

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew, Hon.	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Point Douglas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 11, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 222—The Planning Amendment Act

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), that Bill 222, The Planning Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Martin: Madam Speaker, the bill is part of our government's agenda to reduce red tape and paper burden on Manitobans. This act is a modest amendment to The Planning Act to bring the time frame in line with that of the City of Winnipeg.

Thank you.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Sustainable Development. And I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Compost Awareness Week

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): This week is Compost Awareness Week, and I want to encourage everyone to compost as a way of reducing the waste entering our landfills.

It's important to divert organic waste. When it's buried in the landfill and starved of oxygen, organic waste attracts bacteria that releases methane and other harmful gases. When methane gas is released into the atmosphere it is at least 20 times more harmful than carbon dioxide and a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions.

Composting also has many other benefits. It is an excellent natural fertilizer, perfect for spreading on your lawn, in the garden or your flower beds.

I have personally visited the Brady landfill site to review their compost operation, which has grown significantly over the past few years, and I commend them on their efforts.

Our government is committed to finding ways to encourage sustainability in Manitoba.

Earlier this year, the Green Action Centre's Compost Winnipeg began offering home compost pickup, and I'm proud to be supporting their efforts. This service gives Manitoba homeowners—or Winnipeg homeowners an easy and accessible way to reduce organic waste while helping the environment.

Home compost pickup is offered in seven Winnipeg neighbourhoods, and I'm hopeful to see them expand this convenient service throughout the city.

I applaud the Green Action Centre and Compost Winnipeg for their efforts, and I encourage everyone to consider composting as a means of building a more sustainable Manitoba, not just during Compost Awareness Week, but during the long term.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I rise today to acknowledge and celebrate Compost Awareness Week. I listened intently to the minister's comments, and there were a couple of points I was hoping she was going to touch on which weren't there.

These days are established, of course, to bring attention to important social or economic or environmental issues. These days we take a moment to celebrate what is going on and to take stock of what needs to happen.

The government has acknowledged the day, but the day exists to encourage governments like hers to actually take action. There has been zero action by this government on composting.

Our plan, when we were in government, would have had Manitoba's overall waste heading to landfill cut in half by the year 2020. And composting was a central feature of that, as the minister noted.

A third of our waste that heads to landfill, on average, is organic waste. And it's a perfect opportunity to reduce climate emissions and create a

fantastic fertilizer, and, a point the minister also overlooked, create green jobs right here in Manitoba for people who want to head into that industry.

So I would encourage the minister to go back to November of last year, when I held a policy announcement explaining how this could be done, and would encourage her to take action, rather than just acknowledging the days when they come up on the calendar.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak to this statement? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, this week, Compost Awareness Week—yet, sadly, Winnipeg has one of the lowest composting rates for kitchen waste in Canada, at almost half the national average.

The average Winnipegger creates 83 kilograms of kitchen food waste per year. Food accounts for 28 per cent of residential waste in Winnipeg, adding up to nearly 60 million kilograms of food waste disposed in Winnipeg's Brady Road Landfill alone.

Composting can reduce household garbage by half as well as improve our soils. Food waste produces methane gas into the atmosphere, a potent climate-change gas. The non-profit Green Action Centre, through Compost Winnipeg, has begun a residential and commercial compost pickup program to help reduce landfill waste by about 40 per cent and has already diverted more than 80,000 kilograms of Winnipeg waste from the landfill since last spring, a good step forward. Compost Winnipeg currently has about 150 homes on its waiting list, so we know the demand is there.

Madam Speaker, the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg have not yet provided an adequate strategy for reducing food waste. The contributions to emissions from food waste are a significant and important part of our fight against climate change. The government has a big opportunity today to partner with municipalities to build a more sustainable Manitoba.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage, and I would indicate that the 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Manitoba Day

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am pleased to announce that this Friday, May the 12th, is Manitoba Day, the day we celebrate the 170–147th anniversary of our province entering Confederation.

The Manitoba Act, which created the province of Manitoba, was passed by the Parliament of Canada and received royal assent on May 12th, 1870. While indigenous people have called this land their home for centuries, it was on this day, 147 years ago, that the province we know today took shape.

In 1986, May 12th was designated as Manitoba Day in recognition of the importance of this day in the history of our province. Manitoba Day is an ideal time for us to reflect on the achievements of the past generations of Manitobans and our accomplishments as a province since our entry into the Canadian Confederation. It is also a time to reflect on the steps and the missteps of our forefathers that were made along the way and to ensure a path forward towards reconciliation.

By understanding what has shaped our province, we strengthen our sense of being Manitoban and being part of a community. We also expand our appreciation for the talent and creativity of those who came before us, and the rich legacy that we have inherited from them. Our province's museums and heritage organizations proudly showcase Manitoba's rich and diverse history, making the stories of our development as a province better known through exhibits and special events.

Across our province, celebrations and events will be taking place to mark our 147th anniversary. These gatherings will bring people of all ages and origins together to commemorate and to celebrate our thriving multicultural mosaic, to reflect upon our collective achievements and to plan for the future. I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to celebrate our good fortune to be part of this great province on Manitoba's birthday. May everyone enjoy the many events dedicated volunteers and many diverse organizations across the province that have planned in honour of this important anniversary.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I thank the minister for her statement.

Madam Speaker, our wonderful province turns 147 tomorrow. Manitoba's birthday offers an opportunity to reflect on our shared history, the people and opportunities that make Manitoba great and the work that's yet to be done.

Manitoba is the home of 63 First Nations with five distinct linguistic groups. It's also the home of the Metis nation. While we celebrate our province's birthday, we must take time to contemplate our history and the stories of First Nations and Metis people that remain untold. It is only through the recovery and sharing of these untold stories that we can truly walk the path to reconciliation.

* (13:40)

Manitobans are consistently among the most generous people in the country. Whether it's money, time or resources, we selflessly give when it matters most. The lives of Manitobans in all corners of the province are improved by generosity and kindness. Let us not forget this as we welcome asylum seekers and refugee claimants to our province.

Our great province is known for its affordability advantage. From hydro rates to post-secondary tuition, Manitobans of all ages are paying less for quality services than other Canadians. We urge the government to remember this as they steer the province into austere, uncertain territory.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the ministerial statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the statement? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, most of us cringe, jokingly of course, at the thought of adding another candle to our birthday cakes. However, on other occasions we embrace turning another year older. That will be the case tomorrow, as we add another candle to Manitoba's birthday cake.

Tomorrow is Manitoba's 147th birthday.

It all started back on May 12th, 1870, when the Manitoba Act was passed by the Canadian Parliament by a vote of 120 to 11. On June 23rd the land was transferred from the Hudson Bay Company to the Government of Canada, and the following day

the Manitoba Act was endorsed by Louis Riel's provisional government. The Manitoba Act was then proclaimed on July 15th, 1870, officially establishing this great province of ours.

Over the past 147 years, we have witnessed our province grow by leaps and bounds. We have watched families settle and Manitoba blossom into a cultural mosaic, all very evident by the amount of festivals and celebrations that take place right across the province. Manitoba is our shining example of hard work, dedication, family values and resilience.

Madam Speaker, I am so grateful to call Manitoba my home. I'm even more honoured to stand in this House to recognize this special occasion.

Happy birthday, Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Finance on a ministerial statement. And I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Manitoba's Credit Rating

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to represent Manitoba in recent meetings with the three major credit rating agencies: Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Dominion Bond Rating Service. I was able to provide an update on our government's plan to fix the finances and repair our services and rebuild our economy. And Manitobans understand that every dollar spent on interest payments for our province's debt is a dollar that cannot be spent on improving services for Manitobans, services that Manitobans rely on in health care, education and infrastructure. And the reality is that every credit rating downgrade that results from unsustainable fiscal policies means that money that should be spent on the priorities of Manitobans in Manitoba is, instead, paid to lenders outside our province.

And Manitoba homeowners understand the threat posed by potential increases to borrowing rates. While we are living at a time of historically low interest rates, we know that rates will inevitably rise in the future, as they have in the past, and when they do rise, even a modest 1 per cent increase would

mean nearly \$100 million more in new costs borne by Manitobans.

Credit rating agencies made their concerns about the previous government's debt clear with their rating comments in the past. Moody's said in 2014 that the negative rating outlook reflects our assessment of the execution risk surrounding Manitoba's plan. In August of 2015, DBRS said that the previous government's fiscal outlook continues to disappoint due to further delays to restore fiscal balance. The path the previous government put us on by ignoring those warnings and not sticking to a plan to reduce deficits resulted in two credit downgrades in the Province of Manitoba and Manitoba being placed on a track to hit a \$1.7-billion deficit by 2019.

In our meetings, I was able to outline actions we have taken to put Manitoba on the road to recovery. I outlined legislation introduced by our government to ensure a sustainable public service, fiscal accountability, reduce red tape and protect taxpayers. I detailed our Budget 2017 plan to control expenditure growth, find efficiencies and transform how government does business while making those important investments in the areas that are most important to Manitobans. I also shared the work that Manitoba Hydro is currently undertaking to achieve efficiencies and address its own financial challenges.

The agencies showed interest in the fiscal performance review report included in Budget 2017 and the work of the fiscal advisory panel, whose report helped inform decisions for Budget 2017, and I was pleased to share that our government acted quickly on recommendations of these reports, realizing savings in areas like tax-credit changes.

I am pleased to report that credit rating agencies are receptive to see progress is being made by the Manitoba government over the last year in spending the—curbing the spending growth in the 2016 year and the actions that we're undertaking in Budget 2017 to further address the deficit.

They agreed with our assessment that we are not out of the woods yet. They share our concern about Manitobans' overall debt levels and deficit. They appreciated that our plan in Budget 2017 includes multi-year targets, but they continue to express concern that under the previous governments, targets were not met. I provided assurances that we intend to meet our targets and are focused on our responsible recovery plan to balance the budget while protecting front-line services.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba faces challenges in restoring the financial health of the Province, but we are confident in our plan to fix the finances, repair the services and rebuild the economy. We believe that Manitoba will rise to the challenge. We are on the road to recovery.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Madam Speaker, we know that the program of cuts and austerity that the government has engaged in will not create the necessary conditions to grow our economy and create a fair, just and inclusive society for all Manitobans.

Cuts to education and hikes to tuition make it harder for children and youth to acquire the skills and training they need to succeed. Cuts to infrastructure investment damage our economy and make it harder to create good jobs for the future. Cuts to wages, job losses and increases in the cost of living for electricity and auto insurance make life more unaffordable for families and for seniors.

Madam Speaker, we know that this government dreams in ideological technicolour, reminiscing of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Stephen Harper, but that's quickly turning into a nightmare for Manitobans. Surely what is needed is a more balanced approach, one that makes sure families, seniors and youth come first.

This government recently received a credit update just this past February. It requested this update prior to the budget, contrary to the usual practice, as a ploy to try and bait the 'crediting' rating agencies into giving bad news to lay the groundwork for their austerity budget. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order please.

Mr. Allum: But the agencies did not co-operate; they did not bite. They noted, contrary to the gloom and doom we just heard from the Finance Minister, that Manitoba's economy and economic outlook remains stable—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: When you have a program of steady growth and get—and good jobs, it gets recognized. Deficit and debt can be managed without drastic cuts to services or serious hikes in the cost of living. We hope, though it's a faint hope, that this government comes to its senses and recognizes this fact. Investments in our public services make our economy stronger and lays the groundwork for a better future for all Manitobans.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the minister have leave to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: The minister's statement is a timely one given that we hear today that the credit downgrades are occurring on all six of Canada's major banks, so that there is clearly, economy-wide, some concern, particularly about the possibility of slowdown in the real-estate market at a time when Canadians are taking on higher levels of household debt.

I note that in March of this year the government of Manitoba, and specifically the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), speaking after being in government and in control of our finances for 11 months, said, and I quote: The Province's fiscal state is still a cause for alarm. I cautioned the minister in being over-crisis-oriented. It's important to keep a cool head and to take effective action.

* (13:50)

I also note that the Dominion Bond Rating Service commented on the provincial budget to say that it was aspiration without action. And clearly, from the minister's comments, there are some continuing concerns from the bond rating agencies. And that is something that we will need to be aware of, particularly given what is happening in terms of Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Hydro's debt, expected to increase rather dramatically in the next few years.

We note in the budget that the budget was not making the critical push to prevent sickness, to improve wellness in areas of diabetes and mental health and brain health—areas where there could be significant progress improving the health of people and decreasing health-care costs. We also note that there was a lack of emphasis on post-secondary education, which is so critical to the growth of our economy in the years ahead.

I also note with concern about the targeting in the budget of students and ending the tuition fee rebate. Just at a time when students are starting out in their career, the government is making it more difficult for them. So I believe that there are things that this government can and should be doing to help our situation, but I thank the minister for his statement on fiscal update.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Silver Heights Restaurant

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): And now for something completely different.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise in this House today to recognize the work of the Siwicki family in sunny St. James. In 1957, Anthony Siwicki Sr., along with three friends, purchased an existing coffee shop on Portage Avenue, and slowly expanded it into a restaurant and 'louge,' now called the Silver Heights Restaurant.

In 1964, Tony bought out his partners and, with his sons, Jim, Dave and Allan, grew the business. The Silver Heights Restaurant has been operating now for three generations. Today, it is run by Jim, his wife Maureen and their sons, Tony—with wife, Sue—and JC. Once again, this restaurant is a family affair.

Tony had a simple operating philosophy that has been continued with his sons: to provide his guests with a quick and friendly service and to serve fresh, delicious, quality food at a reasonable price. They have also been known to quench a thirst from time to time, Madam Speaker.

Whether you're a neighbour, business owner, celebrity or well-known athlete, you can boast about the consistent, fine food and service you receive there.

The Siwickis' relationship with their clientele extends far beyond their world-famous ribs. Not only do they care about their clients and the restaurant, they work to support community groups in St. James by selling tickets and supplying charities with food donations.

This is truly an example of community people in a community business, Madam Speaker. Their mottos have always maintained that this—with this community spirit, from the best deserve to the best, and today's motto: Be Well, Live Well and Eat Well.

The Silver Heights Restaurant will toast their diamond anniversary the first week of June. Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Siwicki family for 60 years of service to St. James, and for also welcoming all Manitobans.

Kakeka Thundersky

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Madam Speaker, I'm proud to recognize a young Manitoban who won a big award for helping our community.

Kakeka Thundersky, is with us today, along with her sisters Raven and Thaegwan.

Kakeka has been involved in the community her entire life. From a young age, her mom taught her to live by the teaching of generosity and to give back to the community. Her mother, Raven Thundersky, modelled altruism by advocating on behalf of people made sick by asbestos and also on behalf of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

So maybe we shouldn't be surprised by what Kakeka's done as a teenager, though it's still remarkable. She's organized clothing drives for the Salvation Army, delivered Christmas hampers for the Christmas Cheer Board, and volunteered with Got Bannock?, a group that serves soup and fry bread to people on the streets of the North Main neighbourhood. While in high school, after seeing Siloam Mission clients who only had flimsy plastic bags to hold all their worldly possessions, she collected 200 backpacks for some of the most vulnerable people in our province.

In December, Kakeka was honoured with the prestigious Everyday Political Citizen award, which celebrates Canadians engaged in their communities and building democracy. She was chosen by a jury that included Margaret Atwood and Rick Mercer.

The award also marks Kakeka's rise above adversity. Kakeka lost both her parents last year. Losing one parent is hard, never mind both. Yet Kakeka continues to help in the inner city even as she pursues her university 'educasion'—education. She's carrying on her mom's work, and that's a beautiful thing.

Madam Speaker, in our language, Kakeka means everlasting. May her continued service of our community help ensure her mother's legacy lasts forever.

Miigwech, Kakeka.

Madam Speaker: Members' statements?

Model United Nations Assembly

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Sixty years ago, Winnipeg's Model United Nations Assembly began. It was, and continues to be, organized by the Winnipeg Rotary Club, downtown, a club which was

the first Rotary club outside the United States, the club that made Rotary international.

In the early years, one of the delegates to the Model United Nations Assembly was Lloyd Axworthy. Indeed, the results of MUNA assemblies around the world have contributed to the development of many community leaders, not only in Canada. One of the guest speakers at the start of this year's MUNA was Chris Dunning [*phonetic*], the US consul in Winnipeg. He described how the MUNA he attended in the US played a pivotal role in the development of his own career. For myself, when I was growing up in Saskatoon, in grade 12 I participated in a MUNA, and it was an important step in my own growth and understanding of the world.

This year, there were more than 60 delegations from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario and the United States. As happens each year, the United States was represented by a team of Canadian students while Canada was represented by students from the United States. The students showed progress from the initial sessions to much greater participation and independence later. And they kept the pages very busy passing notes back and forth between delegations. Friday evening was an opportunity for all team members and councillors to relax and have a good time at the Hitch 'n Post.

For me, I was fortunate to be able to participate in the event as the deputy president of the assembly on Friday morning. The students were well organized and it was an easy job. I want to thank Jim—serves—Ferguson who served as president this year and has for many years in the past.

I want to congratulate the members of Rotary's Model United Nations Assembly organizing committee, chaired by Roy Vallance, and to the Rotary volunteers who helped make the event such a success.

Thank you.

Celebrating Manitoba

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Manitoba, the land of the boreal forest and golden wheat fields, home of the beaver and where, still, the mighty moose wanders at will. Manitoba has bison and caribou, and if you'd like to see more, you can visit our world-class zoo.

First Nations, Cree, Ojibwa, Assiniboia and many others would gather in this province on one of

our 100,000 lakes or beautiful rivers to meet, to trade, to live. York Factory to Fort Garry, soon visitors came from far away, became neighbours, friends, and now today we have First Nations and Metis and people from all over the world.

The Selkirk settlers and Chief Peguis signed the first treaty with Europeans, and we celebrate that this summer. From Hudson's Bay trade to the Wolseley expedition destination, this province is the keystone province.

* (14:00)

Between the 60th parallel and the 49th parallel, eastern Canada and western Canada meet here in the centre of Canada, central Canada. I hope the CBC is listening: Manitoba is the centre of Canada, perhaps the universe.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Oh, is there leave to allow the member to quickly finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Fletcher: We have many valuable things: mining, crops, but, most importantly, we have water. Water, water everywhere, and there is a drop to drink. We have gorgeous blue skies and we have stunning reddish orange sunsets.

Glorious and free is our motto, and glorious and free we are indeed. We live in the best country in the world at the best time in human history to be alive, and we live in the best province in the best country.

Thank you.

Portage Terriers

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I rise today to share with this House that—the exciting news that the Portage Terriers are Manitoba Junior Hockey League champions for the third consecutive year.

The Terriers captured the Turnbull Cup in front of the hometown crowd with a 1-0 win over the OCN Blizzard on April 19th, 2017, at Stride Place in Portage la Prairie, earning them a spot in the Western Canada Cup tournament in Penticton, BC, where they did a great job of representing Manitoba.

Portage la Prairie is a great hockey town and I want to acknowledge the incredible support the team receives from the community, as well as the many volunteers who have been an integral part of the club's success.

I would particularly like to acknowledge Blake Spiller, general manager and head coach, and Paul Harland, assistant coach for the team. Since Blake assumed the head coach's role in 2006, the team has seen unprecedented success, winning 7 MJHL league championships and the Royal Bank national championship in 2015. Blake also holds three MJHL Coach of the Year awards, his first in 2008 and, most recently, MJHL and CJHL Coach of the Year titles back to back for 2015, 2016.

This year, local players, Jared Roy and Lane Taylor, had the privilege to win the Turnbull Cup in their hometown. The Terriers finished the 2016-17 season with a record of 37, 19 and 4 and the overall record for the year of 50, 28 and 14.

Madam Speaker, I ask all the honourable members to join me in congratulating the 2017 Turnbull Cup champions, the Portage Terriers.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests to introduce to you in the gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery from Horndean Christian Day School 22 grades 5 to 10 students under the direction of Martin Friesen, and this group is located in the honourable—constituency of the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

And also in the public gallery we have Mr. Glen McKenzie, mayor of Swan River, and his wife Mrs. June McKenzie. Glen is the son of Mr. Wally McKenzie, who was MLA for Russell from 1966 to 1986. And these are the guests of the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome all of you to the Legislature today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Transparency and Accountability Government Performance Record

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier's contradictions are becoming more sharp by the day.

He pretends to be transparent and then fails to disclose his ownership of companies in Costa Rica. He claims to be always working, but then it emerges that he's actually away in Costa Rica during flooding in Manitoba. He claims to be working even on vacation, but then can't produce evidence or records of his communications.

Madam Speaker, transparency is more simple watchword. It must be put into practice.

Why does the Premier not think that he needs to be transparent with the people of Manitoba?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, when you're six-three in grade 7, you learn that transparency is absolutely mandatory in life and it has been ever since then and it's going to continue to be.

Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: The Premier's contradictions continue.

He claims to support our health system, then cancels important projects like a new CancerCare building and hundreds of personal-care-home beds. He claims he wants to improve our health-care system, then he shuts three emergency rooms and an urgent-care clinic. He claims he works well with others, then he gets in fights with labour and front-line workers.

Madam Speaker, the Premier thinks—seems to think that he does not need to be accountable for his actions. Will he take responsibility today?

Mr. Pallister: I respect divergent views, Madam Speaker. We have a lot of divergent views in this place, but it's because, well, thinking people do sometimes disagree, but it's the respect we show for each other when we disagree that I think is the measure of the person, and I will continue to demonstrate, as will all the members of this government, our respect for organized labour, our respect for special interests around the province.

However, we will not have a province that is run by them and in their special interests. We will have a province that is run in the best interests of all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: The Premier claimed yesterday that, quote, I don't have to defend my work ethic to you or anyone else, unquote.

The Premier thinks he does not owe the people of Manitoba or their representatives answers to their questions. The Premier thinks he can do whatever he

wants without being accountable to anyone. This is a worrisome attitude, Madam Speaker. It goes to the heart of transparency and accountability.

Will the Premier admit that he must be accountable to the people of Manitoba and will he take steps to actually be accountable?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, I grew up in a 500-square-foot house, but I had the values instilled in me by my family and my friends and the neighbours that if you worked hard and you were honest and you did your very best and you helped other people in your life, you might find success. And I want the province of Manitoba to be that kind of a province for people who grew up like me and who grow up like me.

I want a province where people can find success in their lives, not with handouts, Madam Speaker, but with a hand up, and that's the kind of government we're operating here today.

Premier's Staff Communications Government Email and Cell Use

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, this Premier does not use a government cellphone when he's on his extended trips to Costa Rica. He doesn't use government email—the Premier doesn't use government email when he's away in Costa Rica. Yesterday, the Premier told us this is because he follows a protocol used by previous governments and previous premiers, and it's fair to say that comes as a surprise to us.

So could the Premier please table the protocol, which he says directs him not to use government cellphones and government email, in the House, and will he do it today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, they say there are two things, results and excuses. The previous administration was loaded with excuses. We're loaded with results.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Swan: I'll take that as a refusal by the Premier to table a protocol, and that's because no such protocol exists. And this is just another instance of a Premier who makes up excuses after the fact to hide his own actions, just as he did when he told media that he couldn't be in Manitoba during flooding in the summer of 2014 because of a family wedding in Alberta to hide the fact he was actually down in

Costa Rica, just like the Premier failed to disclose his corporations in Costa Rica until he was caught.

Will the Premier today acknowledge he was mistaken about the existence of a protocol directing him not to use a government cellphone and email, and apologize to Manitobans?

* (14:10)

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, we now know the reason there's so many leaks over there: it was a Swiss-cheese government, and we know why. The member's just put on record that there were no protocols whatsoever for protecting the security and the confidentiality of information.

There you have it, on the record of this House.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: I can assure the Premier there was no protocol that directed Cabinet ministers and premiers not to use government cellphones and government email within the bounds of freedom of information legislation.

It's abundantly clear this Premier believes he's above any duty to the people of Manitoba to explain his actions. He flouts the law that requires members to disclose their ownership of companies. And we showed that just again yesterday in Estimates, when the Premier refused to explain why he'd failed to disclose his interest in a Manitoba company, Pallister Investments 22 Ltd., in which he is a shareholder, director and officer.

Unexplainable lapses, nonexistent protocols, incredible answers to simple questions—the pattern is clear.

It begs the question: What exactly does this Premier have to hide?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, one thing I don't have to hide is my genuine affection for the member opposite. I have liked the member for Minto since I first met him and I continue to like him very much.

But I do, with all due respect to the member opposite, follow the advice of the conflict of interest commissioner when it comes to disclosure of assets, not the member for Minto.

So, though I like the member for Minto very much, I don't consider him to be an expert on ethics in any way, shape or form.

Emergency Room Services Timeline for Closures

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, this Premier is ducking and running from the press and the public, and any pretense of transparency has apparently gone right out the window. All this at a time when the Premier's proposing to shutter ERs and make the biggest cuts to our health-care system in a generation, and yet he refuses to give Manitobans the whole plan.

Doctors have questions of this Premier; nurses have questions of this Premier; residents of my area, all throughout the city, have questions of this Premier. And for six weeks, this Premier hasn't given straight answers about how these closures will roll out.

Why won't this Premier stand behind his decision to cut and just tell Manitobans when their ERs are going to be closed?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, his ducking-and-running accusation doesn't ring sincere, Madam Speaker.

I mean, the members opposite blacked out the pages of documents. If media or members, when we were in opposition, wanted information, we got blacked-out documents all the time, if we got anything at all. When the previous government ministers were asked to do interviews on that side of the hall, they ran out this door over here, and they did it for weeks on end.

So, Madam Speaker, on the issues of accountability, I've been available to the media every single day that I've been here but two—every single day since I became Premier, but two.

And so the member opposite needs to understand something about accountability: we know what it means; he needs to look it up.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wiebe: What we're asking for is for this Premier to take ownership over his cuts to the health-care system.

This Premier's been trying to hide wherever he can, whether that's behind the WRHA and decisions they've made, behind Ottawa, or maybe it's just

behind page 62. And yet, when he couldn't find anywhere else to hide, he brought in a backroom political spin doctor to manage his cuts in the health-care system.

But Manitobans aren't asking for political spin. They're asking for real accountability and they're asking for their ERs to remain open.

Why is this Premier paying a backroom political spin doctor rather than just telling Manitobans his plan?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, I think the member's going way too far when he attacks a former chief of staff to a prime minister of Canada. I think he's going way too far when he attacks a former chief of staff to a noted premier of New Brunswick and a chief of staff to a respected Finance minister in Jim Flaherty. I think he goes way too far. And I think that's a mistake in judgment. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the reality is, Madam Speaker, that this Premier doesn't have a spin problem; he has a patient-care problem. And that's what we're asking about today.

Front-line nurses, doctors—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —and people in my community, throughout the city and all over this province, are trying to understand why this Premier is cutting ER services and how he thinks that's going to make our system any better. This Premier broke his promise to protect front-line services and, no matter how hard they spin that or run from that, Manitobans will remember that betrayal.

Will the minister and the Premier stop the spin and just give Manitobans the full account and the full plan of when their ERs are going to be closed?

Mr. Pallister: Apart from the unintended humour and irony in that preamble, Madam Speaker, the member did hit, early on, on one fact: we inherited a serious problem with patient care.

The system is broken. The system was broken when the previous administration was in charge of it and it was getting worse. They were given advice of

their own commissioning. They refused to follow it. They lacked the moral fortitude to follow up and pursue a better system.

The world hates change, Madam Speaker, but it's the only thing that ever brings progress. We will pursue progress for the patients of this province because they should not have to endure the worst system in Canada any longer. And, under this government, they will not have to.

Premier's Staff Communications Communication Security Protocol

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I'd just like a simple clarification of the facts on what the Premier has shared over the past 24 hours.

Yesterday, he said that he uses the same communication security protocol as the previous government. In question period today, he acknowledged that there was no communication security protocol under the previous government.

So can he tell the House today: Does he use a protocol for communication security?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) admitted that the previous government had no such practices; I did not. I've had instruction from senior civil servants as to the practices I am to follow, and I've been told that they are the same instructions that were given to the previous administration. That in itself is defined as a protocol.

But I understand, Madam Speaker, why the members opposite are unwilling to talk about the real issues that matter to Manitobans. I understand they don't want to talk about fixing the finances when they were headed towards a \$1.7-billion deficit. But we do, and we are interested in focusing on fixing the finances of this Province.

I understand that they do not want to talk about the longest wait times in Canada, but we do, because we were hired to work on focusing to repair the services for Manitoba families. And we will.

And I understand that, with a legacy of the highest tax hikes in Canada, bar none, they do not want to talk about rebuilding the economy. But we are focused on rebuilding the economy. They need to get in the game and start focusing on what Manitobans care about, just for a change.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: This is an important issue, and it is something that should be legitimately questioned because the communications that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) uses are the—part of records that should be kept by this government. The people of Manitoba, in the name of accountability and openness and 'transparency', have a right to know what the Premier is up to.

So, can he tell the House today what his communication security protocol is and table it?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): The member for Fort Rouge says it's about accountability and, indeed, this is about accountability. That is why this government brought in a fiscal responsibility bill that is the most significant set of circumstances that calls government to be accountable to citizens.

We will be in committee this evening hearing from Manitobans about this government's plan to exceed anything that previous government did in terms of providing openness and accountability for Manitobans. We know that we'll be judged by our results. We welcome that process. They ran from it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a final supplementary.

Freedom of Information Compliance

Mr. Kinew: You know, there are important concerns that are raised by the non-answers that we're hearing in question period today, specifically with respect to freedom of information, but also with respect to the keeping of proper government records.

* (14:20)

These are legitimate questions that are asked genuinely in the name of openness and transparency.

So, it's a simple, direct question: Can the Premier commit to this House today that everything that he's doing will be in line with freedom of information laws in this province?

Mr. Pallister: Not only can I commit to that, Madam Speaker, but we are looking for ways to broaden the access to information. We have made more information available in our recent prebudget process than was ever made available in the past.

We continue to make information available, and we will pursue every avenue to make information available because we believe that that is a very

important aspect of how we can change government for the better from the type of practices that saw blacked-out reports issued where full reports should've been available; and where information on secret payments, severance payments, to pals was not made available for a year and a half; or where contracts issued out untendered to friends of the previous government were not reported for years.

And, Madam Speaker, these are the kinds of practices we want to put an end to. And so, of course, we're going to be doing everything we can to accommodate that additional transparency.

Shoal Lake 40 First Nation Freedom Road Construction Update

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Back in early November, the Premier predicted that shovels would be in the ground to build Freedom Road within 60 to 90 days. Well, that was approximately 180 days ago.

Can the Minister for Infrastructure inform the House whether or not shovels have broken ground for Freedom Road?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Well, thank you for the question, and we certainly want to talk about the Shoal Lake road because the contract has been let for the aggregate crushing on reserve. It's a matter of time for the equipment, for the personnel, to be able to get to the aggregate crushing equipment, which is sitting there ready to go as soon as the personnel from the company that got the lowest tendered bid on this account can get started.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lathlin: In early December, the Premier said that construction would begin in February. By my calendar, February ended over two months ago.

According to the budget speech, the government continues to engage in discussions regarding Freedom Road. We know that discussions are important, but we also know that, according to the Premier, construction should already be under way.

Can the Minister for Infrastructure explain why he hasn't fulfilled the Premier's mandate and broken ground for Freedom Road?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, Madam Speaker, 17 years and they didn't even get a stone turned over, never mind getting a tendered contract.

I would remind the member that there are section 35 consultations taking place right now. There has been consultation going on with Shoal Lake 40, which is already completed. They're in the midst of happening right now with Shoal Lake 39 and with the Manitoba Metis Federation, as is—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pedersen: —out of the Constitution, we have to do the consultations before construction can begin, and we're also doing engineering and work on the road off—that will be off the reserve.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lathlin: The people of Shoal Lake went through another winter without a road. Their community has provided Winnipeg with clean, fresh water for over a hundred years. Meanwhile, they faced boil water advisories for 19 years, people have died from falling through the ice and the community has been completely shut off during ferry breakdowns.

Can the Minister for Infrastructure assure the people of Shoal Lake today that they will have access—they will have an all-access road before next winter sets in?

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, the good people of Shoal Lake reserves have endured 17 years in the past of not even an attempt by the former government to build a road.

We have an aggregate-crushing contract out. We're doing engineering. We're doing consulting work with the—as is required under section 35.

The road will happen. It will be built. Under this government, we will make it happen.

Federal Health Agreement Timeline for Signature

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): This government has had over half a year to make a decision about the federal health-care transfers. Like other Manitobans, we have not forgotten that this has not yet been resolved.

Can the minister provide the House with an update as to when Manitobans can expect the agreement to be signed?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker,

I am glad that the member is engaged in this issue. I wish she would have been equally as engaged almost a year ago when we started to talk to the federal government about being a real partner—a real partner—with Manitobans in health care. We know that there is a declining escalator when it comes to funding in health care. We know that that puts services at risk because the federal government doesn't want to be a partner. It's a little bit late, but I'm glad she's finally on board and ready to stand up to Ottawa.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it was weeks ago that we heard this Premier (Mr. Pallister) say that this government was very close to signing a health-care agreement. It doesn't cost \$5,000 to call Ottawa.

Madam Speaker, this government needs to engage in a meaningful conversation—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Lamoureux: —about these agreements.

How much more money will the minister forfeit from this province because this government can't work together with other levels of government?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, it feels like she turned off the Wi-Fi, because she was roaming all over on that question, but when she finally did get to her point, the point was a good one in the sense that we really need Ottawa to be a real partner with Manitoba. Manitobans want Ottawa to be a real partner.

I hope this is a turning point for the member opposite and her colleagues in the Liberal caucus. I hope that all the Liberal leaders who are running, all three of them in the caucus, are now going to stand up to Ottawa, say to the Prime Minister, be a real partner and be a real partner today.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, on one hand, we have the minister, and I'll quote, telling us to get on a blow horn and ask Ottawa for help. Then, on the other hand, we have a different minister accusing us of being Ottawa-west and telling us we need to get inside with this provincial government.

Madam Speaker, The Liberal caucus is doing what is best for Manitobans by holding this government accountable.

So, I ask again: When will this government negotiate a health-care deal?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, those were actually both correct. We did implore the Liberal caucus, all three of them, to get on the horn, get on the blow horn, get on a telephone, get on anything and say to Ottawa, be a real partner. And because they refused to do that—for month after month, they decided not to help us stand up for Manitobans—that is why they said they're Ottawa-west. I'm disappointed they continue to be Ottawa-west.

When we look out the back of the Legislature, we see the Assiniboine River; they look out, they see the Rideau Canal, Madam Speaker.

Tourism Promotion Government Initiatives

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): Anyone can—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Curry: —check their phones and check social media, if they're on some kind of a connection, and see my Facebook and see one of my favourite activities to do in my riding is to visit Rainbow Stage, Canada's largest and longest outdoor theatre, located right in the heart of Kildonan, in Kildonan Park.

Not only does tourism give Manitobans the opportunity to showcase where we live, it is also a great economic driver, creating jobs and bringing investment into our province. This is why I was so pleased to hear that the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade announce investments being made by our government into such an important industry.

* (14:30)

On top of displaying how spectacular our province is, can the minister please explain to the House why tourism is so important to Manitobans and the Manitoba economy?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Certainly, tourism has a significant economic impact in Manitoba and many people are employed in this sector. In fact, it generates—it's a \$1.5-billion industry here in Manitoba, generating

\$272 million in tax revenue. In fact, through our 96/4 plan, we're investing an additional \$452,000 in this year's budget to promote Manitoba.

Manitoba—Madam Speaker, I know the previous NDP governments used taxpayers' money to promote themselves. Our government is using taxpayers' money to promote Manitoba. Just this morning, we introduced three new videos to Manitobans used to promote Manitoba around the world, just in time for Manitoba's birthday tomorrow. Happy birthday.

Sale of MTS to Bell Services and Rate Concerns

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): My question is to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) of the province.

For reasons only known to this Premier, the Manitoba government supported the merger of Bell and MTS. This deal will undoubtedly be a disaster for Manitoba consumers: higher rates and poorer service. We've already seen one consequence of the merger with the loss of 85 good-paying, quality jobs in Winnipeg.

Will this Premier explain to this House how higher rates, poorer service and job cuts help Manitoba consumers?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question from the member. I don't necessarily appreciate the doom and gloom coming from the NDP opposite.

We recognize not every day we're going to create jobs in Manitoba, but most days we do create jobs, and we strongly believe in positive partnerships with the business community. And we believe, through those positive partnerships, we will create more jobs in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Elmwood, on a supplementary question.

Xplornet Services

Mr. Maloway: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. And also to the Premier: instead of keeping MTS independent as a strong, fourth player in the telecommunications market, Xplornet is now supposed to meet the needs of Manitoba's consumers, especially those in the rural areas.

It's been nearly three months now since the merger was approved, but there seems to be no activity by this company.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) tell Manitobans just what's the holdup preventing Xplornet from offering service?

Mr. Cullen: I know, in contrast to previous governments who did not go out and have discussions with companies, we actually are having discussions with companies, and these companies are coming to Manitoba and they are bringing investment with them, investment in infrastructure. And we're really looking forward to that investment, especially in rural Manitoba where we need some additional services.

So, we are working closely with these companies to make sure that individuals will be looked after and that that money will be spent here in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Elmwood, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to ask the Premier, then. We are now seeing the results of the Premier's misguided actions. He gave his blessing to the deal without seeking any guarantees that Manitoba consumers would be protected. He forgot to put Manitobans first. Now he's letting another company, Xplornet, fail in its obligation to offer strong and adequate broadband services to Manitoba.

When will this Premier stop cozying up to big business and start putting Manitoba consumers first?

Mr. Cullen: Through the rules that the federal government has laid out, there's actually going to be more competition in Manitoba. And that's what the NDP were asking for before, was more competition.

So there's going to be more competition in the marketplace, and I think that's a good thing. And, with the money that's going to be invested in capital, there's going to be more jobs created in Manitoba. In fact, Madam Speaker, Manitobans have already created 6,000 jobs since January 1st of this year.

Manitoba Hydro Western Power Sales

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): The—this question is directed to somebody.

The Minister for Crown Services called Hydro bankrupt and is trying to hike rates, yet the Minister of Growth thinks Hydro is well placed to sell power to our neighbours in the west. This would generate new revenue and help keep rates affordable for us.

Why won't the Crowns minister listen to the Minister for Growth?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Well, Madam Speaker, I understand why the member opposite is confused. The member responsible for energy works with the minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, and we all go around the country and try to sell our hydroelectricity. That is what you call a team.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question. *[interjection]*

Order.

Mr. Marcelino: The Premier and his minister have spent years attacking Hydro investments. But now the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen) has seen the light, I think. Keeyask and Bipole III presents a real opportunity for power sales to our western neighbour.

The only approach the Crowns minister has is to make cuts and hike rates.

If he won't listen to us, will he listen to the Minister for Growth? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler: The NDP bipole-Keeyask levy is really all about NDP disrespect. In fact, Keeyask was supposed to cost \$6.5 billion—that was according to the NDP. The true cost is now in and around \$8.7 billion. This \$2.2-billion difference is an NDP disrespect. And, unfortunately, that disrespect will be paid for by ratepayers for generations.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Marcelino: Now I'll have to try the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade.

Will he please—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marcelino: Will he please ask the Minister for Crown Services to withdraw his claim that Hydro is bankrupt?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, I would like to point out to the member, and for the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), who has been listening very intently to the discussion about a team, the Minister responsible for Growth, Enterprise and Trade was in Saskatchewan talking about all kinds of

opportunities. We've been travelling not just throughout Canada but throughout the United States talking about—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schuler: —the benefits of our hydroelectric company.

However, there is a reality, Madam Speaker, that under the NDP we are now going to have the bipole-Keeyask levy, which is going to cost generations a lot of money on their bills.

Madam Speaker, I would like to point out to members that it's a team like this that's going to get us out of the disaster left behind by the NDP.

Child-Care Spaces Government Initiatives

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, yesterday was a wonderful day, and it was a wonderful day because our government took another step towards shortening child-care wait times and creating more child-care spaces.

Manitoba's families have told us they need more affordable and accessible child care. We listened; we're listening. We delivered; we're delivering. We're going to continue to do that, because it's important to all Manitobans.

Can the Minister of Families inform the House on how our government is improving access to child-care spaces across the province?

* (14:40)

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): It was a pleasure to be at Great-West Life to view a public-private partnership in terms of child-care delivery here in the province of Manitoba.

Our government has already delivered spaces. We've approved 15 community-based spot—which is going to create over 700 spaces. We also committed, in terms of new builds, in terms of schools, to have child-care centres that are part of it and yesterday we were able to announce \$2.8 million of funding for community-based projects to create affordable child-care spaces here in Manitoba. The final piece is working with the federal government. There'll be significant dollars on the line, and we're going to create thousands more spaces for Manitobans.

Reduction of Health Bargaining Units Use of Union Bargaining Councils

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, it's been well recognized that we have a very large number of health-care bargaining units in Manitoba.

Speaker after speaker at committee stage on Monday night, which considered this issue, said that the best way to reduce the number of bargaining units is to use union bargaining councils.

Why is the Premier not planning to use union bargaining councils to reduce the number of health-care bargaining units?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): It's a pleasure to take a second question from a second Liberal leadership candidate this afternoon.

When it comes to the bargaining units, I'm glad that the member opposite recognizes that more than 180 bargaining units in health care is far too many for a system.

When you look at western Manitoba and provinces—western Canada and provinces like British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, if you take their bargaining units and combine them and multiply them by five, they are still less than the bargaining units in Winnipeg. We're going to change that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, the problem is simply this: that the government is using a draconian it's-my-way-or-the-highway approach instead of listening to people, instead of considering options which are well meaning and put forward, like using union bargaining councils.

I ask the Minister of Health once more: Why is he not going to reduce the number of health-care bargaining units in a reasonable way, as unions have proposed, using union bargaining councils?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, this is an issue that has been there for 20 years. In 2003 there was legislation to reduce the number of bargaining units in the city of Winnipeg. That legislation was never acted upon by the former NDP government. This is not something that is happening quickly. This has affected patient care for the last 20 years and nothing has happened.

If the member opposite wants to stand by and do nothing, he can stand by with his friends in the NDP. We will take action.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, the minister may have been at committee, but he wasn't listening or he wasn't hearing.

The fact is that the representatives there, one after the other—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: —said simply it would be quicker, it would be cheaper to use health-care bargaining councils to address this issue to dramatically the use—reduce the number of bargaining units and have a way to move forward more quickly, less costly in addressing health-care issues.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Appreciate the comments from the member on the topic of bargaining units.

We are at the tail-end of most Canadian jurisdictions in addressing this issue, and it's wise to address.

It allows working people to spend time focusing on the things they trained to do, such as addressing patient care, such as delivering tests that people need so they can have diagnosis. These are the things that we want to focus on, not wrangling with one another, not raising union dues to an unnecessarily high level. Giving people security in their health-care system is important, Madam Speaker.

I just wanted to take the opportunity to wish everyone here a happy Mother's Day, especially, of course, the mothers in this room right now, but through all of us here, to our mothers and to mothers around the province: we thank you, we appreciate you, we love you.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: And I have a ruling for the House.

At the start of routine proceedings on April 27th, 2017, the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Maloway) raised a point of order regarding documents referred to by the Premier during question period on April 26th, 2017. The Government House

Leader (Mr. Micklefield) spoke to the point of order before I took the matter under advisement.

I thank members for their comments on this matter, as I believe the rules and practices relating to the tabling of documents in this House are important and worthy of a moment of consideration.

Before addressing the point of order, I would like to provide a little context on this matter as a point of reference for all members.

First, our rule 40(5) states: "Where in a debate a member directly quotes from private documents, including digital representation or correspondence, any other member may require the member who is speaking to table a printed copy of the document quoted." This rule forms the basis of our approach to the tabling of documents in our debates.

Second, we are further guided in this area by one of our main procedural authorities, House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, where, on pages 609 and 610, O'Brien and Bosc offer the following insights on tabling of documents referred to in debate: A public document referred to but not quoted by a minister need not be tabled. If a minister quotes a private letter in debate, the letter becomes a public document and must be tabled on request. However, a minister is not obliged to table personal notes referred to during debate or question period.

Third, rulings from previous Manitoba Speakers reinforce these sentiments. Speakers Hickes, Dacquay, Rocan and Walding all ruled in similar circumstances that if a member quotes a private document in debate, the member is then obligated to table that document in the House. There are also numerous rulings from these Speakers indicating that if a member is referring to a private document but not quoting from it or quoting from a public document, then they are not required to table the document.

Based on this collection of references and precedents, I offer the following guidelines for members regarding the tabling of documents in debate: (1) if a member directly quotes from a private document in debate, they are obligated to table it if requested to do so; (2) a member is not obligated to table a public document even if they quote from it in debate, though they may table it if they choose to do so; (3) a member is not obligated to table documents referred to in debate but not

directly quoted; (4) a member is not obligated to table briefing notes or speaking notes.

I would like members to understand that the principle underlying these guidelines is that if a member quotes from a private document, all members should have access to that entire document in addition to excerpts quoted in debate.

For further reference, the germane point for all members of this House would be: do not quote from a private document in debate unless you are prepared to table that document.

Turning to the matter at hand, I will review for all members the events of that exchange in question period on April 26th, 2017, and the content of the subsequent point of order.

On April 26th, 2017, I had asked the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to table a document he appeared to be quoting from during one of his answers. Following question period, the Premier did, in fact, table a letter he had received from a Manitoban and a copy of that letter was provided to the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Maloway).

During his subsequent point of order, the Official Opposition House Leader stated that: the Premier appeared to quote from two letters received from Manitobans. When asked to table the letters, he tabled the second letter from which he had quoted. Pursuant to rule 40(5), I requested the Premier table the first letter from which he quoted during the exchange with the member of Fort Garry-Riverview in yesterday's question period.

* (14:50)

I would note that in reviewing Hansard from April 26th, 2017, it was not completely clear whether the Premier was directly quoting the first document mentioned or paraphrasing comments from that document. Without that knowledge, it is difficult for me, as your Speaker, to make a determination on whether or not the Official Opposition House Leader had raised a valid point of order.

I would, however, encourage all members to be mindful of the guidelines I referenced earlier, to be aware of them when they are referring to documents in the House, to clearly indicate on the record whether they are referencing a private or a public document and also to indicate whether they are quoting or paraphrasing a document in debate.

I would like to thank all members for their attention to this ruling, and I look forward to your ongoing co-operation in the House.

PETITIONS

Taxi Regulations

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly. The background of the petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Maloway: (5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that would transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-share services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk that could lead to issues such as been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read, they are deemed to be received by the House.

St. Boniface QuickCare Clinic

Mr. Greg Selinger (St. Boniface): Yes, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly. The background to this petition is as follows:

QuickCare clinics support the health-care system by offering important front-line health-care services that help seniors and families.

The six QuickCare clinics in Winnipeg are accessible, located within communities and have extended hours so that families and seniors can access high quality primary health care quickly and close to home.

QuickCare clinics are staffed by registered nurses and nurse practitioners who are able to diagnose and treat non-urgent-care needs as well as perform procedures and interpret diagnostic tests.

The bilingual St. Boniface QuickCare clinic actively offers an essential health-care service in French to Winnipeg's Franco-Manitoban community.

Having access to bilingual services is essential to ensuring the ongoing vitality of the Franco-Manitoban community.

The provincial government have announced the closing of the St. Boniface QuickCare clinic on January 27, 2017, leaving St. Boniface and St. Vital seniors and families without access to community health care.

We petition the assembly—the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to both recognize the importance of bilingual health-care services in Manitoba and reverse their decision to close the St. Boniface QuickCare clinic.

Signed by many, many Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

Neighbourhoods Alive! Funding

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly. The background to this petition is as follows:

Since 2001, the Neighbourhoods Alive! program has supported stronger neighbourhoods and communities in Manitoba.

(2) Neighbourhoods Alive! uses a community led development model that partners with neighbourhood renewal corporations on projects that aim to revitalize communities.

(3) Neighbourhoods Alive!, and the neighbourhood renewal corporations it supports, have played a vital and important role in revitalizing many neighbourhoods in Manitoba through community driven solutions, including employment and training, education and recreation, safety and crime prevention, and housing and physical improvements.

(4) Neighbourhoods Alive! now serves 13 neighbourhood renewal corporations across Manitoba which have developed expertise in engaging with their local residents and determining the priorities of their communities.

(5) The provincial government's previous investments into Neighbourhoods Alive! have been bolstered by community and corporate donations as well as essential support from community volunteers, small businesses and local agencies.

(6) Late in 2016, the minister responsible for the Neighbourhoods Alive! program said new funding for initiatives was paused, and that the future of the Neighbourhoods Alive! program was being reviewed bringing hundreds of community projects to a standstill.

(7) Neighbourhood renewal corporations and their communities are concerned this funding freeze is the first step in a slow phase-out of the Neighbourhoods Alive! grant program, which would have severe negative impacts on families and communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to support the Neighbourhoods Alive! program and the communities served by the neighbourhood renewal corporations by continuing to provide consistent core funding for existing neighbourhood

renewal corporations and enhancing the public funding available for specific initiatives.

And this petition is signed by Carole O'Brien, Cathy Collins, Kenneth Kahn and many, many more Manitobans.

Kelvin High School Gymnasium and Wellness Centre

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

(2) Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the health and welfare of all students.

(3) All forms of educational infrastructure, including gymnasiums and recreation centres in general, represent an incredible value-for-money investment, whereby the return is improved physical and psychological health and wellness.

(4) Kelvin High School is one of the largest high schools in the province, with over 1,200 students.

(5) Kelvin High School spent several years raising almost \$1.2 million towards the construction of a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

(6) Some Kelvin students currently have to pay to use outside facilities to obtain their mandatory physical education credit.

(7) The provincial government, in a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for the Kelvin gym and wellness centre for political reasons, despite the extensive community support, fundraising and engagement.

(8) It is wasteful and disrespectful to the dedicated efforts of students, staff and the community in general to simply lay their goals aside without consultation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the need for excellent recreation facilities in all Manitoba schools, to reverse this regressive cut and to provide Kelvin High School with the funding necessary to complete a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

This petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans. Thank you.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

* (15:00)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition was signed by many Manitobans.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): On House business, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Private Bills will meet on Tuesday, May 16th, 2017, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 218, The Red Tape Reduction Day Act; and Bill 221, the missing murdered—sorry—The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Awareness Day Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Private Bills will meet on Tuesday, May 16th, 2017, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 218, The Red Tape Reduction Day Act; and Bill 221, The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Awareness Day Act.

Mr. Micklefield: On House business, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, May 16th, 2017, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 16, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act; Bill 18, The Legislative Security Act; Bill 25, The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act (Various Acts Amended); and Bill 26, The Election Financing Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, May 16th, 2017, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 16, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act; Bill 18, The Legislative Security Act; Bill 25, The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act (Various Acts Amended); and Bill 26, The Election Financing Amendment Act.

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): I am seeking leave to alter the Estimates sequence, for today only, to substitute the Department of Agriculture for Executive Council in room 254.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to alter the Estimates sequence, for today only, to substitute the Department of Agriculture for Executive Council in room 254? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: I'm seeking leave to alter the Estimates sequence, for today only, to substitute the Department of Indigenous and Municipal Relations for Executive Council in room 254.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to alter the Estimates sequence, for today only, to substitute the Department of Indigenous and Municipal Relations for Executive Council in room 254? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I am seeking leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Department of Finance for Executive Council in room 254.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Department of Finance for Executive Council in room 254? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No leave.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I am seeking leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Civil Service Commission for Executive Council in room 254.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Civil Service Commission for Executive Council in room 254? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No leave.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I am seeking leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage for Executive Council in room 254.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage for Executive Council in room 254? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No leave.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I am seeking leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Department of Sustainable Development for Executive Council in room 254.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Department of Sustainable Development for Executive Council in room 254? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I am seeking leave to alter the Estimates sequence today only to substitute the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living for Executive Council in room 254 and, at the same time as the two sections of Supply in the committee rooms meet, for the House to meet to consider legislation.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to alter the Estimates sequence for today only to substitute the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living for Executive Council in room 254 and, at the same time as the two sections of Supply in the committee rooms meet, for the House to meet to consider legislation? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No leave.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I am seeking leave for today only so that the Committee of Supply will meet in two sections, the Chamber section with Health, Seniors and Active Living, and the section in room 255 with Education and Training.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House for today only so that the Committee of Supply will meet in two sections, the Chamber section with Health, Seniors and Active Living, and the section in room 255 with Education and Training? Is that agreed?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, this afternoon we would like to continue with Estimates.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:40)

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

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for department of Executive Council.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I'm pleased to see the Minister of Agriculture substituting for the Premier (Mr. Pallister) today and that we're able to continue on.

Yesterday, we were talking about the Public Utilities Board, and the Premier was sharing his philosophical view of the mandate of the PUB.

I wonder if the minister would care to elucidate on that for us.

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): If it's agreeable to the committee, I'd like to ask my staff to join me at the table.

In reference to the member's question, we do enjoy this opportunity in the Executive Council to be able to talk about a number of issues, and I know the member talked about the Public Utility Board, where they left off yesterday, and I wouldn't want to pre-empt that discussion, but I know that we are so excited about some of the opportunities coming forward in regards to Agriculture.

One of those in particular, and the member may be very much aware, is that that we were in negotiations with a company called Roquette. It's a company out of France that is very passionate about making sure we're going forward on the protein highway, and one of those plant proteins is the pea process. And, of course, it's a \$400-million cash injection into the field of agriculture and manufacturing, and it's going to build a state-of-the-art facility here in Portage la Prairie.

I know the member would be extremely interested to find out that this is going to create 375 construction jobs starting very, very soon. In fact, they originally had an opening date of October of 2019. They are so excited about starting the

process on peas within the province of Manitoba, growing that plant protein, they actually moved that date up to April of 2019 as a result of that, and once that facility is up and operating, it will create 155 new permanent jobs in Manitoba for all Manitobans to enjoy. We're not talking about just low-income jobs; we're talking about high-paying jobs, jobs that are going to be, you know, in that 75 to 150 thousand dollar range. So we're very excited about that opportunity, and that's just one of many of the opportunities that we're talking about.

* (15:50)

The RM of Portage was involved in this, also the City of Portage. They're ecstatic about those opportunities. And I know that there's some sewer and water upgrades. I know member talked about the Public Utilities Board—that they'll be involved in some of this as well. I don't know if that was a direction that the member was talking about with the Premier, but, certainly, the Public Utilities Board will be part of that. And, when we think about those opportunities going forward—and, of course, the Public Utilities Board is a stand-alone organization that we are very free to let them make the decisions on how they want to govern that board, but, certainly, I know they'll be part of some of the processes and approvals as we go forward.

So I hope that assists the member in the direction he was going to go.

Mr. Allum: Well, I suppose, in some obscure way, that was the direction that we were looking to go. We just—because, you know, the Public Utilities Board is going to play an indispensable role in the next little while in relation to proposed increases around hydro and other submissions that may come forward.

The government tabled a Crown Services act. I wonder if the minister could tell us why the government went in that direction.

Mr. Eichler: I appreciate the member's question.

I think this is a prime opportunity for the member to capitalize on some of the agricultural questions, since I'm helping with Executive Council. The member's very much apprised of the fact that, you know, we are doing a global questioning and just for you to ask whatever questions that he certainly sees fit, but I would hope that he would focus more along the agricultural side of questions that I have a little more expertise on.

But I want to just come back on the Roquette issue that I'd talked about earlier. Actually, Roquette has 30 established facilities—21 production sites in Europe, Asia and North America. It currently sells into more than 100 companies. It has over 8,000 employees. Roquette group family enterprise is one of the top-ranking processors of starch: No. 2 in Europe, No. 1 in France and India. I know the previous government and administration made a number of trips to India in regards to making sure that they were trying to get some business out of there.

We actually was able to entice this company from Roquette to come to Manitoba and capitalize on some of our great products, not only here but in western Canada. We know that Manitoba's not been a long—large grower of peas, but we certainly know that Saskatchewan, Alberta is primary growers of that product.

And, of course, we know that this year we're hosting the Protein Highway, if you will, here in Winnipeg, in September. We're very proud of that fact. We have had not only animal protein but plant protein as well and—when we have a chance to talk about those proteins that are so important to keep in Manitobans and Canadians and feed the world, I know the member's very much interested in the fact by 2040, we'll have a population that's actually double what it is today. So Manitoba has—certainly has a very important role to play in making sure that we have not only the animal protein but the plant protein as we go forward.

I also would be remiss if I didn't talk about the pulses, and I know the pulses are also very important. Pulses started off quite small in Manitoba. It was 1.6 million acres last year; this year we're looking at close to 2.2 million acres of pulses that are going to be planted within the province of Manitoba. So we're real excited to work with them, in partnership, in order to ensure that we see this product grow and prosper in Manitoba.

And just so the member's also aware that, you know, when we—coming back to his other question in regards to tabling things, I know when we tabled the proposal for Roquette that came—when they come into Manitoba and we made the announcement, you know, this is the largest single investment in agriculture in the history of Manitoba, one that we're very proud of—four hundred million dollars is a significant amount of money.

There's other companies that contribute to agricultural products within Manitoba, and we're certainly very pleased that a company such as Roquette would want to come to Manitoba and help us grow our economy.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I'd like to ask the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) why the Premier's staff are not here for Executive Council Estimates.

Mr. Eichler: You know, I really appreciate the question from the member from Minto and my good friend. I know that he's passionate about his agenda, and we know that he has a number of things he's trying to prove. And—but Exec Council is more than the Premier (Mr. Pallister), as he's very much aware, and he's been part of Executive Council as he goes forward and, you know, in his previous life as a minister.

And we take responsibility for Executive Council very seriously. And we are a team. And we are very proud of the fact that we are a team. And when we have an opportunity to step up and talk about various aspects—and Executive Council is a broad array of issues, as every member in this Chamber and this committee room certainly understands. So, I don't take it personally. I know the member from Minto wanted to address some questions particularly to the Premier, but we're a team and we're going to continue to be a team.

And I would love to talk about agriculture if the member so pleases, but certainly, I don't know if he heard my comments in regards to Roquette, but certainly, we also have some other very ambitious goals. One of those is—and we're coming back to the protein highway, when we talk about protein, and we know that the previous administration certainly supported the hog industry. We know that Maple Leaf is running at about 79 per cent of capacity. The members know that in order to be profitable, you have to be around that 82 to 83 per cent. We're not where close to that. We're certainly hoping that we can go there hard within Manitoba to not only make sure it's sustainable, but in an environmental way, that—one that's going to be conducive to making sure we grow our herd, but protecting the environment at the same time. So we're very proud of that.

Also, I made a commitment, and I know my critic would be interested in this, as well, I'm glad that he's here, the member from Flin Flon, and that's growing the beef herd in order to make sure that we

get our numbers up. They're currently sitting about 450,000. Prior to BSE, they were 750,000. I would like to see those numbers get back to the 750,000 head. It's going to be a challenge; there's no doubt about it.

But I certainly understand the fact that Agriculture has 33,000 jobs in Manitoba. So it's a significant contributor to our overall natural growth. And I know that when we talk about that, you know, and just on that alone, the beef forage program, and I know the member from Flin Flon would be interested in this, of course, the Manitoba forage and grasslands, McDonald's Canada certainly has been a player in that, as well. I had an opportunity to participate just last week in McDonald's on-Ronald McDonald House, and ensuring that we were there to be with them in order to ensure that they help people in rural Manitoba as well.

So this is significant for us in Manitoba and part of the Executive Council. We're certainly pleased to have those conversations and happy to assist members opposite in making sure they understand some of the things that are going on, knowing agriculture by the Executive Council, which, as a team effort, is very important.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), I'd just like to remind all of everybody on the committee today that referencing the presence or absence of any of the members is not allowed, so I'd just like to remind everybody that that is not to be done.

So, the member for Minto.

Mr. Swan: I'm happy to ask questions of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) in Executive Council Estimates, but I'd like him to answer the question. If it truly is a team and if he believes that it's appropriate that we proceed, why is the—why are the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) staff not here for Executive Council Estimates?

*(15:50)

Mr. Eichler: You know, a team approach is a number of people, and it may not be his choice of people, but I consider that an insult to my DM, and she's part of the Executive Council, as well. And I would hope the member would apologize for that comment, because certainly when we look at any department, whether it be Justice, whether it be transportation, whether it would be Agriculture, that's part of the executive team. And no member in this Chamber or this committee room should single

any department out to not be an important part of that. And I'm very disappointed the member would slander any department, because it's not one that he particularly chose to pick.

Mr. Swan: Well, that's fine then. I'm sure, then, from what the Minister of Agriculture has said, that his very capable deputy minister will then be able to answer all kinds of questions.

So could the Minister of Agriculture please table the organizational chart for Executive Council?

Mr. Eichler: The member's full aware that whenever we talk about structures of any particular type, whatever department, is fully available in the Estimates book for the member to go and check and see whatever flow chart that very well may be. So this information is available at his fingertips, but it's unfortunate the member—you know, he should be able to get a copy of that. It's available to all members of the House, whether you're in government or in opposition. I know that in opposition I certainly had the opportunity to be able to access that information. In fact, transparent and open government is all about that, and we're certainly not apologizing for not having a chart that he wants to see. It's available to all members. He can also search that out through the Clerk's office and certainly be available to him.

But I want to come back to what I talked about earlier and just highlight for the member a little bit more in regards to the beef program that I talked about earlier. There's some other partnerships there that I think I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about: Ducks Unlimited Canada is also a large player in regards to the program in order to help us grow our beef numbers, which, I know, is significant, to help us grow our economy, to help Manitobans be ensured that they will be part of that growing process.

If the member remembers—and I know that, you know, I'm dating myself a little bit here—when I first got elected in 2003, BSE had broken out, and it was significant impact to our economy by the least number and the loss of beef cattle during that time. And the border got closed to us. We tried to eat our way out of that, and certainly we all did our part. I know, at the time, Premier Doer was in charge. I know he made a number of trips down to North Dakota and to Washington, actually then becoming the ambassador for Canada to United States. And we're certainly pleased that we were able to work with the former premier in order to ensure that we got the border open. Once he also was there, after the

border did get opened, the country-of-origin labelling broke out, and, of course, we were able, then, to work with the former premier and ensure that we based our decisions on science.

One of the organizations that I partnered with was the state agricultural leaders group, and they were a phenomenal organization made up of agricultural leaders right across United States and, of course, some senators, state legislatures; those were the ones that helped us open up the border just for not only BSE but country-of-origin labelling. So we were very passionate about doing that, and we also worked with the former Conservative government in order to make sure that we listened and built on those relationships.

The other part of it was, now that the Liberal government's been elected, we're certainly respectful of our relationship with the Minister of Agriculture and the minister of transportation and moving our goods and services to our export markets, and we're certainly pleased that we're able to do some of those things. In fact, we just got back this morning from Ottawa in regards to our federal-provincial-territorial meeting at which we had a number of discussions. Part of those would be the next policy framework, which I know my critic from Flin Flon certainly wanting to know more about, so I know he'll have some questions on that, I'm sure.

Once this comes into effect in 2018—we do not have an agreement yet in regards to the next policy framework, but we know that we're very close to making sure that we do have those conversations that's going to give us the best results for Manitobans, the best results for Canadians, in order to feed the world, as I talked about earlier, in 2040, when we see our population double, and we certainly want to make sure that we're part of that solution and make sure that we are there for all Manitobans, all Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Allum: Sorry, I'm having a little following—hard time following the minister's answers.

Yesterday, sent out under—or sent under from the Clerk's office, says matters under advisement: Committee of Supply Executive Council May 10th, 2017. Table of matters under advisement: provision—item No. 2, provision of organizational chart for Executive Council, but I just heard the minister tell us to go get it ourselves.

So which is it? Is he contradicting the Premier (Mr. Pallister)?

Mr. Eichler: Well, you know, I'll let the member decide how he wants to interpret that. I'm not going to be the interpreter of his question. I'm sure that he's very capable at doing that; he spent a number of days in the Cabinet role and Executive Council. He's very much aware of the process of which one's to follow.

But I want to come back—and I'd be remiss if I didn't want to talk a little bit about the bison sector and how that is so important to Manitoba's economy. And one of the things, you know, when you get into these roles and, of course, the member's accused me of not knowing exactly what I'm talking about. But I can tell him that some things were not sure, and one of those is the bison sector, and I'd be remiss if I didn't help educate my critic and, of course, you know, my good friend from Fort Garry-Riverview, that sheep and bison don't mix, and sheep carry a disease that is hazardous to the bison herd. It can actually wipe out a herd in just a matter of weeks and months, and we've worked really hard to maintain the bison herds in Manitoba. We're very clear about making sure we want to establish and keep that herd growing. We've seen the price of bison come back to historic levels, in fact, during the Royal Winter Fair we had an opportunity to meet with the Bison Association. Again, it was a very informative meeting.

I know there's a number of bison up in the member from Flin Flon's area that certainly are very prosperous. They're doing a good job, and I know the member from Swan River also has a number of producers there that are moving forward in the growth of their herds and they want to see movement on that as well.

Also, the First Nations are very active in growing their herds as well, and I know I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about Peguis. I certainly had the opportunity to meet with Peguis this afternoon at the Downs, for the Downs kickoff, and they're very excited about getting involved in agriculture and I know the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke) has been working hand in hand with them to help them become more self-reliant. They want to invest in their members, in their opportunities, in order to see that they are sustainable, not only now but into the future. So we're certainly appreciative of the working relationship that we've been able identify and work with, and I know that members opposite would be

pleased to know that as we've seen the increase in the bison herd, we certainly see some of that money come back into our economy to see that Manitoba will grow and prosper and it will become the most improved province in all of Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Allum: Mr. Chair, I know that you advised us yesterday quite wisely, quite sagely, that you can't require anyone to answer a question or anything in that regard and I appreciate that. I appreciate your role and the service that you provide. But the minister, I think, is finding himself in a contradiction that we're going to give him a chance to get out of.

We were told and committed and promised that a work chart of Executive Council would be provided to us, but the minister told us, in fact, just earlier, and it will be recorded in Hansard, that we should just go get it ourselves and that that would not be forthcoming.

Does he want to reflect on that answer now and provide us—recognize the commitment that was made by his Premier (Mr. Pallister) yesterday?

Mr. Eichler: Well, I thank the member for the question, and I was not here yesterday when the member asked the question and I'm not at liberty to discuss whether or not the matter was before this committee or not.

* (16:00)

But I do also—I'd be remiss if I didn't advise the member that there's a number of other things that are very exciting in Manitoba that I do want to talk about, and that's a company called Canada Sheep.

And Canada Sheep is a company from New Zealand. They are very focused on growing the sheep herd here in Manitoba. In fact, they started down in the member's from—the Chair's member—his riding, and they've moved on to other parts of the province; they've moved up into the Lunder area, into the Stonewall area. They're certainly committed to growing the sheep herd in Manitoba. Their goal is to end up having enough sheep to process 200 head per day in a community called Sarto, and they're committed not only to ensuring that the sheep population grows in Manitoba, but the economic benefits that come with that will help all communities—all communities in not only rural Manitoba, but in the city of Winnipeg.

I know the member opposite loves to talk about jobs and economic growth. We've talked about that

in our ag committee just a couple of weeks ago. I know he's passionate about it, and he talked about some of the things that will help his area and his community grow and prosper. And this is what we talk about when we think about agriculture. It's an economic engine for Manitoba that's going to keep on giving, giving, giving. And I love to come back to the numbers: 33,000 jobs. There's a direct correlation to agriculture and driving the economy of Manitoba.

When we think about the opportunity of the sheep growing in Manitoba, you know, it—I don't know if you've been to Costco lately, but it runs around 20 bucks a pound; that's pretty significant. There's only one other sector—one other sector alone—that's the top of the sheep as far as return on investment's concerned, as far as investment to get into the product, and that's the goat business. The goat business is expanding in Manitoba. It's a business that I think people need to take advantage of in order to ensure that it's sustainable as well.

And we know we're a diverse culture, and as a result of that, we've seen the marketplace, the demand for goats, within the province of 'manitoba' certainly grow, and it's one of those economic engines that will, again, keep on giving and benefit all Manitobans as we go forward in order to ensure that Manitoba, it is sustainable in agriculture, and of course create that economic wealth, that economic opportunity in order to ensure that Manitobans has those good jobs within Manitoba so they can stay in Manitoba and create that economic wealth that we certainly know that we want to see Manitoba grow and prosper.

An Honourable Member: Good news.

Mr. Eichler: Very good news.

Mr. Allum: Well, the minister, unfortunately, not answering the question. And I read, from him, an official document put out by the Clerk's office: Matters Under Advisement, Committee of Supply, Executive Council. Dated May 10th, 2017, and if you scroll to the bottom it says, table of matters under advisement: provision of organizational chart for Executive Council. Yet the minister, in his opening answer, told us that we should just go look for ourselves.

So, could we get a straight answer from him? Is he going to live up to the Premier's commitment, or is he breaking faith with his own Premier?

Mr. Eichler: I'd be remiss if I didn't come back and talk a little bit more about growing the agricultural sector.

And we've seen a number—and I know if the members are for supply management or not, but certainly we've seen supply management. I've met with those folks. We see a 10 per cent growth, and I know the members nodding their heads, and they're excited about this opportunity as well.

They're just—

Mr. Chairperson: I—order. Order. I'd like to interrupt here.

It's getting a little bit loud on both sides of the table. I would appreciate if we would stick to the questions and the answers—

An Honourable Member: Yes, so would we.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Are you questioning the Chair?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

An Honourable Member: No, I am not, and I apologize.

Mr. Eichler: Back to what I was talking about earlier.

It is exciting when we think about the poultry sector, the egg-layers. We're going to see a 10 per cent growth in that sector alone. This year, we're going to see a 10 per cent increase in our growing chickens.

We're going to see a 10 per cent growth in our dairy business. We are very excited about our dairy producers seeing that growth. We know that Parmalat will be opening their facility very, very soon, which will give us another market opportunity for our dairy producers to take them up to.

Also, we know that the dairy producers are probably the strictest and hardest on their own. They're a group that is so proud of their organization that they self-inspect; they self-govern. They're harder on themselves than—probably, like most families are, we're harder on each other than we are on somebody else.

So we're, certainly, pleased to work with the dairy producers in 'shorder' to ensure that they, in fact, do grow their sectors as well.

And, of course, I would also be remiss if I didn't talk about the small farm direct marketing, and I

know that also is very important to all members of the House in regards to small business and direct marketing. There is an organization called the marketing association of Manitoba, which uses a—name is also is a direct farm market for communication purposes. Of course, almost everybody in the Chamber knows that St. Norbert market is renowned and renown for its ability to be able to attract investors and people that want to take their products to the next level.

Some of those products started in the Food Development Centre at—in Portage la Prairie, and we're certainly pleased to be part of that. When we see them come to market, come to that goal in life where they're able to take that first jam and that first dozen eggs to get started in the marketplace.

We have another company called Cornell ice cream. It's a small, small business that certainly got up and running, and we're—know that that's a great success story that we're able to share with all Manitobans and a product that, if members opposite or members in my team have not had an opportunity to taste the Cornell ice cream, I certainly encourage them to do so. It's some phenomenal products. They're a dairy family. Started off as a product that came from their dream; they brought that to not only to our department to Manitobans to enjoy, and we're certainly very pleased to be in partnerships with them and help them expand on their marketplace as well.

So thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Allum: Well, I'll let the record show that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), in Executive Council today, simply refused to live up to a commitment made by the Premier of Manitoba.

So I want to ask him now, as a member of Executive Council, can he tell us or at least table for us the protocol he uses for his cellphone communications?

Mr. Eichler: I'd be remiss if I didn't come back to talk about the great news story. And one of the things when I become minister, and I don't know what the previous member did when he was minister, but certainly there's lots of bad news out there. He seems to want to focus on the bad news. But one of the things I made very clear to my producers: there's lots of good news out there, and we don't have to dwell on the negative.

And I don't know where the member wants to focus his energies on, but I certainly want to focus on

the good news. And the good news is, is that the bee sector in Manitoba and, of course, we know has had some challenges over the years, and, of course, Manitoba continues to be a leader in the bee stocks and also in the honey production.

Now, this past July, I had the opportunity to go to my first federal-provincial-territorial meeting in Calgary, and I had the opportunity to meet with the Japanese consulate. And it was a fantastic meeting of which we were able to talk about a number of issues in order to help Manitoba be successful. That conversation turned into the bee business, and they are now back wanting to buy Manitoba honey. It's a product that—it's an all-natural product that we're so proud of to be able to work with our producers, and, I think, it would be important for us to note that honey bee inspection, in 2016, was 3,508; lead-or cuff bee inspection was 45; interprovincial movement inspection was 288, in 2016.

Now that's significant when we talk about the honey business, and we know that large inventories that were imported from the US, through a back door through the Asian market, certainly had an impact on the economy for the honey bees guys. And, certainly, we're hoping that we'll see some of that recover, some of that come back so that our bee growers are prosperous.

In fact, I don't know if the member's been involved in 4-H, but I certainly had the opportunity, on Sunday, to join the 4-H kids out of Camp Manitou. And we talked about the bees and how—what an important part of our economy that they play. And so it was students there from ages nine to 14, and we talked about what an important role that the bees had to play in Manitoba.

* (16:10)

In keeping with the initiative to help the 4-H, which they are great at and wanting to be part of, they were allowed to construct a bee nest, and it was simply a matter of a stump off a tree, certainly a simple enough model to follow, and you drill holes in this tree in order to allow the bees to hibernate there and protect them from the environment and to protect them so that the next generation of bees will be able to move forward.

And I know that members will be certainly excited about that in order to keep nature at its best, and I know every member in this House is conscious of the fact that the environment is so important for us to move forward on and make sure that we protect it.

So bees are a small part, but certainly one that we're very committed to to see that industry grow and prosper, and of course by keeping nature in balance, that's certainly part of that opportunity as well, so I'm glad to share that good news with the members opposite.

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Chair, I'm kind of stung by that answer, to be honest with you, but I wonder if the minister could tell us, is he familiar with the protocol—communications protocol that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) referenced in committee yesterday as a member of the Executive Council? Does he follow the same communications protocol or not?

Mr. Eichler: Well, the best thing to do when you get stung, and I don't know if the member realizes this, but maybe you should attend to the camp with me, but if you do get stung, the best thing to do is to flip if off; use a credit card, or—don't squeeze it. The best thing that you can do is to get rid of that stinger the quicker that you can, so I hope he didn't get stung too hard, but certainly that's an opportunity for him to learn.

Estimates are a process of which we try to take back some of those things that we get out of committee and use those to benefit others, so I'm happy to share that information, you know, with the member. I know that it might seem like a simple thing, but one day, if he does get stung by a real bee, then he'll know what to do.

But the other thing that I would be remiss if I didn't talk about was the Green Innovations Hub, of which we're so proud of here in Manitoba, and I would be remiss if I didn't identify some of those companies that are right here in Winnipeg, and I know the member's probably very well familiar with a company called Cargill. Cargill—I was at was the—I met with them; they were elated to meet with me and talk about their future plans, not only for Manitoba, but for Canada as a whole, and of course their opportunities to move forward on some of the new agreements that we've been working on.

One the member may be familiar with, and that's called CEA, that's a European trade agreement, and Cargill's focusing very heavily on the opportunity to be able to capitalize on some of those trade opportunities, in particular the beef sector that I talked about earlier on.

Now, I'm so excited about that opportunity that when we see our beef numbers grow they want to be able to have a marketplace for that, and I know the

members opposite are very much aware of that, so we can grow our beef numbers, but without a market it certainly don't do us a lot of good.

So, Cargill's focused on capitalizing on that opportunity in order for them to ensure that they do, in fact, have that marketplace for them as they go forward.

Manitoba's a small player in the overall export business and the beef side of things. The United States is our No. 1 trade partner; we're their No. 1 trade partner. They have the ability to consume more of the higher end cuts, where in Canada we consume a larger number of the ground beef cuts, the smaller rump roasts, those types of products, in order to help use up some of that product.

I know it's important for the member to understand that some of our trade does go to—under the new agreement, through CETA and we're certainly happy that we're having some of those opportunities.

And, again, protein is a large part of that, so we're looking forward to some of those others.

They'll be remiss if I didn't talk about was Paterson's Grain elevator. They are world exporters as well. They export a large number of crops to these other countries, whether it be the Asian market, the European market. There's certainly one that's important for us to make sure we support.

A couple of others—Richardson farms—they're another major contributor to our Manitoba economy in order for us to ensure that we do have the jobs and the opportunities for those Manitobans, and, of course, it gives our farmers another marketplace that, I know, the members opposite would be pleased to learn about.

Also, in regards to the Monsanto and Bayer merger. When we talk about that merger and keeping that head office here in Manitoba was really important to us here in Manitoba. So we're certainly happy about that as well.

And I know the member would probably be wanting to know a little bit more about some of these, and, hopefully, we'll share with him in the next comment.

Mr. Allum: I have no doubt the Agriculture Department is a hive of activity. I wonder if the minister would tell us: How does he communicate with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) when he's in Costa Rica? Does he dial out by cellphone? Does he do it

by email? In what manner, given all of these huge and important issues that the minister has just identified, how does he communicate as a member of Executive Council when the Premier is in Costa Rica?

Mr. Eichler: I appreciate the question. I know the member would be somewhat skeptical if I did not mention the Grain Innovation Hub here in Manitoba. Of course, it reinforces Manitoba as a global focal point for agri-food and agri-innovation.

Of course, I would be—also be remiss if I didn't talk about research. None of these products would have probably got to where they are if it wasn't based on good, sound research. And when we look at these programs—not only now, but going into the future—research is really what it's all about. And, of course, the Grain Innovation Hub is a large part of that.

An Honourable Member: On a point of order, Mr. Chairperson.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Minto, on a point of order.

Mr. Swan: I've been—I was listening very carefully to the minister's answer, and you know, again, there's a lot of latitude for a minister, even if the minister's here without any staff from Executive Council. But the minister's answer has absolutely nothing to do with the question that was asked by my colleague the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum). Not the same department, not the same continent, frankly, than the question that was being asked.

The minister is not responding to questions that are being validly asked by members of the opposition—doing what is our job as Her Majesty's official opposition to ask questions and receive answers from Cabinet ministers. So I would direct—I would ask the chair to direct the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) to take this process seriously, to listen to the questions that are being posed by members of the opposition and to provide an answer. And, if the minister does not have an answer, to give an undertaking to provide those so that we're not wasting people's time this afternoon.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I think the member's point of order really has no validity here. This process is called Estimates, and it's about the budget that's being delivered by this government, and it's a very good budget. But, apparently, they either forget to read

their Estimates books or they don't really realize what is—Estimates are about. Their questions should be focused on finances. That's what the budget is about, in case they didn't know that. And they have complete latitude on their questions to ask, and the answers also have complete latitude.

So his point of order, really, is irrelevant.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a point of order.

Mr. Allum: Just to the point, here. We have a responsibility as the official opposition to ask questions of members of Executive Council when we're in the Estimates process, and we are in—I heard—you bring us into session here—that we were going to be talking about Executive Council, and so the member is asked about his activities as a member of Executive Council. It would only be appropriate for him to answer questions that are asked.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any other questions on this point of order?

The Chair has no authority over the quality or content of the questions or answers, and therefore I rule that there is no point of order. I've given a lot of latitude in both directions on both sides. I'm ruling that there is no point of order, so we will continue.

Mr. Swan: With all due respect, Mr. Chairperson—and I appreciate you're in a tough situation—but I challenge your ruling.

* (16:20)

Mr. Chairperson: It's my understanding that you cannot challenge the ruling of the Chair in Committee of Supply on a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Swan: Well, it is an embarrassment. This government takes this democratic process so frivolously that they put up a gentleman who I like, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), in Executive Council Estimates, and that's fine. If he's the one who's going to sit in that chair and take questions, give answers, that's fine; but we've already put on the record that the Minister of Agriculture has chosen not to have any Executive Council staff here with him, no one that works in the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) office, no one that advises the Premier that can actually give answers to any of the questions that the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) was talking about. This is an absolute sham this afternoon. The

members of the government should be embarrassed, frankly, at the way that this is carrying on this afternoon.

The Minister of Agriculture is not even attempting—so, let's take—let's try again with a question, maybe more along the lines of what the member for Midland would be interested in.

How much money is budgeted in the Executive Council Estimates this year for the development of social impact bonds?

Mr. Eichler: It's unfortunate the members opposite don't appreciate agriculture as much as I do and this government and the Premier. I mean, the Premier has been dedicated to—he's the fifth premier from outside the city limits, and I don't know if the members know that or not. He understood agriculture, he understands the value of agriculture, he's made it very, very clear that agriculture's an economic engine, one that's going to keep on giving year after year after year. It's the backbone of this province, so it's unfortunate that the member opposite does not take it seriously. We do; I know the Premier does, and we have discussions on an ongoing basis with the Premier in regards to—in fact, I encourage the members opposite to look up my mandate letter. The mandate letter is very clear that we're going to have more value added, we're going to see our economy grow and prosper, and if that's not part of the Manitoba government, then I don't know what you're looking for, but certainly, it is a large part of our economic engine. I've put on the record several times that part of what agriculture does.

I have not even begun to tell you all the rest of the good news that we have going on in Agriculture. I'm happy to share that news with you and, as part of the Executive Council, I'm certainly pleased to share that information with you and I would be remiss if I didn't talk about some of the things, coming back to what I talked about earlier in regards to the Grain Innovation Hub.

In fact, during 2015, '16, '17, there was \$3.5 million provincial was allocated 22 research jobs. Now, that's jobs that are high-paying jobs. Part of that Executive Council that is so much part of our overall economy—now, maybe members opposite don't consider that much money, but for us, \$3.5 million in research is significant. Also, I think it'd be notable that investments in equipment and, of course, wheat genomics—\$1 million was 'invanced' in laboratory equipment at the Canadian Centre for Agri-Food Research in Health and Medicine.

I think that's very significant—\$2.2 million in grain-processing equipment at the Canadian International Grains Institute.

These are all Manitoba companies. These are companies that are economic engines of Manitoba. I know members opposite certainly would probably agree with me that these are our leaders of tomorrow, these are our leaders that create those jobs, that economic opportunity, in order for Manitoba to grow and prosper.

Now, also—I'd also be remiss if I didn't talk about the \$2.2 million in wheat research at the Discovery and Variety Development, disease resistant—these are things that are important to all Manitobans: \$640,000 in honeybee and wheat genomics at the GMO prairie institute; to \$326,000 in grain processing and 'nutrigen' through deduction 'incentives' at the University of Manitoba. Again, creating those good jobs, that opportunity to see the University of Manitoba grow and prosper, and then also 200—two point two four point four in laboratory growth in cabinet greenhouse equipment, which is again helping our northern communities grow and prosper and helping those that need hands sometimes in that next step in order to provide food for themselves, and of course, the rest of their communities.

So there's a number of good things that come as a result of Manitoba, and I want to come back to help the members opposite to talk about the mandate that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) gave me, and that's to be also the most improved province. I—and I'll read into the record.

So our party's been given mandate to restore trust in government, improve the lives of Manitobans and their families. This is a high honour and privilege we have been given. It will be our focus every day in government. And it's unfortunate the members opposite don't take this as seriously as I do because certainly when I've been given a mandate, I take it seriously as a team approach. Maybe members opposite didn't want to take that approach. I think that Manitobans showed their views in that regard, and I will stand by my Premier, and I'll stand in the Department of Agriculture, and we'll be proud to help Manitoba be the most improved province in all of Canada.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm sorry. I may have laughed out loud when the member talked about trust in government, so I realize that probably wasn't appropriate. But, if the member wants anyone to trust in this government, he should be making some

effort to answer the questions that are being posed to him. I'm sorry the Premier's put the Minister of Agriculture, who I, frankly, like, in a position that he's embarrassing himself this afternoon with the complete inability to answer any question that's being put forward. If people want open and transparent government, they expect that when there is a formal committee proceeding taking place, such as Estimates, that there's someone sitting in the minister's chair that will actually pay attention to the questions and give answers.

So I'll ask the minister again: What are the government's plans for social impact bonds for this fiscal year?

Mr. Eichler: Well, it's unfortunate. I know the former—the member was former Justice minister, and I know he had a role to play in that role, and it's unfortunate that some of the things happened under the previous administration that he had some role in, some role he didn't, but I'm here to judge him—or I am not here to judge anybody else in this Chamber. And he may not perhaps that to understand how important agriculture really is, and I accept his apology. And I don't think he was laughing at me; he was laughing at the comment in his words, not mine.

But, certainly, I know that agriculture is important and I'm not embarrassing myself at all. And I find myself somewhat bewildered that the members opposite don't want to talk about agriculture. He had an opportunity to continue on that this afternoon in Estimates. That request was denied. I certainly feel I have a right to talk about agriculture, and I will continue to talk about agriculture not only now but into the future.

And I'd be remiss if I did not make it very clear that we have a mandate, and that's to reach out to all of our commodity groups to make sure that we, in fact, are listening to Manitobans, and we do. June 28th of last year, I wanted to make sure I was focused on my commodity groups' and my sectors' views not only on the next policy framework, but what they wanted to have for Manitoba to carry as their voice on to our federal counterparts, and, of course, what this might look like going into the future.

So also had another meeting, which I invited members opposite to attend. They chose not to attend. Unfortunately, they did not want to come to the June 28th or July 12th meeting. And that's unfortunate because it was seen first-hand the role that agricultural plays, the role that agricultural has,

in regards to growing our economy, the jobs that it creates. It's unfortunate that members opposite don't want to take that as seriously as I do, and I certainly do take this very clear, and I can tell members opposite, then, when we delivered our Calgary statement with my colleagues right across Canada, they were proud. They were proud to stand and talk about agriculture.

And maybe members opposite don't have the drive and desire that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and I and our Cabinet have in regards to growing our economy, focusing on creating those jobs, fixing our finances in order that we can ensure that Manitobans do have those opportunities to see Manitoba grow and prosper.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I guess we'll carry on with this—I'm not sure what the right term is, so I won't use it.

The Premier had claimed that no front-line workers would lose their jobs if Manitobans voted for him. Can the Minister of Agriculture indicate if there was a target for staff reductions across departments in this 'budget,' and if so, what that staffing position reduction target was for this budget?

* (16:30)

Mr. Eichler: I appreciate the critic's question, and I know that we talked about this when we was Estimates a couple of weeks ago, in regards to Agriculture. And I don't know if you were asking a global question on the number of positions or if it was in regards to agricultural, so if I could get clarity on that, Mr. Chair, it would be helpful.

Mr. Lindsey: I would certainly love to clarify that for the Minister of Agriculture.

When I was in the Agriculture section of the Estimates process, I asked questions specific to Agriculture.

I believe today we're in Executive Council, not Agriculture, so I'm asking questions about the global.

Mr. Eichler: Certainly, I know that when we talked about agricultural just not very long ago, certainly we were very excited to share the news with the member in regards to management 'streamlining' initiative.

Of course, government committed to reducing management by 112 positions. The streaming of 112 manage positions was announced on October the 'sixt' of 2017, and that was to occur over a

two-phase implementation schedule, effective March 31st, 2017, through to December 31st, 2017.

Mr. Allum: As a member of Executive Council, the minister will almost certainly have seen a fiscal performance review that was undertaken by KPMG, and for which the Premier said 97 per cent of it would be released to the public, but we know that that hasn't happened.

Can he tell us if—in the fiscal performance review, if it contains the names of individuals who submitted information to it?

Mr. Eichler: Thank the member for the question. I know that the Estimates process is one that can be frustrating for government, frustrating for members opposite, and I think this is more of a question for the Department of Finance when you get the opportunity to have Estimates. And I know that you would certainly be pleased to have the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) address some of those issues.

I'm not sure if the critic's prepared to call that department. I know he had an opportunity earlier on today when we asked leave that Agriculture be brought up. So we were happy to jump in as the Executive Council for Agriculture to help highlight some of those things that are driving our economy, if you will. And so, I certainly encourage the member to take part in that Estimates process once he has an opportunity to call Finance. He had that opportunity earlier today and fortunately, he decided not to do that. He decided to stay with Executive Council.

And I know that, you know, we do have to talk a little bit more about Growing Forward in regards of 2017. There's two applications been approved totalling 135.7 million. Young farmers, the next-generation program were approved for over four hundred and forty-three point five thousand dollars in regards to funding through 95 approved applications. On the Growing Assurance, environment has provided producers with over \$6.6 million in funding based on 171 approved projects for the adoption of beneficial management practice, known as BMPs, related primary to increase matures—manure storage capacity and extensive livestock—wintering of livestock.

So there's a number of significant programs that are going forward and, if the member has questions specific to agriculture, I'd be happy to try and answer those through Executive Council, and others that would be more beneficial. He can certainly ask the ministers at the time in regards to those Estimates,

and we encourage the member opposite to move forward on the Estimate process in regards to whatever department he wants to call after Executive Council.

Mr. Swan: Well, the member still seems to be confused that we're in the middle of Executive Council Estimates and I—my colleagues and I don't know why it's the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) sitting in that chair. But so be it—but maybe it's helpful because, you know, I wasn't getting any useful answers out of the Premier (Mr. Pallister), either, so what's the difference?

But I'll ask the Minister of Agriculture, then: Can he put on the record the apparent protocol that seems to exist that tells Cabinet ministers that they should not be using government cellphones for government business, or government emails for government business? Could he either talk about that or tender a copy of it today?

Mr. Eichler: I thank the member, and he knows the process and he knows what has been said previously, and I encourage the member that Executive Council—and when he's talking to the Premier he's more than happy to ask those questions.

But, in regards to foreign food safety, we've approved 939 producer applications for a total of \$6.1 million for the adoption of the insurance systems and business management practices to mitigate risk factors not only for food safety, bio-security, traceability and, of course, plant and animal health.

'Innovation'—innovation programs includes provincial grants of 216 grants for \$66.5 million to ensure Manitoba has the capacity to develop innovations that advance the competitiveness and sustainability of agriculture, agri-food product, agri-food sectors.

Food safety process and distribution programming provides over \$1.7 million in project funding of 96 agro-products, processors or distributors for business management 'praxisum', targeting the adoption of assurance programs. The growing value program includes provincial grants totalling \$19.3 million in funding to 65 agro-product processors to increase capacity and their competitive advantage.

So I know that this will help the members opposite in understanding, again, the value of agriculture and its role in the Executive Council process.

Mr. Allum: The Premier committed to releasing 97 per cent of the KPMG report. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) refused to provide one word of that report.

Who does the minister support? The Premier, or the Minister of Finance?

Mr. Eichler: Well, the member knows full well the Minister of Finance and the Premier—and our caucus and Cabinet—delivered on a budget that was meaningful for all Manitobans, a budget that made it very clear that Manitoba's open for business once again, not only in the field of agriculture, but all departments.

And I mentioned earlier on that we're able to have a company by the name of Roquette come into Manitoba, and maybe he missed that earlier on, but it's certainly—for us as Manitobans—we want to ensure that we're listening to Manitobans, we're making sure we deliver for Manitobans in order to ensure that we have the best value for return on investments for all Manitobans.

And I know the Minister of Finance had a number—a number literally in the thousands of consultations, inputs from either being online or in person to ensure that Manitobans had a voice in their budget. And the member talks about whether or not it was a good decision, bad decision. Manitobans—we're listening to Manitobans, and we're hearing loud and clear that this was a small step, but a step in the right direction. We were on a path of a \$1.7-billion deficit. I don't know if the members opposite feel that was significant or not, but for us—and what we heard from Manitobans—certainly was not 'asseptable', was not a path that they wanted to go down.

* (16:40)

Whenever you talk about that size of deficit—if the previous administration was to have been re-elected, it would have been a path of destruction. We're focused on one that's going to get results for Manitobans, one that's going to give Manitobans an opportunity to see our economy grow and prosper, that will repair our services, fix our finances and create jobs in Manitoba.

Mr. Lindsey: The Premier claimed that his proposed wage freeze legislation would result in a lowering of expenditures of approximately \$100 million a year. Perhaps the Minister of Agriculture could enlighten us at how the Premier arrived at that estimation.

Mr. Eichler: Well, you know, in the industry consultations that we had across this province and when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and others were doing their consultation process, there was a number of issues that were brought forward in order to ensure that we had the best interest of Manitobans. And we talked about these not only in Treasury Board but at the Cabinet level and all the levels of government, those that are involved in government, those that are not involved in government, those that are non-union, those are union. We had those conversations with a number of folks right across Manitoba in order to ensure we had the right budget at the right time at the right place.

And I know the Minister of Finance and all members of Cabinet and all members of this government take our positions very, very seriously in order to ensure that we did listen to Manitobans, and, as a result of that, Budget 2017 was brought forward. And, when we look at some of the changes that were made and what we're looking at in not only Agriculture but other parts of our government in order to ensure that we get the best value for return on investment, that that's here for all Manitobans, create those jobs and fix our finances in order that we're able to create that employment, those long-sustaining jobs that are going to be here for Manitobans and, of course, ensure that we make sure that Manitobans have a voice at the table, and we certainly listened to Manitobans and we delivered on that budget.

Mr. Swan: We understand that an individual named David McLaughlin was employed by Executive Council last year.

Why did the taxpayers of Manitoba have to pay nearly \$25,000 for his travel expenses from his home to Manitoba?

Mr. Eichler: Well, you know, the member raises a question that should probably be addressed, again, to Finance once the member finally gets his call within the Estimates process. I don't know what the members opposite are afraid of. Moving on down the chain of Estimates, there's an opportunity for each member, each member of Cabinet to be questioned.

I'm a bit disappointed that they don't want to talk about agriculture because I certainly—I do want to talk about agriculture. We had the opening day of Agriculture in this very room. I thought we were having a good discussion. It's unfortunate that members opposite don't want to continue on with

that. We are just simply wanting to carry on with what we talked about earlier on.

And we certainly understand that whenever we look at positions, whether that be of any role within government, is one that has to be considered the best value for investment, and we're certainly pleased to have Mr. McLaughlin as part of our team. We're proud to have him part of our team, and I really don't know why members opposite don't feel that Mr. McLaughlin is worth the money that they're talking about. Certainly, we were very pleased to have a person of this calibre on our team, and it's unfortunate members opposite don't see it that way.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm fascinated that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) believes paying somebody \$25,000 to come—to commute to a job that's located here in Winnipeg is good value for money, but we've got the minister's answer on that and I guess that's the closest thing we've had to an answer this afternoon.

How many times has the minister ever spoken to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) while the Premier's sojourning down in Costa Rica?

Mr. Eichler: Well, I thank the member for the question. I talk to the Premier on a regular basis. I don't keep track of where he's at. I have a department to run and I really—I don't ask the Premier where he's at, nor do I care where the Premier's at. He's on call 24-7, 365.

I don't know what you did when you were in government, but I can tell you that I'm on the call, on the clock 24-7, 365, and maybe—maybe you should take some of those work ethics back to your department and you'd maybe see some different results, but I'm certainly pleased at my ability to be able to help deliver on my mandate that's been given to me. My—I talk to the Premier on a regular basis in order to seek his advice on certain items. He seeks my advice on certain items. We have a great working relationship, and that will continue. I don't know what members opposite decide they want to maybe put in for a day, but I know I'm very proud to stand with our Premier each and every day to help Manitoba be the most improved province in all of Canada.

Mr. Allum: As member of Executive Council, the minister would've helped to approve the order-in-council in relation to expanding the powers of the PUB. Can the minister give us an outline of what

those expanded powers are and why that order-in-council was passed?

Mr. Eichler: Well, I can see why the former government had some problems in regards to confidentiality. The member's very much aware that anything in Cabinet is confidential information. He knows orders-in-council are made public; that information will be shared on the website and through other venues that are available to all members. We do not discuss what happens in Cabinet, nor will we, and I know the member opposite should appreciate the fact that that's something that is not discussed in regards to staffing and other issues.

Mr. Lindsey: The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) made some statements about how he's available and works 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and he's able to contact the Premier (Mr. Pallister) anytime he wants to discuss an issue. So, perhaps, then, the Minister of Agriculture will tell us how he contacts the Premier when the Premier's in Costa Rica.

Mr. Eichler: Well, you know what? It's—you know, this little witch hunt that members opposite are on seem to forget that work ethic is something that is—it's a gift. It's a gift that keeps on giving, a gift whenever you're trying to make Manitoba the most improved province in all of Canada, that we take that very seriously, and the Premier takes that position very seriously. I take my position very seriously, and, you know, there's a number of ways of which we can be held to account, and those are by questions that you're answering, and others by the general public.

The general public understands that the Premier's doing an outstanding job. I hope I'm doing as good a job as the Premier is in delivering his mandate as I am, and I'm not sure, I'll be judged on that by the electorate once that comes, and so will the Premier. And we take this position very seriously. We know that Manitobans will ask us to deliver on our mandate that the Premier outlined and we were charged with as members of Executive Council. We're very pleased that we are making progress. Are we there yet? No, we're not at all. We got a long ways to go.

The previous government had 17 years to fix the finances, repair the services. That didn't happen. We had a debt of runaway control of which we're trying to get a handle on. We did make significant cuts. We did make some investments that were going to make Manitoba better. We know that it's loud and clear

that what was there before was not working. We were tenth out of tenth in regards to the education system, which I know the member opposite was certainly part of, and we're trying to fix that. We had a health care that was not working, that we listened to Manitobans. The Minister of Health made significant changes there. I know that we're in desperate need of making sure our finances were in order in order to ensure that we don't get another credit downgrade. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) took that very seriously, and he made a number of initiatives to make sure that the finances of Manitoba were getting fixed and repaired, and I know that in the Estimates process, if they ever move out of Executive Council, we'll be able to ask the Minister of Finance some of those questions rather than through Executive Council. But, certainly, it's open dialogue for questions, and we move forward, and, of course, we like to always come back to what we've been charged with, and that's delivering our mandate to Manitobans.

Mr. Swan: Well, the Minister of Agriculture, we may be getting somewhere this afternoon. He's now confirmed that he doesn't—he actually can't tell us if he's ever made any contact by phone to the Premier when he's been down in Costa Rica. He's made that pretty clear this afternoon.

* (16:50)

He also made clear that he can't put on the record how he actually would even get in touch with the Premier.

It is good, though, that the Minister's Agriculture staff are with him for inexplicable reasons, but they're with him, and we welcome them. This'll be something can help him with then.

Has the Minister of Agriculture ever sent the Premier an email and which address did he send it to?

Mr. Eichler: Well, you know, the—my good friend from Minto is certainly wanting to go on a path that he seems to think that there's no communications. There is communications on a regular basis. I don't know how the member opposite communicates, but we certainly know how to communicate. We're very good at communicating.

I understand very clearly what my mandate is, and I don't know where the member was last night actually for Minto, nor do I really care where the member was at last night at Minto. He might have been at a ball game. He might have been in

Edmonton. I really don't know, but that's really not the point.

I know if the member from Minto wanted to talk to me, he would've called me. He could've emailed me. He could've faxed me. There's a number of varieties of which are available to all members to correspond. I get letters from all across Manitoba. I don't know if the members opposite ever got that. But certainly we do have a number of ways of communicating. I don't know if the member knows, there's cellphones; there's all kinds of opportunities that we can communicate with one another, and maybe you guys don't communicate that way, but we're certainly—we're able to communicate in a very effective manner in order to make sure we make Manitoba the most improved province in all of Canada.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the member for that response.

So, again, he won't tell us how he communicates or if he even does communicate with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) by email.

If I then send you an email at ralph.eichler@leg.gov.mb.ca, and I either talk about something that's serious or maybe less serious about our constituencies, I presume you'll get that email and you'll probably respond because I know you're a decent man and you would do that.

Is that fair?

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the minister, I already said once about using names in there. I would ask the—*[interjection]*

The member for Minto (Mr. Swan).

Mr. Swan: Well, I'll rephrase that certainly. I didn't want to put the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) on the spot.

If I was to send him an email to his legislative email account, which is his first name with a dot, followed by the last name, followed by @leg.gov.mb.ca, would the Minister of Agriculture receive that and respond to it?

Mr. Eichler: The member knows how dedicated I am to my constituents, and one of the things that my predecessor shared with me, Mr. Harry Enns, and I just can't thank his family for sharing him with Manitobans. He was elected to this Assembly for 37 years and did yeoman's work. And the first thing, piece of advice that he gave me was always make

sure you get back to your folks. I took that very seriously, and I think as all members of this House and this government does, and I know that I take it very seriously.

I would be remiss if I would not share with members opposite that, you know, when he talks about getting back to constituents, we certainly do that. And prior to email, when the first member from Lakeside was elected, D.L. Campbell, who was the second premier of Manitoba, lived outside the city limits, I'm sure he got back to a number of people as well. Maybe not through email, but certainly he had a great way of communicating. He would go door-knocking and he would say, hi, Mary, how's the old yellow dog there and call it by name. One of those legendary politicians that I'm proud to say was the first member of Lakeside. He served 47 years, and also the longest serving Ag minister in the history of Manitoba. He was the Ag minister for 11 years and also was the premier of Manitoba at the same time.

So I thank the D.L. Campbell family for what they gave up, and certainly his daughter was very good and passionate about delivering a message on behalf of the Campbell family celebrating 95 years and three MLAs in the history of Manitoba.

I know that the Enns family was also very pleased to do that.

And, actually, they didn't even have to do it through email; they did it through voice, one of those unique things. You're able to sit down and talk about it and share the good news with all Manitobans in order to ensure that they shared their legacy with others, as they talked about what their family did and accomplished within Manitoba.

And Dale Campbell certainly had an opportunity, as the second premier of Manitoba outside the city limits—did an outstanding job. And we're pleased that we have folks from all parts of Manitoba that put their name on a ballot to make sure Manitoba is represented to the best of its ability and all members do the best they can within their elected ability to be able to deliver on what they have been elected to do.

And I think every member in this Chamber is respectful of one another in regards to that initiative in order to ensure that their constituents are heard. And I know members opposite, as well, want to make sure their voices are heard so they can get back to their constituents, as well.

So yes, times have changed; we have all kinds of ways of communicating. And we're certainly pleased

to be able to communicate with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) whenever we feel we need to or he feels he needs to communicate with us. So certainly lines of communication are open.

Mr. Swan: I hope the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) didn't think that I was suggesting that he doesn't work hard, because I know he does. And I know he's a good constituency representative, as—as I think he's put on the record—as is expected in Lakeside constituency, as well as others.

Would the minister then agree that it would be hard to serve your constituents and serve the Province without using your legislative email?

Mr. Eichler: You know, it's an interesting question. And I'm not a—I get lots of emails, I think like all of us do. I don't know what you get, but I'm somewhere in the neighbourhood of 200 emails per day, so certainly it's a large part of my business, but I would not say it was the largest.

I would say voice communication is probably one of the largest. I get a large number of written requests, as well. I think all of us do. So I wouldn't say that email would be one over the other, I wouldn't say mail was over the other. I think it's about being open and respond in a timely manner. I think every one of us in this Chamber and this House make it very clear that we're here to get back to constituents in a timely manner.

I know I did send a letter to the—when I was a critic, to the former minister of MIT. In fact, I can quote the dates. It was June the 9th of 2011, the year of our flood. And the 415 Highway was underwater. I asked the minister at the time if we could get some assistance on 415. We had schools getting ready to graduate; the road got closed. I finally got an answer. It was in November the 9th of 2015.

So I don't know if that's respectable in regards to timelines or not. Certainly, I didn't feel I got a timely answer. And I try to get back to everyone that gets in touch with me, usually within 12 to 24 hours. I'm not sure if I'm too soon or not soon enough, but certainly I try to ensure that I at least acknowledge the letter.

And that's all I got four months later, or five months later after I sent my request in to the former minister of MIT. And it was just acknowledged in the letter that they got it. There was no results and no commitment to fixing the problem or see that there was initiative.

Certainly, I hope our government does not follow that mandate. Certainly, I don't. And I hope that we never hear about that from any member of this government or opposition, for that matter.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister. And I expect he will tell me that his favourite way to communicate with people is face-to-face. I would expect that's the case. He did mention in his last question that it's also voice, which I presume he means by telephone.

Does the minister receive calls and make calls on his government-issued cellphone?

Mr. Eichler: Absolutely. I don't—being in Cabinet, I know the member opposite can certainly understand as a minister of the Crown you're held to account, and we're in a number of committees. I wouldn't say I do a lot on cellphone—no, not really. I do what I can, but most of them go to voicemail. I don't know what your life is like and nor does it matter to me how you respond to your constituents, but certainly cellphone is part of it.

And I know when I was opposition, I got probably more calls then—

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

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (15:20)

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

I'd like to inform the members of the committee that, as part of the ongoing efforts to update the video series, Inside the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, we will be filming—there will be filming taking place in the Committee of Supply this afternoon.

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume considerations of the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions. However, I understand the honourable minister has a statement.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): From yesterday, there were some outstanding questions on past funding.

Funding for the support and employment services in Morden-Winkler, in Steinbach, was a total of \$1.1 million. Specifically, in Steinbach,

expenditures were \$605.4 thousand. In Morden-Winkler, it was 140.2 for the—this is for the fiscal year '16-17. In addition, \$353,000 will be used to support skill development in this region.

Yesterday I indicated that 654.2 was used for adult education in the Westman region. I'd like to clarify that the 652 was used to support employment services for adults in the Westman region. I also indicated yesterday that 50.2 of this funding was used for Westman immigration services.

There are also two adult learning centres in Brandon. This—there is—sorry, there is the Brandon Literacy Council and the Assiniboine community college adult learning centre. The operating grant for '17-18 for these two centres is anticipated to be \$670,000. In addition, the adult literacy programs were offered in the centres cost \$336,000 in the '16-17, for reference.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Can the minister provide an update on the status of the human rights complaint against the Hanover School Division?

Mr. Wishart: It is still in front of the commission. We do not know the exact point in that process.

Mr. Kinew: Has the department provided human rights training to the Hanover School Division?

Mr. Wishart: We have contacted Hanover School Division and offered them the option of doing that. To this point in time, they have not followed up.

Mr. Kinew: Are there any other plans for the department to follow up with the Hanover School Division on this issue?

Mr. Wishart: We have continued to offer to provide them additional training to the school division. However, in the interim, we have put in place a program called Respect in Schools, which does also contain LGBTTTQ* training—or information as part of that.

So we have added to the additional information that is in place already in the school division by offering this program in the school, and it has had some uptake.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister clarify if this is training for students, or is this training for trustees?

Mr. Wishart: This is training for teachers and for school officials.

In addition, it is available to students, but it also includes all staff for the division, so that includes bus drivers, 'custodial' people, and parent councils.

Mr. Kinew: And just for the purposes of clarity, when the minister refers to this including LGBTTTQ* issues in the training, does that mean that it teaches that, you know, sexual orientation and gender identity are protected under the Manitoba Human Rights Code?

Mr. Wishart: As this is a program available across Canada, it doesn't specifically reference the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. However, it does certainly direct people to the resources available and would certainly point out that that type of commission would—does exist in various provinces, but it doesn't specifically reference Manitoba's commission.

Mr. Kinew: I'd like to ask some questions about Healthy Child. Can the minister provide an update as to what, you know, benefits and programs are currently being offered by the department under the Healthy Child umbrella?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for his question.

There's quite a list of programs that we are operating and offering out of Healthy Child committee: Early Childhood Development Innovation Fund, the Healthy Baby Manitoba parental benefit, the Families First program, the early childhood development hubs program, PPP—Positive Parenting Program, the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Strategy, the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy, children and youth with complex needs, Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, Communities That Care, and the Bright Futures fund.

Mr. Kinew: With respect to the benefit that's provided, is it met at the same level as previous years or has it been indexed to inflation? Has there been any change there with the amount provided?

Mr. Wishart: It's exactly the same amount as from the previous year.

Mr. Kinew: So, just for clarity, it's the same amount in nominal dollars as last year?

* (15:30)

Mr. Wishart: It's the same amount of dollars. We did repurpose some dollars to provide support for Early Childhood Development Innovation Fund. That is one that we are 'partening' with the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation through the United Way.

Mr. Kinew: Can the minister provide details on the partnership with the McConnell family foundation: Is this a social impact bond? Or what is the nature—is this just, like, a matching grant? What is the nature of the arrangement?

Mr. Wishart: Thank the member for the question.

The fund that we work with, the J.W. family foundation, is a matching fund with provincial funding.

Mr. Kinew: And so can the minister tell us who would be receiving money under this program? Is this client-serving organizations or is this a direct grant to parents and families?

Mr. Wishart: Now, the project with Winnipeg Boldness is 250,000 per year. It's renegotiated annually. And so we anticipate continuing forward, but of course we depend on our partners for that.

And also we have a program with the United Way, For Every Family, and it's \$7.5 million over six years.

Mr. Kinew: And what is the dollar value of the amount provided as the benefit? Like, what is the total dollar value of the benefit?

Mr. Wishart: Just for clarification, to the honourable member from Fort Rouge, are you talking about the Prenatal Benefit that you would like to know the total of, or the two programs that I just read the amount for?

Mr. Kinew: The Prenatal Benefit, the dollar value of that, yes. *[interjection]* No, I made note of the other figures that he provided already.

Mr. Wishart: The amount of the Manitoba Prenatal Benefit, which applies in the last two trimesters—the maximum amount is \$81.41 per month. And the amount that we have spent on that last year is \$1.779 million.

Mr. Kinew: And what is the dollar value of the money for suicide prevention that the minister referred to when he outlined the list of programs supported under Healthy Child?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for his patience.

So we worked together with Health on that suicide strategy. The total budget for that strategy is \$3.211 million. And our portion of that is \$71,000 at this point in time.

Mr. Kinew: So, help me—can the minister help me understand the co-ordination? I understand that the

Healthy Child, you know, initiative, sort of, is a cross-departmental strategy.

So, is it a fair characterization to say that, though a lot of this money may flow from Health, that it is sort of the Education and Training Department that provides the quarterbacking for how those resources are distributed? And, if that's incorrect, then please, you know, maybe correct my characterization.

Mr. Wishart: So this is actually delivered by the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, of which I am chair, and my deputy is—secretary is the correct terminology. But it involves four–five different departments, so it's a combined effort between the different departments.

* (15:40)

In this particular program, there're really just the two partners involved in that, but we work together on this. It's a co-ordinated approach. We meet regularly and develop new strategies, but the delivery really is the responsibility of the Healthy Child committee itself. And there are people that work directly with—for Healthy Child, so it is their responsibility.

Mr. Kinew: And what is the dollar value of the programs that are aimed to prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and to assist families on that front?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

There are a number of programs that we are involved in: the InSight Mentoring Program, which is 1.354–\$1,354,000; project CHOICES, which is \$201,000; the FASD Family Support services, including building circles of support, \$47,600; FASD research scientist grant which is \$80,000.

FASD initiatives—there's quite a number of them: Total for that is \$229,000. They include the Canada Northwest Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Partnership, the FASD Research Network with—the remainder of the initiatives actually go to FASD training.

We also have the Manitoba FASD Coalition which we support for \$55,400; FASD in the Classroom, \$55,300; Manitoba Key Worker Program, \$150,000; Visions and Voices program which is \$30,000; the Mothering Project done through Mount Carmel that the member might be familiar with, for \$70,000; FASD Family Support, Education and Counselling—the amount that we support that program is \$99,000; and Low Incidence

Funding—that's classroom level support and that's \$5.425 million.

So the total that we've spent out of Education and Training on FASD prevention and dealing with FASD cases is \$7.7 million.

Mr. Kinew: And what does the data tell us in terms of incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in the province and what is the trend?

Mr. Wishart: Before I forget, there are also programs that are run out of Families that also touch on FASD, so you might want to direct that question to Families as well if you're interested in following up.

We do struggle a bit with the diagnosis level because, as the member knows, it is very difficult to diagnose FASD. It is considered to be about 1 per cent of the population, but the level of diagnosis is not accurate enough for us to know whether we're making progress or not making progress at this point.

I think all we can do is try, and certainly, preventive—prevention programs are well worth the dollars in this area because, as the member knows, not only is it a burden to the family, it's a burden to everyone, and it certainly limits a child's ability and potential during their lifetime. I think every dollar spent on prevention is a dollar well spent.

Mr. Kinew: Absolutely agree. I remember interviewing a young man not quite in the middle years of school back when I was a journalist, and it was a very powerful moment when he sort of asked a rhetorical question, like, to me—in my presence, anyways, asked a rhetorical question, why did my mom do this to me? Like, why did she not know that this was going to affect my life?

So I would just share that anecdote with the minister as a way of encouraging him to continue investing in these programs and to understand the very important role that they can play for young people and—in our society.

So I am curious also with respect to Healthy Child—and this might get a little bit into the weeds. There's a bit of, I guess, departmental reorganization that's happened from, you know, the time that this government's taken office, and I think some of that's kind of reflected in the way the Estimates books are presented. So, when we were comparing from last year to this year, there's a few lines that looked as though they've perhaps moved around.

So I guess, to begin, on the last year's Healthy Child Manitoba Office budget line, it was indicated

that there was \$32 million there when it was under Children and Youth Services. This year, Healthy Child Manitoba Office is under K-to-12 Education and Healthy Child Programs, and it's listed as just over \$38 million, with \$38.193.

So I'm just wondering, is the difference between roughly \$32 and \$38 million—is that because there has been some reorganization of programs under the Healthy Child Manitoba Office umbrella, or is that due to an increase in funding? Can the minister explain that to us?

Mr. Wishart: So I'm looking at—and the member is right; we've certainly made some major reorganizational changes in the Department of Education and Training. But, looking at page 69 where we do the previous year comparison to this year's comparison for the—that would cover the Healthy Child office, and it—this book shows 38.193 both in last year and in this year.

Mr. Kinew: Right, so, allow me to clarify. And again, this is sort of a weird—it's a question that I'm not exactly sure how to articulate.

I think the difference is not shown when looking at year to year in this year's Estimates books; it is shown when looking at this year's Estimates book to what was printed in last year's Estimates book. And when we look at last year's printed version, there's a \$32-million figure under Healthy Child Manitoba Office. The minister is correct that when we look at the 2016-17 adjusted figure in this year's Estimates book, it is \$38 million and then it's the same figure for 2017-2018.

* (15:50)

But I'm just wondering what changed from what was printed last year and what is in this year's printed version, and if we could have some insight into the rationale or organizational changes that underlie that.

Mr. Wishart: So the member, I believe, is basically correct and there really has been no change year over year in terms of the funding.

Some of the—because of the reorganization, some what was reported at departmental level, and in particular MB4Youth and the youth area, are now being reported at the departmental level. So the—there is no change in expenditure year over year in terms of the amount of money that was available, but there are some things in it now that weren't there before.

Mr. Kinew: So, just to clarify, this means that—like, there were programs which would have appeared in sort of sub-budget lines last year, and now they're appearing at the departmental level? Is that—?

Mr. Wishart: It's not so much programs as actually some of the support services related to that. Things like transportation, communications; actually, supplies and services and other operating that are listed there now that weren't there before.

Mr. Kinew: And so, if we were to look at last year's expend—like, I can see they're reported on page 69 in this year's Estimates book. If we were to look at last year's book, where would these expenses have been reported?

Mr. Wishart: They would have been reported at the complete departmental level and not broken down into this Healthy Child section, so sort of one step up in terms of the overall expenditures.

Mr. Kinew: All right, similar sort of question with respect to the Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy. I notice that, if we look at last year's printed Estimates book, this year's printed Estimates book there's about \$100,000 difference.

Can the minister confirm if that's due to an increase in funding of \$100,000, or is this just sort of the same process of various expenses being re-categorized this year?

* (16:00)

Mr. Wishart: I'm afraid we'll have to get back to you on the details. Multiple departments contributed to this particular portion, so it's going to be a very detailed accounting of who contributed how much, and there was some changes from which departments contributed how much. And we'll have to verify that and get back to you.

Mr. Kinew: So this will be a matter under advisement, just to clarify.

Mr. Wishart: Yes, it will.

Mr. Kinew: All right. Well, I promised to get into the weeds, so into the weeds we shall go.

Basically, it's the same sort of question, but having to do with MB4Youth, which was under the Healthy Child and—or, sorry, children and youth services, you know, budget items in last year's Estimates book.

I'm just wondering: Can the minister tell us where that appears in this year's book, and is the

same funding supporting the same delivery of services this year?

Mr. Wishart: So what was MB4Youth previously is now in post-secondary and workforce development with the exception of Green Team, which has gone over to Indigenous and Municipal Affairs with the rest of the green team project.

Mr. Kinew: So is it the same amount of funding supporting the same amount of programs this year?

Mr. Wishart: It's exactly the same amount of funding. Programs have just been moved to different locations.

Mr. Kinew: And so—okay. So—yes, sorry, I understand.

So the Estimates book talks about the Healthy Child advisory committee. Can the minister provide an update on that, because I believe—it's listed as to be appointed, but I was just wondering whether that group has been convened and whether we know who's going to be on the advisory committee.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

The Healthy Child advisory committee is going through part of an all-governmental process where we're reviewing boards and commissions and, right now, it is unresolved as to the nature of it. We believe that it will move forward and may be a little smaller than it was—because it was quite a large committee. But we certainly intend to move forward with it.

Mr. Kinew: What are the terms of reference for the members of this committee?

Mr. Wishart: Its role will be—basically be unchanged. It's to provide recommendations to the Chair of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, and they will continue to do that, particularly as it relates to Healthy Child Manitoba overall strategy.

Mr. Kinew: So are there any current members of this committee or are they all to be added?

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the member for the question.

We have not convened this committee, so those that were on the board will still be, effectively, a member. We're waiting to see the boards and commissions process to see what the final recommendations are before we reconvene.

Mr. Kinew: Are there any changes to the membership that the minister can tell us about?

Mr. Wishart: There have been no changes, no appointments made. We're still waiting on the process that helps determine the size and the frequency of the meetings and things like that. That'll be a recommendation to us.

Mr. Kinew: And what is the timeline for this process?

Mr. Wishart: Thank the member for the question.

I'm not sure I can give him an absolute date. The process has been ongoing, and we certainly hope that it'll reach completion as soon as possible. We would appreciate advice in regards to this area, but I can't give the member a specific date of completion.

Mr. Kinew: Does the minister anticipate any changes being made to Healthy Child programs before this committee is reconvened?

Mr. Wishart: Thank the member for the question and, of course, we meet as a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet on an ongoing basis. I think it's been—well, for a period of time, it was every month and now it's—we meet every two months, and the deputies meet in the 'intermedian' month.

We're trying to look for opportunities, improvements. We're doing evaluations. We have not made significant changes to the program other than some fine tuning, if you want to call it that, of existing programs. Certainly, before we move too far, we would be hoping to have the committee in place.

Mr. Kinew: The issue of absenteeism in certain schools has been raised in the media recently, so I was wondering, if maybe, you know, beginning with the North—I understand that there's been some issues with absenteeism in Mystery Lake school division.

* (16:10)

Mr. Wishart: Well, this is a long answer.

As the member knows, absenteeism has been a problem for some years, and there's been some discussions, actually, more recently in the city of Winnipeg here as well. I know this has been a problem for Mystery Lake for some time. I had an opportunity to discuss this with the school board. And we do depend a lot on the school boards to take a lot of initiative in regards to dealing with that. They often work through the parent councils, which is the local connection to each school. We're looking for opportunities—we want to make sure that, first off, that all the barriers to getting there are removed if

possible. So issues like transportation, meals in particular, mental health supports are in place.

One of the other ways we've been working to try and improve attendance at schools is to get for the students that are attending in—also the ones that we have a challenge with in regards to absenteeism is for them to see a way forward for themselves through the school system. So we've been bringing in a lot more vocational information so that they can see a career path forward. Mentors are great examples to work with on that. But we, in particular, we've been doing a lot of vocational work down into the school system so that those that—even down as far as grade 8 and grade 9, to make sure that they can see, you know, a path forward for themselves once they get into the high school system.

That is one of the driving factors in why we have restructured the department the way that we have done. We want to get a better linkage, both with the post-secondaries, of course, and vocational and trades into the high school system. In the future, we're going to need an awful lot of people in these areas to replace those that are retiring. We want those—want to provide the opportunities for those that are in Manitoba, in particular, that are in the school system to achieve on these. So we want to show them that there is a way forward, that there's an opportunity for you here, that you can find a career here in Manitoba. You can create a career for yourself here in Manitoba. It can be successful. And that there's a path through the school system. And that will hopefully get stronger engagement through them.

I know when I was in Thompson for a labour market advisory meeting, we also took the time to sit down with the Boys & Girls Club that is active in Thompson to try and empathize with them as well.

It's a battle in terms of getting engagement. These days, there's a lot of distractions for students. And they do see other options available to them that aren't necessarily part of the school system. We want to make sure that we can keep them in the school system if possible.

If you follow the numbers through as to what's been happening, and we look at post-secondary institutions, particularly the colleges, because they do a really good job of tracking the numbers, and the ages of people that come and where they go. We're losing more of the students from the high school system; graduation rates show us that. But when we do get them out of the high school system, they're not

immediately moving into careers; there's a lot more taking a number of years in there. Whether those are productive years or not is very hard to tell, but we get a lot of the—a lot more people back into the college and post-secondary system at an older age now than was the case even a few years ago.

We use the community schools program a lot as well to try and feed right into other opportunities. That's another form of engagement. There's some successful ones here and a couple in the rural communities. That would be something that we certainly would look for opportunities to expand as well. It's not going to be a simple answer, but we do know that we have problems in this area; we need to get improvements in terms of that. As the member knows, through the high school system, there's a lot more self-directed courses available now. Some of that is also designed really to try and get engagement from students that have shown challenges in terms of attendance or shown less than a lot of interest in the school system, though we are working together with the school divisions.

Mr. Kinew: Are there any new programs to combat absenteeism?

Mr. Wishart: And, certainly had this discussion with a number of people and not the least of which was—I met with Sel Burrows not too long ago to talk about some of the issues. He's at the urban side of it, and we did certainly agree that there's some areas that we can work on. In particular, with Mr. Burrows, we were talking about trying to get down below the grade 9 level and into the, you know, the grade 8—well, the K-to-grade-8 system. So we try and get the engagement so that the people can see a path forward; the children can see a path forward for themselves.

Vocational in the high schools is certainly one that many people see as a good option for themselves, but, you know, the post-secondaries of other types are also ones that we want to do that. We've been encouraging almost every group that we met with, even in the sector councils, to get into the schools more and more so that the students know that there is careers out there, that there's options out there. We've had the same kind of discussion with Red River, but encouraging them to go down into the younger years of the schools from where they are. Traditionally, they focused a lot on 10 to 12, in particular. Sometimes we've already lost a lot of the students by that point in time. In fact, data would suggest that that grade 9 year is a very critical year to

have—for people to get a vision of what the school system might hold for them, and we want to make sure that we have as many options available as that. Something like Red River right now, with 230 courses available, yes, 230 different types of courses available, and want to get them to have more exposure in the school system.

We have the skills competition coming to Manitoba, national skills coming to Manitoba in the end of May, early June. It'll be at RBC Convention Centre. That's a great opportunity to highlight those that are doing well already in the system. But what we're really using that for, more than anything, is to get the exposure to other students. So besides the 500 or so that will be competing in it from Manitoba, we plan on having between 10 and 12,000 students actually attend that so that they get the exposure and see what types of careers are available. That's a real showplace. We're very pleased to have it here in Manitoba, and we think it'll provide us with a bit of a boost in terms of getting attention on the trades and training that we've probably struggled to get in the past. But certainly people are aware of it.

* (16:20)

There's almost an innate bias against trades in particular because most of the guidance counsellors that are available in career counselling that's available in the high school are university graduates, so they sort of self-select; I think it's subliminal on their part—for the better students to, you know, go—should go to university or go to college. And they don't focus quite so much on those that are struggling. And attendance is often related to struggling in the school system.

We want to make sure that we make—demonstrate the possibilities to them as well. I know I work with the vocational teacher in my own community an awful lot, and he's been having some considerable success in getting students that probably would never have graduated otherwise be—to stay in the school system because of vocational interest. And we hope to replicate that in other areas as well.

It's not going to be easy, and it's not going to be something you fix in one or two years. It's going to take a lot of build, but we are—at least have begun the process.

Mr. Kinew: I was speaking to a school administrator in the area that I represent today, who had previously been the principal at a school in the Point Douglas

area—so it's the area that Sel Burrows is advocating on behalf of. And it's anecdotal, but one of the observations that she shared with me is that there is a real challenge around getting the PACs activated in that area.

And so you almost have a chicken and the egg problem if you're trying to use the parental advisory councils to do some of this sort of work, not just on absenteeism but also on fundraising, to support some of the extracurricular activities that might make a school more fun for a young person to participate and then, you know, drive attendance in other ways there.

So, you know, just all that to say that I'd encourage the minister that, you know, perhaps, you know, there are other avenues that need to be taken to try and—you know, even just as a precursor to turning to the PACs. Like, there's, you know, some work that needs to be done in terms of getting everybody in certain areas involved, and making sure that families are involved and that there's, you know, a culture of success built at schools. So I just share that as an observation, but I do appreciate the thoughtfulness of the reply here.

So I'd ask whether, I guess, there's any additional way for the department to do some outreach or to help drive involvement in the parental advisory committees at schools that may be a little under-involved right now.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I appreciate the member's concern; I share it. I mean, we need to get good connection with community groups, in particular parent councils, which we do work with. We have an association of parent councils, and I actually met with them just last Saturday and had a very good discussion, at great length, to look at the different potentials in regards to that.

But it was actually this particular discussion that we had with Mr. Burrows, in particular about community strengths and how do you work with them. And maybe we have to think a little bit outside of the box and not just talk about parent councils, but, you know, community organizations in general and how can we build with that. For any one of these community organizations, whether they're community development corporations or whatever, there's opportunities. And some of the community development corporations, as the member knows, have great connections with the youth in their community, have long-standing programs. Others, you know, they go in different directions. There's not a

sort of a standard to those. They're really designed to fit the needs of the community, and I think that they've evolved, accordingly; some are focused a lot on housing, some are focused a lot on community safety and things like that. But where they have good connections with youth organizations—that is a great opportunity for us.

We work a pile with the Boys & Girls Club. We have summer programs with them, as well, you know, and try and work with them to make sure that we keep the engagement or get stronger engagement. It's a different process in each one of the communities; to some degree, you have to kind of customize your solution to the needs of that particular community. But we're quite prepared to work with them. That's one of the reasons we worked with the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils an awful lot: because they have the strong connections with each individual school. And we certainly enjoy a good relationship with them. Sometimes, it's—*for*—with them, it's more than just a policy issue, but it's the specific needs of one or two schools that we're trying to work towards.

Mr. Kinew: Thanks for the answer, there.

So, in the budget papers document, on page 18, it shows that the capital spending for Education this year will be \$176 million. I'm wondering if the minister can tell the committee here which projects will be funded out of this amount this year.

Mr. Wishart: Well, certainly, I appreciate the member's question.

Much of the funding that is committed that the member referred to is still in the Treasury Board process and we have a practice of notifying the school divisions first as things are approved, so I can't really give the member specifics, though I think he knows that we've talked about a couple of schools that we're wanting to move forward very quickly, that is, Winkler and Niverville in particular. But the biggest portion of the dollars doesn't go to new school construction, it's actually in the area of maintenance and expansions and so we're really focused an awful lot on safety, security and access issues.

I can certainly share with the member that there's a long list of projects that go back a number of years and I—the member's heard me talk about in the House how we needed to expend more dollars. We were behind in terms of maintenance issues on the education infrastructure and weren't—and behind in

terms of building, so—which is one of the reasons we're being creative in how we look at financing and are looking at P3s as an option.

I believe that the member will be looking forward to seeing how the evaluation that we're—we've done a call for proposal on turns out. I'm sure that he's got questions. I know I have questions. We'll be looking into that and we certainly are hopeful that it'll provide a solution for us. There's a lot of different financial tools available now that weren't available 20 years ago; P3s is just one of those.

So we will—we'll certainly look forward to trying to catch up on some of the education infrastructure. We need to build schools in this province. Our population is growing, the number of students in the system is growing as compared to a period during the '90s-'80s and '90s, actually, really, when the number of students was dropping every year. Now we've seem to have turned the corner in virtually every school division. There's still a handful where the numbers are stable or declining, but there's growth in almost every school division, so we have lots of challenges on a lot of fronts and we want to work with the school boards and make sure that we can meet the needs in terms of educational infrastructure.

Mr. Kinew: So, without sort of jumping the Treasury Board process, can the minister sort of break out, without revealing which specific projects, can the minister break out where that 167—rather, \$176 million will be spent in terms of different priority areas?

Mr. Scott Johnston, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Wishart: Certainly, you know, to some degree the member knows the total amount of dollars that we're looking at there. I can't, you know, given the Treasury Board process, break that down to too much of detail. But the—part of that will be new builds, in particular, additions related to schools.

But our biggest focus, as I mentioned earlier, is going to be on maintenance—particular roof units. I don't know whether the member is aware that Fort Rouge School had a fire a month or so ago, and that was a out-of-date roof unit that was well past its life expectancy. We're fortunate that it didn't cause a lot of real damage. I think it was on a long weekend, so the amount of days lost were minor. But that's the sort of stuff we've really got to catch up because we—you know it's not only concerning in terms of the skill—school in terms of will we lose the capacity, but

it's a safety and security issue, and so we certainly want to focus on that.

* (16:30)

When it comes to access issues, I did want to share with the member, we know we have a long way to go. Our policy related to access for those with disabilities is as the need comes forward in every—any particular school. We deal with that on a case-by-case basis and try and make sure that we can do it as promptly as possible. So, very often, you know, we know which students are coming in to the system, but sometimes you're surprised a little bit that we have to respond fairly quickly in terms of access issues for students with disabilities, so that is one that actually takes a lot of time and effort and a fair bit of cost.

And on top of that, of course, we've added the policy—and it was in place with the existing government to some degree as well—where, where we can, we're building child-care facilities in conjunction with the schools. And that's our policy with new schools, and will be for any P3 schools, should they be built as well.

But we're also looking at—when we do additional—addition projects in schools, we look at whether or not it's feasible to add child cares as part of that. It's a big part of the process; it's also a big part of the cost. So, because they are on a square-foot basis, child cares are some of the more expensive parts of construction. So, we certainly work very closely with the school divisions in regards to that.

We have a long ways to go on that, but we're slowly making progress. And I think the member probably is very supportive of the fact that we have taken this approach to try and increase the capacity on child care in Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: So how much capital dollars will be spent on maintenance and expansions this year?

Mr. Wishart: Then our overall projected budget is \$176 million. Some of that has to go through the Treasury Board yet—process, needless to say. But that's what we anticipate spending in this area for additional construction. And also, as I said, an awful lot of those dollars are going to go into delayed maintenance, if you want to call it that, or repairs or access issues and safety.

Really—and, you know, you look at—an awful lot of them seem to be roof projects. We just simply have to do them. If we don't do them, we'll have

health-related issues with moulds. You know, we—I shared with the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) one day that all three of his schools in the community are all getting new roofs this year simply because they're all roughly the same age, they're built roughly the same time, and they're all at the same point in the maintenance cycle. And in many cases, they probably should have been done a few years ago. I think one of them was recommended in 2008. And he was very much aware that they're having roof leakage problems in the schools.

We simply have to do these things.

Mr. Greg Selinger (St. Boniface): Just want to explore a couple of other areas with you for a few moments, Minister. Can you talk to us a bit about where you stand with respect to the community schools program that we have in your department? My understanding is there's about 40-plus schools. Maybe you could update us on the number of schools that have been designated community schools, and your views on them.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

In regards to community schools, we have 29 community schools, but we also have 15 more; they're sort of part of the network, so whether you count them as in or not, they're not quite structured the same way as the community schools. And we are looking at adding a couple more in the coming year. So, certainly, that would have an impact on the amount of budget that is available for them. Very strong support for these. We were talking earlier and I'm not sure whether the member was here to hear it—and I don't know if I can say that.

An Honourable Member: Well, you already did.

Mr. Wishart: Yes.

Whether the member was aware. But we know that this is a part of getting a better engagement with students, better enrollment, better attendance.

The community schools' numbers, when you compare them to the rest of them in terms of absenteeism, are generally notably better. There's a few exceptions to that rule as well, but there's a screening process, of course, in students getting into the community schools, so I think that is part of the factor.

But we're very supportive of that approach and would like to be able to expand it even further. But we, I think, have to be a little patient as this program goals—grows, but the word is certainly spreading.

Mr. Selinger: I'm glad to hear you've added a couple and that you've got about 44, maybe 46 if you've added a couple.

And I'm—I don't know if the minister's aware of it, but I think Manitoba's the only province in Canada that has community schools legislation that lays out sort of a broad model for community schools.

Has the member had the chance to review the legislation to see the model?

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much for the question, and you're right, I—as far as I know, we are the only ones.

I know that at the Education ministers, we had some discussion with other ministers. They have similar types of approaches without having the legislation.

It is a model that generally is working very well in other jurisdictions as well, and it's something that I think we want to continue to expand here in Manitoba.

The times are changing when it comes to the education system. There's a lot more competition for the attention of the students as well as compared to even 10 or 20 years ago, and certainly, we need to do whatever we can in terms of changing the education system to make it more relevant to students.

They are often in a hurry at that point in life to get out into the workforce and get out into the real world. If we can keep them engaged—and part of the community schools program very much gets them engaged in specific projects, and there's some really creative projects that individual students bring forward. It is time well-spent in the school system. I think it changes their whole attitude about education if we're successful in doing that, and I think that's a key factor.

Even, you know, students from households or families that don't have the fiscal challenges and poverty pressures or other issues, whether they be mental health or whatever, do often struggle with the school system finding it relevant to their point of view.

Lot of that often depends on whether they have good solid role models to follow either in their family or somewhere else in their network, and certainly, those are extremely valuable. And community schools, because it is a one-on-one relationship to a high degree with the—between the

teachers and the students, can often be those role models, and that strengthens that.

* (16:40)

I—you know, I can't say enough about them. I think there's great potential there. I think they may well turn out to be our way forward in the future. You know, we're certainly looking at what other things need to be changed, but the education system is evolving pretty rapidly and it'll only continue to do so even faster as more technology kind of creeps into the system and provides students with better options.

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the perspective of the minister on this because as you go through your experience as a minister and funding may remain tight in terms of the amount of incremental dollars you can provide for operating every year, you will probably get some pressure to shut some of the smaller schools. And, as you know, we also have some legislation on that that requires a process with some consent from the parents, as opposed to other jurisdictions which tend to pull the plug on the smaller schools and all the disruption that comes with that. And, as an MLA who understands rural Manitoba, you'll know how critical a school is to the future viability of a community.

The community schools model can be an important way for a community with a school with a declining number of students to revitalize that as an institution with adult education programs, employment and training programs. You have the immigration file. You could even inject into that English as an additional language and employment programs and use that facility for lifelong learning opportunities, not just the regular students of the K-to-12 age, but lifelong learning, starting with early childhood all the way through to adults and retired people who still have a vital interest in learning and are very interested in doing things. And the school can be a hub for that and bring people together in the community.

I just wondered if the member wanted to comment on that, in terms of how it can help rural communities and smaller schools stay viable.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the question from the member. I certainly do understand, especially as it relates to rural communities. I've seen some spectacular community arguments over schools closing and openings and the options remaining.

We are fortunate now in that many rural communities are finally starting to see some real growth

again, and that's really good, and that provides—it's more—it strengthens the whole argument of keeping the school open in the community.

In particular, as the member noted, we particularly see opportunities regarding new immigrants in the rural communities. Initially with PNP programs, it was—they were often more immigration into certain communities and it wasn't really spreading. Now it's definitely spreading, you know, into many rural communities, strengthening those rural communities, changing the nature of those rural communities in a very positive way, opening up a lot of eyes, and that's never a bad thing.

It works for the adults in the community, but it also really works for the kids in the community. They have a whole different attitude and a more international attitude and they see great potential beyond their own boundaries, and that's positive in so many ways.

You know, in terms of the adult ed, I'm pleased that the numbers continue to grow year over year in adult education and we are looking at how we can get better linkages with adult ed. Right now, it's sort of off by itself, not really part of the K-to-12 system, and so we look for opportunities to get involved with that, but not really—it should feed in better into the colleges and vocational and the trades system than it does, and so we're looking for ways to strengthen that, and that is actually part of a current discussion that's going on and consultation that's going on to look for opportunities to do that so that we can make the system have all of the linkages.

The member heard me talk earlier, I think, about why we restructured the department the way we have. It does make for a very big department; I'll absolutely concede that point, but we have all of the players in one place. We simply have to make sure that we have all of the linkages working as well as we possibly can and make sure that there's really no—and I know—I've heard the member make the comment: no dead ends for students. Absolutely, we want there to be no dead ends for students, that there's a way forward for them all.

Mr. Selinger: And I want to suggest to the minister that with this intention of having more adult learning opportunities, more EAL classes, more daycares in school—in schools, I think your community school model can provide a platform at the community level that brings together all those institutions which you might look at as horizontally in the community but often in silos and not working and talking to each

other and even have relationships with your community colleges and universities where pre-trades courses are taught there with investments in the skills labs, or what used to be called the shops. You can have trades training starting right in the high schools—early childhood development training, I heard you discuss the other day—and provide a concrete bridge from academic learning to skill-based learning and competency-based learning, which creates a pathway to employment right at the school level. And I think the community school model is a very good way to sort of bring a lot of those initiatives together at the community level.

And I wanted to ask the member if he's had the chance to see the Oak Lake Community School, the home of Maurice Strong—came from there. It's an excellent example of a success out there.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member—I haven't actually had a chance to tour the Oak Lake facility. I've discussed it with the MLA, and we've had some good discussions about the potential and—that it represents.

But we are, you know, very much aware that we need to take advantage of structures like this in the communities, be they rural or urban, to provide the opportunities and expand the range of skills that we are offering in the system, whether we offer it in adult ed or whether we offer it in the K-to-12 system.

Just as an example, the ECE programs, which we're working at getting down into the high school system, we can make them work really nicely. One of the things that happens at Red River, which does a lot of our ECE training, is it's—there's a waiting list for the first year, quite a long waiting list, and yet the second year has always got empty spaces. And it's not because people quit—well, I guess they do quit. They find jobs. And they decide, well, that's as far as I want to go. And so we never fill the second-year class. What we're trying to do is make sure that in the high school system we get the first year done on ECE, so they can actually come in to the second year. So we make better use of our capacity and so that it's full all the time.

We are looking for opportunities and in the process of adding to the capacity with other parts of the post-secondary system. I know that we're working with MITT in particular on developing some ECE courses for new Canadians, and, in particular, some of that'll be around the refugee community. And the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) and I actually discussed that a little

bit the other day. I think that we all agree that there's good opportunities in regards to that. So we look for opportunities to build on that now and into the future.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

So, you know, I go on at great lengths, but the range of skills that we want to get down into the school, especially—it's widening all the time. I'll give my deputy credit for this phrase: in the department, we talk about cradle-to-career. It's not a bad concept to have. The child-care facilities are just an opening, and we would certainly like to have more of those available so that the kids come into the system in better shape, more ready for education.

Mr. Selinger: I wanted to just talk a bit about grad rates, and I know it was brought up earlier by one of my colleagues. And the minister, I think, correctly identified that community schools can be very effective at increasing graduation rates and attendance rates; graduation being dependent on showing up and being able to be exposed to the knowledge and the teaching and the learning.

I think a review would show that in neighbourhoods, and where attendance rates may have been an issue in the past, where a good community school program is in place, that you will find a dramatic improvement in attendance rates from the very simple fact of having a principal or a teacher or a community school liaison worker go and visit the homes and work with the families and parents to overcome any issues that may be in the way of them attending school on a regular basis.

And, you know, we've talked a lot about PISA scores and international test scores in the Legislature, and I've heard the comments which—I'd be happy to debate them with you. I'm not completely convinced that when Canada is one of the top 10 education performers in the world that we should be beating each other up whether there's a five-point difference between being in No. 6th position or No. 9th position. The range is very small when it's out of 700 points or whatever the scoring is.

What's—what is important is keeping the young person in school and helping them complete their high school, because that's the single best indicator of whether they will go on to do a post-secondary or a trade or some further lifelong learning. If they can come out with a feeling of success after high school, that is going to make a gigantic difference in their

lifelong trajectory for future career success and learning.

So I wondered if the member wanted to comment about attendance and graduation rates.

* (16:50)

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the member for the question. It's certainly a good discussion to talk about, I don't know, what we can do to try and make the system work better in regards to keeping kids in the school system. And absolutely right; certainly, the community schools are a strong part of that.

You know, when we look at the PISA scores, nationally and internationally, it's more about trends than anything else, and that's what—certainly what we're monitoring. They're—you know, how the trends are from year to year, the variations of, well, two year—the variations tend to be greater than the overall direction. So we certainly look at them with some awareness of what—you know, how valuable they are in the whole process.

But getting graduation rates up is a very high priority for us. There's a lot of—when you move from a five-year graduation to a six-year graduation, you find quite significantly more people coming back into the system, more students coming back into the system often as adult ed. And I mentioned that the numbers continue to rise, there. I'm very encouraged by that. That's showing that people are coming to realize, when they get past their younger years that, yes, if I have a future, it's with education. And so they come back. They don't always feel comfortable coming back to the high school that maybe they didn't do so well in and maybe doesn't have the best of memories. But they—we provide them with some other alternatives. And I said earlier, we're looking for ways to look that other—those other alternatives better into the system and provide greater strength.

So we're certainly, you know, working to bring—to strengthen that and bring it forward. We've had some success, in particular in some communities, with cultural awareness as part of the education system, and we'll certainly continue to do that. I mean, it comes into the TRC process as well. But there's reasons to do it anyway. And so, certainly, we're focusing on that a fair bit, as well, as part of the process. And people feel more comfortable if there's something they're familiar with in the whole process.

We did teachers awards not too long ago, the ministers. And now the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has a

special award for teachers as well. And you talk to a lot of those people; they are the difference for a lot of the students that they have taught. They have become that role model they have demonstrated, and there was, in several cases, there were students there because of the teachers. They came to recognize the teachers. I think that's a very strong endorsement that we have absolutely some wonderful teachers in our education system. We simply have to give them the tools and make sure we can build on that and strengthen the whole community.

We—the student benefits; the teachers benefit; the community benefits; we, as a province, benefit; and, as a country, we benefit from better education. So it's certainly our priority for our government.

Mr. Selinger: The other thing about the community schools is you can cluster them. You can have an elementary, or even an early childhood development program, parent-child learning centre, which there's been some funding in Family Services on in partnership with United Way, clustered—parent-child learning centre, daycares, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools can cluster into a community schools network which provides that cradle-to-career opportunity for people.

And I think you will find that, if the parents are learning and are feeling some success in that, that is a strong message to the kids in the school. And, if they're learning in roughly the same environment, there's role modelling going on there, and everybody's coming out of that feeling quite a bit better about their chances for success. So, I think, there's a lot of opportunity there, and, I think, there are schools within our various school divisions that are willing to work in clusters to accomplish some of these things—whether it's The Pas or in rural Manitoba or in Winnipeg, for example. I think, there's some real opportunities there to build some community school clusters. Just leave that for the member to think about.

And the one final thing I wanted to talk about is the community school liaison officers. I encourage the department to think about how we can develop their skills to generate resources.

In some neighbourhoods there's a shortage of good breakfast programs or good food for families. The community school liaison worker should not just be home visitors focusing on individuals, although that can be a part of what they do. But they need the skill and capacity to be community development workers to develop and generate resources to forge

those partnerships with other institutions in the community—private, public, non-profit, et cetera—to bring resources together to meet the needs of the families in their catchment areas.

And so I ask the minister if he would take a look at the program and look at what training can be provided to the community school liaison officers to develop their capacity in terms of community development.

I'm seeing this in one of the schools in my area where there's a lack of apparent counsel. There's a need for a food program, and there's nobody that feels they have the skills to do it. So we're working with them to develop that capacity.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the member for the question, and I certainly appreciate many of his comments on what the potential is. And we are working through the liaison officers trying to develop the capacity of many—not only the community schools, but other schools and the parent councils, because it's very—it really improves the whole community.

I've heard in a number of individual cases, adults in the adult-ed system, you know, say I went back to school because I wanted to be a good role model for my children. I wanted to be able to actually, at the bottom line, wanted to be able to read to my kids, and you know these are great motivators. They want to be good role models. You can't ask for more than that in a community.

It can be really simple things in a number of communities, including my own. The walking school bus program has made a world of difference, and you would never have imagined something as simple as going around knocking on doors and gathering up kids on the way to school, which many of the teachers do. And I, you know, certainly want to recognize them for the extra effort they are making, because it isn't always nice out there when they go and do that, you know, often cold days, and they make a world of difference and they get more kids in the school.

It certainly strengthens the whole community when you do that. You know, we are quite used to the old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to educate a child, as well. So it's everybody's responsibility in there.

There is some creative programs out there. I know I was reading the other day about backpack program, which is really sending food home for the

weekend. Houston and several US states—that's something that we may have a look at, as well for some communities because kids have needs on the weekend too, and depending on family supports, maybe there's not enough there, and so that'd be something that maybe we should be talking about too.

We certainly work very closely with a number of groups, including the parent councils, to make, you know, food programs in the school. Certainly we don't fully fund it we become seed money in many cases, and it's amazing how much support we get in the communities from the business community and from individual people in the community.

Mr. Kinew: All right. I thank the minister.

The Estimates book on page 51 notes that there's a reduction in funding to the Manitoba School Boards Association for Safe Schools Manitoba.

Can the minister, in 30 seconds or less, provide an answer as to the—why the program has been changed and what the plans are for the future?

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

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (15:10)

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

This section of Committee of Supply has now resumed consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Could the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living introduce his staff?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): As requested yesterday by the opposition who had some further questions on the clinical rollout in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, we've asked, for today, that Mr. Milton Sussman, president and chief executive officer of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, join us this afternoon, along with Lori Lamont, the vice-president, Interprofessional Practice, and chief nursing officer with the WRHA. And then returning this afternoon again is Dan Skwarchuk, the assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer for Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living and, of

course, the deputy minister of Health, Karen Herd, who joins us again this afternoon.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Does the member for Concordia have anyone to introduce or—okay, we'll continue with—as previous agreed, questioning over this department will proceed in a global manner, and again, based on the questions to be—topics of the questions of the employees that are here today that can answer those questions, so that is the condition.

So the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): On page 35 of the supplementary Estimates book, can the minister account for the decrease in Health infrastructure spending?

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the questions from the member opposite on capital. And one of the things that I learnt early on, becoming the Minister of Health, but not having known this before, is that within the Department of Health, there exists a capital cap. That capital cap was put in place by the former NDP government, the former administration, many years ago. And the cap of about \$189 million was intended to constrain the principal and interest costs of Health capital to that amount and to cap it within that particular amount.

And my understanding is that it was intended to ensure that the growing costs and the unsustainable costs of Health capital would be captured within that cap, as directed by Treasury Board, under the former NDP government.

So, having learnt about the cap when I became the Minister of Health, now slightly more than a year ago, one of the questions, the early questions, that I asked was, well, what is the status of the cap? Where does it sit? And I was told by officials, at that time, that if there was no additional capital approved in Health, that we would go over the cap just by virtue of the previous promises, which led me to the question, after I got over the surprise, shock and something slight less than horror of that—the question about, well, all the promises that had been made previously, prior to the election, the billions of dollars of capital promises, how were those to be paid for if the cap would already be exceeded with none of those being accounted for? And I was unable to obtain an answer because it became clear that none existed, that all the promises that were made previously under the former NDP government that

had never been accounted for in terms of having money to actually pay for them.

* (15:20)

So that was something that was concerning, because I knew that there was many individuals and organizations in Manitoba who felt an expectation, having been promised things by the previous government, that things were to happen and they never would have been told, of course, that the money didn't exist and never had been budgeted for. And so that was a very unfortunate thing to learn on one of the very early days as Minister of Health. And, of course, we've had to now go ahead and tell people the reality of the situation when it comes to capital spending in the province of Manitoba—not easy discussions, not easy decisions, but I always feel that it's better to be honest and truthful with people up front rather than raise expectations that are false or can't be met.

And, while I don't always sleep well at night as the Minister of Health, it certainly makes me feel and sleep better knowing that we've been honest with people. And so that was an interesting learning experience for me, having become Minister of Health.

I'm sure the member opposite will have some questions about the capital cap as well.

Mr. Wiebe: So, then, can the minister confirm that the decision to cut the capital projects was made purely for budgetary reasons and had no consideration for need of these projects to enhance patient care or to enhance the programs that are being delivered?

Mr. Goertzen: The member had asked the question about the line reduction on capital health spending.

I can inform the member that that's a result of reduction in management positions and that it would—more properly reflects the staffing now. He will know that our government made a commitment to reduce the management at the top of the structure—not an easy decision to make, of course, but it started with first the reduction in the size of Cabinet and then moved to core government. There's also, of course, direction that's been given to health authorities across the province to reduce the management within those health authorities. And so the line-item reduction that he has referred to in the Estimates book is a result of that management streamlining.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, more specifically, the reduction was in staff that are planning and administering new capital projects in the province, again, to enhance patient care. These are projects well needed within the community—identified by health professionals as being needed projects.

Is the minister confirming that his decision to cut these programs, cut these projects was solely to meet a budgetary target?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, one of the things I heard from a doctor—when meeting with a doctor, and it stuck with me—it was several months ago—he said the definition of infinity is health care, because there is an infinite amount of things that you can do within the health-care system that would benefit people.

I think I've said both in this House and in other forums that there are no bad projects that come to my desk as Health Minister. Every project that comes forward, I think, would help someone. Now it might be multi-millions of dollars and help a relatively small group of people, but they do help someone. There are no projects that have come across my desk that look entirely without merit. I don't see any projects that ask for multi-million dollars of funding to track the migratory pattern of the pine beetle, for example, which you could immediately identify as not being a good use of public funds.

Every proposal that comes to the Ministry of Health for health capital funding would have a benefit for someone, but that is not the measure when it comes to deciding whether or not health capital projects can be approved at any given time, nor is that the measure that Treasury Board uses when determining whether funding would be approved for a health capital project.

What Treasury Board and what the department has to, of course, measure is whether or not it is sustainable in the overall system, and it's not whether or not it's a good project. And, I think, this is part of the problem that the former NDP government ran into. They didn't have the ability to measure out, over time, what the overall cost impact for the health-care system would be of saying yes to everything, and they ran into a situation where, having promised everything to everyone and not having actually put the money aside to fulfill those promises, there were a awful lot of disappointed people. And so, I think, what the member has to ask himself is not whether or not projects aren't proceeding because they're not worthwhile projects, but whether or not they're not proceeding because his former government refused

to actually put money aside to allow them to proceed. That's really the question that he should be asking.

And, if he were to ask that question, I would say to him that that is, in fact, exactly what has happened—that many projects aren't able to proceed at this time, not based on the merit of the project, but because the former government never put any money aside to allow those projects to happen.

In fact, they went even further than that. They put in a capital cap that specifically said that the department was not allowed to spend more on capital and interest on health-care projects over a certain dollar value, and they never accounted for how they were going to keep within that dollar figure to the point that when we became government, the cap would be exceeded without approving one new project, let alone looking at all the projects that had been promised previously by the former government.

I don't think it's compassionate or caring to make promises to people about projects when you have no intention to fulfill them because you've put no money aside for them. I would think that that is actually the opposite of compassion.

So I think what the member was trying to ask was whether or not projects weren't able to be proceeded with because the former government didn't put money aside for them, and the answer to that question that he's asked is yes. That is why the former projects couldn't proceed at this time.

Mr. Wiebe: Before you ask, Mr. Chair, I'm joined in the Chamber now by Emily Coutts, our research co-ordinator for our opposition caucus.

What—if I could ask the minister—what kind of monitoring or reporting does the department do on private health-care delivery in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, there's been no change in that regard since the former government was in place. There's been no additional expectation of monitoring of care.

The member will know that we are guided by the Canada Health Act in terms of what is provided by the public system. There are many things that are outside of that system.

In a general way, although not entirely a complete way, what I've always been told to use as a guidepost is generally those things that happen in hospitals and doctors' offices are covered under the Canada health-care act, and many of those things that

happen outside are not. And so, for example, the member will know that certain eye-care functions or dentistry don't always fall squarely under the Canada health-care act.

There are, of course, insurance plans that do cover many Manitobans but not all Manitobans.

But there's been no additional procedure or policy put in place to monitor those things that fall outside of the Canada health-care act. But it is a good discussion, and I think that there needs to be more discussion about the Canada health-care act, how it's applied, whether it's applied consistently, whether it's applied in a way that makes sense.

I know the member opposite asked in a question period, I think, last year about what is happening in Saskatchewan when it comes to their MRIs and whether or not I agreed with Saskatchewan that they had the right to undertake that. And, as I said at that time, I think that innovation, as undertaken in Saskatchewan, should not be discouraged. I think the federal government would do well to work with provinces to see where they can leverage different ways to reduce wait times in their own individual jurisdictions. And I would hope that the member would concur and agree with us on that.

Mr. Wiebe: Could the minister talk about some of the lessons that he's—him and his department—have learned from the Saskatchewan experiment? And have they—has the Saskatchewan health department communicated with Manitoba Health regarding the usage rates, initial feedback from patients, initial feedback from the health-care professionals? Just how is that program working for Saskatchewan right now?

Mr. Goertzen: While there are a lot of programs that are undertaken in Saskatchewan, as there are in Manitoba and other provinces, the—I did have the opportunity now, not quite a year ago, to go to Saskatchewan and be with officials there. I was joined by my deputy minister and we met with the deputy minister of Health for Saskatchewan along with the Health minister for rural health, Mr. Greg Ottenbreit, and the former minister of Health, the urban minister of Health in Saskatchewan, Mr. Duncan. He had just been shuffled out of that position, I think, about two weeks before I got there, and—but we did have the opportunity to meet with him.

* (15:30)

In Saskatchewan, my understanding is from that meeting, and I don't know that it's changed, they break the Ministry of Health up into two ministers: they have a rural minister of Health and an urban minister of Health, and so I had the opportunity to meet with both of them early, at that time the former urban minister of Health, along with the then-current and still current rural minister of Health, and a lot of different pieces of innovation were discussed.

We talked a lot about their process going through the lean exercise in Saskatchewan and how they brought a more wholesome—fulsome, I should say, lean process into the health-care system in that province, both in their hospitals and also within their ministry.

We had the opportunity to visit some facilities, visit the department, see the visibility walls, to walk the visibility walls with them. For those who are familiar with the lean process that exists in private industry, to look at continuous improvement that happens not on a monthly, but a daily endeavour in those areas, and we were certainly impressed by that, so much so that there were officials from Saskatchewan that joined us just a few weeks ago to go through a goal-setting, a priority-setting exercise. I think, in the vernacular of lean, it's called Hoshin Kanri to ensure that you can align your system that everybody is moving towards the same goals, so folks from Saskatchewan Department of Health came to help lead that exercise. I was very pleased to see that and appreciated it very much that they offered that.

I recently wrote a letter to the Minister of Health in Saskatchewan to thank him for allowing his department to have officials come out and lead our officials through that process. I think it was a useful one-day exercise and to help identify of the many—one of the challenges that I found as Health Minister is that it's such a big department touching on almost every part of government and accounting for nearly half of the budget that there are so many priorities on any given day that it is sometimes hard to be focused because so many things are happening and so many things are coming at you.

The officials at the table in front of me, I'm sure, would say the same thing within their own particular areas of responsibility, and so having that exercise and being led by officials from Saskatchewan I think was very helpful. We appreciated their efforts. We continue to stay in contact with officials in Saskatchewan, but not just officials in Saskatchewan.

I had some good discussions with Terry Lake prior to him not running for re-election in the most recent BC election. We had some good discussions around the fight on opioids in British Columbia; of course, they're in a very difficult situation in BC, as all provinces are, but on a different scale on opioids. And so there were many discussions that we had with Health ministers across the province, Saskatchewan being, I think, a good one, though, because it's not only close in terms of proximity, but there are some similarities demographically and geographic-wise when it comes to our two provinces.

Mr. Wiebe: So it sounds like there's been some positive collaboration between Saskatchewan and Manitoba looking at their model.

So, again, and I appreciate that maybe the minister was just giving his staff a little bit of time to gather the facts, but just asking if there's information that they have regarding the usage rates, the initial feedback from patients, and the initial feedback from health-care professionals.

Just what can we learn from Saskatchewan? What have they—what kinds of ideas have they passed along that may be useful here in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, when it comes to the issue of MRIs and the two for one MRIs, I haven't seen the most recent statistics. Last I spoke with the Minister of Health, Jim Reiter, about the subject, he indicated that it was going well. In fact, he was quite concerned that the federal government might reduce or curtail their ability to use the two-for-one MRI system. They certainly had indicated they had reduced or helped to reduce their wait times into providing services to many folks in Saskatchewan who otherwise might not have gotten service. He, of course, would have to maybe contact the Saskatchewan government directly to get their numbers as it relates to what is happening in Saskatchewan, but certainly every indication that I've had and the discussions that I've had with Mr. Reiter, who is the Urban Minister of Health and responsible for that file, is that they believe that the system has gone well.

Now, you know, would every health-care provider in Saskatchewan be in agreement with the system? I'm sure not. I suspect if you found a system or a health-care area where everybody agreed on everything, that you would've hit utopia in the health-care system. But I'm sure that there is disagreement within the health-care system as there is reasonable disagreement in many different areas.

But I clearly heard that they are pleased with the two-for-one MRI system, which is why they were quite concerned when the federal government made overtures that they were going to try to stop the program for happening. And I'm glad that the federal government seemed to back off of—off that position because I don't think it would've been based on patient care; it would've been simply based on ideology.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, I can appreciate that the minister doesn't have the information at his fingertips, but I would imagine his staff would. This would be something they—at least he could consult with them, maybe, and ask them if they have this information. Maybe he can indicate that in his next answer.

So, again, usage rates, initial feedback from patients, initial feedback from health-care professionals, any service issues that they've identified in the rollout or, you know, some of the successes, I guess, early successes, of the program. And maybe the minister can just talk about whether he thinks that this Saskatchewan model is something that could work here in Manitoba. Is that his initial take-away from the meetings that he's had?

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, I—he would really have to contact the folks in Saskatchewan for data in terms of their most recent data. I wouldn't want to speak on behalf of the Saskatchewan government as much as, you know, I believe they are working hard on many of the same issues that we are working on and other governments in Canada and other health ministers across the country are working on. But he is certainly free to contact folks in Saskatchewan. I don't think they've been shy in sharing their successes. He may even want to meet with them. I don't know if the former government—I think at one time they held some joint Cabinet meetings with the former government of Saskatchewan, maybe even Brad Wall's government; I don't remember the timing, exactly, of that. So they would've had opportunity to have discussions about a number of different things as we do, but nothing prevents the member from speaking to Saskatchewan.

But, on the back end of his question, he did ask about my views on it and whether it would have application in Manitoba. Certainly, I think that we are open to that. I sort of think it could be beneficial to Manitoba in the right circumstance. Of course, it requires a private provider to want to enter into that kind of an arrangement. It's not something that a

government will force or set up within government necessarily. There might be some unique circumstances or specific areas to explore, but I—obviously, it requires an outside entity to find that it meets their individual needs, their own financial needs, and they can provide the service in a way that makes sense. But we've made it clear that we would be open to those suggestions and ideas if it worked in Manitoba, worked in the financial context, worked in the medical context, but it would also have to work for the provider that was looking to provide the service.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister update us on the status of the Dauphin MRI?

Mr. Goertzen: I think there was some wrong information provided to the media or reported in the media about an MRI having been constructed in a country far from here. The most recent information that I received from officials is that there was—has not been a construction of an MRI for Dauphin, that the—that that has not been completed. I think there was some indication that it was sitting in a warehouse somewhere ready to be shipped, and that is not the information that I've been provided.

But we have been clear in saying that the wait-times task force, which we have commissioned, will be looking not only at wait times within emergency rooms, but also key procedures and diagnostic procedures. And so one of the things, of course, we'd want them to look at is the placement of MRIs and to make sure that it is done on a basis that makes the most sense for the most amount of people. Again, you could put an MRI in every corner of every street, and that might be beneficial for individuals, if you could actually find people to operate them, but that isn't realistic or sustainable.

* (15:40)

And so the decisions have to be made on an evidence-based basis. And that is why we've asked the wait times task force to examine, among other things, MRIs and where they are placed.

Having said that, I do want to say, while I have the opportunity and while we're talking about Dauphin, that the expanded ER in Dauphin, which is now well under way, I think is going to be a benefit to the community. I've certainly heard from those within the community who feel positive about it and who believe that it'll be an important part of the health-care system. I know it's something that languished for many years, under the former

government, but we are pleased to ensure that the ER construction is proceeding and we expect that it'll be a benefit to the community.

I'm—I suspect that the member opposite will want to be—say some positive things about the project moving forward. And I hope that he puts those on the record.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, what I will put on the record is that I'm surprised that, you know, with Dr. Peachey's report recommending a reorganization of emergency rooms in rural Manitoba, similar to what has happened within the city of Winnipeg, that the project is going ahead full steam without any consideration of an assessment of what the services are in that area. I'm surprised that the minister is ploughing straight ahead with that. I'm wondering if he's getting that from the KPMG report or he's getting this from somewhere else.

And just in that vein, if I can ask, what is the timeline for the wait times task force—the report from the wait times task force? And how much of that report will be made public?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I'm shocked and I'm disappointed to hear the member opposite speak so negatively about the Dauphin emergency room project. I'm quite disappointed, you know. And, in fact, I'm quite confused, because on a daily basis, almost a daily basis, he stands in this House during question period, as is his right to do so, and bemoan the fact that there is a consolidation and efficiencies being found within the health-care system. He wonders why emergency rooms are being repurposed in the city of Winnipeg, and yet, when it comes to rural Manitoba he has the exact opposite view and he's quite critical that an emergency room is actually being built and redeveloped in the city of Dauphin, which, I believe, the RHA would consider a hub.

You know, and that is kind of the principle of Dr. Peachey's report, in that there should be medical hubs both within the city of Winnipeg and within rural Manitoba to ensure that efficiencies are found, to ensure that facilities are operating at the capacity that people would expect when they show up, so they don't show up at a facility to—only to find out that it's closed or find out that they have to wait for eight, 10, 12 hours at a time for service. And so it's quite in keeping with the report of Dr. Peachey that the emergency room would fit as a hub within Dauphin.

But I have to say that I am quite concerned that the member is so negative about a project in a

community such as Dauphin, one that the former government held for many years—and people have the right, of course, to elect the representative that they choose, that that is the great thing about our democracy—and so for many years they chose Stan Struthers, a man that, while I've often disagreed with Mr. Struthers in this House on a number of issues, I found him quite personable and liked him very much as an individual. We often spoke not only in the House but at Bomber games and at other occasions when we had the opportunity to, and I think that Mr. Struthers would be quite disappointed to hear the member opposite speak so negatively about a facility in the community that he represented for many years.

And, I mean, I hope that this isn't a signal that the member is turning his back on rural Manitoba and doesn't believe that people in rural Manitoba deserve quality health care. So—and it's quite in contrast to the comments that the member has made in this House for other things. I'm quite shocked that he suddenly has decided that he doesn't think emergency rooms are a good thing and that he wants to see emergency rooms stopped and shuttered. But, I mean, I guess he'll have to justify that position.

There has been other inconsistencies that I've heard in the past from members opposite. I remember during the election campaign—I don't think it was this member but another member of the former government, stand on a street corner and say that funding for cancer care drugs would be cancelled if the Progressive Conservatives were to win government. And then, when the government was won by this side of the House, then what we found was that there was record investments in cancer care drugs and quite the opposite of the member not—there not being funding for cancer care drugs; there was actually record funding. And how did the member and the other members of his caucus respond? Not by apologizing for the accusation that was wrong, but by actually voting against the record funding increase for cancer-care drugs that existed in the budget.

Quite a shocking departure, but if this is the back and forth that we're going to expect from this member, I am disappointed, because I believe that he is an honourable member and would also be wise, I think, to put on the record that the 16,000 or so visits a year that are happening at the Dauphin ER, and is a hub in western Manitoba, are important. And if—for him to leave on the record that he's opposed to that project, I think, is not only damaging to the folks in Dauphin but quite at odds to what this member's

trying to say in other forums and in other places regarding other projects.

Mr. Wiebe: So the minister is saying that the Dauphin ER is a hub, and it has been decided that it's a hub going forward.

Did—where did he get that information from? Where—how did he make that decision? Was that from Dr. Peachey's report, solely, and was it his just decision based on that report, which services—which ER is a hub or which one is not? Or is it from the KPMG report? Or is it from the RHA in the area? Or is it from his wait-times task force? Which evidence did he use to say that Dauphin is the hub rather than any other ER that's in rural Manitoba? And if he has that list, can he table that list so that we know which ERs are hubs and which ones are going to be, as in his words, shuttered?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the member opposite wonders how I came to the determination that the Dauphin ER should be a hub in western Manitoba. In fact, it was the former government in 2013 that made the—made that decision. And now he's against the decision of the former government. I mean, I'm entirely confused by the line of questioning for the member.

Each and every day, he stands up in question period and bemoans the fact that there is repurposing of hospitals based on the Peachey report, which was commissioned by the former government, in fact, the hand-picks consultant by the former government. He bemoans the fact that there is hubs that are being selected there, and now he seems to be opposed to the fact that the former government selected Dauphin as a hub, and we agreed with the former government and decided to ensure that those investments are happening. And now the member wants those investments cut out of the good community of Dauphin; yet on the other hand, he wonders what the status of the MRI is in Dauphin.

So, on the one hand, he wants to rush to put an MRI in place before hearing back from the wait-times task force; on the other hand, he wants the ER to be shuttered and closed. I'm not sure where he thinks the MRI would go if we were to shutter the hospital as proposed by the member opposite. But maybe this is just a pattern, an unfortunate pattern, of a variety of different attacks that don't seem to have any co-ordination. But there's a difference between tactics and strategy, and I think that the member opposite should look less at tactical issues and look perhaps more strategic ones.

So, when we look at where the health-care provisions and dollars go, we do so with the idea that they help the most number of people, but also recognizing that not every project can happen immediately, that there are financial restraints or sustainability that has to be required within the system, and I think that that is certainly something that is quite important for the system overall, Mr. Chairperson.

So I'm confused, obviously, by the member's questioning, wondering why we're not shutting down the ER in Dauphin, wondering why we're following the recommendation of his former government. I don't know if he had this much disagreement in the caucus of the former government, if he raised these concerns and issues with Erin Selby, if he raised these concerns and issues with Sharon Blady, if he stormed into Theresa Oswald's office and said I disagree with everything that you're doing in Health. It would seem strange to me if he did. I don't know the member to be that type of an individual, but I'm certainly confused by the questioning that's happening here this afternoon.

* (15:50)

But if he's demanding—well, not if he—he's demanding that we stop the construction of the ER on Dauphin, I'm certainly willing to communicate that to the folks in Dauphin and say that despite the demands of the NDP, that we shutter the Dauphin ER and not use it as a hub. It was formally demanded by the former NDP government. I'm willing to communicate that to the folks in Dauphin. They would be probably equally confused as I would be, but we, certainly, are proud of the investment that we're placing in the Dauphin ER, looking forward to it continuing and going forward and providing service to the residents of Westman.

Mr. Wiebe: So, well, I'm glad the minister is as confused as the rest of Manitoba is about his plan, because he won't release it. He won't tell anybody where he's getting his information. He won't tell anybody what he's basing his decisions on. Now he says he's basing it on the will of the former government.

Well, I can tell you what the will of the former government was, and that is to keep ERs in the city open, particularly Concordia, Misericordia—to have some kind of point of access for any health care at those facilities and to expand our health care in our rural areas, as is the case in Dauphin and other places, where projects that were initiated by the

former government are now being flouted by the current government as being great projects. Well, we were saying they were great projects, and then he said, well, no, experts are saying there shouldn't be so many projects.

And now you're hand-picking—and the minister's hand-picking projects willy-nilly, it appears, and, if he isn't, then give us an indication: Where is he getting his information from? Is it from KPMG? Is it from the wait times task force? Is it from the RHA? Who is making these recommendations and, if he's getting it from the wait times task force, will he release that information to the public?

He's already put on the record he won't release the KPMG report, the report that he himself said would be made public, that he promised would be made public. And now he's gone back on that—on his word.

So now I'm simply giving him the opportunity. Manitobans are weighing in on the wait times task force; he's making decisions without that information in front of him. He's using bits of information from the KPMG report, which are hidden and secret and he won't share with others. He's picking and choosing parts of Peachey that suit his needs and then ignoring others. So where is he getting his information from? What's informing it? And when can we expect the wait times task force report to be tabled and will it be made public, in its entirety, for all Manitobans to see?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I mean, I'm shocked. The member starts off his—well, it's charitable to call it a question—but he starts off whatever that was, saying that he's proud of the decision by the former government to look at Dauphin as an expanded ER. They didn't do the project; it took this government to get it started and to get it done. But he starts off by saying that he's proud of it, and yet it wasn't 10 minutes ago where he said we should shut it down; we shouldn't be doing it. You know, I mean, it's one thing to not be consistent from day to day, but it's another thing not to be consistent from question to question. And I'm quite concerned that the member would put on the record that we shouldn't be doing the Dauphin ER, as he put on the record in his previous question, feels that it's not perhaps a good use of money—and I've said in the past that, you know, you have to ensure that you're doing the right projects at the right times, and knowing that there's not limitless money, that it has to be within the context of sustainability, knowing

that the needs of patients today are important, but the needs of patients 10 years from now have to be looked at, as well, and to ensure that there is a system in place. So I don't make an apology for ensuring that there is resources going into the Dauphin ER. I'm looking forward to it being a successful project, being a hub for western Manitoba to serving many patients around Dauphin.

I suspect that his former colleague, my friend Stan Struthers, would be quite disturbed by this line of questioning from the member opposite that we should not do the Dauphin ER, that it should be shut down. I suspect, if he was here, he would wonder what is the direction of this new NDP. One of the leaders—potential leaders of the NDP has indicated—the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) has indicated that this is a new direction for the NDP. Apparently, the new direction is to shut down ERs in rural Manitoba, even though they've been identified by the former government as a hub.

But now, of course, he also asked in that—in what, I guess, was disguised as a question, where it is that we were getting information when it comes to the Winnipeg clinical plan. Well, he knows full well—although maybe he's forgotten—that the direction is coming from the Peachey report, which was commissioned by the NDP. And I thank him, because I didn't realize until a couple of weeks ago during Estimates that not only was the Peachey report commissioned by the former NDP government, but there wasn't even a tender when it came to the individual who was selected for the project. The NDP looked around at North America, I suppose, and decided that the best person to do the revamp of the Winnipeg clinical site but also the Province of Manitoba was Dr. Peachey. They sought him out as their preferred expert, and now they're doing everything they can to run away from the very person that they selected to do the report, you know.

It's interesting that the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the former premier, hasn't directed any questions on this particular issue. I suspect he might have a very different view from the member opposite, because he was the premier, of course, who commissioned the report and was involved in hand-selecting the consultant.

I wouldn't want to suggest that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) had any sort of direct role in selecting Dr. Peachey other than being in his government. And so I suppose you could've raised the concerns at that point. But to try to now disavow

the fact that it was that government who selected the individual to come up with the report to do the work, to do the consultations, to have the interviews of people right across the system to have a working group established that had representatives from Manitoba Nurses Union, from Doctors Manitoba, a wider range of medical professionals.

And to come up with a report, and suddenly, the member opposite doesn't want to have any knowledge of it when, in fact, it was his government who decided to hand-select it of all the consultants, and I don't know how many consultants there are in North America; there are probably legion of them who were willing to do this type of work. But they specifically, among all those consultants who were available in North America, selected this very one to do the work, because they must've felt that there was no one better. No one better suited to look at the Winnipeg and Manitoba to do the first clinical assessment in our province, that they specifically picked this individual, and now, the member opposite doesn't want to believe that anything that was reported in that report is worth pursuing.

Now, he knows, as I indicated to him yesterday, Dr. Peachey came out at the WRHA announcement when the plan was announced, he went on to local radio, he talked about why the plan was a good plan. He commended those who are operationalizing the plan, and I'm glad that he did. But, you know, and each and every day the member opposite tries to say that somehow, Dr. Peachey wasn't in favour of the plan. Well, I don't think he would've gotten on an airplane, as fun as airplane travel is, and come halfway across the country to sit at a table to say that it was an important thing to do if he didn't agree with it.

Mr. Wiebe: And the simple question is—is which part of the Peachey report is the minister even referring to. Is it the part that says that Concordia Hospital should not be closed? Or is it the part that says that Concordia Hospital should be closed? Because there are two separate recommendations. In fact, I would argue that the one recommendation is the one that's under the title recommendations. It is recommended that, D-04, very—very clear.

Now, I understand that the minister directed staff to put together a chart that said something different and contradicted his own report. I guess that's the decision that they made at some point when he brought together his team to steer, as in his words, Dr. Peachey into the exact ideological stance that he

wanted him to be in. That's the decision that the minister made. He politically interfered in that process through his staff, and that's fine, that's where he wants to go.

But now he has a few other reports he needs to account for, and he can't just keep saying, well, it was Dr. Peachey and Dr. Peachey alone, because they forgot that they actually made a couple of other promises when they got elected and one of them was to do a wait times task force to make some recommendations. And we see nothing from that. We haven't gotten any information.

They also said, well, we'll go right to the private sector and we'll find out what's their recommendation. Last time they recommended that we privatize home care; maybe this time we'll get a different result.

Let's go back to KPMG. KPMG made a report and the minister said, absolutely, every part of this, every piece of the information is going to be made public and you'll get to see it and we'll dissect it, and we'll talk it through as Manitobans. We'll decide what the best future is.

And you know what? Honestly, we don't even know what's in that report. It could say absolutely everything that the minister is doing, because he won't release the report. So there's no accountability, and on top of that, he's not giving us the information on the wait times task force, which I know is publicly available about the timelines, because the timelines are publicly available. He won't put on the record what those timelines are and he won't commit here today, I think, because he know—he's not going to follow through on that promise either to make that information public.

* (16:00)

So he's going to go back on his word on KPMG, back on his word on the wait times task force or maybe he's not. And, if he's not, then he can just simply answer for us today; put it on the record. Let's move on. I've got pages of questions that Manitobans have asked me to ask the minister here today, and he's here sitting here spinning instead of asking—answering questions.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, it might take the next three sets of answers for me to get through some of the things that the member raised. The most concerning one is, though, the one that I'm going to start with first, where he put on the record and—you know, he might not want to do this outside the Chamber where his

privilege on legal responsibility isn't covered. But he put on the record that somehow the government and political staff interfered with Dr. Peachey and his report.

Now, as I've told him several days ago, I'd never heard of Dr. Peachey before becoming the Minister of Health, and it was some time after becoming Minister of Health that I'd heard of him. The first time I ever met Dr. Peachey was in a hotel room, I believe, in Toronto, where he approached me. I think he was doing something else in the hotel. I'd never met him previously. I never had any interaction as he worked up his report. He was, of course, hand-selected and commissioned by the former NDP government. Staff in my office had no interaction with Dr. Peachey in his report. He tabled his report to us on the date that I provided to the member some weeks ago, and we accepted it. And that seems to—that seems to be the concern and the thing that is bothering this member the most.

He somehow feels, and he's been watching 'conspiracy' movies, I suppose, and has dreamt up some conspiracy that there was some grand scheme to have Dr. Peachey come up with the report that would direct clinical services in Manitoba. Now, that, of course, impugns the reputation of Dr. Peachey, who, I understand, is renowned across Canada for his work, has done this in many other provinces. I doubt there is another province in Canada where he's been accused by an elected official of somehow manipulating his report politically. I hope he never reads Hansard. I'm not going to send it to him, because I'd feel ashamed for the member, that he's made this kind of an accusation against someone who's reputable, who, in fact, he hired. And so, if he—if the member opposite didn't feel that Dr. Peachey was reputable enough not to be persuaded politically, then I don't know why he would've hired him. But I've given him the assurance that neither I nor my staff had any interaction with Dr. Peachey. We got his report. We accepted it.

But, for the member to put onto the record that he somehow feels that a renowned and respected doctor, who has done this sort of work in other provinces, somehow was manipulated. I feel sorry for the member. I feel almost as sorry for Dr. Peachey. I hope he never hears about this. I certainly won't advise him of it, because I would feel embarrassed for the Province that we'd have someone who'd even raise those sorts of aspersions against someone like Dr. Peachey.

But the member goes on to say, well, you know, that somehow, and I'm assuming he's referring to page 62 where the—where there's a clear outline—it's done in a graph—where it outlines that there should be three emergency rooms and two subacute units in the city of Winnipeg. It gives the rationale for it. He somehow thinks that we sat down and drew this, that the government drew this and then inserted it in the dark of night into the Peachey report.

Mr. Chairperson, I mean, it's—it ranks up there with the various conspiracies that exist on assassinations of presidents. Mr. Speaker, perhaps he wants to give us his views on those, as well, and how many shooters there were in the grassy knoll. But, if he doesn't want to go into that level of conspiracy, I'd like to know how he thinks that we somehow managed to tap into Dr. Peachey's report, walk into the Watergate of Peachey reports and to insert a graph. I mean, it's ridiculous. It would be funny in some ways if it didn't impugn the reputation of somebody who I haven't gotten to know particularly well, but who, I believe, that his reputation speaks for itself across Canada. And I certainly hope that none of this reflects ill on Manitoba.

I'd be very concerned to see these sorts of comments go beyond the Chamber. But, if the member wants to repeat them outside of the Chamber, it might result in some interesting letters to the member.

But, ultimately, I think, you know, he's having a difficult time accepting the fact that his government commissioned Dr. Peachey, hand-picked him from consultants across North America and decided to hire him. And he got the report back, as I did. He saw the report, and then, suddenly, he tried to distance himself from his own government.

Now, we recognize that within the NDP there are several factions, and they orbit separately around the universe of the NDP Union Centre. But I don't know why he would have to try to drag in Dr. Peachey into the civil fight of the NDP.

Mr. Wiebe: So I've, you know, I've thought that maybe, in the past—I've put it on the record that maybe the minister only read up to page 62, but it's becoming more and more clear that he only read page 62, because in Peachey's own report he says that he had political guidance, that he heard the Throne Speech talking about how the Province was bankrupt and that only projects that involved cuts and only ideas of cuts would be ones that would be entertained. And then he was surrounded by a

number of politically appointed people on a steering committee and told, okay, now produce a report.

And, so I can picture how this probably went down. Now so, during the previous government Dr. Peachey started his work. From the minister's own information, it involved going out, gathering information, doing an environmental scan, figuring out what resources were out there. He did that work under the previous government.

Then the new government was elected, and the first thing that they said was, we're not going to spend anything in health care and, in fact, we have to cut the budget to afford to cut taxes for people. That's one of the priorities of the government. So they said, well, you have to come up with substantial cost savings in the health-care field; why don't you write a report about that? And, we've got it in front of us here.

And they went ahead and they did what they could to make sure that it looked the way that it should for their political ambitions, and made sure that it hit all the marks they needed it to, but they forgot to flip to page 203. I guess somebody missed that. And, they forgot to bring the Wite-Out, I suppose, and change the part where it says, quote, that the emergency departments in the three—three—three—other community hospitals become urgent-care centres. And the minister has no answer for this.

So maybe I'm wrong. You're right, maybe this is a conspiracy theory. Maybe I'm totally off base and, in fact, Dr. Peachey only meant what he put in his recommendations. You're probably right. This is actually what he meant, the part where it says recommendations. It is recommended that, D-04, and it spells out in black and white, as clear as day. Or maybe—maybe—he meant his recommendation D-08, maybe that's what he meant. That's the one that he thought the government should implement. And that there should be—the clinical governance should assess whether replacement regional services are available or can be made available. Maybe that's the one that he thought should get some attention from the minister.

But, no, the minister went to page 62, and it's surprising that that's the one that he chooses. I wish he would say, you know, on page 203, Mr. Chairperson, it says—but, no, he never says that—page 62. And he never references the fact that Dr. Peachey, in his own report, says that he is being guided by the ideological bent of this government and that's the basis for making his recommendations.

And I don't blame Dr. Peachey for doing that because the government set out those parameters and, if you're writing a report that would hope to be implemented by a government, I guess you would make recommendations that fit with their ideological stance. And that's, I guess, what he did.

But, ultimately it is in the minister's hands to decide whether he'll follow recommendation D-04, whether he'll follow page 62, whether he'll follow recommendation C-16, whether he'll pick and choose recommendation C-09, whether he will pick C-12. Doesn't comment much on those recommendations—in fact, doesn't make any comment about those, simply page 62. I'm starting to think the minister missed the rest of the report.

*(16:10)

The other thing that he fails to make any comment on and, again, with good reason, because he's already misrepresented multiple times the availability of the KPMG report. He made a promise in this House, on the record, that that would be released. He went back on that promise; he wouldn't follow through on that. A promise made; a promise broken.

Manitobans paid attention to that. They want to know now: Is the wait times task force something that he is going to not be a chicken about and actually release and let everybody in Manitoba see first-hand and make their own decisions.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Mr. Chairperson, the member asked the question why I referred the NDP to page 62. It was a chart. I thought it was simple for them to understand. I thought it might be the easiest thing for them to be able to digest quickly. You know, it had nice pictures. I thought it was fairly easy to comprehend, so that's why I referred them to page 62. But it's very clear in terms of what it outlines. It clearly indicates what the health-care system in Winnipeg would be best aligned to deal with.

Now, the other thing he said in the—again I wouldn't want to call it a question, but whatever that was for the last five minutes, he's said that there—you know, the steering committee for the Peachey report was politically appointed. I'm shocked to hear that, because it was appointed in 2013 by the former NDP government. I mean, the fact that they would have a—sorry, it was appointed by the former NDP government. The fact that they would have politically appointed, in 2015, before we came into government,

a steering committee absolutely shocks me. I'd love to hear more about it. Maybe the member could enlighten me why the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) politically appointed a steering committee that was being headed by Dr. Peachey.

And now we're finding the conspiracies. I think we've truly found a real conspiracy. After an hour and a half of this, Mr. Chairperson, the conspiracy is the member, by his own admission, feels that—not only does he feel that people broke into Dr. Peachey's office in the Maritimes and somehow managed to finagle something into the report that he was unaware of, but he admits that the former government politically appointed people to the committee.

Now let's look at these political appointments that he refers to: Beth Beaupre, the assistant deputy minister for the Department of Health, he's indicating that it was a political appointment by his former government on that report; Jean Cox, the assistant deputy minister for Manitoba Health—a political appointment, he says, onto Dr. Peachey's commission; Marcia Thomson; Bernadette Preun; Avis Gray; all long-serving civil servants who the member opposite indicates is—were politically appointed by his government; Milton Sussman, who we asked to be here to answer technical questions, which we clearly aren't getting so he's gone on to do the work that he needs to do, having brought him here because we heard that there was going to be technical questions.

Others who—within the regional health authorities—Ben Fry from the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, this is a political appointment, the member sort of indicates, from the previous NDP government in 2015. I don't know why the member for St. Boniface would have done such a thing.

Sandi Mowat, the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union, who was on the steering committee, the member has alleged in this House and on the record that Sandi Mowat, the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union was a political appointment directed by the member for St. Boniface. This is almost worthy of an inquiry, although I suppose the judges have other things to do.

The member also alleges that Dr. Brian Postl was a political appointment by the former government to help manipulate the Peachey report.

He indicates that Robert Cram, the chief executive officer of Doctors Manitoba—of Doctors

Manitoba—was a political appointment by the former government to steer the Peachey report into some sort of political direction back when he was in government. This might be—you know, this is a conspiracy that seems to have no ends, Mr. Chairperson.

Dr. Sri Navaratnam from CancerCare Manitoba—from CancerCare Manitoba—who was on the steering committee, he has indicated was a political appointment to try to gerrymander the Peachey report. On and on it goes.

Executive directors from Manitoba Inuit Association; the director for First Nations health and social services secretariat, Dr. Brock Wright, who we've heard speak about the Peachey report. He indicates that all of these people were appointed by the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the former premier and the former Cabinet of the NDP—political appointments to steer the Peachey report into an outcome that would be detrimental to the residents of Manitoba. This is a conspiracy that would rank with the great conspiracies in North America. This is a conspiracy that would take years to unwind, that might take judges and legions of lawyers to unwind. Maybe the member opposite wants to correct the record, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Wiebe: So we've asked the minister some pretty straightforward questions and he refuses to—he refused to consult with his staff that were at the table.

We do have some questions for Mr. Sussman, and now he just, I guess, disappeared. You know, the—you know, this is just—this is par for the course, I have to say. That the minister takes this completely political. We asked some pretty decent questions, I think, about programs in other places, about how they can be implemented. He goes off on a tangent. He makes up things that—wants to claim that I said or others have said. He wants to go on this whole conspiracy theory political spin. You know, I don't get it. We're trying to get somewhere, here, and—when he goes totally political on things. And then he sends away the staff that can actually answer the questions.

I'm going to ask the minister—maybe this will be helpful. I'll ask him a straightforward question. He'll give me a straightforward answer. We'll get back on track. He can call Mr. Sussman back in, and we can get to some business, here.

When will the wait times task force be complete? And will he table the complete document

for all Manitobans to see? Not a political question—simply a factual question to put on the record. I'm sure he can answer that.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, of course, a question that had three minutes of political jargon before we actually got to the question.

So the member wants to talk about—and says that, somehow, we've sent away Mr. Sussman. You know, it was the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), who I specifically indicated to yesterday before we left this session, that if he had particular questions, I would bring the officials in from the WRHA. We've now sat here for an hour and, during that hour, what officials had to listen to was the member opposite suggesting that Dr. Peachey—the Dr. Peachey who was hand selected by the NDP, who is renowned for his work across Canada, was somehow politically manipulated, and that stuff was inserted into his report, Mr. Chairperson.

I don't think that people who are tasked with running many things within the health-care system should, for an hour, have to endure such accusations. He went on to say, in a previous question, that the steering committee that Dr. Peachey put together, to try to get input from people across the health-care system, were politically appointed under the former NDP government and that, somehow, were in on this conspiracy to manipulate and guide the report.

Those are not—and then he accuses me of being political after suggesting that these grand conspiracy, which not only have no basis in fact but also have no basis in common sense, were somehow conspired upon. And they wouldn't have been conspired upon by me, because I wasn't the minister; I was an opposition critic, sitting not far from where the member is sitting now during the time that the Peachey steering committee was put together. And yet, somehow, he either believes that his own government conducted this conspiracy to put these political appointees, as he calls them, onto the committee to gerrymander the outcome of the report, or he thinks that, somehow, as an opposition critic—not even the opposition critic for health—that I somehow manipulated the Peachey report and the steering committee from the opposition benches, which I occupied for far too long, Mr. Chairperson.

Now, maybe he's giving me far too much credit in terms of what he thinks my persuasive powers are—or my manipulative powers are. But to somehow suggest that, from the opposition benches, that I was able to appoint, politically, individuals to a Peachey

report that I had never heard of until after I became the Minister of Health, I think, absolutely strains credibility.

But, again, I continue to be concerned that the member has put on the record that he doesn't believe that Dr. Peachey operated in a way that was above board, that was professional. He indicates that he feels he was somehow manipulated, and I'm advised from officials that, when Dr. Peachey was here for the announcement by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, that he clearly—

An Honourable Member: Point of privilege, Mr. Chair—matter of privilege. Apologies

* (16:20)

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Chairperson: To the—what—member for Concordia, on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): On a matter of privilege, Mr. Chair.

I can appreciate the willingness of the minister and department officials to accommodate us to undertake these Estimates in a global fashion. And I can appreciate, especially for staff, how difficult that can be in terms of giving their time to make sure that they're available for us to ask any questions in a global fashion. So I can appreciate how difficult that can be for staff.

We did indicate to this committee that we would, if we needed to have a certain official, we would give some indication that that official needed to be available on that particular day. And so we did that. In the last Estimates, you'll remember we asked that Dr. Sussman be available to answer questions here in the committee.

Now, again, I can appreciate that because of the global nature of the discussion here, it can certainly vary widely in the topics discussed, but we do have some specific questions that we believe Mr. Sussman could help answer for us.

And so the question, I guess, just to the minister, or I guess as part of my matter of privilege, is whether we will be getting Mr. Sussman back. We can actually ask these questions and get on to the business of the committee.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister on—

An Honourable Member: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I think you need to recognize me.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: I apologize for not moving a motion, but I guess I would simply make the motion to—my motion, if the minister would just tell me that the—*[interjection]* Yes, this is—yes.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member from Concordia, on the privilege of—on the matter of privilege.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Chair, I can see I'm making everybody work a lot harder than I think I need to, because what I probably should have asked for is a point of order with regards to a discussion that we had previously, an agreement that we had in this House to have a certain individual here as part of the Estimates process, to have officials here and to answer questions. We understood that there was an agreement to do that. And I'd—so I'm concerned that as of right now the officials aren't available, and we do have some technical questions we'd like to ask and believe that he would be made available. So I apologize.

I will withdraw my matter of privilege.

Point of Order

Mr. Wiebe: And instead ask that, as a point of order, that we get that agreement fulfilled. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister, on the same point of order.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Yes, on the point of order. I would have been tempted to speak on the matter of privilege that one's role as a critic is not a matter of privilege, but I'll move on to the point of order.

The member didn't cite any particular rules under Beauchesne's or under the House of Commons Procedures and Practice. Certainly, we indicated to the members opposite we try to have officials here where we could have them here. The member had now more than an hour to ask questions; he chose not to. He chose to engage in political discourse about potential conspiracies that existed with Dr. Peachey and others, conspiracies that existed within the former government.

Now, of course, he hasn't asked any technical questions, so he has no idea whether they could be answered or not. So the point of order is, obviously, misplaced on a number of different places. He cited

no rule in terms of what has been breached, and so there can't be a point of order based on that. But simply based on common sense, Mr. Chairperson, he's not asked any question that would require a technical answer where one hasn't been provided.

Mr. Chairperson: On the point of order—okay, as the Chair, I just want to make it that it's not really a point of order.

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

(Continued)

Mr. Chairperson: But we should have consideration between the member opposite—the honourable member from Concordia, and the Minister of Health, Healthy Living and—yes, Seniors and Healthy Living, that come to agreement and we'll get Mr. Sussman in later on, maybe Monday or next time we come with Estimates—in supply. And we'll encourage a time and date for that. *[interjection]* Or can he come back today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, again, I'm willing to do that, but, you know, we'd need some assurance from the opposition that they would actually use the time appropriately. There are 27-some-thousand individuals who work within the health-care system, and I'm not going to all have them sitting around in the gallery to the extent they could fit in here to hear political machinations and conspiracies by the member opposite, but I'm certainly willing to bring forward—I'm certainly willing to—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —I'm certainly willing to bring forward the officials assuming that the critic wants to use the time of these officials appropriately.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Okay, so we're getting Milton Sussman back, I guess, within—next minute, a couple minutes, five minutes?

Mr. Goertzen: No. I mean, I said we'll agree—we'll arrange a date, if the member opposite—I—now, unless the member opposite is saying that we're going to be ending the Estimates hour today, but, if we're not ending the—if we're not passing the Supplementary Estimates and we're going to be having them in the days and weeks ahead, then, if the member opposite wants to provide a date where he'll actually ask questions that pertain to those officials, then we'll make those arrangements.

Mr. Wiebe: Did the minister instruct Milton Sussman to leave?

Mr. Goertzen: You know, there are so many conspiracies that are bouncing around the Assembly today I can hardly keep track. I've indicated to the member that if he wants to ask questions of almost any official, I suppose, within reason, he can indicate that to me and we will try to make them available. But for the first hour and some, the member ignored the officials here and went on a political diatribe, which I actually didn't think it was appropriate or becoming for professionals to have to listen to.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I mean, the minister can try and spin this any way he wants. The reality is, is that we asked very concise, specific questions. In fact, we just asked another one at the end of that last series of questions, and I'll ask that question again shortly. But we've asked these questions. In fact, the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) was asking a number of very pointed, important questions, not ones he made up in his own head but ones that have come from health professionals, from citizens, from people who are concerned about these cuts, and he brought them to the Committee here. And the minister said, yes, I will bring in Milton Sussman to answer these questions next time.

* (16:30)

We're here; we're ready. In fact, Milton Sussman was here, and all of a sudden, he's not. I look up from my chair and he's gone. You know, I just—I'm confused because I think the minister, you know, decides that he's going to go on a political tirade here in the House, and then decide that it's gotten too political, you know, after we asked a series of very specific questions that he refused to answer and then gets completely political, wants to spin, wants to make up, you know, stories about things that I've said or, you know, think that I've said certain things.

He can make those stories up, but we do want to get to these important questions, so I'll ask that question again for the—I think the fourth time, at least the third time. Very clearly, when is the health wait times task force report going to be tabled, and will it be tabled in its entirety and made public for all to see?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I'm glad that we have something that's called Hansard and that it's not written in disappearing ink, so, certainly, individuals can go back and look and see the different conspiracies that were raised by the member opposite.

I certainly did indicate that we would have officials here to answer questions. I don't think I said that they would be here for five hours, six hours. We waited for an hour. The member delved into a variety of different conspiracies. First, he started off saying we should shut down construction of the Dauphin ER, then he moved into the fact that he thought somebody broke into Dr. Peachey's office and inserted information into his report, and from there, he went into a conspiracy about how political appointments were made by the former government onto the Peachey report.

But, you know, I do think it's important that we have questions asked that we are willing to provide officials, but not to sit here for days on end to have political tirades.

I remember, as the Justice critic—I spent a legion amount of time as the Justice critic. I think, actually, I probably held the record in the Commonwealth for the longest time as a Justice critic in the British parliamentary system. If anyone wants to prove me different, I'm open to seeing that.

But we—I would, when the—with the various Justice ministers in the past, mister—the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), Mr. Mackintosh, Mr. Chomiak, I would indicate which officials we would need from day to day or which parts of the department, and we would ask those questions. I think it was absolutely unbelievable that we had officials here ready to answer questions and the member delved into a series of conspiracies, into the deep, deep, blue waters of conspiracies, such that I'd never heard of before in the Legislature in Manitoba.

But I do remember yesterday, I think it was, the member for Elmwood did ask a question about whether or not the Concordia Hospital will have code-blue coverage. I'm happy to advise him today that, yes, all hospital sites will have code-blue coverage. The level of emergency care will be based on the services in the facility.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'm glad to hear that they're planning to retain the code-blue coverage, but I guess our questions here are more questions of timing than anything else. I mean, people are—have heard the news that the ER is closing, but people are very unsure as to what the time frame is on this, so, you know, we would like some sort of certainty there as to what the minister has in mind as to when the closure is going to occur and whether there is going to be an intensive-care unit operating at that hospital,

because I'm told that their plans are to still do surgeries for hip and knee there.

And I had it from a good source, a doctor source that claims that you can't have hip and knee operations there without an ICU unit around. I mean, if one of the patients happens to go into cardiac arrest, what are you going to do, roll him off the table at Concordia, put him in an ambulance and rush him over to St. Boniface? Is that the plan here?

So that—those are some of the concerns that I've been getting, from more than one source, by the way, on the ICU question. And the reason that you were supposed to be getting Mr. Sussman here was that you—according to the minister, was that Mr. Sussman was the person who knew when all this was going to happen, and now he's not here. But maybe before he left, he told the minister what the dates were going to be on this.

So would the minister, then, give us the closure dates, I guess, for the hospital and also tell us whether the intensive care unit is going to remain?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I indicated to the member yesterday, before the session of Estimates ended, that we would have Mr. Sussman here for the beginning of the Estimates. In fact, I went one step further and I under-promised and over-delivered. We also had Lori Lamont here, ready to answer questions. For the first hour, the member for Elmwood was nowhere to be seen.

We heard a variety of different conspiracy theories. We heard the reputation of a noted consultant Dr. Peachey impugned by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe). We heard the demand to shut down an ER in Dauphin. We heard a conspiracy by the member for Concordia that there were political appointments made by the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the former premier, to the Peachey steering committee, and that somehow during that time we flew to the Maritimes, we broke into the office of Dr. Peachey, we do a—drew a chart, inserted it onto page 62, re-boarded the airplane, flew back to Winnipeg, and Dr. Peachey was never any of the wiser when he brought his report forward. There wasn't two page 62s in the report, but somehow it just got slipped in seamlessly.

Well, I mean, that was ridiculous. I don't know why we would have officials who are busy running the health-care system sit through these sorts of conspiracy theories that the member opposite—and I don't say this to the member for Elmwood, this was—

these were conspiracies that were launched, unabated, by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) into the depths of conspiracies such that I've hardly seen before in the modern world, a world that is full of conspiracies on the Internet and beyond. But in terms of—been certainly never seen its like from an elected member.

But the member, you know, asks about timing when it comes to the repurposing of the Concordia ER. I—he might want Mr. Sussman here to hear the answer, but I gave him the answer yesterday. I told him, clearly, that the expectation was that the Concordia ER would not be repurposed in 2017, that it would be in the first quarter, likely the spring of 2018. So he asked the question yesterday, in the absence of Mr. Sussman. I gave him the answer, and now he demands that he return to get the answer again, which he was already provided yesterday.

In fact, we heard the critic for Health, the member for Concordia, stand in question period today and say that he had absolutely no idea what the timeline was for the repurposing of the Concordia ER, even though it was provided to him yesterday in Estimates. It's provided in Hansard; you can read it there, if you'd like. It's not written in disappearing ink; it stays there for eternity, for good and for bad. And, if the member wants to look at Hansard, he can. The answer was provided to him yesterday; it's the same answer today as I gave him yesterday. And I'm not sure why he would allow his critic, as the esteemed Opposition House Leader, to stand in the House and put things on the record that are incorrect, as he did in question period today.

We gave him the timeline. It's not going to be in 2017; it's expected to be in the spring of 2018. And that is because it's intended to correspond with the renovations at Grace Hospital. I've said that repeatedly on the record, and suggesting that you haven't heard it or didn't know or forgotten doesn't mean that the—that we are unwilling to provide the information.

Mr. Maloway: By explanation, I was over at Executive Council for a while now because we have a strange spectacle going on over there. It's—first time in the 31 years I've been here, where Executive Council is not being attended by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to ask—to answer questions asked by him, and that, in fact, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) has shown up there representing the Premier, without any of the Premier's staff. I think, he probably has his own staff there. And, to every

question that the—my colleagues are asking—you should really check in on this one, because it is historic. To every question that is being asked of the Premier in Executive Council, is being responded to by the Minister of Agriculture, talking about agricultural questions and pulses and stuff like that.

* (16:40)

So things are definitely off the rails over there, and we are—been dealing with that issue, now, for the last hour or so. And that's why I haven't been over here. But, now that I'm here, and you're over there, and Mr. Sussman is no longer here, maybe we can still try a couple of questions here, and see if you can provide an answer on this one.

So the question is: With additional visitors to the minister coming from across the city seeking emergency treatment at the three remaining ERs, the question is: How many new beds will be opened at those hospitals—that is, the three—and how many will Concordia lose in the process?

Mr. Goertzen: I would think that, in the many years that the member has been here in this Chamber—his many esteemed years of service—he might remember a time, actually, when the premier was actually the minister of Agriculture. There was a time, many years ago, that agriculture played such a significant role in the province of Manitoba that the premier held the dual role of minister of Agriculture and premier.

So we might be harkening back to those grand old days with the Minister of Agriculture in the committee answering Estimates on behalf of the Premier. I wouldn't say it's unprecedented. I might say that we are back to the glory days of—those revered days here in the Legislature, when the premier also held the title of Ag minister, now. Maybe—[interjection]—well, the member says also Finance. So there you go. So perhaps the Finance Minister will be answering questions in the Premier's Estimates as well. So he does remember. So I know that he recalls, now, from 50 or 60 years ago, when he sat in on Estimates, that the Premier had those roles, Mr. Chairperson.

He talks about a spectacle, though, happening in another room. And I won't comment on that because I'm not privy to be there. I'd be happy to go there, if he allows me to go, but then I'd have to hear about how I wasn't sitting in my Estimates. But I'd be quite happy to go and see that because I can't imagine that it matches the spectacle that he missed here for the

first hour of this Estimates as his critic for Health alleged a conspiracy with Dr. Peachey, suggesting that somehow Dr. Peachey was politically manipulated in his report, and that the esteemed consultant that was hired by the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) and his colleagues in government was somehow manipulated in the dark of night.

But he went further than that, and suggested that the steering committee that was assigned by Dr. Peachey, that included the president of MNU and included the chief executive officer of Doctors Manitoba, that they'd somehow been party to this conspiracy because they were political appointments. I'd never heard such a thing. So, perhaps, there are several spectacles happening in the Legislature this afternoon, but I'm—I was sorry to be—bear witness to the one.

Now, the member opposite yesterday asked a question about will Concordia continue to have an ICU to deal with any adverse outcomes from hip and knee surgeries, and I want to provide the member an answer. So it's my understanding that Concordia will have the needed services to support post-op complications as they arise. The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority is planning on a small high observation unit. Patients that are likely to require an ICU will be screened and operated on at an appropriate site. If a patient at Concordia requires an ICU, they will be ensured that they have access to an ICU within the health-care system.

There were 12,000 orthopedic surgeries conducted last year by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's surgery program. There were—of those 12,000, there were 42 ICU admissions last year at Concordia, including 12 from OR. So this represents approximately 1 per cent of the orthopedic surgeries that take place. And I wanted to indicate that because it is my belief—and the member might not feel this way, but I've said it before—that the Concordia hospital, given the demographics that are happening—the change in demographics in Canada, I believe the Concordia hospital, far from having a diminished role in the health-care system, as the member might portray it, I think years into the future they will look back and be seen as one of the key parts of the health-care system. In fact, I think that their value and their work in the health-care system will only grow as time goes along, as they become much more specialized within the needs of caring for patients, not only who need orthopedic surgeries, but those who also need transitional care.

My estimation—it certainly is my hope—that, far from being—having a less—a lesser role in the health-care system, that Concordia and those who work at Concordia will be seen as an integral—a more integral part of the health-care system than they are today in the years ahead. And everything that I see in terms of demographics in Canada would lead me to believe that. So I wanted to provide that information for the member opposite who asked a question, a good question, yesterday and a thoughtful question, on behalf of his constituency. He can 'relee'—relay that back to his constituents.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to ask the minister: So I gather from that, then, that the IC unit that exists there now will cease to exist, because it's not justifiable that there are 42 admissions to ICU units out of 12,000 operations on hip and knee. That—if that's the case, then, when is this IC unit going to be wound down, and where exactly are these 42 cases going to be handled then?

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, I think it would be my expectation that the, you know, 42 cases, remembering a very small percentage of the thousands, of the 12,000 surgeries that take place at Concordia, approximately 1 per cent, that they would be handled, of course, within the system. But, I think, the expectation is, as I indicated, and the response that I'd received from officials, is that patients that are likely to require an ICU would be screened and would be operated on at an appropriate site. So that would probably take in the large majority of those 42 cases, but the vast majority, more than 99 per cent, who don't require an ICU, of course, they'll be treated at Concordia. I think they'll be treated well. They'll be treated appropriately. They have fine staff at Concordia. They'll be—I would like to use the term centre of excellence in many ways, but, certainly, they'll be specialized in what they do. They have a great reputation in terms of their orthopedic surgery program. I think that reputation will only grow and be relied upon more into the future as we see changing demographics, and I can only expect that Concordia will be a—growing in terms of importance when it comes to the health-care system.

Mr. Maloway: So is the minister saying when he uses these statistics of there's 42 admissions for intensive care—to the intensive care unit out of 12,000 orthopedic surgeries, is—I'm assuming he's talking about system wide now, that this is a system-wide answer that he's giving us, that there's 12,000 orthopedic surgeries system wide, and there's

42 admissions out of those 12,000 system-wide to the ICUs. And, on that basis, then, there'll be no ICU at Concordia, that, in fact, all of those 42 will be diverted to St. Boniface and the Health Sciences Centre. Is that what he's saying?

Mr. Goertzen: The member's right in terms of a system-wide procedures. I think what has to be borne in mind is that the pre-op workup in terms of where a person is best placed to have procedures is already done, and that'll continue to be done, and it'll be done with the idea in mind that there'll be a high observation unit, I'm told, at Concordia, but that the very small percentage, small number, who you'd need an ICU would be otherwise directed within the system. But remember now that the Pan Am, which does orthopedic surgeries already and has a great reputation as well for the work that they do on orthopedic surgeries, they don't have an ICU or a critical care unit either.

So, I mean, this is not particularly unusual within the system. Pan Am is doing—it's my understanding from officials, that Pan Am is doing this without a critical care unit, has a great reputation; there are many, many people who often say, I want to make sure I have my procedure done at Pan Am. I hear that from lots of people, because they have such a good history. And I expect that Concordia, who also has a good reputation, will find that their reputation only grows and will only become a more integral part of the system.

* (16:50)

Mr. Maloway: Well, okay, so I'll buy the member's argument, then, that Pan Am doesn't have an ICU unit; it's doing its share of hip and knee surgeries.

So the question is, then, why would this doctor who is—well-known doctor in the city—be making the argument that there has to be an intensive care unit close at hand when you're doing large numbers of orthopedic surgeries? Why is he making that case?

Mr. Goertzen: Well I'm—one of the thing that I learned very early on in my training as lawyer in law school is that, you know, hearsay evidence is hearsay evidence, and it's hard to give it a lot of weight. And I don't say that to diminish what the member is saying. I don't know what his conversations were with whichever medical professional he is referring to. I wasn't in the conversation; I wasn't privy to the conversation. It would be difficult for me to comment on a conversation that I was not a part of.

You know, he asked a question yesterday regarding timing of the repurposing of the Concordia ER; I gave him the answer in terms of the timing of the repurposing of the Concordia ER. He asked a question about code blues; I've responded to him today about the question regarding code blues. He asked a question about the ICUs; we've indicated that there wouldn't be an ICU there but that wouldn't prevent these surgeries from taking place, but it requires the proper prescreening to ensure that you have the right individuals there.

Now, I mean, if there was an unexpected event that were to occur—and unexpected events do occur in the health-care system, probably daily because of the—you know, how many people are accessing the health-care system, you know, during the day and immediately after surgery. An anesthesiologist would be available and an in-house code blue team would be available after hours, so it's not as though there aren't resources that exist within the Concordia, even in the absence of—or that would be true at Pan Am as well, I suppose—that those resources don't exist.

So there are ways to ensure that these resources are there. My understanding is that the site is preparing to have a high observation unit where patients can be monitored more frequently with a lower nurse-to-patient ratio, but to ensure a safe environment.

So these are things that already exist within the health-care system in Winnipeg. They are not new in terms of why whomever it was he spoke to, had a certain perspective. Again, I don't know. But it does speak to a fact—and, I'll—I take this seriously. I do think there needs to be frequent updates in terms of information, in terms of how the plan is proceeding.

Part of that can be here at Estimates. I've committed to the member we can have a discussion about having Mr. Sussman and Lori Lamont return, and we can have a—maybe a clearer understanding of when he'll be asking questions. I'm more than willing to make the commitment for the member. I think he's an honourable member, he's never—well, I wouldn't want to say never—led me astray before, but not so often that I would hold it against him on this particular instance.

So we can do that, for sure. But in terms of—you know, his discussion with the doctor, I don't know. But I do take it seriously that there should be more

frequent updates in terms of how the changes are transpiring. I've indicated that that would be my expectation, that the authority would make itself available—not daily, because they've got lots of stuff to do, but will provide periodic updates in terms of how the rollout is happening and I indicated that to the media yesterday. And I expect that that will happen in a matter of a couple of weeks.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like to ask the minister where the IC unit will be repurposed. Like, where is that—presumably, the whole unit is going to be moved, and it's going to head somewhere. Where is it going to go, and when?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. I mean, that is at the heart or part of the—significant part of the Peachey report is Dr. Peachey indicated that it—through his analysis and through the work of medical officials within the region and in Manitoba, that the critical care resources were spread too thin in the city of Winnipeg. He—you know, there were comparisons used with other cities in Canada—Vancouver, Calgary, Hamilton and Ottawa being the most noteworthy—and his explanation, his analysis within his report is that those resources were spread so thin as to not provide the kind of critical care people would expect when they're presenting with a critical issue at an emergency room.

And so my understanding and my expectation is that those resources would be concentrated largely within the three emergency rooms—24-hour emergency rooms, acute-care units at the Health Sciences Centre, St. Boniface Hospital and the Grace community hospital. So that is—that really speaks to the heart of the Peachey report, in that these resources were spread too thin.

That would be true, I think, as well, when there was discussion about St. Boniface consolidating services many years ago related to heart attacks. There was, you know, lots of concerns and questions about what happens when you're decanting some of those resources from the other hospitals and moving specifically to St. Boniface.

I think that the experience there has been it's been much better; it's been much easier to keep health-care professionals. The outcomes have been better. People are directed to the right place by medical professionals—by paramedics, primarily. People are calling 911; they get there sooner; they get the service that is better. And it's just very much

the same principle about ensuring that you have much better services concentrated in areas that people can rely on in the highest quality way. So that is my expectation of where those resources would be going.

Mr. Maloway: The minister really hasn't answered the question specifically. I mean, what I want to know is, is the unit going to be moved as a unit to St. B, or is it going to—or to Health Sciences, or is it going to be split up with pieces of it all over the place? And when is this going to happen?

Mr. Goertzen: I mean, this goes to a more specific labour issue, and, when we come up with our gentlemen's agreement about when we can have people within the RHA here, we can have further discussion. But my expectation would be is that, you know, people make decisions in terms of where they want to—where they don't want to work. And so, as the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority goes through the labour component of the changes, they'll obviously be working with medical professionals who currently are in sites that are being repurposed and working with them to see what their desire would be in terms of which of the hospitals, with the ERs in this particular case, where they'd be looking to work.

There obviously would be some discussion about where the greatest need is and where they could best be utilized. But, I think, the expectation is that they would be working with those medical professionals to determine where it is that they would best use their services, how they would fit into the overall clinical plan. I don't think—and I could stand to be corrected by Mr. Sussman and others who are working on the plan, but I don't think that the expectation is that they'll pick up and move as one sort of wholesome unit into another hospital but that the resources would be allocated to the other hospitals, as the personnel fit and as the wishes of the individual medical professionals desire.

Mr. Maloway: I asked earlier, you know, the minister is aware that there's probably going to be 100,000 extra visitors per year coming from Concordia, coming from Victoria to the Health Sciences Centre and Grace and St. Boniface. And what we want to know is: How many new beds will be opened in those three main hospitals, and how many of the beds Concordia has right now will be lost?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm advised from officials that there are no expected bed closures at Concordia as a result of the new clinical plan.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 11, 2017

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