront. And it should be just as important for the landscape company that has workers working out there today, and if there's a storm coming in, and there's severe lightning, well, they have a responsibility to make sure that their workers are safe and aren't hurt.

This morning, I was watching my son walk out the door, and there's that terrible incident that to this day still haunts me about a young individual. There was a large dump truck with scalding hot asphalt, and I believe it was in Selkirk, and for some reason, the door was stuck or he didn't realize how it operated and stood behind the gate and tried to leverage it open, and it opened and it buried him. And that, to me—that still haunts me to this day.

And safety is with every department of government, safety is with every corporation, safety should be with everybody, whether it's in their home—you should practise safety—I mean, there's that story now out of Florida. You know, people are nicely at a—what they thought was a beach and a crocodile came out of the water and snapped their child.

* (11:10)

And, you know, now, in retrospect, now they're going to put all kinds of signs up. Now safety's going to become an issue. They're going to put up signs. Actually, safety is part of every department, and I'd like to point out that—point that out to the member, that safety is as important for Crown Services as it is for every other department of government. It is as important for Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries as it should be for any other company in Manitoba.

So, to answer his question, we take it serious. It is part of the Crown corporations and what the

Crown corporations do. We know that they're all involved in various aspects. They also have a lot of employees; a lot of Manitobans go to work in the morning and work for Crown corporations. And we want to ensure that they come home safely to their families and enjoy—hopefully, there's going to be a lot of sunshine this evening and they can get to Red River Ex, where we know that there are a lot of safety precautions that have put in place, and we'd like them to go and have a great evening tonight at the Red River Ex, another fine Manitoba institution. And safety is important to every department in our government.

Mr. Marcelino: Mr. Deputy Speaker, during one of the answers given at length by the honourable minister, he said that he was in a meeting with the chairman of the board—of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board. And during that meeting, can you please tell the minister to tell us if Bipole III was discussed over coffee?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I thank the member for the question, and I had the opportunity to meet with each one of the board chairs. And the one meeting in particular that the member references, I had a cup of Earl Grey tea, and I can assure the member that, at no point in time, did a specific project come up.

What we did at each one of those meetings—and, it started off with the board chair, and then we wanted to have the CEO present. See, the member would know that, under his government, there was—the minister called into the Crown corporation and called this person forward, and that person forward. And there was no real line of authority. Clearly, nobody was in charge, and everybody was in charge. And what we did is, we sat—I sat down with each one of the board chairs and I explained that the old system had failed the ratepayers, and had failed Manitobans. And that, when political operatives, whether it's—even the minister—calls into the Crown corporation and starts to politically interfere, the first thing it does is it undermines the chair and the board of a corporation.

And it would be inconceivable—inconceivable that you would have shareholders of Coca-Cola calling into the corporation and directing them. That's not the way the system should work. And neither should political operatives. An NDP—a political organizer who lucked out and got this great corporation-sponsored job in the minister's office then ran into the Crown corporation and felt that, somehow, by being an NDP political organizer, that

qualified them for running around the corporation, and trying to direct the corporation to do things.

So we sat down with—and it was myself—sat down with each of the chairs, including the meeting that the member references, and we laid out, very clearly, how we were going to interface with the Crown corporations. That we would allow the boards to do their job without interference by NDP political organizers, by political staff hired by—paid for by the corporation, but hired by the NDP, and them running around the corporation, trying to run various aspects of it.

So it was very clear that the boards were responsible for the corporation. If there was going to be any interaction with the Crown corporation, it would be by the minister to the board chair or the board.

And I know, initially, there were some CEOs who were calling my office, you know, asking for meetings, wanting to speak, and we wouldn't correspond with them because that was an old, failed system. That was the member's failed system that didn't work. What we did is made it very clear that they work for the board. And that's the way it should be. The CEO should be working for the board of directors, not for the minister directly. If there is information that the minister's office needs, we have a preeminent deputy minister. The request goes to the deputy minister's office, and that goes into the corporation.

For instance, if the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) has an issue, I want him to know his issue comes through my office, through my SA, goes to the deputy minister's office and, when it goes into the corporation, it doesn't get more or less wait depending on what political party the member ran for. It goes into the corporation and it is treated equally and fairly. Unlike when the member opposite was at the reins of the corporations. Unlike that. We've taken the political side out of it and, I dare say, the Crown corporations love the new system. They have an intake person, customer service person; they deal with it, it's not political—NDP staffers, political organizers running around the corporation directing people how they should or shouldn't be doing things and how fast they should or shouldn't do things.

So we made very clear to the board chairs, that's how the new system was going to run. That's what the meeting was about. And the project that was mentioned was not discussed at those meetings.

* (11:20)

Mr. Marcelino: Just to wrap up for today, I just want to know what is the definition that the honourable minister has for a very simple word: governance—on the meaning of governance, or is that too hard?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'll even do better for the member I'll give him a definition of good governance, and good governance is when you have a model where you respect individuals, when you expect—where you respect professionals, you want to come forward with a governance that works, a governance that has respect involved in it, unlike when the member opposite had his hands on the Crown corporations, that was poor governance. It was governance—the messing around in the Crown corporations and treating them like an arm of a—of the NDP party, that was governance. There is also a definition, but it's a definition of bad governance, of poor governance.

What we are going to bring in place and what we've already started is a process of good governance. It is a model that works around the world, that a corporation does not work for political operatives. First informant—first and foremost, the corporation should be run in the best interest of the ratepayers and the taxpayers of Manitoba; that would be on the forefront. And if the member would look at the mandate letter from the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to the minister, never before have we had a governance where a mandate letter to a minister was released, never before. And I would challenge the member opposite why doesn't he release the last 17 years of mandate letters that were given to ministers? Why doesn't he show some good governance instead of the poor governance we got the last 17 years?

So, first and foremost, in the letter, it states that we are to have corporations run in the best interests of the ratepayers and the people of Manitoba. In the framework letters that we sent to each one of the Crown corporations, never before—it—never before, certainly not the dark dreary last 17 NDP years, did we ever get a governance letter tabled for the House, and not being asked for. It wasn't that it was asked, for we willingly gave it out publicly so that people could see exactly what our interface—what our interaction would be with the Crown corporation, never before was that done.

And I would suggest to the member from Tyndall Park, I suggest there never was a framework letter in 17 years put forward by the NDP because

they would be horrified if that would've ever gotten out. They would've been embarrassed beyond belief if people in Manitoba would've known what their true intentions were with the Crown corporations, the kind of political interference the kind of shenanigans that were going on that the Crown corporations' ratepayers were paying for political organizers, NDP political organizers in the Crown corporation.

If Manitobans would have known that, they would've been horrified. That's why there probably aren't even framework letters. I would ask the member to table them, but we all know that they don't exist, because they never had that, those were—that was done down in the basement with—in smoky rooms where people sat around with cigars, carved up the Crown corporations how it was going to be in the best—best interests of the NDP party. That's gone.

We are bringing in a good governance model. A model whereby we will respect the professionals. We will respect the engineers at Manitoba Hydro. We will respect the actuaries at MPI. We will respect the executives of Liquor & Lotteries, and we will get them to talk to the boards, give them advice and then recommendations come forward. That is good governance, because governance under the NDP—I gave him a definition of governance, what bad NDP governments—governance looks like.

The bipole line, \$1.2 billion when it was first announced, and it was going to pay for itself, and the member opposite was part of that. I mean what kind of foolishness is that when Manitoba Hydro was warning—warning—the professionals were warning that what the NDP was doing was a bad decision. That was bad governance. So we're not going to undo bad governance with more bad governance. We're going to bring in good governance. We're going to listen to the professionals that have been hired, and we believe the Crown corporations have good people working for them. We believe they've got some of the best people working for them. They've got professionals working for them that have the best interests of the corporation and the ratepayers and Manitobans at heart, and they're going to give advice to our boards, and we're going to listen to those recommendations. That's good governance.

Mr. Marcelino: Yes, I defer the questioning to my honourable friend from Fort Garry-Riverview. Thank you.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I think, by agreement, we had agreed to have the Finance Minister come in for 11:30, and that's what we're

looking for at this point. We're not releasing the Crown Services Minister. We're still looking for his job description. But this is just to advise, we're not releasing him. We're going to continue on with the Department of Finance for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Chairperson: So we'll just give a moment for the two ministers to exchange seats, and, if any other staff have to come in, we'll let them.

If everybody's ready, we'll continue the Committee of Supply, and we'll first get the members to introduce their staff in attendance.

I'll get the minister—okay. The Minister of Finance.

* (11:30)

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I have with me, at the table, Deputy Minister Jim Hrichishen. I have with me from the Treasury Board, Giselle Martel, and I have Executive Financial Officer Chester Wojciechowski.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), can you introduce your staff.

Mr. Allum: I have the remarkable Kelsey Hutton with me today.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

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

Mr. Allum: Just a point of clarification around the minister's schedule. My understanding is that he's going to an FPT on Monday, only Monday, or Tuesday, just if he could give me his travel plans.

Mr. Friesen: The Finance Ministers Meeting is a Monday meeting, so it begins on the Sunday night beforehand with a few different events, and so I'll be flying out on Sunday in the afternoon, returning to Manitoba on Monday evening. I would ask the member, just so I understand, is he—is it his intention to conclude this Committee of Supply to be able to facilitate Manitoba's participation this year at the Finance Ministers Meeting?

Mr. Allum: Well, thank you. I appreciate the answer. It's just—strictly asked for information. We're certainly willing to be flexible in making sure that Estimates proceedings continue, but we have no intention of releasing the Finance Minister when he returns from his meeting. I didn't catch—quite catch

where it was, but I would assume on Tuesday, we'll resume.

Yesterday, we concluded by just talking a little bit about Accommodation Services and the minister provided some clarification on budget lines, and that was helpful. I'm wondering if he would be so kind as to table a list of the projects that Accommodation Services will be working on in the next year.

Mr. Friesen: First of all, in answer to the member's question, this year's Finance Ministers Meeting will take place in Vancouver.

Mr. Andrew Smith, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

And secondly, on his question pertaining to Accommodation Services, as I began to answer yesterday, the member will note that on page 97 of the supplementary information for review, he will note that under capital investment, there is no change, year over year, for the Accommodation Services capital projects, stated as \$60 million in 2015-16 and stated as \$60 million in 2016-17.

The member is asking for us to table a list. I don't have such a list here in the Chamber, but we could provide him a list that would give additional detail as to specific projects inside that capital projects envelope. So we'd be happy to provide that information at a later time.

Mr. Allum: And I thank the minister for that. That's—it's simply—we did appreciate what the member's told us and we were merely interested in seeing what's on the agenda for Accommodation Services in the upcoming year. As I said to him yesterday, I have high regard for the associate deputy minister there, as I do for all staff in Finance. And so we're just interested in seeing what projects are coming forward, and so that's terrific.

I want to move now to a discussion of the government's alleged deficit or, in fact, their own deficit, and I want to spend some time on the particulars of the inflated deficit that the minister presented to Manitobans several weeks ago, prior to the budget. He'll recall a press conference held down in the—room 68, I think it is, in the theatre, in which he went and he put it out to the people of Manitoba that there was a billion-dollar core deficit and then was unable to provide any details.

Several days later, after much delay, he was able to produce a list of some kind. And so I want to talk about that particular list with him this morning, if we could, and if he's amenable to it.

What I see here is that he said that the deficit had increased over what our government had—the core deficit had increased over what the—our government had projected by, it looks like 220–\$328 million over what we had projected in the core deficit. He—I stand to be corrected if I don't have that number quite right, but I'm just trying to do some quick math here.

Included in that was \$148 million in expenditures and then \$180-million decrease in revenue, so we want to talk about both those items with him today, as they seem to be inconsistent or, at least, not related to what we had found in government. And there are many elements of moving parts within what the list we have in front of us.

And so I want to just ask him—first of all, he says, in the Expenditures 'componeted' of it, he says there's a \$66-million increase in expenditures to recognize the impact of funding the regional health authorities, RHA, operating deficits.

Could he confirm for us that that kind of expenditure, that kind of number, would have ordinarily been found in a summary budget, not in the operating budget?

*(11:40)

Mr. Friesen: Of course, I'm happy to continue answering questions in this particular area, if that's the will of the member, but he understands that this is a discussion that we've already had. And, as a matter of fact, that even when he ceded the questioning to the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that these were discussion items that were fully considered in these Estimates of Supply. So, if it's his will to return there, we can, of course, do it, because he's driving the bus. But I also want to make the member aware that there exists within the agreement 100 hours for the consideration of all committees of Supply, of all departmental Estimates. And I'm sure that the member will take a thoughtful approach in considering that there are whole other departments that have not been considered.

The Department of Agriculture, for instance, has not even been considered. I'm thinking about my drive this morning, seeing another inch and a half of rainfall on newly seeded ground and the significant concerns that are being expressed this morning as to how this might affect the economy of Manitoba, instances of significant hail and damaging winds last night. I'm assuming that the critic for Agriculture will have considerable questions on this matter.

We'll take whatever time that the member deems is necessary to provide him, again, the information that I provided two days ago. And I will substantiate, again, the deterioration in the economic situation against the budget projection—his own government brought in the 2015-16 budget, because the member used a word that he said—he used the word inflated, and he is correct in using the term. The inflation is the amount of the deterioration in deficit against the budgetary target as expressed in probably March of '15-16.

When the government brought their budget in '15, the NDP indicated a net loss target of \$421 million. They indicated—on core government, I should specify, they indicated a revenue amount, they indicated an expenditure amount, they indicated, I should note for the record, a year-end adjustment lapse, because that is also a discussion item we've had. And we've talked about the fact that a lapse, an adjustment lapse figure is a conventional piece in public accounting as an expression that basically signals that there are fluctuations throughout the year, and then, as the year progresses, that that lapsed amount is basically reduced as certainty increases around expenditure and revenue areas.

But the number that the NDP presented in 421 was a number they stuck to for a long, long time. And it was only, in the dying days of the NDP government, in the last few days, before the election call, where they finally disclosed to Manitobans a new number, a number that would indicate that the net loss for the year was profoundly changed from the number they provided earlier.

The number they presented then was \$646 million. Now, it started at 421 and then, finally, in one of the dying—last days of the NDP's mandate, they disclosed to Manitobans—hung onto the number before then, and then disclosed, at that time, that they had missed the mark by hundreds of millions of dollars.

So let's first establish the context of this discussion. The context of this discussion is that the member would have us believe that, while his government set budgetary targets each and every year for the last 10 years and overspent their planned budget, each and every year for the past 10 years and, indeed, did the same in the 2015-16 budgetary year, by their own numbers, indicating an increased deterioration in their net loss of more than \$220 million. The member, somehow, would now say but any suggestion that they had not been

accurate on the 646 is completely unreasonable. And that, Mr. Chair, is simply a premise that we cannot abide by.

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Smith): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Allum: I want to point out to the minister—and he is minister of the Crown, and his authority and influence extends broadly, but it doesn't extend to telling us how we might organize our activities in Estimates.

And I'm sorry that he finds it tiresome that he's in here and having to be accountable to the people of Manitoba. I'm sorry that it exhausts him. But this is a legitimate process of this House; it's been practised in parliamentary tradition for generations. And, if he has a problem with it, then, maybe he's not cut out for the job. I think that he is, but I regret to have him tell me, and tell the opposition, how they should be organizing their activities with regard to Estimates. He's the Finance Minister of the province and he'll—he's obliged to answer questions until such time as the 100 hours runs out or we release him. Until that point, he should respect our right and our ability, as an opposition, on behalf of the people of Manitoba, to undertake our questioning as well see fit.

I would also say that he used the terms lapses are conventional. And that's quite right. He's worried about that. Lapses are conventional. Why he would go out to the people of Manitoba and take credit for a lapse, something that happens ordinarily, a normal course of affairs, is quite surprising. And I think that he'll regret having made such a comment.

But the question is, Mr. Chair, we asked him about the \$66-million increase in expenditures to recognize the impact of funding the regional health authority's operating deficits. Can he check with those officials, and would he ask them would they normally have included a number like that—this particular item—in the summary budget not in the core operating budget.

* (11:50)

Mr. Friesen: Well, first of all, to be clear—and this goes back to what I said earlier—every time that the member puts information that's incorrect on the record then my first responsibility is to correct the information.

The member has a preponderance for trying to put words in my mouth, and they're not accurate and they don't reflect the actual transcript of this

proceeding. So I'll just mention to him, again, I'm very honoured to have the opportunity to have this role. I'm humbled to take on this role. I'm endeavouring to learn fast in my role. And I'm always one who diligently takes on whatever assignment has been given to me.

So I want to disabuse the member of any notion that I'm unhappy to sit in these proceedings. But, when we begin to reconsider items that have received a fulsome consideration then, really, the onus is on him to—not to justify his actions to me, but to justify his actions to his colleagues, who, I believe, are probably waiting in the wings for their opportunity.

The member himself asked specific questions about other departmental appropriations in respect of FTEs. He asked for specific information about technical political officers. And, at that time, we continually try to educate the minister about how the process works, and remind him that he has these opportunities. He has the ability to avail himself of the opportunity to attend other Committees of Supply when other Estimates are considered and ask these same questions. He seems to be his own worst enemy. He's preventing himself that opportunity. That is all that I wish to outline to the member in respect of my earlier comments.

So, if the minister would like to run the clock completely out in Finance, we're only too happy, as a government, to continue to have the opportunity to explain and to rationalize the very important and considered and reasonable measures that we have brought in Budget 2016, which we believe will assist all Manitobans—Manitobans who have been unfairly treated, who have continued to be the income earners with one of the highest tax burdens in all of Canada.

So, while I apologize to the Chair if the information that I present is redundant, the minister is referencing expenditure impacts and revenue impacts. Now, I remind him again—and I'm looking at page 26 of the update that his own government brought on March 8th this year, just weeks before the election. And that update itself showed impact on both the revenue and the expenditures side; extreme impact. Impacts that his government did not disclose to Manitobans. They did what they did in the past, which was to hang on to the bad news.

As the critic for Finance, I can remind this minister there were many times where we knew what the legislation said about dates by which his government must release to the public information,

updates on budgetary performance. And the government would wait until a Friday afternoon at 2 p.m., at the last part of a deadline, and then they would quietly move information out the door when media had filed reports, hoping that over the weekend the bad news would die down and they could come in and defray what should have been something that the government was willing to face head on.

We won't take that approach. I respect the comments of the Auditor General in this manner. What the auditor has said in the past about the necessity to, on a regular basis, consistent with the requirements to respect the spirit of those requirements and to disclose information in a timely manner. Now, this government hung on to the bad news even in respect of the March 8th update, finally updating. The member takes the preposterous position that while his government hit their—missed their targets every time, and, indeed, it's what his own document showed on March 8th, he somehow draws a line arbitrarily in the sand and says, yes, we broke our word every time. But it's outrageous to think that there would have been impacts beyond the \$646 million that we updated on March the 8th that we wouldn't have told Manitobans about. Well, of course, there would've been impacts that they didn't want to tell Manitobans about. What was the context? The context was they were heading into an—

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Smith): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Allum: Let me just simply say that this morning, the minister, and I think he is a humble man, has exceeded the boundaries of his humility.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

This is somebody who has suggested to us that somehow we released information under the cover of darkness when, in fact, for \$108 million he released it at—when he talked about there's \$108 million at, cuts he released to press release 10 days too late, but he released it at 5 o'clock on a Thursday afternoon after Estimates had concluded. So, I mean, that really—I don't think that he should be casting stones at this stage.

Now, if he could just answer the question about the \$66 million for the RHAs included in his core deficit. Could he confirm with his officials that this number would've ordinarily been found in the summary deficit?

* (12:00)

Mr. Friesen: This allows the opportunity to continue to give the response I gave earlier.

The member understands that it is the standard practice of government-reporting entities to report on both core and summary, and the member understands that there are principles referred to as GAAP principles, generally accepted accounting practices, that are in place for the presentation of materials specific to the summary budget. It's one of the reasons the other day when we had a discussion about what was fact and fiction in budget, you know, we were clear to point out that when it comes to summary lines, these are items on which people in a department sign off on and say, all the work was done in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices.

But he's inviting a larger issue around summary and core reporting, and it's a conversation that I definitely welcome because it's important that we get it right. The minister—or the member has to understand, first off, that no one on this side is winging it, that there are rules and there are procedures. And I know that while he was not the—ever a minister for Finance, he was a minister in other portfolios, and so he understands appropriations. He understands the way his department would have to report to Treasury Board on a regular basis in order for the information to be gathered and then reported.

It's done, of course, in order that there be transparent information to Manitobans and there is timely information to Manitobans. So these are the two tests, right: their timeliness and transparency—and accuracy, of course; that's what we want as well. That's why I take exception to the member's party that brought a budget document that really, clearly, wasn't a budget. They called it an update. Clearest evidence, the fact that it wasn't a rigorous piece of information is the fact that when it came time to do the lock-up, I noticed that there were no departmental people who would enter into the room of the lock-up. I noticed that the Finance minister for the NDP did not enter into the lock-up room with media.

Now, I don't know if it could ever be said that a Finance minister in any context in this province would not have gone into the lock-up with media. But I assure him that on March the 8th, the Finance minister did not go into the lock-up and neither did departmental officials. So who was in that room with the media? Communications people from the NDP. What better indication could there be that this was

not a robust document that was presenting information in the way a budget would present information?

So I invite the conversation that he embarks on about summary and core reporting. This same member whose party brings a budget, states a deficit target, misses it by over \$220 million but waits to the last final point in time before disclosing that deterioration to Manitobans. But then at the same time, he takes the position that somehow the idea that there could be further deterioration against that stated target is somehow unreal and incomprehensible. I would suggest that it is only incomprehensible to this member. It is certainly comprehensible to Manitobans who understand the legacy of a pay-more-get-less NDP party. They understand that they're living in a high-tax, high-debt, low-results jurisdiction. It's a bad-news context. But we are optimistic as Manitobans and as a new government that real, significant work can be done to reverse this.

So I don't accept the member's premise that he starts on that somehow says, well, there were impacts on the revenue side and the expenditure side. Each and every time, that resulted in a deterioration of his government's performance against its own stated targets. Somehow, now, he takes this approach that he is unconvinced and states that, surely there could be no further deterioration. We've shown what that deterioration is to Manitobans. The full challenge is a \$1-billion deficit that we have taken real steps to address and work against with real budgetary measures.

Mr. Allum: Well, I thank the minister for that non-answer.

Maybe he now could answer the question. What we're asking: Could he confirm with his officials the \$66 million that we are talking about here related to increase in expenditures to recognize the impact of funding the regional health authorities would normally, and usually, be included on the summary side, not on the operating side.

Could he just answer that question?

Mr. Friesen: So, to continue on my answer, then.

So the member is inviting explanation as to the—this same expenditure variance, and revenue variance in respect of the 2015-16 budget. And I'm happy to provide that change—forecast change from March 8th. But I also remind the member that, if he's interested, he could go back and find this same

detail in the Hansard from this Committee of Supply from a few days ago when it was asked the first time.

Those revenue changes are inclusive of a \$29-million increase for 2011 Spring Flood Disaster Financial Assistance municipality claims. Those additional impacts on that budget included \$24-million increase for 2014 heavy rains financial assistance municipality claims.

The impacts include an \$8-million decrease for under-expenditures in municipal and City of Brandon emergent-to-permanent flood mitigation programs. There's a number of reasons why that is. I guess, perhaps, I would speculate that maybe projects just didn't go out the door as quickly as anticipated. We could have a discussion as well about that.

There's a \$17-million increase to expenditure due to a new actuarial valuation for long-term disability and the continuation of benefits that was received in late April, and so it was an impact in that budget. We felt it made most sense to put it there. I think there's an actuarial review that is conducted every three years, so this would be standard practice.

There was a \$12-million increase in spending for environmental liability costs related to mines. And I've had a briefing on that as well. That particular instance refers to the Ruttan Mine site. It's one of the largest contaminated mine sites in all of Manitoba.

There's a \$6-million increase to expenditure to write down a capital asset to reflect the proper valuation. If the minister would like to have more detail on that, I believe that's something we might be able to provide in the abstract. We won't have any items to table on that here, but we can have a discussion.

There is a \$2-million increase for a loan-loss provision on loans provided to the LRTP, that's the Leaf Rapids town properties. The member will know that issue. The member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) will know that issue too. That's been a long-time standing issue for the province, and I would invite their guidance as well, in terms of understanding in the long-term how we face that particular challenge, because it is a unique circumstance that continues to impact in the province, and that's—it's a tough one with no easy solutions.

* (12:10)

But, in addition to this, of course, there was also a revenue items. There was adjustments on both the revenue and the expenditures side. Revenue items included—on the '15-16 year, of course—\$180-million decrease in terms of federal cost-shared 'disastral' financial assistance program. There was a tax revenue decrease of \$33 million.

And I would invite that conversation from the member to talk about why taxation revenues are lagging against targeted amounts. I would specifically invite that when it comes to discussing retail sales tax because this is a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby we warned the government that by raising the PST they were also inviting noncompliance. And the member will understand that any time, in the minds of the general public, that taxation items that are deemed to be unfair or punitive by spenders and by consumers, the instance of noncompliance goes up. And we had that discussion in respect to tobacco.

Other revenue decreased \$6 million, and the Canada Health Transfer saw a \$2-million increase. All of these things impact, including, of course, what he mentioned, as well, which was an impact—\$66-million increase to government expenditure to recognize the impact of funding the regional health authorities' operating deficits.

And I would, in my next answer, be able to expound further on my answer to the member.

Mr. Allum: Well, let the record show, Mr. Chair, that we've asked three times now. This will be a fourth.

Minister told me earlier that he was tired of being here, wished that we would end this process. If he would simply answer the questions that were asked, we might actually get to the result that he desires. So let me ask it a little bit differently.

With respect to the \$66-million increase in expenditures to recognize the impact of funding the regional health authorities' operating deficits, can he consult with his officials and tell us how this money was reported last year?

Mr. Friesen: I find it interesting that the member uses the statement, simply answer the question, because I've known the member long enough to have had the opportunity to sit in Estimates when he was behind the chair as the minister. And I don't know how long his memory goes back to those proceedings, but I remind the member that we have in place in this Legislature a set of new rules and

rules that extend to the Committee of Supply. And whereas in an interest to keep the proceedings moving, these rules now, they contain a condition that answers not exceed five minutes and questions not exceed five minutes.

No such rule agreement was in place in the consideration of the Committee of Supply for Education in 2014 when the minister was asked questions repeatedly by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko). And I can recall in one instance he was asked a question to table three letters and the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) started the clock and spoke until finally there was a point of order; the point of order was ruled on, and then the member continued his answer, still on the basis of a request for three pieces of paper, and in the very next segment, answering a three-line question recorded in Hansard, the minister went on for 10 minutes. He didn't talk about the issue.

So I think it's important to acknowledge he's trying to suggest somehow that there is a lack of willingness to comply. Nothing could be further from the truth. But I point to his own lack of willingness to comply in previous proceedings of the same way.

The minister—the member simply can't have it both ways. He can't somehow now be indignant that I'm trying to provide an answer for him, based on a very comprehensive and high-level question, and I'm trying to provide context and I'm trying to provide background. Now, he's not inviting that. But as I've committed to him earlier, we're happy to be here and provide all the information that we can. But I won't short-circuit the process of providing the context. I think that's important for Manitobans to have this information. I think context is important for all things. I think context is important whenever we talk about the failure of the NDP government to hit its targets, and we have to talk about what is the context of that.

So the minister is—the member is inviting a discussion around revenue and expenditure items. I don't agree with him in his assessment of how I answered that question, and I want to continue to provide an answer to that question now. But let's be clear, that when that member was in the chair as the minister, he didn't take an approach in which he offered three-line answers. It seems to me that, if I was giving him the benefit of the doubt, I would suggest that what he was probably—maybe what he

was probably trying to do in this three- or four-page answer was provide context.

So I would beg the member to provide me the same opportunity to provide context in respect of a multifaceted question that he asks.

A number of years ago, when the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) was the Finance minister, he issued a press release, and I wish I had the press release in front of me right now, but I can paraphrase it. It comes from about two thousand '08-09, and I can cite question period in Hansard, because I read it into the record a number of times when I was the Finance critic. Because, the member for St. Boniface, when he was the Finance minister, brought a change to the manner in which government was reporting in its regular budgets and public accounts. And the member from Morris will assist me if I get this wrong, but the basic change was to say that they were favouring a summary reporting format because it was the clearest way to show comprehensive and transparent and timely information.

And then, about a year and a half ago, the NDP issued a new press release where they said the exact opposite. We believe that both are important, summary and core reports, for the purpose of transparency in a timely manner to all Manitobans.

Mr. Allum: With respect to the \$66 million in expenditures to recognize the impact of funding the regional health authorities' operating deficits, can the minister tell the committee how it was reported last year? Was it in the operating or the summary side?

Mr. Friesen: So the member is inviting a question about RHA deficits and I welcome that conversation, because the context of this discussion is that we've made clear in the election, we've made clear in our Throne Speech, we've made clear in our budget, with real and significant measures, that deficits matter. They really do make a difference down the road.

The NDP government is a government that has doubled the net debt of the province from about \$10 billion to \$21 billion—[interjection] Yes, on summary net debt, and that's in a short space of time, within a space of about eight years. That's tremendously significant.

* (12:20)

We understand that debt is an expression of the cumulative effect of operating a deficit plus, of course, all the other borrowings that government

takes on to fund its capital and other projects within both core government and within summary government, that area pertaining to the utilities to government business enterprise, to hospitals, schools, universities and colleges with respect to infrastructure.

And so deficits matter. And, over time, of course, the effect of running deficits is not just abstract. It is not just for accountants to fret over. It makes a real difference as it did this spring when, suddenly and without warning, the overall amount that we pay as a government each year to credit-rating agencies in terms of the amount that we are paying each year just to finance that debt rose by \$15 million; I think it was about \$10 million over core and 15 overall.

That's significant. Imagine, had the government been able to hit its targets, over time, and we had not seen a \$15-million impact on the bottom line, that would have been money that was available to those same RHAs to allow them to hit their targets.

We didn't have that money available to us as government because, over time, despite the warnings of credit-rating agencies, this government did not change course when they were warned, you know, by Moodys, when their progress was characterized as adjustment fatigue, when it was said, very clearly, that there would be further action undertaken by bond-rating agencies if the government did not meet its budgetary targets and move towards balance. Still nothing was done and the impact was realized.

And so now we pay more. I shudder to think what it will mean for Manitoba, over time, going forward, considering all of this additional impact with all of the borrowings, all of the bonds that have been issued now, in respect of that same summary line that the member cites. I'm thinking of Hydro right now. And I reminded him earlier that, when it comes to Hydro and core government, that even this year Manitoba undertook to issue \$6.5 billion in new borrowings. This is unprecedented. The Province of Manitoba has never borrowed that much in a single year.

And the member would be wrong if he would suggest that that somehow did not raise eyebrows in the financial community. I assure him that it did. I assure him that that conversation is one front of mind when I meet with groups and individuals both in our province and outside of our province. I'm quite certain the conversation will come up again. In short, it's not sustainable.

So, when he speaks of the RHA deficits, yes, I share his concern that the RHA's missed those targets by \$66 million this year. He referred to the last year, and so I would surmise that he's speaking of '15-16, and so yes, last year we reported that \$66 million. We identified it; we recognized it; and we reported that amount. I believe we reported that amount in the core government area, and that was in the 2015-16 budget. And I share his concern about a \$66-million deficit in the RHAs.

Mr. Allum: You know, it's such a torturous path that the Finance Minister takes in answering a very simple question, so let me just confirm what I think I just heard.

With respect to the \$66-million increase in expenditures to recognize the impact of funding the regional health authorities' operating deficits, we asked how it was reported last year and is he putting on the record that it was reported in the core side? Is that what he just said?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for that question about the RHAs and the deficit of \$66 million that we have cited and signified in our budget.

And I think as well I would add that the concern, of course, we have is—we've talked about the importance for government to hit its targets. And we've taken steps, of course, in this budget, and we're continuing to work. Ministers are working with their departments in respect to the current operating year and understanding and sending the message that it is important in all areas of government for government to hit its target. Indeed, over time, if we do not, there's real impact.

And over time we've seen that year over year in the province of Manitoba when it comes to RHAs, RHAs have also had challenges in reaching their targets. And health care is very important. We all know this. But the member understands as well the context, and that is even in respect of the Canada Health Transfer and the 6 per cent annual increase over the last number of years that we've had, I think he would acknowledge that when it comes to additional money for health care, it has to be about more than just revenue generation. I think it was Jeffrey Simpson, who said in his book, *Chronic Condition*, he says, more money didn't buy us change; it only bought us time.

And that's, indeed, what I know Finance ministers will grapple over, Health ministers will

grapple over and first ministers will grapple with when it comes to how to make a model whereby we're getting value for money and hitting our targets and bringing real systemic change, because, of course, under the NDP, Manitobans didn't get that. They spent a lot of money in health care, but we have some of the longest ER waits in all of Canada. We have the highest ambulance rates in all of Canada. A report recently noted the fact that it takes some of the longest times in Manitoba after diagnosis of illness to get treatment. There's a real gap in there. It's a gap that's either on the diagnosis-to-treatment side or it was maybe on the practitioner-to-specialist side. In one of those areas, we were the absolute worst.

So these are real challenges, and we need to meet them. And, certainly, you know, in respect of the—this last year that he's talking about, he said the previous year; I surmise he's thinking of '15-16. Yes, a \$66-million deficit in the RHAs. And so what will be important is government continues to send the message of doing better, meeting targets, measuring against stated criteria. We will have to have that discussion as well. And so the member will understand that as part of that exercise, we'll be conducting a comprehensive exercise in respect of evaluating health care and doing that work.

On page 11 of the budget, he will find, under Expenditure Estimate: Core Government, in the section titled Health, inclusive of Health, Seniors and Active Living, an expenditure estimate of \$5.989 billion. That's this year's. But for the forecast, '15-16, 5.769. And, yes, he is correct that on that line item is the \$66-million deficit of the RHAs.

Mr. Allum: —show in the short amount of time that we have left that the minister refused to answer a basic question. Even when he put something on the record, I asked for clarification, and he wouldn't provide it for us.

We're going to continue in this line of questioning until we get an answer, Mr. Chair.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): The hour being 12:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, June 17, 2016

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