

Fifth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
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GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
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HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
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KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
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MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
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WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	Inkster	
<i>Vacant</i>	Lac du Bonnet	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 16, 2011

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 35—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Cell Phone Contracts)

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 35, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Cell Phone Contracts); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection du consommateur (contrats de téléphonie cellulaire), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, this bill proposes fairness and balance for cellphone contracts for Manitobans, including allowing cellphone customers to cancel their contract and prohibit unreasonable cancellation fees, among other changes.

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

PETITIONS

PTH 16 and PTH 5 North—Traffic Signals

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The junction of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north is an increasingly busy intersection which is used by motorists and pedestrians alike.

The Town of Neepawa has raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about safety levels at this intersection.

The Town of Neepawa has also passed a resolution requesting that Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation install traffic lights at this intersection in order to increase safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider making the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north a priority project in order to help protect the safety of the motorists and pedestrians who use it.

This petition is signed by P. Martin, S. Smith, J. Lessard and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Auto Theft—Court Order Breaches

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

On December 11th, 2009, in Winnipeg, Zdzislaw Andrzejczak was killed when the car that he was driving collided with a stolen vehicle.

The death of Mr. Andrzejczak, a husband and a father, along with too many other deaths and injuries involving stolen vehicles, was a preventable tragedy.

Many of those accused in fatalities involving stolen vehicles were previously known to police and identified as chronic and high-risk car thieves who had court orders against them.

Chronic car thieves pose a risk to the safety of all Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all court orders for car thieves are vigorously monitored and enforced.

And to request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all breaches of court orders on car thieves are reported to police and vigorously prosecuted.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by V. Pienkowski, Z. Cofnas, S. Rewett and thousands of other Manitobans.

Convicted Auto Thieves—Denial of MPI Benefits

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

In Manitoba, a car thief convicted of stealing a vehicle involved in a car accident is eligible to receive compensation and assistance for personal injury from Manitoba Public Insurance.

Too many Manitoba families have had their lives tragically altered by motor vehicle accidents involving car thieves and stolen vehicles.

It is an injustice to victims, their families and law-abiding Manitobans that MPI premiums are used to benefit car thieves involved in those accidents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Justice deny all MPI benefits to a person for injuries received in an accident if he or she is convicted of stealing a motor vehicle involved in the accident.

And this petition is signed by J. Pethmoridler, D. Vandersluis, T. Bergsma and many, many more fine Manitobans.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flooding and Ice Jams Update

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): One week ago today, we announced that there was a need to take the extraordinary step of conducting a controlled release of water from the Assiniboine River to help avoid the possibility of a catastrophe—or of a catastrophic, pardon me, uncontrolled breach.

In the seven days since, a lot of work has been done to build up the system's capacity to delay and minimize the need for a controlled release and to protect homes at most immediate risk from the water. The controlled release is unfolding as planned—and, if I could add, I appreciate the fact that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) and Leader of the Liberal Party were able to accompany me to the site today—and military and provincial crews are staying ahead of the water flow. All homes that could be

affected by flows from the release point have been or will be provided with flood protection systems.

These seven days have not been without fear and anxiety for those in the area of the controlled release or in the much broader area at risk of an uncontrolled breach. The concerns of people in the area are understandable, and we have responded with improved direct communication to people in these areas, and a firm commitment has been made to a comprehensive special compensation program.

* (13:40)

Our goal has been and continues to be to keep control of these unprecedented flows on the Assiniboine River. The crest has now reached Brandon and is flowing eastwards to the focal point in Portage. We will continue to remain extremely vigilant to ensure weak spots in the dikes are continually addressed and that the flow of water is managed in the safest way possible.

We also recognize that Lake Manitoba as it is at its highest level in 50 years. Prior to the 1960s, lake levels were commonly around this level, but we recognize that for many home and cottage owners today's levels are a major challenge and well beyond what they have seen.

There are currently over 1,500 Canadian Forces personnel on the ground on the Assiniboine, and these resources have allowed us to free up provincial staff to provide immediate assistance in the Interlake. As of today, Manitoba Conservation has deployed 68 staff to the RM of St. Laurent and surrounding area to assist with sandbagging and the dike construction efforts. At this time, we are working with the military leadership on an urgent basis to assess the needs in other areas of the province, with the priority being areas along Lake Manitoba.

We now have the weather on our side and a massive deployment of people and equipment on the ground is currently working to protect homes and properties. As the crest moves down the Assiniboine, we will continue to remain on high alert and do what is necessary to protect Manitobans.

For the ongoing work of the thousands of people on the front lines of this ongoing flood fight, I express my thanks on behalf of all of us here at the Manitoba Legislature.

I would also like to note that there are more than 3,600 people currently evacuated from their homes and acknowledge the disruption and hardship this

flood is causing in the lives of many Manitoba families.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister again for the latest update.

The deliberate breach of the Assiniboine River dike has now occurred and the water is fanning out over the landscape. We would like to thank the countless volunteers, soldiers, municipal officials and government staff who have worked so diligently in recent days to try to prepare homes and properties that will be affected by the breach. This is a situation that has created considerable uncertainty which will continue for some time as the water moves out surrounding homes and businesses and covering valuable farmland. Ongoing updates on this situation will be critical.

We would also like to thank those who turned out in droves over the weekend to try and protect properties along the shores of Lake Manitoba where high water levels combined with the ongoing threat of high winds are posing a very serious threat.

Work is currently under way in communities like Oak Lake to protect at-risk properties there. Residents in the area of the Shoal lakes are also trying to cope with high water levels.

With 3,383 people evacuated as of yesterday, flooding continues to take a heavy impact on individuals. We appreciate the ongoing efforts of those working with the evacuees in these trying times.

A man is presumed drowned after the boat he and another man were riding in overturned on the Assiniboine River Saturday night. The incident is a reminder of just how fast Manitoba's rivers and streams are during flood events, and caution must be the order of the day for anyone near these waterways.

We look forward to continued updates on the rapidly evolving flood situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: I want to thank the minister for his help both on Saturday when I was in Brandon and Portage and Delta Beach and Elie, and, today, for the courtesy that the minister took in arranging a

helicopter view of the Assiniboine River, a visit to the dike and the diversion controls at Portage and a view of the diversion itself and Lake Manitoba and from Delta Beach all the way up to St. Laurent. It provides a—certainly, a different perspective from on the ground and the magnitude and the extent and, certainly, a perspective on the extraordinary activity, particularly between Portage and Baie St. Paul, of the shoring up of the dikes in that region.

I want to say that, you know, all the time I have spent in various parts of the province helping and joining in others to see and check up on what's happening with the flood, that the incredible stories that people provide of what is happening on the ground, the ability of individuals and groups and municipalities to improvise creatively and effectively to be on top of the local solutions, I think it—when it's compiled, it will be an amazing story of this flood of this year and the challenges that people have had to face and the creative and effective solutions that have been found.

So, I want to say a thank-you to all those who have participated, who have chipped in, who have helped their neighbours, because that's a big part of this, and the contributions of many in the Hutterite colonies. I was out sandbagging with a group at Rosedale, at Delta Beach on Saturday, and the contribution that the Hutterite community has made is very substantial and needs to be recognized.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, we have Evelyn Walker, Adelheid Heier, Edith Klowak, Elsie Picklyk and Marlene Puffalt, who are the guests of the honourable Minister for Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Ms. Marcelino).

And also in the public gallery we have members from the Paramedics Association of Manitoba, accompanied by Chairperson Jodi Possia; and then members from MGEU Local 911, accompanied by President Chris Broughton; and members of the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg and International Association of Fire Fighters, accompanied by President Alex Forrest.

And also we have in the public gallery, we have Jaime Black who is the creator of the REDress Project at the Legislature this week, Nahanni Fontaine, special advisor on Aboriginal women's

issues to the Province, and Kim Hunter and Angela Failler from the University of Winnipeg Women's and Gender Studies Department, as well as the IWGS Advisory Council, who are the guests of the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you all here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Shoal Lakes

Flood Mitigation and Compensation Plans

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to acknowledge and thank those emergency responders that we are acknowledging this week for the great job they do each and every day on behalf of Manitobans throughout our province.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, I just want to thank the Minister of Emergency Measures and MIT, as well as the staff of those departments and others, who today provided us with an opportunity to take a look at the flooded regions to the west of us from an aerial perspective.

And we're certainly impressed by the efforts on the ground of the Canadian Forces, government departments, staff of Manitoba Hydro involved in monitoring water flows and protective systems, and all those others who've been involved in this remarkable effort, in addition to the Hutterite colonies who we've seen come forward and assist many communities in need throughout the province over the past period of time.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we had an opportunity to visit with some of the families and property owners in the area of Shoal lakes where water has been rising significantly over a number of years and, in particular, in the early part of this year.

And I just want to ask the minister if he can indicate for those families who have property in the vicinity of Shoal lakes, what is the government's plan with respect to moving forward to either protect or compensate or some combination of those two things for those families who are now suffering as a result of the rising water?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Deputy Premier): I, too, would like to acknowledge all of those people who are working on those floods so diligently, and the true Manitoba spirit is coming out when people will come together in the way they have to support other Manitobans.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is a very unique and a very extreme situation that we have that we are dealing with right now. And, as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has said in his other comments, that this—because this is unique there will be a special compensation program, and people will work at this. And I'm hoping that we can announce very soon as to how there—this will be addressed. And I can assure the member that all of those things will be taken into consideration, whether it is damage to fields, whether it is cleanup, whether it is providing hay for livestock. All of those will be taken into consideration as we put this compensation package together.

*(13:50)

Mr. McFadyen: I appreciate the comments of the minister with respect to the commendments made to special compensation, and I just wonder if the minister is able to confirm whether the property owners and families within the vicinity of the Shoal lakes are going to be included within the umbrella of these special compensation programs.

Ms. Wowchuk: The Leader of the Opposition knows full well that when the issue arose of livestock in the Interlake area and the fact that there was no feed for livestock, steps were taken very quickly to involve the departments that had to be involved in it to ensure that livestock was protected, that there was feed for that livestock, Mr. Speaker. That is the urgent matter of today.

It is urgent that we continue to communicate with farmers, we continue to communicate with homeowners, and that is happening on a regular basis. As well, we have to communicate with them that there will be compensation for those people who have—who are facing hardships during this difficult time, Mr. Speaker. And we will continue to work on that. But, ultimately, we will continue to ensure that livestock is moved and livestock is fed.

Mr. McFadyen: We appreciate the efforts that have been made and the comments made by the minister with respect to the issue of livestock in many areas where that livestock is having to be moved or protected.

In particular, Mr. Speaker, we had the opportunity over the weekend to meet with families who had acquired property in the area of Shoal lakes that even as of five years ago was two miles from the shore of those lakes and today is under water, homes which are being surrounded, livelihoods which are

being destroyed, and what they are looking for more than anything else is some level of certainty about the go-forward plan.

We recognize that there are efforts being made and the very significant pressures that government is under at the moment. I wonder if the minister can just indicate when that certainty will arrive for those families, in particular, that are impacted by the rising water around Shoal lakes which is some distance from the area of the deliberate breach.

Ms. Wowchuk: Again, the member wants to focus on a specific area.

I want to say to the member that this is a pressing and evolving issue right across the province. We know that the water has crested in Brandon; more water will be coming. We know that First Nations like Fairford and Lake St. Martin and Little Saskatchewan are all suffering at this moment. There are priorities that have to be dealt with like protecting those communities, Mr. Speaker, and resources are being put in place there.

There is the livestock that has to be moved, but the issue continues to evolve, and we have given our word, and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has given his word that there will be compensation and there will be compensation to cover damages, income loss, the cost of recovering the land. All of those issues will be addressed, but there are pressing issues that have to be addressed today like protecting homes, protecting livestock and, in particular, look down the stream at First Nations who are also being affected.

Lake Manitoba

Flood Mitigation and Compensation Plans

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

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on a new question, the minister is quite right. The First Nations at Fairford and Lake St. Martin are being impacted, as are First Nations on the west side of Lake Manitoba, as well as people with properties along the east and south shores of Lake Manitoba. And I do want to thank the minister for recommitting the government on the issue of income loss and other types of losses that are being suffered by people in various parts of the province.

And I just want to ask the minister: With the level of flows coming into Lake Manitoba, we saw,

over the weekend, quite a lot of panic in terms of sandbagging and attempts to protect property in different places. Can the minister just indicate what steps are being taken to ensure that communications are adequate for those people who are impacted by rising water wherever it may be around the shores of Lake Manitoba, and indicate whether the surveying is going on that needs to be done, and the protective measures including sandbags and diking and other steps are being undertaken?

There was a lot of anxiety and concern along the shores of Lake Manitoba at Lundar Beach, Twin Lakes beaches, Delta, Lake St. Martin, Fairford and other areas. Can she just provide some greater level of certainty about the go-forward plan?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): I know the Leader of the Opposition certainly saw—myself and the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)—the situation first-hand on Lake Manitoba. It clearly is creating very significant challenges.

We've seen the highest water levels since regulation in 1961. The levels we're seeing are perhaps comparable to pre-regulation days, but much of the development that has taken place in and around Lake Manitoba has taken place since 1961.

As the Leader of the Opposition is also aware, too, I know the Premier (Mr. Selinger) is visiting directly in that area, and I certainly appreciate that both he and the Liberal leader have also been talking to people in that area as well.

I have talked to a number of people directly impacted and we've clearly identified a number of things. One is the need for the kind of detailed surveying that we've been prioritizing in the controlled release area. The second is providing inundation information. The Department of Water Stewardship did provide that last week but, clearly, resources are an issue and that's why we've dispatched additional resources as of today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: And I do want to thank the minister for the response and, again, the opportunity this morning to both view directly and have some discussion about some of the—both historic and current issues impacting people around Lake Manitoba.

As the minister is aware there has been a slow rise in the levels of Lake Manitoba over a number of years. That lake is currently at a record high level, certainly in terms of recent history, and the concern

expressed by many property owners is that even in recent years at lower water levels where there is high winds or any significant amount of weather activity, properties and shorelines have been extremely badly damaged. And the concern with water levels where they are at the moment, Mr. Speaker, is that any amount of wind could be very destructive to a very significant number of people with properties around the lake.

So there are both short-term and long-term issues. And I wonder, with the minister having addressed some of the short-term issues, if he can just confirm that the government is looking at the need for some immediate short-term support around the lake and also provide some indication as the government's longer term plans for those people who have an interest in Lake Manitoba.

Mr. Ashton: We've been focusing very much on exactly what the Leader of the Opposition talked about which is the combination of high water levels and also the impact of high wind events. We certainly saw that this weekend. The weather has improved, but we know that this is Manitoba, we will get significant wind events, not just on Lake Manitoba but other lakes, including Lake Winnipeg.

I do want to indicate, too, that we have dispatched an additional 68 seasonal Conservation employees who will be working directly in the RM of St. Laurent. I do know that the issue of information, again, is important. I've talked to the reeve from Grahamdale this morning and we are moving as quickly as we can to do the detailed survey information which is necessary to provide the kind of protection we're talking about. But we are mobilizing a significant number of resources because even when the Assiniboine is—has peaked over the next week to 10 days, it will be an ongoing challenge to the lakes here in Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: We appreciate the minister's acknowledgement that even with the great challenges along the Assiniboine that after that river begins to—the level of that river begins to drop over the coming weeks, the levels on Lake Manitoba are expected to remain high in Shoal lakes. It will certainly remain high given the realities of that basin and could even continue to rise throughout the summer and into the fall.

And I would just ask the minister if they could direct as much energy and attention as they're able to, to dealing with those very significant issues, both along the shores of Lake Manitoba in the short term,

medium and long term, as well as those properties around the Shoal lakes.

As was indicated earlier, there were people who have acquired property in that area that was two miles from the shore of that lake who are now facing flooding, Mr. Speaker, and are expected to face that challenge for months if not years to come.

* (14:00)

I want to ask the minister for a commitment to ensure that those interests are looked after and that as much certainty as they can provide is provided as quickly as possible.

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, to put it in perspective, the normal range is as high as 812.9 feet. We're already seeing levels on Lake Manitoba of 814.6 feet, and it's not expected to crest until 815.6 feet, and if you consider the fact that 813 feet is the level at which there is concern about susceptibility, there is a huge, huge challenge.

A lot of it, by the way, has been developing through the natural inflows and it's important to note that there are a number of rivers, the Whitemud and the Waterhen, that do flow into Lake Manitoba. Lake Manitoba is both regulated by the Portage Diversion, and, obviously, there's a lot of focus in on the Portage Diversion now. But it is also—it does have an outlet, the Fairford Diversion. But we're not underestimating in any way, shape or form, the challenges ahead, and it will be a major focus for us, not just over the next few days, but over the next few months.

Assiniboine River Dike Breaches Compensation Eligibility

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, under some of the existing flood-related compensation packages, such as the one relating to artificial flooding caused by the operation of the Red River Floodway, the legislation specifies there are certain steps a property owner must take to be eligible for compensation. People in communities like Oakville, Elie, Starbuck and Sanford are still preparing their properties and businesses for the arrival of water from the deliberate Assiniboine River dike breach.

Mr. Speaker, recognizing there have been—has been a special compensation package offered, what advice would the minister give to these people as they prepare to ensure that they will qualify for compensation?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): The key focus over the last week has been clearly on flood protection.

I am pleased to report to the House, as I did in the ministerial statement, that we've made significant progress in putting in flood protection systems in homes in the area that would be potentially impacted by the controlled release. But we saw today, very clearly, both from the air but also on the ground, many homes that were not protected even a few days ago, and I do want to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, if I can, once again, our thanks to our provincial crews, the municipal staff and officials, the many volunteers.

But I can't say enough about our Armed Forces. They stepped up to the plate and, quite frankly, what's happened the past week in terms of flood protection in that area has been remarkable, and I want to put on the record, if I could, on behalf of all of us here in the Legislature and here in Manitoba, once again, a big thank-you to our Armed Forces for being there for us.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, there isn't enough words to praise the people, the men and women that are out there on the front lines doing work for mitigation. We don't want people to be deemed ineligible for compensation because they did not follow required flood mitigation procedures that were not communicated to them ahead of time and in clear language.

Mr. Speaker, recognizing there has been a special compensation package offered, what eligibility guidelines have been developed so far? When will they be made public? And what advice can the minister give to property owners and businesses who are preparing in advance for the water's arrival? Will he be using clear language meeting the same standards for flood compensation that this government expects from others?

Mr. Ashton: I want to assure the member of two things: first of all, that the advice that we've been giving has been very consistent over the last few weeks and that is that flood protection is job No. 1. And I do want to state on the record as well that the anxiety, the stress that we've seen for many people in the flood-affected areas but, particularly in the area of the controlled release, was very understandable. The good news, a week later, is that we are still at 500 cfs; that is, of course, being evaluated on a daily basis. But it has not only been a controlled release, it is, clearly, controllable, and that's very important

because that was one of the major concerns that people did have in the area.

I also want to advise the member of the second key element here and that is we recognize this is a unique situation. It developed rapidly and, certainly, we will not be expecting people to have been doing things a week or two or three weeks ago. This situation developed very rapidly last week. We're going to make sure that the program is not only comprehensive but it's fair and reflects the reality in that area.

And so our concern is—for people is to make sure they're flood protected, not to worry about the paperwork after this. We'll make sure we have a fair compensation program for people in the area and that is guaranteed, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, if people know now what they need to do to be eligible, there's still time to do it, but there has to be clear direction, clear language and clear communication to those just ahead of the flood waters so they can take the necessary steps. It would be very devastating for families and businesses to find out after the fact they did not qualify for compensation.

Recognizing there has been a special compensation package offered, can the minister inform the House how this information has been communicated to those in the inundation zone so they can take the necessary steps to ensure their eligibility for compensation.

Mr. Ashton: Well, first of all, in terms of communications, one thing we recognized last week is despite all of the public media coverage—and it's been very extensive and very helpful—despite the normal protocols for communication, working with the municipalities and the various emergency measures protocols that we have in place, we actually sat down and we realized two things. One is we had to recognize that people were saying they weren't getting the information they needed, and that, second of all, the best way is the typical way we do things in this province; we actually sent teams door to door, to each and every home.

We've had the survey information completed. We've provided that information to homeowners in that area.

And I want to stress one thing. Job No. 1 is flood protection. And when it comes to the recovery stage, I wouldn't want anybody right now to be worrying about anything other than the—than dealing with the

immediate challenge with the flood. We're not going to have people cut off from compensation because of some paperwork they might've been able to do if they were able to do that now. Right now, it's flood protection.

We're going to announce the details of the compensation program, and I can say once again it will be comprehensive and recognize the unique situation impacting on people in that area.

Lake Manitoba Water Levels

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, May 6th was the last day that the provincial government provided current levels and projected levels for Lake Manitoba in its daily flood bulletins. On May the 12th, I asked the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) to once again include those numbers in the provincial flood reports. People are asking for that specific information. It's very important to those living and working around Lake Manitoba to have access to those numbers.

Mr. Speaker, why is the Minister of Water Stewardship refusing to publish those numbers on a daily basis?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I just want to reiterate what I said a short time ago. It's currently 814.6 feet. We do provide that information to the public.

We also, by the way, have gone one step further and provided inundation maps, in fact, a week ago. We had a public meeting in Warren. In addition to the inundation maps, we're also working on detailed surveying.

I want to stress, one of the key things we've done in the past week in the controlled release area was put in place detailed surveying. That is one of the concerns. That's certainly the concern I'm hearing from municipal leaders in and around Lake Manitoba. It goes back to some of the questions that were asked earlier. We recognize that's going to be a significant concern, but we are providing that information.

What really is important for people in that area, though, is the translation of that into inundation maps. We've done that and more detailed surveying so people know where to put the flood protection, and we will be—do that because we recognize it's a

key element on Lake Manitoba as well, flood protection.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, the people are clearly telling me out there that they're not—they have no faith in the inundation maps.

This past weekend, I talked to dozens of people on the west side of Lake Manitoba. I asked what information they needed as they deal with this spring's flooding and rising lake levels. They unanimously told me they need to know the current levels of Lake Manitoba, the amounts the lake is rising each day and the projected levels the lake may reach.

Mr. Speaker, I ask again: Why is the minister stewardship failing to provide that information?

Mr. Ashton: Once again, I'll repeat, Mr. Speaker, the current level on Lake Manitoba is 814.6 feet. It's projected to crest at 815.6 in late June. I want to acknowledge again that that is well above the 813 feet level at which you do start to see significant risk of flooding.

*(14:10)

In terms of the inundation maps, that is only one of the dimensions, but even in the middle of a major flood we recognized that was important. The second is to get the detailed information out, and we are doing that as we speak. And the third element—and this, again, is where we put additional resources in. Despite all the pressures, we put additional resources in and around Lake Manitoba.

Lake Manitoba is a priority and will continue to be a priority well into the summer, Mr. Speaker. We know there are significant flood concerns and we are going to work with people in the surrounding communities to act—to protect homes around Lake Manitoba.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, the minister still hasn't answered the question about why they aren't included in the daily flood reports.

Mr. Speaker, ranchers, farmers and property owners are fighting to protect their livestock and properties from rising lake levels. They know how high to—they don't know how high to build their dikes. Critical information once released by the provincial government on a daily basis is no longer being released. There are concerns about the accuracy of the inundation maps. People who have lived beside the lake all their lives have become

accustomed to making decisions based on the numerical data the government has been providing.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) commit today to providing the needed information to property owners around Lake Manitoba? What is her reluctance to reinstate information about current and projected levels of the lake?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll be quite happy, and I know my colleague, the Minister of Water Stewardship, will be quite happy to sit down with the member. I know we've had briefings in the past. The—we provide that information. I'm not sure perhaps why the member is having difficulty in accessing it, and I do want to indicate we provide it not just in terms of the immediate situation but also the projected crest and, in fact, we are anticipating the crest in late June.

And in terms of the inundation maps that was based on the topographical information available on the level of the lake, we will update that information, but it's important not just to have the macro maps, the inundation maps, it's also important to have the on-the-ground surveying that can identify the specific needs in each home, and we will be doing that, Mr. Speaker.

It is a priority and perhaps—I suggest—perhaps the member and I meet afterwards because there clearly is another communication gap, it's between the member and what is happening. I'm not being critical, but we—that information is available. If he's not getting it, we'll make sure he gets it on daily basis.

Shoal Lakes Flood Information for Residents

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, me and my colleagues asked many questions what the government is doing about the rising Shoal lakes. The past weekend I received notice that the RM of Woodlands and the provincial government have declared a state of emergency in this situation. The notice says roads may become impassable making it impossible for emergency vehicles to respond. Furthermore, evacuations may be necessary. This is a very serious situation.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Water Stewardship please update the House on what she is going to do to issue the rising Shoal lakes? People

need to know so they can make the plans for their future.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, perhaps, just to update members of the House, it certainly was very obvious to myself, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), the Leader of the Liberal Party going over the Shoal lakes' basin, it's currently—it's been indicated that the lakes are about .5 metres from the natural—spilling into Grassmere's system, and this would certainly cause damage in the areas. The member knows—I know the member knows that area very well.

We have been at work on the measures that homeowners in that area are going to be required to do that, but I want to acknowledge, again, that there are already areas that are under water. We have been working both on the short-term but also the long-term solutions as well. Options have been identified, including a drain that would drain into Lake Manitoba. The cost of that would be about \$24 million. So we're both working on the immediate and the long-term situation at Shoal lakes. It is of major concern, Mr. Speaker.

Sturgeon Creek Drain Plans

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, over the past few days I've toured the Shoal lakes several times. Water was running over the Fire Line Road, No. 85. This water will make its way into the Sturgeon Creek. There are concerns that homes, farms and parts of St. James may be affected if the road breaks.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) please update the House on what her government is doing with the Sturgeon Creek drain in relation to the rising Shoal lakes?

Mr. Ashton: Well, in the short term we've been identifying the immediate impacts, and I do want to indicate that we've also done a lot of work. My colleague, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) has not only been directly to the area, but has been working with the producers in the area.

And I do want to, by the way, indicate that one of the key challenges we are dealing with here is the impact on livestock, and it is a very significant priority, and we've been able to work with local residents, such as Howard Hilstrom, but also with producer organizations. In fact, I believe the Minister for Agriculture is in daily contact with producer organizations, so we recognize that as an issue.

I do want to indicate that we're also identifying the potential impacts we have identified in terms of the overflow, and every step will be made to ensure that any impacted areas will have flood protection and-or evacuations on a case-by-case basis, Mr. Speaker.

Grassmere Creek Drain Plans

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows there's another drain affected by the rising Shoal lakes. It is the Grassmere Drain and some water has started to move into it as well. Currently, there are no controls on the Grassmere or the Sturgeon Creek drains to offer protection of a large amount of water or to breach the Shoal lakes. Many are concerned about the risk it poses to the people and property along the way.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Water Stewardship has some very serious decisions to make. People need to be prepared. Will the minister please update the House on what contingency plans are in place if such a breach occurs on the Shoal lakes?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that this has been an important part of our overall planning, and I do want to mention—again, I identified this in my earlier answer—that the current situation, as it is not at the level of naturally spilling into the Grassmere, that, though, is obviously a concern in the immediate period of time.

And I do want to stress, by the way, that we have been identifying measures that will deal with the situation in the short run, any potential impacts. And I do want to put on the record that the Department of Water Stewardship, despite all the pressures across the province, has been focusing in on this area as well, has been specifically monitoring what is happening, but also most importantly, projecting what the potential impacts are. And based on those impacts, we're working with the local municipalities in terms of flood protection. That is the key element, Mr. Speaker.

Cattle Industry Relocation of Herds

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, at a meeting on May 9th, Manitoba Agriculture officials warned it may be necessary to evacuate 100,000 cattle due to rising water levels on Lake Manitoba. The Minister of Agriculture is aware of the problems cattle and bison producers are facing on the Shoal lakes area due to rising lake levels there. And some

livestock have been forced to move because of a deliberate breach of the dike on the Assiniboine River.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture provide this House with an update on how many livestock have been relocated to date and how many more will have to be moved in days ahead?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I can't say enough about the good work that has been done by officials in our department, in MAFRI, in conjunction with groups like the Manitoba Beef Producers, Keystone Agricultural Producers, Manitoba Pork, the chicken growers, egg farmers. There's a long list of groups that have worked together to make sure not only cattle are protected, but all Manitoba livestock that are threatened. Whether we're talking about the area that I visited yesterday, visiting the Sunnyside Hutterite Colony, whether we're talking about that part of our province or any other part of our province, a lot of very good work has been done to identify those producers who have their backs to the wall and need our help.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, he must have missed the question. This is not an answer to how many have to be relocated yet.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Beef Producers is trying to compile a relevant information for their members affected by flooding. Many producers are also looking to this provincial government for leadership and information. Manitoba Agriculture recommends that pet owners and hobby farms affected by flooding contact the animal care line for advice.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture advise this House if the department will be offering a toll-free line with extended service hours that livestock producers can call if they have questions about the evacuations of animals, and is such a line in the works?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I would offer to my friend from Emerson that maybe we could get him together with some of my officials and take a look at the work that's being done out at our site at the University of Manitoba, our emergency centre, where we do have people who are manning phones, staffing phones, taking calls from the very producers that this member is talking about.

* (14:20)

We have, I might point out, a farm rural stress line that we put in place, that has been operating throughout this time as well because this is a hard time for farm families, Mr. Speaker. It is very stressful to see your cattle in a position where they may or may not get looked after. And we're identifying those farmers, those ranchers who need that kind of help. And I've got to say, the farmers have been working very well, even before they come to our department looking for some solutions, they've been working very hard, very tenacious in looking after their cattle, and we're there for them.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, if there's a command centre at the University of Manitoba, no one else knows except the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, a smooth information flow is essential if thousands of livestock are going to be temporarily relocated. Producers in the region not hit by flooding are stepping forward regarding available pasture. I know of one instance that when a producer contacted Manitoba agricultural office in the Interlake last Thursday to let them know he had pasture available, no one has yet called him back.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain how calls regarding about cattle boarding are being handled? Is the information being conveyed into the central registry in a timely fashion so producers who need to move their cattle have a current listing of what pasture is available?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, this member's got to give more credit to the people who are working hard on the front lines. All over this province there's one example after another of Manitobans coming together, working neighbour to neighbour, working to help each other out.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was at the emergency operation centre and he was very impressed that they were—*[interjection]* Yes, this really isn't a time for partisan politics, Mr. Speaker.

Everyday, I see example after example of people coming together and helping each other out. This government and the people in the department of MAFRI have been working very, very tenaciously, very diligently, not just recently, but dating back weeks and months to get ready. And we've made good contacts with people every day around—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

NOR-MAN Health Authority Release of External Review

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, a lack of transparency and accountability has crippled the NDP's record on health care in Manitoba. And while I believe that last week's NDP announcement about Bill 38 is nothing short of political window dressing, in fairness, I'd like to give the Minister of Health an opportunity to be transparent today in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, when the minister released—when will the minister release the external report about the NOR-MAN health authority into allegations of corruption, of unaccountability, nepotism and, most important, the poor delivery of health care in the NOR-MAN region of northern Manitoba?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, and I'll begin by saying that it is our belief that the doctors and the nurses, indeed, the EMS personnel, the health-care aides that are working in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority go to work every single day to do the very best job that they can for the citizens of that region.

I would further say, Mr. Speaker, that when there were issues brought forward about concerns in the region with administration and other issues, we called for the external review. It is my understanding that that review is in the final stages of completion and I'll be receiving that shortly. And we have always said, we are going to make the recommendations public and we are going to act on those recommendations.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the timing of last week's transparency announcement was curious, because it took place a day after the resignation of the CEO of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority. Manitobans are well aware of the allegations of exaggerated operational costs that took place under this minister's purview. Manitobans are aware of the good doctors who had privileges taken away for attempting to provide good service under this minister's purview. Manitobans are aware that this minister allowed the CEO to appoint his wife to a powerful position.

So, in the spirit of the transparent bill, will this Minister of Health, today, be transparent about the details of Mr. Lockhart's resignation from his position as CEO of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority?

Ms. Oswald: I will inform the House that the board received the recommendation—or the resignation of the CEO of NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority. I can tell the members that this resignation occurred independent of the review, which is still being completed. We are going to act on those recommendations. We'll take them very seriously; it's why we called for the review to occur in the first place, Mr. Speaker.

And may I say that this would not be the first time that this member endeavoured to impugn members of the public that have performed in our health system and, lo, those many occasions he has been incorrect. I'm not going to engage in that with him here. I can let the member know that we took requests seriously to have things reviewed and we'll make those recommendations public as we are acting on them.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans deserve transparency and Manitobans were promised the external report in early spring, but it hasn't come. The minister's own staffer promised Tom Heine in Flin Flon the report by mid-May and today's the 16th of May and it's still not here. Now, residents of Flin Flon are beginning to think that the minister won't do her job and be transparent and release the report and tell us why Mr. Lockhart resigned. This all gives credence to the frustration that they feel the minister doesn't care enough about the health of northern Manitobans to do her job properly.

Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of this bill, will the minister be transparent, release the external report into these allegations of corruption, nepotism, unaccountability and poor health care and the lack of availability of family physicians? Will she release this report today?

Ms. Oswald: And, again, I believe I said twice that we are going to release the recommendations. We're going to act on them. Because we do believe that everybody in Manitoba deserves to have the best possible health care.

Mr. Speaker, we're putting information online concerning wait times, concerning critical incidents, more than has ever been done in the history of this province. We are going to do this in a fair and balanced manner. It wouldn't be the first time that the member from River Heights has appointed himself judge, jury and executioner. He can do that. We will not.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

National Emergency Medical Services Week

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Speaker, this week is National Emergency Medical Services Week, the theme of which is "Everyday Heroes," and many of them who have joined here today in the Legislature gallery. EMS Week honours the dedication of the men and women who provide patients with quality emergency medical response on the front lines of our health-care system. These highly trained EMS professionals respond to thousands of emergency calls every year in this province and, quite literally, they save lives.

In Manitoba, we are fortunate to have both a workforce of professional paramedics and also to have firefighter paramedics playing a key role as a part of the emergency medical response team in places like Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson and covering the majority of the Manitoba population. Over the last decade, we have seen vast improvements in emergency medical response right across the province. More paramedic training has been introduced to meet increasing standards. The entire fleet of ambulances has been replaced and more added, and new ambulance stations have been built. And the Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre was established in Brandon to offer a co-ordinated dispatch EMS, and ambulances are being outfitted with GPS to enhance dispatching and to improve ambulance response times.

During this time of flooding, Mr. Speaker, with road closures and evacuations affecting families in many Manitoba communities, we know dedicated EMS professionals are working hard to maintain emergency medical response in partnership with the ambulance helicopter here from STARS in Alberta, and we look forward to establishing a permanent helicopter program in Manitoba to help ensure the most effective, rapid response to meet patient needs.

* (14:30)

Mr Speaker, on behalf of all members of this House and every Manitoban, I would like to extend our sincere thank you to all our guests here today in the gallery and to the EMS personnel throughout the province. You are truly everyday heroes, and we are grateful for the special medical care services you provide each and every day to Manitobans.

I ask all members of this Legislative Assembly to join me in thanking these everyday heroes, the women and men in EMS across Manitoba.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, this week has been declared Emergency Medical Services Awareness Week in honour of Manitoba's EMS teams who provide vital services to our communities. I am disappointed that the NDP didn't do a ministerial statement on this, though.

EMS providers are hard-working, dedicated professionals who strive to keep our communities safe and healthy. The theme of this week, "Everyday Heroes," captures the spirit of the work these men and women perform on a daily basis.

Exciting events have been planned for every day this week to promote safe and healthy lifestyles and to celebrate the work that EMS personnel do. All of these events showcase the importance of emergency medical services in an informative and fun way.

The celebrations started a bit early with the third annual EMS at the ballpark on Friday night. There were emergency vehicles on site and special on-field activities to get everyone in the spirit. Yesterday morning, the week was officially kicked off with a bike ride at Assiniboine Park. Tonight, the third Annual Celebration of Life Awards will be held to celebrate the work of EMS providers and civilians to keep Winnipeg safe.

Tomorrow, the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service and the Heart and Stroke Foundation will be at the U of M Bannatyne Campus to promote their Public Access Defibrillator program. Wednesday, there is an EMS Children's Day at the Assiniboine Zoo, and Thursday the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service and the Heart and Stroke Foundation will be in grade 11 and 12 classes teaching about CPR and semi-automatic external defibrillators. Finally, Friday will see the launch of the Seniors EMS Awareness Campaign, which aims to prevent falls and other injuries.

There are nearly 1,850 licensed EMS providers in Manitoba. These people are highly trained professionals who provide life-saving support for our communities in the greatest times of need, including in times of floods. As the first line of response, emergency medical services are crucial to the health-care system. Pre-hospital care from EMS providers is shown to greatly improve the survival and recovery rates in illnesses and injuries. We see an example of this with the STARS helicopter used during this flood episode.

On a personal note, Mr. Speaker, when I was the victim of a hit-and-run car crash caused by a car thief in a stolen car, paramedics had a significant impact on me with their calmness and their professionalism. They made me feel safe after a terrifying car accident.

And, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our caucus I would like to thank Manitoba's EMS providers for the exceptional work that they do.

Brooklands Senior Centre

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, last month I was pleased to attend the volunteer appreciation luncheon hosted by the Brooklands Senior Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Brooklands Senior Centre, also known as the Brooklands Pioneer Senior Citizens Club, was founded in 1982 by a group of local seniors. It strives to meet the social, physical, emotional and intellectual needs of the residents in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Speaker, the centre is a place where residents go for recreation, education and socialization. Through its program and activities, the centre promotes leadership, volunteerism, personal growth and community participation. Despite the name, programs are not restricted to seniors. People of all ages are welcome to participate in activities.

Volunteers are essential to its day-to-day activities. Volunteers run bingo games, holiday celebrations and fitness classes. They are the ones behind all of the many pancake breakfasts, fall dinners, craft classes and handyman projects. They host the teas and dinners for the residents and their families. Many volunteers are also members of the centre's board. It is because of these volunteers that big dreams and goals for the betterment of the community are conceived and achieved. In the near future, when new facilities such as the Explorer daycare centre, a co-op seniors housing and a satellite medical clinic are realized, Mr. Speaker, the community has so much to thank the members, volunteers and board members of Brooklands Senior Centre.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 40 volunteers were recognized for their contribution over this past year. It is thanks to the volunteers that the Brooklands Senior Centre is such a great space and alive with activities. Thank you to all of them for their time and dedication.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask leave to have the names of the awardees included in this statement in *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave to add the names of the members into the member's statement? [*Agreed*]

Brooklands Pioneer Senior Centre Volunteers

Adelheid Heier, Alice Steinke, Anne Pistun, Arlie Walker, Betty Ann Moreau, Brian Shaver, Charlotte Clapper, Cheryl Collins, Edith Klowak, Elaine Cuthbert, Elie Thorpe, Elsie Picklyk, Emily Reimer, Ester Navoa, Gerry Kjartanson, Gilles Chamberland, John Sawatzky, John Steinke, Libby Murkin, Margaret Hoban, Margaret Smith, Margrit Dangel, Marlene Puffalt, Maxine Warenko, Nora Daniel, Pat Sawicki, Peter Warenko, Scot Fielding, Scott McCauley, Sheila Dumore, Shirley Hoban, Harvey Sumka, Tobi Randell, Wanda Randel.

Walter Danyluk

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday was May 12th, Manitoba Day, a day to remember Manitobans and institutions in Manitoba that have helped shape our province.

One Manitoban that I would like to remember today is Walter Danyluk. Manitoba has a proud heritage of developing parks and Mr. Danyluk was instrumental in creating some of the most beautiful parks in this country as well as our Manitoba provincial park system.

Born in 1923, Walter Danyluk was raised on the edge of today's Whiteshell Provincial Park in Rennie, Manitoba. He obtained his Master's degree in resource development from Michigan State University. He returned to Manitoba to become the chief of the Parks division of the Forestry branch.

In 1963, Mr. Danyluk was appointed the director of the newly formed Parks branch. He held this position for 10 years and was responsible for establishing and managing a park system comprised of 30 recreation areas, numerous highway waysides and nine provincial parks, including one of our most beloved parks, Birds Hill, which, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to have in my constituency.

Local residents are very proud of Birds Hill Park as it is a space that we share with all Manitobans. Mr. Danyluk thought it was important for people to witness the maturing and renewal process of flora and fauna and Manitoba's beautiful parks were the perfect setting for this.

Today families from all over our province, Canada and even the United States visit Manitoba's provincial parks to enjoy their beauty, engage in recreational activities and spend times with their family, just as Walter would have liked.

Walter Danyluk passed away on October 15th, 2003. In his memory, Amisk Trail, a 4.2-kilometre trail through Whiteshell Provincial Park was dedicated to him.

Mr. Speaker, in a few days when we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Parks Canada, the world's first national park service, we will again be reminded of Mr. Danyluk's contribution to our parks. We owe a great deal of the recreational spaces we enjoy to him. Walter Danyluk was truly a park pioneer and a great Manitoban.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REDress Project

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, today is the first day of the REDress Project here at the Legislature addressing gendered and racialized issues that still exist.

Art is a tool that we can use to open up conversation about difficult topics; in this case, violence against Aboriginal women. The REDress Project is an installation piece by the local Métis artist, Jaime Black, which displays red dresses to mark the absence of over 600 missing and murdered Aboriginal women across Canada.

Since February, I have been working with Jaime and the ministers for Housing and Community Development and Aboriginal and Northern Affairs to bring this exhibition to the Legislature. Thank you to Jaime for the vision to create and share this project, and to the ministers for their diligence to making it a reality here at that Legislature. Together with Nahanni Fontaine, special advisor on Aboriginal women's issues, they've done extraordinary work to raise awareness around the loss felt for those missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

Fifty dresses will be displayed throughout the building from May 16th to May 20th. The empty dresses hang a few feet above the ground, slightly above eye level. Each one represents a lost daughter, sister or mother. We are all diminished when even one woman goes missing or is murdered. These dresses are meant to not only evoke a presence through the marking of absence, but to challenge the viewer to confront their own responsibility to address

the issue. This project is meant to involve the community as well as to raise awareness.

* (14:40)

The dresses displayed are donated from people or organizations across the country. The artist aims to collect a total of 600 to represent the Aboriginal women who are no longer with us. So far, over 130 dresses have been donated. Ace Art Inc. first displayed the installation and the University of Winnipeg's Institute for Women's and Gender Studies and Ka Ni Kanichihk Aboriginal Women Reclaiming Our Power program hosted the project at the university during International Women's Week in March.

Jaime Black will take this exhibition to many locations across Canada, each time educating and challenging new audiences. Despite its sensitive nature, we need to keep pressing the issue. Projects like this keep alive the memory of the 600 women lost.

Thank you to everyone who generously donated to this project and to the supporting organizations and to Jaime Black, creator and artist.

I hope that this project will be an effective step towards change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS
House Business

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

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Would you please canvass the House to see if there's agreement that the following changes to the Estimates sequence take place: Estimates for the Department of Health will be moved to room 255; following Health, consideration of the Estimates for the Legislative Assembly will take place, also in room 255; following the Legislative Assembly, consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation will take place, also in room 255.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Is there agreement that the following changes to the Estimates sequence take

place: Estimates for the Department of Health will be moved to room 255; following Health, consideration of the Estimates for the Legislative Assembly will take place, also in room 255; following the Legislative Assembly, consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation will take place, also in room 255.

Is there an agreement on this? *[Agreed]*

The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Ms. Howard: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on further House business.

First, I'd like to thank the House leader for the opposition and members of the opposition for their extraordinary flexibility and co-operation as we move through Estimates in this time of flooding.

Would you also please canvass the House to see if there's leave for one section of Supply to meet tomorrow morning from 9:30 to 11 in room 255 to continue with consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

An Honourable Member: Put that in a brochure: extraordinary flexibility.

Mr. Speaker: I'm just waiting until he's finished, because I'm trying to do House business here. It's pretty hard when people are talking back and forth, and I want to make sure everyone hears what we're agreeing to here, because we have to either agree to it or not agree to it.

Is there leave for one section of Supply to meet tomorrow morning from 9:30 to 11 in room 255 to continue with consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation?

Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Ms. Howard: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we're ready to move into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. We will now move into Committee of Supply, and in the Chamber will be Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives; room 255 will be Health; and room 254 will be Water Stewardship.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)
WATER STEWARDSHIP

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Water Stewardship.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Yes, I do.

Before I start talking about Water Stewardship's priorities and objectives for the coming year, I would really like to take a moment to thank all those folks who are working so hard on this unprecedented flood that we are experiencing in our province. There are members of the Armed Forces, there are members of the provincial government, local municipalities and volunteers whom's names we will never know who are all coming together and working so hard, not only around the experiences of the Red River earlier this season, but also through the situation that we're seeing along the Assiniboine River.

And, you know, in Manitoba, when there's a problem, we don't say, oh, that's your problem, you go and deal with it. We say, how do we help? And that doesn't happen everywhere around the world, but we have a fine example here. And in fact, I call it the Manitoba model because I've seen fellow Manitobans come together around forest fires, around previous floods, around situations that are very, very serious.

And I'd also like to give a few wishes for the folks whose homes are being flood protected in all the areas, whether it's the area of the controlled release, whether it's the area of the larger designated area that a uncontrolled breach would affect, whether it's people who have been evacuated around the emptying point of the Portage Diversion or Lake Manitoba. Certainly, we need to think about the First Nations people not only in Peguis, but also Pinaymootang and Lake St. Martin and Little Sask who are also experiencing evacuation and have been experiencing difficulties with water levels over the last number of years; the folks around Lake St. Martin and all the people in Manitoba who are affected in some way.

I also want to thank folks beyond our provincial borders who are seeing that we're experiencing a hardship and are doing whatever they can, if—even if it's just picking up the phone and calling someone you know who is in a zone that may be or is being affected and just letting them know that you're thinking about them.

There certainly will be a lot of work to do post-flood. Every year in Water Stewardship when we experience a high-water event, we fight the event as it's happening because these are real-time events. And then we look at how do we improve things for the people who are living in the areas that were affected.

So I had a tour yesterday around the area of the Portage RM. I met with the reeve, Kam Blight, who is a very good partner to be working with, and we have had very good communications with him. He really understands what's happening in his area and is working very, very hard on behalf of the folks that he's representing. So I look forward to working with him in the future.

And I also want to give a special thanks to the Hutterite population in Manitoba who, even though they may not be affected, have been coming out—entire communities—coming out for days to help. And I remember sandbagging north of Winnipeg in 2009 with members from some of the colonies who were coming out and the incredible contribution that they made and continue to make. And we know that Manitobans will pull together, that we will work through this together and that, again, this is the Manitoba model and I am extremely proud to be a Manitoban at this time.

I would like to commend all of the staff of Water Stewardship who, whether in the headlines or not, work very, very hard, day in and day out, so that this generation and generations to come will have good, clean, healthy, quality water in the province of Manitoba. They are professionals who have worked tirelessly throughout, not just this time, but throughout the year. Particularly, at this time, Steve Topping and his group are ensuring that Manitobans receive the most accurate information in the most real time possible and provide wherever and whatever specific information is needed and help to organize and co-ordinate response efforts.

I know that the Office of Drinking Water will soon be busy as the floodwaters begin to recede, as we are seeing south of Manitoba, and they will be working with people to ensure that they know what

to do to ensure that their ground drinking water source is a healthy one to have in their homes for their friends and family.

So there's a lot of work that goes on preparing, and there's a lot of work that goes on after an event like this. And there is a lot of work that goes on throughout the department that may or may not be part of these events, high-water events.

Mr. Chairperson, just to speak a little bit more of past high-water events, this provincial government significantly reduced ice-jamming problems by funding modifications and repairs to the Amphibex, owned by the North Red corporation. And I want to thank the mayors and reeves of the North Red for their partnership, for their vision and for delivering in the areas that they said they would, again and again and again.

This year, we purchased a third Amphibex icebreaker and we undertook an ice-cutting program that involved seven ice cutters. We also took on an ice-coring program, and I'm sure Manitobans will remember the high-water events that were brought on by the ice jams north of Winnipeg in 2009. This year, it was amazing to see, even though we had similar conditions, weather-wise, and the strength of the ice and the thickness of the ice, because of the unprecedented cutting and coring and ice breaking that we did, we didn't have one ice jam that would have affected folks in the way that 2009 did. We had small, sort of periodic ones that some families did experience difficulties around, but, for the most part, the ice flowed freely.

And I also want to thank the North Red corporation for their spirit of community in which they have made all of their resources available to all Manitobans. We had the Amphibex up at the mouth of the Portage Diversion this year, around the Delta Beach area, to help move the waters out. We had the Amphibex in various locations around the Icelandic River, and also, I think, we had them in around the Kelsey area. So, again, thanks to the North Red corporation for their generosity of spirit.

Mr. Chairperson, our ice-cutting and -breaking program can be credited again with mitigating damages and reducing flight-flooding-flight-fight-floodfighting costs for communities throughout Manitoba, including Selkirk, Waterhen, Ralls Island, Whitemud River, Riverton and, in fact, the city of Winnipeg itself.

I want to move a little distance in our department, now, to the area of fisheries. We've seen that our commercial fish production is mostly sold out of this country, and the \$30 million that our annual sales resulting from this freshwater fishery represents a significant contribution to Manitoba's economy. A lot of First Nations and Métis communities benefit greatly from this, so we want to keep and maintain our healthy fishery here in the province.

And we also want to continue to improve the health of Lake Winnipeg by setting stronger targets for nutrient reduction and working to restore the health of our province's large coastal marshes. And we've been working on some quite exciting initiatives; the bulrushes project in the Netley-Libau Marsh is a—is going to produce products that we can sell at the end of the day. Instead of having nutrients going into the water, the bulrushes will pull the nutrients out, and that way we'll be able to actually sell what was once a problem.

Mr. Chairperson, we're working towards further reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus loading. We will continue to establish long-term, ecologically based nutrient-reduction objectives for Lake Winnipeg and collaborate with the different levels of government. And we'll work to enshrine new water quality standards, objectives and guidelines in a regulation under The Water Protection Act.

Also, Mr. Chair, we're looking at wetland restoration knowing that wetlands are important to the ecological system, as well as being an important part of the water retention system in times of high water. We'll work with Conservation, ETT, Manitoba Water & Wastewater Association and the AMM and other interested parties, such as MCDA and local RMs, to make sure that we're providing opportunities for operators of water and waste-water facilities. And a progressive program is being developed that addresses a critical labour shortfall of certified water and waste-water facility operators. This new program will provide—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The minister's time is over. We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition—*[interjection]*

Okay. The minister's time is over, but we let her finish her comments.

Do we have a leave so the minister can finish her comments? Leave? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chairperson, this new program will provide Manitoba youth with opportunity and incentive to embark on a career that will help to insure the continued safety of drinking water supplies for all Manitobans in the future. It is anticipated that the first training course under the apprenticeship program will be offered at Red River community college in 2011-2012.

And that does complete my opening comments.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Chairperson, I have just a few as well. I appreciate the minister's opening comments and there is a great deal of information, given the seriousness of the situation around the province that I'd like to ask the minister as we move forward. But I just wanted to, as well, confirm my appreciation for the staff in Conservation—or, pardon me, I did that before—in Water Stewardship and all these initiatives.

The situation with—that we're faced with around the province right now is very severe and I know it's stressful for not only the individuals on—in the communities that are involved, but also for staff and making decisions and moving forward in these areas and in the department. And I want to give my commendation to all those involved in that process. I also want to express my thanks to all of those in—throughout the province who are working so diligently in regards to sandbagging and diking and making efforts to try to save homes and property for others.

And it's very unfortunate that there was a loss of life yesterday in the Assiniboine River here, and some others this spring, in regards to flooding conditions and accidents that have happened in Manitoba. But, as a result of the direct flows of water on these areas, it's been very concerting, I guess, to say that there hasn't been more loss in that regard than there has been in the province.

And so, the loss of property is a tremendous blow to all of those who are concerned in those areas, and who has had it happen to them personally. I remember throwing sandbags in Souris in 1976, as well, Madam Minister, and that was a very stressful time because you're working against the clock all the time and it's heavy work. It's continuous work and it's—it becomes very monotonous and—but yet work that has to be continued on and on and on, or else you don't succeed against the water. And, in most

cases in Manitoba, we've been very successful in that endeavour.

So I want to say congratulations to everyone again throughout the province and the department on regards to the work that's being done today. There are a whole group of areas, because of the severity of the situation, in regards to questions that I'd like to ask the department and the minister today. And so with that I will conclude my opening remarks and look forward to being able to proceed with the Estimate process on Water Stewardship.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 25.1.(a) contained in resolution 25.1.

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

* (15:00)

Ms. Melnick: I'd like to introduce Don Norquay, our deputy minister, and thank him very much for all of his efforts throughout this flood fight and throughout all the other issues that we deal with throughout this province on water. We are in a high-water period, and this is the third spring that we've been very active against the fight back of high waters, first on the Red in 2009, last year again on the Red, and this year unprecedented levels on the Assiniboine. So I'd like to take the opportunity to thank him for all of his efforts.

I'd like to introduce Bruce Gray, our assistant deputy minister of Corporate Services. The flood fight is a lot about front line; it's also about the finances. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) has announced we'll probably be spending with the compensation packages over \$200 million this year, and Bruce and his team have been very helpful and very accommodating in some quick decisions that had to be made as a result of the current situation. We, actually, as a government, have been preparing for this spring since November. So, thank you, Bruce, for the work that you and your team do.

Dwight Williamson is assistant deputy minister, Ecological Services Division. Dwight has worked very hard on our water quality initiatives, has worked with a lot of community members and groups to

bring forward a lot of the positive work that is being done on water quality within the province, both within Manitoba and the United States through the Red River Basin Commission. We have strong ties, also, with Israeli water quality scientists, and Dwight has been a real leader in that area in helping us establish and maintain very good relationships to see real results not only here but beyond the boundaries of Manitoba.

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

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, I would request that we proceed on a global process.

Mr. Chairperson: It's agreed? [*Agreed*]

It's agreed that questions for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and welcome, as well, to the deputy and assistant deputies here today as well. And I'd just take a quick minute, Madam Minister, if you could introduce the other staff that are here with us today as well.

Ms. Melnick: Practice is they're introduced when they come to the table. Do we want to—I'll leave it to the Clerk's office to determine what's appropriate.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, I think it's a good time to introduce the—honourable member have asked. So it's a good time to introduce all the staff members.

Ms. Melnick: Okay. We also have joining us today Kim Philip, who is director of Regulatory Services. The Office of Drinking Water falls under Kim's area of responsibility, and her group has worked very, very hard throughout, also, throughout these high-water events to make Manitobans know what they have to do when their groundwater source is an individual well, to make them aware of timing around not drinking the water in their home, having it tested when the water recedes, also going for annual well-water testing. It was largely under Kim's leadership that we developed an entire program around well water and well-water testing in use, not only during high-water periods but throughout the calendar year as well.

Joe O'Connor is the director of the Fisheries Branch here in the Department of Water Stewardship

and Joe has worked very hard to help us establish the incredible market that the freshwater resource within Lake Winnipeg and some of our other 110,000 lakes have come. They are well regarded world round—worldwide. He has an excellent relationship with the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, which, of course, we support.

A little-known fact is that I think it's 90 per cent of the gefilte fish market around the world uses the whitefish from the province of Manitoba from Lake Winnipeg. Joe has worked with fishers around Manitoba to establish these markets, to maintain these markets. He has very patiently worked with fishers to explain differences in policies and ways that we can all move forward together.

Also joining us today is Rodney Dieleman. He is the director-comptroller working with Assistant Deputy Minister Bruce Gray. And, again, I wanted to thank Rodney and his team for some of the quick actions that we've had to take around this spring's events and making sure that we're able to deliver the resources to Manitobans when they need them which, again, is a very real-time event. So, again, thank you to the others who have joined us today.

Mr. Maguire: Thanks, Madam Minister. The—do you have a list of political staff that you could provide me and maybe that you could list—just name—provide me now with some of the names, positions and full-times equivalent?

Ms. Melnick: Chris Pawley is my special assistant, and he is a full-time member of our team in Water Stewardship. And Cindy Edmunds is also full-time. She works out of the Riel constituency office.

Mr. Maguire: And so the minister just has the two positions?

Ms. Melnick: Correct.

Mr. Maguire: Could you provide me with a list of all the staff in the minister's and the deputy minister's office?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chairperson, in the minister's office I've already talked about Chris Pawley and Cindy Edmunds. We also have Karen Sabine who is appointment secretary, and that is a full-time position. And we have Anita Trudel who is the correspondence secretary. Again, that is a full-time position.

We also have during this time of high water, Kip Tyler, who is intake coordinator. He is working in the Saulteaux group—at Saulteaux with the group that

is actually working on the flood forecasting, et cetera. He generally works for the Regulatory and Operational Services division and neither he nor Karen nor Anita Trudel are political appointments. They are staff, which I think is what the member had asked for. Is that correct?

Just to clarify, did you need—require any other information?

Mr. Maguire: No, I was just looking at the list of staff the minister would have in the deputy minister's office in regards to that and she's provided me her own office before, so.

Ms. Melnick: In the deputy's offices, of course, our Deputy Don Norquay, which is a more than full-time position. Jason Senyk who is—has been seconded from Planning and Co-ordination Branch within the department is senior policy and issue management co-ordinator; Grace Wereta, administrative assistant to the deputy minister, and Huguette Lacroix is the correspondence secretary. All of those jobs are full-time.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister provide me with the number of vacancies they might have in the department, any indication whether they're concentrated in a specific branch or are they scattered throughout the department?

* (15:10)

Ms. Melnick: The total vacancies as of the end of March 2011 are 24.

Mr. Maguire: Are they scattered around or are they concentrated in one sector of the department?

Ms. Melnick: We have them located in different areas of the department. There's one in Admin, a couple in—about seven in Regulatory and Operation Services, and we also have in Ecological Services—in various areas of Ecological Services. So, again, that's a total of 24.

Mr. Maguire: Is there a program and the minister's intention in filling these positions, or is there a plan in place for that?

Ms. Melnick: Four have actually been filled; we're just waiting for the individuals to actually begin. Others are in various stages of being rated by the civil service to make sure that they're properly classified, and then they'll go to—some are already being posted, some are setting up interviews. So they're all in various stages of being filled.

Mr. Maguire: I just had a question in regards to travel within the minister's department, and I wondered whether there's been any travel by the Premier (Mr. Selinger) in regards to her department, or a delegation led by the Premier that her department may have paid for.

Ms. Melnick: Just a question: Am I able to read from a source from a BlackBerry in Estimates?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister can do from the BlackBerry as well.

Ms. Melnick: Water Stewardship paid the hotel accommodation for Premier Selinger and Paul Vogt, the Clerk of the House, in Washington, DC. This occurred November 21st to 22nd, 2010, and the issues that we dealt with during those meetings were focused on Devils Lake.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I don't know what the protocol is for accepting BlackBerry emails here, but we can check with that later. In regards to it, I appreciate the minister for her answer, and that, I assume, was the only case of expense to her department by the Premier or a delegation led by him?

Ms. Melnick: Just to clarify, I did consult with the Clerk's office, and they did confirm it's all right to read from BlackBerry records for Estimates. And I believe that is the only one, yes.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, can the minister outline any trips that she took in regards to her department during this past year, as well?

Ms. Melnick: I accompanied the Premier (Mr. Selinger) on the Devils Lake's discussions to Washington, DC, November 21st-22nd, 2010.

Mr. Maguire: And so, since the April 1st of 2010, that would be the only trip of any nature that the minister may have gone—I was asking more—not necessarily with the Premier, but on her own in her own department's role.

Ms. Melnick: I also attended the International Legislators Forum. That was the 10th annual general meeting. That occurred June 21st to the 23rd, 2010, in Moorhead, Minnesota, and I think the member might have been there as well. And I also accompanied the Premier on the mission to Israel, 2010. That occurred October 9th to the 21st, 2010, and those are the two other trips that I took this year.

Mr. Maguire: Just for the record, I was with the—at the meeting that the minister's at in Moorhead.

And just for clarification, as well, then, her travel costs to Israel were paid out of her department, or was that on a—on the Premier's office paying—Executive Council paying for that?

Ms. Melnick: The travel expenses for myself were paid out of Water Stewardship.

Mr. Maguire: I have a number of questions or a few questions, I should say, around some of the staffing in the annual report. The Regulatory and Operational Services sector, and I wonder if the minister can indicate to me how many positions are in the Flood Forecasting and Flood Response Co-ordination branch and the Hydrologic Forecast Centre within it. If she could just provide me with that.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chair, I believe the member is asking about the Flood Forecasting and Flood Response Co-ordination area of the department, and the answer to that is nine FTEs.

Mr. Maguire: Are there any part-time in that area?

*(15:20)

Ms. Melnick: We also have one FTE which is on loan from the Water Control Systems Management, so that would make a total of 10.

And I think there was a question: Are there any part-time positions? No, there are not.

Mr. Maguire: I just wonder if the minister can clarify: How many of those 10 positions, then, are in the Hydrologic Forecast Centre within that Co-ordination Branch?

Ms. Melnick: Seven.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks, Madam Minister. I just wondered if there's any of these positions that are currently vacant.

Ms. Melnick: All seven are currently filled.

Mr. Maguire: This has been a pretty trying spring in regards to forecasting and that sort of thing, and I just wondered if the minister can provide me with an indication of how many staff are involved in the development of this year's flood outlooks vis-à-vis the daily report—flood reports and the forecasts for the both full-time and part-time, if I could get a—just an update on that.

Ms. Melnick: I think the member will appreciate that Steve Topping has not joined us today. He is extremely involved in the direct flood fight. So I may be taking a number of questions under advisement,

and I'm sure that the member will understand that at this point in time there's a need to do that.

Mr. Maguire: I guess I was just simply asking how many staff people are working on this in regards to the forecasting and flooding. I think—don't think it's too difficult a question, and I just wondered if the minister can take a minute or two and just find out what kind of numbers of staff she may have in that area.

Ms. Melnick: As for the direct development of the flood forecasting, we certainly have the seven that I have mentioned. I know Steve Topping is very involved in it as well.

But I'm going to take the majority of the question under advisement, Mr. Chair, because there are individuals from different sections of the department that may be playing a role. So rather than misspeak and provide information that is not absolutely accurate, I'd like to take that question under advisement.

Mr. Maguire: I guess I'm a little bit under consternation by that, and I mean, I guess if it was—

Can the minister give me some magnitude of the number of people that are working there without an exact number today then—yes, just a—some magnitude of the number of people that are working in this area. I'd certainly appreciate it. I believe my BlackBerry just buzzed with another flood update right now, and I appreciate the work that goes into that on a daily and hourly basis during a crisis like this. And I just felt that the minister might be able to provide me with at least a ballpark figure on the numbers there and provide me with more of an accurate number tomorrow or later in the day in regards to the number of personnel that are making up these reports.

Ms. Melnick: I'll provide the information as soon as I can.

I'm not sure—the member, I hope, does understand the reason for Steve Topping not to be joining us today. It's simply a matter of being on the front lines of the flood fight. He just received a buzz that gave him today's update with the flood sheets attached. I'm sure he would recognize, having been part of high-water events, flood events in the past dating back to 1976, that there is an awful lot of work to be done. And in events like this which are real time, it's important that we have the staff who are most focused on those events focusing on those.

That having been said, I have taken this under advisement and I will be providing the information as soon as is reasonable and accessible.

Mr. Maguire: I thank the minister.

One more question in that area. As the minister indicated in her opening remarks, this has certainly been a long-expected crisis, dating back to last fall with all the wet weather and everything we had and saturated lands throughout Manitoba and our neighbours south and north—or south and west as well. And so I know that there's been a lot of preparation, or I assume that there's been a lot of preparation. And I've been at public meetings where Mr. Topping has been there and provided valuable information to rural municipalities. I've spoken with many of those rural municipalities myself in regards to preparation for this spring's flood, particularly in regards to operations on the Assiniboine and, of course, the Red and the Souris, which seem to be the three major areas right now of those from a tributary point of view, and, of course, Shoal lakes, Lake Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg's operation as well, but particularly Lake Manitoba in that regard.

And so I—knowing that we've been dealing with this all winter, can the minister indicate to me how many people they've had—she's had working on outlooks, on flood outlooks and these reports throughout the winter?

Ms. Melnick: Again, I'll take that under advisement.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairperson, I just want to move on, then. In time, I'll come back to that later and maybe the minister can provide me with that information by tomorrow. Would that be possible?

Ms. Melnick: I'll provide it as soon as I can.

Mr. Maguire: The—there's been some changes in regards to forecasting and the staffing and that sort of thing over the past year, and I know there was a primary change in regards to the top position in this area and—with Mr. Warkentin retiring last year. I believe I've met him once or twice, but I believe that there's, you know, he did retire after a long time with the government in this particular area.

And so I just wondered what the process was used to search for a replacement. Was it a direct competition or was the replacement sought by a headhunting firm, I guess, for want of a better terminology, by the department?

* (15:30)

Ms. Melnick: I'm going to take this under advisement. We don't have the full facts here again. That would be part of the process that was followed in the department, and I think we need to make sure that we have the facts before I would put anything on record. So, I know the member, again, would recognize the need to get information on the record as soon as possible, but also make sure it's correct information. So I'll ask for the member's patience in getting this information.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Chairperson, this is a—I'm just asking about process. I know that the—I understand that Mr. Warkentin at least had been there for many decades, as I said earlier, and that there hasn't been a lot of turnover in regards to that area over time, but can the minister not tell me what process that was used for the replacement?

Ms. Melnick: Well, if sort of a broad description would be acceptable, it was a openly, nationally advertised competition. Anything more specific about the process—I'm not sure if the member has any more questions than that, but it was advertised on a national basis. It was an open competition. I'm not sure if the member is requiring any more information.

Mr. Maguire: I thank the minister. Can she just provide me then with a—maybe a copy of the advertised qualifications for the position?

Ms. Melnick: That I definitely don't have with me. So, again, I'll have to take that under advisement.

Mr. Maguire: So she will be able to provide me with a copy of the advertised qualifications for that position?

Ms. Melnick: When I have it, yes.

Mr. Maguire: Would the minister be able to do that tomorrow?

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, as soon as we can get it.

Mr. Maguire: Okay. But I guess if it was an advertised, nationally open process, there'd have to be an ad, so it shouldn't be too hard to pull it up off of the website, that sort of thing, if the minister has it, that sort of thing. I just—I'm not asking for it today but I'm assuming that there'd be an opportunity to provide that to me before we finish the Estimates process.

Ms. Melnick: I said that I will provide it as soon as I have it. Hopefully, it will be by tomorrow.

Mr. Maguire: Thank you, Madam Minister. Can she just outline for me how many people were interviewed for the position?

Ms. Melnick: I can't.

Mr. Maguire: Is there a reason for that?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chair, I don't have the numbers in front of me. I can, again, take that question under advisement.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister tell me, then, whether there was more than one or whether there was an interview process?

Ms. Melnick: I can confirm there was an interview process and there was more than one.

Mr. Maguire: Was the successful candidate's prior experience with flood forecasting on the Canadian prairies—I guess the question is: What was the successful candidate's experience prior to the, you know, in the area of flood forecasting?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chair, with the nationally advertised advertisement, there was specific criteria, and throughout the process. So being the successful candidate, it's clear that he did meet that criteria.

Mr. Maguire: And from my dealings with the department and that sort of thing, can the minister indicate to me if it was Mr. Mutulu that was the successful candidate in this regard?

Ms. Melnick: He was hired as a well-qualified person who, in fact, met the criteria. And if I could just add, it's actually the appropriate way to address Phillip is Dr. Mutulu. He has a Ph.D., so just to make sure we're addressing him appropriately.

Mr. Maguire: I certainly have no problem with that as well, Madam Minister, in regards to Dr. Mutulu's experience, and so I just wondered if the minister can indicate to me what kind of transition period or overlap there was between, you know, the leaving of Mr. Warkentin and Dr. Mutulu's assumption of the full responsibility for his role.

Ms. Melnick: Again, I'm going to take that question under advisement. We don't have exact dates here so, again, in the interest of putting accurate information on the public record, I'll take that under advisement.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I just think it's a bit important. I—it's not overly onerous on the minister on this one, but it's just, you know, just to share institutional knowledge when you've been in a position as long as Mr. Warkentin was and maybe to flag some of the

potential that might have been there this spring when we were looking at a situation that we may be faced with because it did start to rain on May the 5th last year and never quit, and the Shellmouth indications that the Assiniboine were going to be high because it's been running over the spillway virtually from then until into December, or certainly in late November last year, in that area, and there was much water let out of the conduit all winter long at the Shellmouth. And so I just wondered if the minister could provide me with the date that the actual change occurred as well.

Ms. Melnick: Again, I've already answered that question, but what I would like to say is there has been a lot of very good work done by the department. In looking as far back as last year, there was a lot of focus put on the saturation of the earth, the water levels. A lot of focus was put on the precipitation that fell, whether it was rain, whether it was snow. The Shellmouth Dam was drawn down to historic low levels. We did make sure that we were clearing up any space that could have been used this spring and, in fact, has been used this spring in the Shellmouth Dam.

* (15:40)

We negotiated an unprecedented agreement on Fishing Lake and releases of Fishing Lake with the government of Saskatchewan, largely through the Saskatchewan Water Authority. I had the privilege to meet the minister, my counterpart, in Saskatchewan during the second co-Cabinet meeting with the government of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and we talked about high water levels, not only in Manitoba but also in Saskatchewan. And I think it was through a very generous spirit, indeed, that the government negotiated this precedent-setting agreement with fishing—about Fishing Lake with the government of Manitoba, which does include not releasing waters from Fishing Lake during times when Manitoba's experiencing high-water events. So, again, I'd like to put on the record that we have a very good working relationship with the government of Saskatchewan and thank them very much for their understanding and action.

We also have J. Doering, who is, I believe, the head of Civil Engineering at University of Manitoba, who has also been following this story and has said that no one could've predicted what we're experiencing this spring, based on information through the winter. No one could have predicted—you know, we were looking at the flood of '76 which, I

think, was the one that you did sandbagging on, and we were looking at high-water levels then. We have 50 per cent more water in the Assiniboine Basin now than we had on the flood of record of 1976.

So, based on the information that we had, predictions were made. We did things like building the dikes along the Assiniboine River, now referred to as the Assiniboine dikes. We had done a lot of prep work around the Portage Diversion, making sure that it was in very good running and working condition around the gates of the Portage Diversion. We've done a lot of preparatory work in terms of, with my colleague the Minister of MIT around buying flood tubes, around the sandbagging machines, around the Amphibex machines, around the various ways of holding back water, the Aqua Dams, flood tubes, et cetera.

So there has been a tremendous challenge placed in front of Manitobans this spring. We are rising to that challenge. We're all working very hard on that, and so there was a lot of work done to prepare for this, but to be receiving a snowstorm, I think it was, oh, was it four weeks ago now, followed two weeks later by a almost precedent-setting rainstorm where in parts of Saskatchewan communities were receiving 50 millimetres of rain in a very short time. Certainly, on the Manitoba side, it was not unusual to receive 25 to 30 millimetres, and then we had the flow coming from Saskatchewan.

So, all of this water buildup, the soil moisture content, in the moisture, the water buildup from last fall, the rain and the snow that has fallen, this has become a natural phenomenon, if you will, and we are working very hard to keep Manitobans informed and to work. We've brought in the military to work with Manitobans to deal with the current situation, and I think it's also important to note that we will not be stopping until we're assured that the high waters have moved on, the unprecedented step of the controlled release. We are protecting every home. It's my understanding that there are three homes that have water buildup around them now and that the flood tubes and the other flood mitigation works are, in fact, protecting those homes.

We don't want one house to go down. We don't want one family to be left without the housing that they evacuated from, and we'll continue to work in this way.

Mr. Maguire: I think most of that was included in the minister's opening comments and so I don't know what it has to do with the question I asked, which

was the date that Mr. Warkentin retired—a simple question. So, I just go on and ask whether Mr. Warkentin was consulted informally or formally after his retirement day?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Warkentin did have a contract. He was working on the projections up to the start of this spring's events. He is currently working on the inflows into the Portage Diversion—pardon me, inflows into the Portage Reservoir.

Mr. Maguire: Thanks, Madam Minister, as there is quite a difference, the diversion and the reservoir, and I appreciate that correction.

And I guess I just wondered what were the events that led to Mr. Warkentin being brought back on contract, and she's outlined some of the role that he's playing at this stage of the flood forecasting challenges.

* (15:50)

Ms. Melnick: Again, Alf Warkentin was—he started his own company when he retired, and we had asked him to come in earlier in the season to work on some high-level forecasting, and today he is being retained again for the Portage Reservoir.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I guess, you know, from what I've read, Mr. Warkentin seems happy to be back and doing some contract work with the department, and the minister's indicated that he is. I guess I—my question's going to be, could he have been hired earlier or how early was he contracted?

He stated in *The Globe and Mail*, and I quote: It should have come a lot earlier. I thought it should have come a month ago, but I guess things got a little bit—got a bit, pardon me, hot lately. There's problems—there's serious problems. End quote.

Can the minister just advise me as to what that might be in reference to?

Ms. Melnick: I think Mr. Warkentin clarified those comments himself in the *Winnipeg Free Press* article where he said the conditions were serious. That, I think, was—appeared maybe two or three days after *The Globe and Mail* article that you were referring to previously.

I'd like to, at this time, actually welcome Steve Topping to the table. I wasn't expecting you this afternoon, so thank you very much. He's the executive director of the flood mitigation program and has been working tirelessly for not only the duration of this event but the many months that

preceded it. And, again, I want to thank you and your entire team for the incredible work on behalf of all Manitobans and for the response to conditions that simply could not have been predicted, and that you know that everyone is very appreciative of everything that you and your team are doing. So thank you.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I'd like to welcome Mr. Topping as well. When you say tirelessly, I hope he did actually get away for his event, but I'm not sure—in Saskatoon there that he was talking to me about—but I'm not sure he did—in coaching.

But anyway, I appreciate the work that he's done throughout the province. I just want to finish this up, and then the minister may have clarified it, but that same *Globe and Mail* article also quoted Mr. Warkentin as saying, you've got a big flood potential across all of Manitoba. You'd think that a relatively new staff could use some help, but, you know, that wasn't my decision.

So, in light of these serious situations that have unfolded with the flooding this year, particularly, you know, around the levels on the Assiniboine River, does the minister believe that she could have contacted individuals like Mr. Warkentin sooner so they could have offered additional insight and expertise?

I guess my comment is you can just never have enough support in a time like this. And the minister did indicate that she'd hired him earlier and so that relates to the date that maybe he was retired last year, the date of change there with Dr. Mutulu. And so I just wondered if she can provide me with an update in regards to those comments and the hiring now and what contract Mr. Warkentin might have had earlier.

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, I think Mr. Warkentin spoke for himself in the *Winnipeg Free Press* article where he said he was referring to the high conditions. Again we have Jay Doering telling us that this simply could not—as the way this spring has unfolded, this simply could not have been predicted. And he has, in fact, said that the provincial government has made a lot of right decisions under these very trying circumstances.

Again, Mr. Warkentin had been brought in previous to the flood—previous to the thaw. He currently is working on inflows into the Portage Reservoir. I'll let Mr. Warkentin's own words speak for himself to determine what it was he meant, and I think he clarified that quite well.

Mr. Maguire: Is there other—are there other retired members of the department that the minister's department—the minister and the department have rehired for the situation that we're faced with today, and if so, how many?

Ms. Melnick: Twelve individuals who had been retired were, in fact, brought in to deal with the spring events.

Mr. Maguire: Without naming them all, can the minister just supply me with a list of those at some point?

Ms. Melnick: You mean the list of positions?

Mr. Maguire: A list of the positions and the names of the retired people that have been brought back on contract.

Ms. Melnick: We'll have to check that out. If they've come back as independent contractors, there may be proprietary concerns around that, so we'll have to have a look at what the member's requested.

Mr. Maguire: Thanks, Madam Minister. If you could look into that for me, that'd be appreciated.

I know the area of broadcasting and talking about the flood situation has been very well done by the individual responsible for that this year, who has just joined us. And I just wondered, though—in previous floods, the flood forecaster of name has been the lead person in the public in regards to media events and that sort of thing. And I just wondered if there's been a—you know, there has seemed to be a change from that level to the executive director of infrastructure in handling the issues publicly for Water Stewardship, and just wondered if there was a reason that the minister could give me for that shift.

* (16:00)

Ms. Melnick: Well, if the member recalls, Dr. Mutulu was, in fact, involved in many of the media briefings at—earlier this spring.

We recognized that we were going to have unprecedented flooding throughout the province of Manitoba that would extend from the 49th parallel all the way up to including and north of the Dauphin area, and we wanted to make sure that we were most effectively using all of the person power. So there was a decision to make sure that Dr. Mutulu would be focusing on his team, would be focusing on the flood forecasting duties due to the depth and breadth of experience of Steve Topping. There was a discussion with Steve to see if he felt that he could

handle the daily briefings in all of those areas. He felt that he could and, in fact, has done a tremendous job in that. So we looked at what we were dealing with. We wanted to make sure that we were best using all the personnel that we had, Dr. Mutulu included, and this is the decision that was come up with.

Mr. Maguire: And I want to add, as well, that I've appreciated the minister's counterpart, the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Ashton), for providing briefings for myself and others in our caucus at different times. And I know Mr. Topping has been at some of those and provided us with information and—as well as others—and it's certainly beneficial. So I thank him and yourself for that.

I just wanted to move on to some of the flow measurement issues, Madam Minister, and I wondered if the minister could provide an overview of the province hydrometric—hydrometric, rather—network and how it works in regards to the metering across the province.

Ms. Melnick: Well, we have, throughout the province of Manitoba, in all the major rivers and many, many of the tributaries, approximately 300 gauges, and these gauges are controlled by the Department of Water Stewardship, by the Water Survey of Canada as well as Manitoba Hydro. And they record water levels and flows in real time. They're providing real-time information, so it's not what happened at 6 p.m. last night or even what happened at 9 a.m. this morning; it's real-time information.

In fact, Manitoba Hydro is providing the water metering at the controlled release, and they are specific to 400 cfs, 395 cfs, et cetera. When I was touring the area yesterday, I actually witnessed a metering process from Hydro where they slide the meter across the controlled release opening four times, and then they take the average reading, which is how they determine that, and they do that, I believe, it's once every two hours.

Now, generally, we have three water-metering teams. Teams are generally two employees of Water Stewardship at a time, so normally we would have three of these teams out there checking the gauges. For the last couple of months, we've had 13 water-metering teams, and they are providing information on a daily basis through the acoustic Doppler metering system. And we have—working on these teams, we have Hydro employees; KGS employees; members of the MIT component; Water

Stewardship; and, of course, the Water Survey of Canada, and I believe that's through Environment Canada.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks, Madam Minister.

How many of these real-time hydrometric stations does the—I think is that she's indicated that she owns 300, or is that shared with the federal people in regards to that, and she's indicated how often they're checked, but I just wondered if she could outline for me how many does the Province actually own and maintain?

Ms. Melnick: We don't have those breakdowns with us.

One of the things that I wanted to talk about is the Prairie Provinces Water Board, which, of course, has been a long-standing agreement between Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have gauges on trans-boundary waterways, so where there's the boundaries between provincial jurisdiction, those would largely be Prairie Provinces Water Board, which would also be shared with Canada.

*(16:10)

The Province of Manitoba and Hydro also work very closely together, as, again, I mentioned the water metering at the controlled release is actually being done by Hydro, so I don't have exact numbers as to which are Prairie Provinces Water Board, which are provincial and which are Hydro.

But—sorry, to just continue my remarks—but all of the information, regardless of who is actually carrying out the monitoring at the gauges, is all reported in to the Department of Water Stewardship.

Mr. Maguire: Thank you, Madam Minister, for the clarification of who they're reported to. I assumed that they come in to Water Stewardship and appreciate that.

She indicated that there were 300 such stations or gauges, I guess, in her earlier comments, though. And I just wondered if she knows how many the Province owns and maintains, and maybe to narrow it down even more, how many are situated on the Assiniboine River and where are they.

Ms. Melnick: Again, there are gauges that are owned by Manitoba, gauges that are owned jointly by Canada and Manitoba, and then Hydro. So, we have nearly 150 water level recording stations that are operated by Manitoba and approximately 205 stream flow and water level recording stations which

are cost-shared with Environment Canada under the Canada-Manitoba agreement for the water quantity surveys.

I think that the member asked where these gauges are placed on the Assiniboine. We can't give you specific information for gauges in Saskatchewan, but we do get readings from various—well, all the gauges in Saskatchewan; I just don't have them listed in front of me right now. For the Manitoba side, there are gauges at Shellmouth, Miniota, Virden, Brandon, Griswold, Grand Valley, Holland, Portage Diversion, Baie St. Paul and Headingley. We may have missed a few here and there, but, generally, that's the location of the gauges on the Assiniboine.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I just wondered: How often are those gauges then checked to ensure that they're providing accurate readings?

Ms. Melnick: The gauges on the Assiniboine, the ones that I just mentioned, the Shellmouth to Headingley, are checked on a daily basis pretty much down the line. In areas where water flows may not be of such activity, if I could say that, they might be checked every second day, every third day. So in areas where there are high-water events, certainly, the focus on checking the gauges on a very regular schedule would be implemented. Again, I mentioned we normally have three crews who do the water checking; we now have 13.

Mr. Maguire: The minister indicated that Hydro has a number of these hydromatic stations supplying data to them as well. And can she provide information to me as to whether that's used for the spring flood outlooks, bulletins and that sort of thing as well, and where Hydro's station is located?

Ms. Melnick: Well, Hydro plays a couple of different roles in the gauges. They contribute to the cost of running the gauges. The gauges, when they're checked, have to be read, recalibrated, make sure they're placed in the appropriate location, et cetera. So they help with the cost of running them. Most of the Hydro-owned-and-operated gauges are around areas where there's hydro activity; for example, in the city of Selkirk, all around Lake Winnipeg, in fact, along the Nelson River and along the Churchill River. Those areas have not been part of the recent high-water events, but when we need to make sure that we get readings that are, you know, on a real-time basis every day, Hydro would step up to help with that. Again, gauges can be checked every second or third day when there's not the sort of

high-water events that we're experiencing along the Assiniboine now.

Mr. Maguire: Thanks. Just to go back to my previous question, I know that the minister indicated that they're checked, the levels are checked in the gauges every couple of hours, that sort of thing. But I was more concerned about how often they're checked for—to ensure that they're providing accurate readings. Can she—is that done every couple of hours, as well, or can she enlighten me as to how often they are checked for accuracy?

* (16:20)

Ms. Melnick: Well, every time a gauge is checked, it's recalibrated and it's made sure that it's working to do the recordings that are necessary.

Mr. Maguire: Pardon me, Madam Minister, the—just to go back to your answer earlier, and I appreciate the fact that you named a number of the positions and—of these gauges on the Assiniboine but you also indicated to me that we may have missed a few. I don't think that provides a lot of solace to the Manitobans that are looking at the—with concern in regards to the flow on the Assiniboine River right now. And so is the minister just saying that because they're—she's not aware of them all or are there, in fact, others than the ones she just named?

Ms. Melnick: Just to be clear, I was talking about the list I was giving, not gauges that are checked. If the member was confused about my response earlier, I can go through a full list: now, we have Kamsack, which is actually in Saskatchewan; Shellmouth—pardon me, the Shell northern river around Inglis—[interjection]—Shell River—sorry—the Shell River in the—around Inglis; Shellmouth Reservoir, the inflow—checks the inflow, the level in the Shellmouth Dam, the conduit flow and the spillway flow and then it gives the total outflow.

The Shellmouth Bridge, Russell, old highway No. 4, Millwood, PR 579, Qu'Appelle at Welby, St-Lazare, Miniota, Virden, Griswold, Brandon, Grand Valley, Brandon 1st Street, Holland, Portage—upstream of the Portage Diversion—pardon me, Portage upstream of the Portage Diversion, the Portage Diversion, Portage Southport, Baie St. Paul, PTH 1 east—sometimes referred to as Lido Plage—and Headingley.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thank you for that more informative answer, Madam Minister. That certainly is a number of other spots on the river—on the Assiniboine, that I was certainly indicated—or

thought myself that there was more positions than that and I appreciate your getting back to me with more of the—answering my second question here.

I guess the one concern that I have in regards to this is that there were a few of these that weren't reported until a couple of weeks ago in regards to flows through the whole April period and particularly the one at St-Lazare, and I'm kind of taken aback that there wasn't meter readings posted on the website up until late April in regards to that one.

Can the minister provide me with information as to whether there are other third parties and other people that they hire to read some of these gauges along the river and, in fact, if that was just an oversight or if it was something that wasn't done this year and, in fact, whether it's even part of their program?

Ms. Melnick: I'm a little confused by the member's question. Could you explain further what you're asking?

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I guess I'm just asking if the minister has any third parties that read some of these gauges for her along the—we'll use the Assiniboine because it's, of course, the tributary that's the greatest concern right now in the province. I'm sure that there are others on the Red, and that sort of thing as well, but just in—are there others that they rely on for third parties that read the provincial gauges or privately held gauges in order to provide information for the development of the flood reports?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, we do have some gauges that landowners, upon whose area gauges can be placed, do, in fact, do some reading for us.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I guess I just wanted to ask the minister in regards—I know that she's indicated that this has been a dire situation, but can the minister provide an explanation for why her government appeared to be caught by surprise with regard to the levels on the Assiniboine and as a result, wasn't able to anticipate the problems that subsequently arose east of Portage la Prairie?

Ms. Melnick: I never indicated this was a dire situation. I said this was an unprecedented time. In the water flow along the Assiniboine, this is the 1976 level plus 50 per cent in the watershed. What I said was no one could have predicted, when we were doing the forecasting earlier on, how this season would have turned out. We had a very heavy snowstorm; I think it was about four weekends ago.

We had very heavy rainstorms. There was—this is a real-time event. When we need to, we are adjusting the forecasting with the information that we have. We had the snowstorm and then a very quick melt of that snowstorm, and that snowstorm affected not only Manitoba but Saskatchewan, and then we had a near-unprecedented rainstorm of some 50 millimetres in many areas in Saskatchewan that made its way into Manitoba. We had, up in the Dauphin area, an unprecedented spring rainstorm, I believe, of 40 millimetres to 45, if I remember correctly. And then throughout the basin, there was at least an average of 20 to 25 millimetres, so it's a real-time response to real-time events.

Again, I want to thank Manitobans, thank the military for working on the Assiniboine dikes, for working in their communities, for helping their neighbours out in any way that they can. So, again, it's not a dire situation. It's very challenging. A lot of work has been done on the Assiniboine dikes over the last seven or eight days, largely by the military who are getting into areas that are, up until yesterday and today, even better, rain soaked, water soaked, working in difficult situations.

I was out there yesterday, and the helicopters were taking load after load to the real inland sites along the river that one couldn't drive to, could be difficult to even walk around in those areas. So there is a challenging situation that is facing Manitoba, and we are working very hard—not only is the provincial government but the local rural municipalities, the military, and individuals who are protecting their homes as well as the homes of folks whose names they will never know.

Mr. Maguire: Well, I know that it may seem like four weeks ago, but the snow was just 16 days ago, and I guess I just wondered, you know, the minister seemed to be caught off guard in regards to the situation that could have arisen. There was some concerns expressed that the snow wasn't going to impact the flood situation, and I guess I'm concerned when I hear that sort of thing because, having lived in rural Manitoba all of my life, and I don't think it matters where you live, when you get a foot of snow on the first of May, or two feet as we did from the Russell-Roblin-Kamsack area, you know it's going to impact when the tributary of the Assiniboine River itself and its tributaries are overflowing at that particular time.

The Shellmouth Dam had been lowered. It had been lowered to 1,384, which is not an historical low

but it's as low as the department will take that position in regards to, I guess, fish life and other natural fish stocks in that particular river, and I commend them for that. I know how hard they worked all winter to get that down to 1,384. It wasn't an easy task, and with the flows coming in under the—throughout the winter in regards to underground flows, and streams and springs.

* (16:30)

But I guess the—some of those comments were disconcerting, I said. I was told by many people that heard it that they were very upset with that kind of an analogy, and sometimes these things just happen on the spur of an interview or a moment.

But I guess I'm wondering why the—you know, then we got wind of, while we're trying to figure out what was going on, that there was a faulty gauge in Saskatchewan for the minister's—Water Stewardship tried to look at blaming that gauge, then, for the flow rates on the Assiniboine River. And I know in question period—or not in question period, but in regards to—well, it was question period, I guess, when I asked the question. The minister of EMO answered for the minister in regards to that particular situation, and I wonder if she can just clarify why that gauge was used as a kind of a little bit of a scapegoat, I guess, for a while.

Ms. Melnick: Well, this is not a blame game. This is not a finger-pointing exercise. We're dealing with historical highs.

The member partially answered his own question when he talked about the efforts that were made in advance of this spring. He talked about the Shellmouth Dam being drawn down to historic lows.

We also did a lot of work around Brandon diking, and there were some concerns that we had over prepared. I can take that criticism any day. I can't take that we had an opportunity to dike the way that we did in Brandon and wouldn't have taken it, because, of course, with the sort of forecasting that we had in our hands at the time, it's proven that those were the right moves that were made by the department, by MIT, and the people of Brandon are resting much more comfortably today than if we hadn't taken those. In fact, we have been increasing diking around the area because of recent events.

The member points out the rain was not—or the snow was not as long ago as I thought. I think we're on about day 45 of the flood fight here in Manitoba. And we've had people who have been working long

before that time, for example, in raising the Assiniboine dikes under winter conditions, which we all recognize are not the best conditions, but they were the conditions we had to work with. I believe it's some 70 kilometres along a very winding stretch. I know I was on my tour yesterday. It's a perched river, so I was actually at a point in the river where even sitting in a large vehicle I was actually sitting below the level of the water by about two feet, and on top of that dike I could see the reinforcements that were placed by the military. We did raise the dikes at St-Lazare to, again, avoid a serious situation within that community.

The Portage Diversion, for the last 18 months we've been taking a lot of action there to make sure that—we ran the Portage Diversion at 25 cfs for—I believe it was over 30 days during the spring of 2009. At that time, it was an unprecedented run of the diversion, and the diversion did sustain some wear and tear—pardon me, we made sure that we went in and replaced any of the damages done there. We did some cleaning out of the diversion, removing vegetation, removing rocks right at the outlet. There was a lot of debris that was left over from the run. We made sure that it was in good working condition. We made sure that the Portage Reservoir was in good working condition.

So we were preparing for a major event. We did not know and no one knew at the time that we would be preparing for the flood of 2011 which, again, had 50 per cent more water in the Assiniboine basin.

So, again, this is a real-time situation. We are getting information, interpreting that and sharing it with Manitobans on a daily basis. There are briefings that are offered to the press and to the folks of Manitoba on a daily basis. There are flood sheets that are prepared on a daily basis.

Our aim is to have taken the best efforts that we felt we needed to take, and we did that, and now our effort is to keep Manitobans informed and to work with them shoulder to shoulder during this time. We know that there was a crest in—Brandon crested yesterday; I just wanted to confirm with the more recent information in this morning's briefing. So we know that it's not over yet, but there has been a crest in Brandon, and unless there's another very serious precipitous event, we may see levels slowly going down, but I want to emphasize slowly. This will be several months that we're dealing with high waters in Manitoba, and we'll keep working with Manitobans to protect their community, protect individual homes.

We really don't want to see any homes going down; we want to be there to do any preventative work that we can. We've already talked about DFA. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) has spoken with the Prime Minister. The Premier has announced that there will be special compensation package developed for folks who are in the controlled release area. There was every precaution taken in a very short time frame, a lot of effort by a lot of people to protect the homes that may experience water during the controlled release time, and we'll keep working in this way for Manitobans. We know there are people around Lake Manitoba who are experiencing high-water levels. We have asked for military to be deployed there. We understand military will be deployed there. We've been working—again, an unprecedented agreement was struck with the Lake St. Martin and Little Sask First Nations, largely due to the hard work of Deputy Minister Norquay, working with the First Nations communities. We're also looking at what the effects will be of the high waters in Lake St. Martin.

So, to say that, or to 'intinate' that, perhaps there wasn't the proper preparation work done, I think, is not true and is highly unfair to the folks who have worked very, very hard for this event and continue to work hard for it. Are there lessons to be learned? Absolutely. After every high-water event, we look at what worked well, where we need to improve, and then we work very hard to make those improvements.

So, again, I want to commend staff, military, volunteers, homeowners, rural municipality leaders for all the work that we're doing together for each other.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Chairman, I just want to ask the minister again, and it may have been in the confusion of the snowfall coming as quickly as it did on top of a couple of inches of rain in much of western Manitoba, particularly, but I just wondered why the Minister of Water Stewardship tried to blame a faulty gauge in Saskatchewan for the miscalculations of the flow levels on the Assiniboine River. And it may have been just simply that they were overwhelmed by the—or she was overwhelmed by the amount of moisture that was fallen and hadn't had a chance to calculate it yet. But it was only that gauge; it wasn't in Manitoba and all of the other ones seem to have been reported well, and I just wondered if she can provide me with an explanation on that.

Ms. Melnick: This isn't a blame game. We're not blaming. We're looking at the situation. We're informing Manitobans as to what they can expect in real time as quickly as we can. We're not pointing fingers; we're not looking for negativity to be created here. We're looking to move forward. We're looking to fight this flood, and we're looking to be successful in every way that we can and every home that we can in Manitoba.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chairman, and I know we have to fight the flood; we have to move forward. And I appreciate the fact that the minister's now aware that the gauge didn't have anything to do with it in regards to the accuracy of the flood levels and the increased flows. It's been concerned—it's been raised to me, a matter of concern, that, you know, over a four-day period in early May here, that the flow levels had indicated from 26,000 to 39,000 in about a four-day period in Brandon, some 58 per cent increase in flow levels. And that there is a great deal of concern by many involved on the ground trying to fight these things that there was a, you know—how do you fight it when there isn't the forecast that that kind of flow level would increase that quickly?

* (16:40)

And so I guess that's a—that was a concern. And so, knowing full well that we have to move forward and that there is response in Manitoba in the floodway situations—and it's not just the floodway, of course, the, I guess, foresight of having to—having the Portage Diversion and the Shellmouth Dam are, without question, part and parcel of why we're not flooded in downtown Winnipeg here today and why we've been able to save Brandon and Portage la Prairie area from as much damage as has taken place. But can the minister provide me with just a quick answer as to whether she thinks, in her opinion, there are other gauges in Manitoba that haven't performed adequately?

Ms. Melnick: Well, in fact, we were able to make forecasts in time for flood protection to happen around communities such as Brandon. We've worked very closely with Brandon EMO. We were able to bring in, I believe, it was another level of super sandbags with the sandbags behind supporting that level. We were able to forecast in time for what is occurring along the Assiniboine dikes to deal with what is now running through the Portage Diversion. We were able to raise the flows through there from 25,000 to 34,000 cfs. That took a lot of prep work

and, again, a lot of tremendous effort on behalf of people.

So, again, these are real-time events. This is a one-in-300-year flood. This is an event where we have 50 per cent more of the water in the Saskatchewan River basin. This is not a finger-pointing exercise. This is not an exercise where we go out and try to make it seem as though this person, that person, what have you, is to blame. This is a real-time event in which we are taking, because of the unprecedented conditions, taking unprecedented steps such as a controlled release.

Again, we're working with the community in that area. We're protecting their homes. There's a very, very big picture here that I think we need to keep in mind, and it's a tremendous challenge. But I know that by working together, we are helping the Manitobans who are most vulnerable at that time, and I want to say it's amazing when you hear about someone who is sandbagging and they're sandbagging with about 30 people they've never met, and, all of a sudden, someone pulls up in a vehicle and takes out of that vehicle all kinds of coffee, all kinds of treats, doesn't even stop to be thanked, but hurries on, I suppose, to the next location. No one even knows who this person is. But that's the kind of spirit we're seeing, and that's the kind of spirit that we will defeat this flood with.

Mr. Maguire: I have no doubt that the minister's right in regards to the support from individuals around this province in regards to fighting this flood, and that we will beat it. But I think that my question is just around the responsibilities of her, as the minister, and accurate recording, so that the people that are on the ground know what they're fighting and what they have to deal with, and the levels of water that they need to ramp up for. And, I guess, with the snowfall of two feet in the Kamsack-Roblin area taking place on April the 30th and May the 1st, and being well over a week before the changes in levels in Brandon indicated that a 58 per cent increase, that there was a concern there.

No doubt they ramped it up quickly, got in the army to help in the Portage area. Some local forces volunteered their time in Brandon, originally, in the early days. But that the CATs and scrapers and backhoes and Drotts began to move on the dikes in Brandon on that Sunday evening, Saturday and Sunday, to ramp it up. But there was four or five days in there, and a week exactly from the snowfall, before the department actually indicated

that—through the minister—that there was going to be a 58 per cent increase in the water flow in Brandon all of a sudden. And I appreciate how hard everyone's working and working in that area to try and do the best they can. But all I'm saying is there needs to be a great deal of communication and recording going into what the levels are going to be in these kinds of things so that people can react in a very positive manner.

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, there was—there were—there was three days' notice given that water levels were rising. There are real-time events such as the snowfall. After that, we experienced a very sharp rise in temperature, which meant that there would be a very quick release of that water through melting. The forecasting was done. We, again, provided on a daily basis with what we understood was happening around the basin, and communities, such as the second largest city in the province of Manitoba, was able to flood predict to the forecasted level.

There were changes, and the changes were because we had experienced a high snowstorm. There was a very quick rate of melting. The tributaries emptied very quickly. So as we had, again, the real-time information on a daily basis, we were giving that information to communities. We worked very closely with EMO in Brandon to protect the community, with the mayor of Brandon. People rallied and were able to be successful there. Again, we were looking at the Assiniboine dikes.

Our challenge was to maintain 18,000 cfs going down the Assiniboine and to use the Portage Diversion to a more-than-full capacity. At that time we were able to get the diking in place to receive what is flowing through now—I believe there's 33,000 flowing through as of this morning—that that level does fluctuate as well.

So we were able to give the forecasts in time for communities to protect themselves. This can happen in unprecedented conditions, in very high water times when there are events not only as a snowstorm but then a very high water event through rain. And I think that my colleague, the Minister of MIT, has done a very good job in preparing Manitobans for preparing for an active spring. And he has always said, as what happened in 1997, that one weather event can change everything.

Now we were able, at this time, to have two significant water events that had us forecast higher increases in flows and in peaks. We were able to do that in time for communities to protect themselves.

So, again, there has been a lot of effort, not only in the forecasting but in responding to the forecasting, and that is what flood events can bring.

And, again, I want to thank all Manitobans and those beyond Manitoba who have come physically to help us or who have sent well wishes to people who they know are going through difficult times.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I'd just like to say, as well, that the flows on the Portage Diversion hadn't even begun in that period of time that I'm speaking about in regards to Brandon. It was a week later when they started to build the dikes up on the top of the dikes in the Portage Diversion. And I realize and, thankfully, we have been able to get it up to 34,000, to take and alleviate and some of the 52,000 on the Portage Reservoir at this particular time, with the other 18 coming down the Assiniboine River through the city of Winnipeg.

And, so I—my question wasn't about the preparedness in that area. It's certainly just in regards to the comments that were made about how, you know, the snowfall won't affect the flood forecast, because I don't think there was a person left in western Manitoba that saw the two feet of snow that didn't know that it was the 1st of May and that the temperatures would warm up and that this would affect the flow—and it did very quickly.

And so I just wanted to say as well, then, that while this water has eventually now moved on downstream, and I guess one of the concerns that I have is—and one of the questions I want to arise—ask the minister is: just what efforts were made to draw down the level of water in Lake Manitoba in advance of this flood—spring—that is, like—if she can provide me with information to prepare for the possibility that more water may have been diverted into it?

Ms. Melnick: Well, I'll answer that specific question in a moment. But I want to clear the record here, clarify—no one ever said the snow won't affect the forecast. So I'm not sure who the member's referring to there but no one from the forecasting centre ever said that that snow would not affect the forecast. And I want to be very clear on that.

* (16:50)

Also, the member is trying to make it seem as though flood protection was not well in place before we did see a rise in cfs. Brandon's dike was built to 1,184. That was the predicted level of crest. That was before the runoff started. So we had 1,184 protection

in Brandon before the runoff started, so I want the member to be very clear about this.

Today's level in Brandon was 1,182.71. Brandon simply had to raise dikes for their freeboard, so we did not have Brandon unprotected at any time during this event, and when the forecast came in that said we needed to raise for freeboard, that's what we did, and we made sure we worked with Brandon to make sure that that community was well protected. So I just want to clarify there and I'll in a moment deal with the other question the member has.

The Lake Manitoba is fed by the Portage Diversion as well as the Waterhen River through the stream that comes down from Lake Winnipegosis, so there are a number of areas that have also experienced high water that is affecting Lake Manitoba. One of the main actions that we took in anticipation of this spring was to run the Fairford control structure at the maximum as was safe for weather conditions and for the First Nations communities, Pinaymootang, Lake St. Martin, Little Sask, which are directly impacted by the Fairford control structure as well as recognizing how running water through that would affect the levels at Lake St. Martin.

When in ice conditions—and, of course, ice differs through the hard winter; ice that we know and then there's the frazzle ice—we can run at a certain capacity which is not necessarily the full capacity, so we ran at the full capacity as was safe during the weather events—during the weather conditions of that time, keeping in mind the impact that it would have on the local largely First Nation communities.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, and I just—the minister feels then that they did everything they could to get the level of Lake Manitoba down throughout the winter in regards to its situation?

Ms. Melnick: So, as we were able to increase flows out through the Fairford in ice-eliminated conditions, you can move more water through because there's not chance of an ice jam. Also, through the—as the level of the lake rises, you can put more through. So we've been running Fairford at max depending on the ice conditions and weather conditions for a number of months now. We're trying to recall the day that we began to run Fairford at a max. It was in the winter. We don't have that exact date, but it was for a number of months in the winter, and it hasn't been flowing at less than max according to weather and ice conditions since probably the middle of winter.

Mr. Maguire: So is it the minister's department or Hydro that's in charge of the operation of the Fairford Dam?

Ms. Melnick: Water Stewardship directs the operation, but MIT actually does the physical operation of the Fairford control structure.

Mr. Maguire: And the minister alluded to the maximum outflow. Can she provide me with a number that the—that is the maximum outflow of the Fairford Dam?

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, it depends on the level of the water in the lake. Right now, our maximum outflow is 14,000 cfs and we're running at that.

Mr. Maguire: Just in regards to the communications strategy, during a flood it's essential, you know, when it comes to protecting the people, as we've talked about earlier here today. And there's lots of concerns that have been raised in recent days about the flow of information, both surrounding the deliberate breach out in the Assiniboine dike and in relation to the events unfolding around Lake Manitoba due to this increased water levels.

And, you know, a very heavy burden's been placed on local governments trying to manage the flood on several fronts. Just as one example, the minister talked about earlier the RM of Portage la Prairie trying to get its residents in the dike breach inundation zone prepared for that event, and at the same time, property owners on Delta Beach, in the same municipality, were dealing with rising water levels on Lake Manitoba. They needed resources to manage that serious situation including the threat of loss of road access to properties there, Madam Minister, and I guess similar scenarios unfolded elsewhere around Lake Manitoba, taxing the ability of local governments to respond to many needs. Some of that was raised in question period today as well.

Can the minister explain how her department has interacted with local governments throughout this spring's flooding and what steps have been taken to ensure that information and resources have been disseminated as quickly as possible?

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Chairperson, the member's correct when he talks about the importance of communication, and part of that is language. And the member has used the term "breach" and "deliberate breach." This is not—that actually doesn't represent what's happened here. There was a significant risk along the Assiniboine River that there would be an

uncontrolled breach that would have brought 15,000 cfs into any community at any time during any day. What we undertook was to greatly lessen the chance of that happening through a controlled release.

And I know what the member's trying to do. He's trying to play politics with this and he's trying to use words that are not really representative of what's going on here. And there's a responsibility by, I believe, by all members of this House, particularly in a time when we are experiencing a very difficult situation, where people have been evacuated from their homes, to fairly represent what's happened.

So we have—we undertook, myself, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton), with approval and agreement from the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of the Province, to carry out a controlled release. We notified people as soon as we had made this decision and we immediately began working with local emergency measures organizations in the area that would now become a part of the area that we needed to be responding to, which is the controlled release area.

The controlled release area is approximately one-eighth of the area—the total area that would have been at risk if an uncontrolled breach had happened. We are limiting flows through the controlled release as much as we can. I believe today it was 395 cfs. It's—the water is moving at less than a pace than an adult would normally be walking at.

So, the terms that the member is using—please be responsible with the way that you're communicating this. It is a serious situation. We took this as a very serious decision and a decision that, again, was in real time.

There were communication challenges within the first few days. We have been working with local EMOs to improve—

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

HEALTH

*(14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

And the floor is open for questions or statements.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): The minister had indicated just prior to starting this committee that she will be providing the information that we had discussed last week, and it will come in the form of written responses within the next few days. So I appreciate that.

My question—the few questions I have right now are around the issue of access centres, and I just wonder if the minister can tell us how many family doctors there are generally assigned to each access centre.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): The complement of doctors in access centres tends to vary based on health assessments that have been done and analysis of needs, but I could commit to the member to provide more information for her about the various staffing, medical staffing complements at our access centres.

Mrs. Driedger: I would appreciate that response from the minister.

Could she indicate how many patients would be on one doctor's caseload?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member that there has been a lot of work in the recent months in endeavouring to rationalize the caseloads that doctors are serving at the access centres as the advanced Access model of scheduling is incorporated. There's work going on to share the patient load for these doctors and, you know, of course, incorporating the use of nurse practitioners with a view to the development of the primary-care network model that we spoke of the other day, you know, using access centres as a real hub for what's going on with primary care in a community.

As for existing patient loads for doctors, I would have to do some investigating with the region and get back to her concerning, you know, where we are right now in terms of existing loads and the rationalizing and sharing of those loads is going. So I can get back to her with more specific numbers as best I can.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, thank you, and I appreciate the response from the minister and would hope that it would come in a timely manner.

I would also ask the question: Has an evaluation ever been done of the, you know, effectiveness and efficiencies of access centres?

*(14:50)

Ms. Oswald: The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority did conduct a number of patient satisfaction surveys. You know, of course, it's great to have the big idea and believe that a one-stop shop for patients to deal with a breadth of needs. You know, I know the member, from her experiences in health care, would not disagree with the fact that, when somebody presents with a health concern, very often there are numerous concerns, which, of course, was the whole idea of bringing the access centres together, dealing with socio-economic needs, needs of child care, needs of Home Care as well as, you know, any issues that were developing with one's physical health.

And so the patient satisfaction surveys that were conducted over time got very, very high ratings for the access centre and its model. If the member is asking more detail about evaluation tools or instruments that have been used to, you know, measure outcomes or efficacy, I'll need to do more investigation to see where that kind of process is within the regional health authority. But, again, the No. 1 concern was that issue of patient satisfaction, knowing that the amended location of services, and the desired outcome, of course, being that that one-stop shop would be a benefit to people. That was the No. 1 concern for the region, and the response has been very positive.

But I'll work with the member to let her know what other instruments or measuring tools have been used.

Mrs. Driedger: Perhaps the minister could also address in that, then, when she's talking to the WRHA, is really look to see if there is some kind of an evaluation that looks at are we getting the bang for the buck for the amount of money that is being spent on access centres.

Can the minister provide a breakdown of all of the visits to access centres, just in terms of how many doctor visits there were last year, in the last fiscal year, how many visits to nurse practitioners, how many visits to, you know, whoever else is in there, whether, you know, through Family Services? If we could get a breakdown for each of the access centres in terms of the usage, and who's using it, and who they are going there to see.

Ms. Oswald: The member is going to think I'm trying to be cheeky here, but I assure her I'm not. I really do want to go back to her question about bang

for buck, and maybe explore that a little bit with her, you know, with a view to giving her a better answer. I think part of that just came in the question that she asked, in that an analysis of who's going there for what service, how frequently—I think that that would probably be captured in her answer about how you would measure bang for buck. But I wonder if she could just elaborate a little bit on what kinds of things she would like to see that would define, I guess, said bang. Maybe she could just tell me a little bit more about that.

Mrs. Driedger: I would have expected that, I guess, if there was an evaluation in terms of, you know, numbers of patients that are going there, are we actually seeing a broad use in terms of patient use? And, when we look at that, if there has been any, you know, formal tracking of the outcomes, the patient outcomes, with having such a centre.

I mean, one would think that with an access centre, and having the kind of a collaborative model, and having the ability to bring in other disciplines that, in fact, there might be some strong evidence that, in fact, access centres do provide some significant value.

But it would be, I guess, if we were looking at an evaluation, it would be somebody that has the expertise to come in and look at, you know, how do you evaluate a program and develop those criteria. And, certainly, that would be the kind of evaluation and the expertise I think that would be youthful to, you know, address the, you know—for the dollars spent.

Are we seeing a significant group of people that are actually accessing these centres? And the reason, I guess—part of the reason, I guess I'm asking the question, is we know that between just a couple of the access centres, there's twenty and a half million dollars spent in salaries: 7.8 at one access centre and 12.7 at another. So that's \$20.5 million spent just in salaries.

And, when we look at that kind of money, my concern would be, and my question would be: For that type of an expense, are we indeed getting the bang for the buck? You know, are we seeing huge numbers of patients going there? Are we seeing benefits by those patients? Are there improved outcomes? Is this the most cost-effective way to be delivering these services?

Because this looks like a very expensive—just from, you know, looking at the budget, it just looks

like expensive entity. But, if there is, you know, easy evaluation and proof that it works, I think that would be important to the discussion. Because I think it's a fair question to say, you know, for the kind of money that's being spent in these access centres, are we, indeed, seeing the value?, because I would note that for the Transcona Access centre it's over \$11 million a year in expenses, and for the River East it's \$17.4 million in a year in expenses? So when you—and then the downtown area was 22.7 in expenses.

So the expenses seem to be high, and all I was wondering was, you know, if you're looking at these as models, has there been a formal evaluation to see if these are the most effective models for delivering care?

Ms. Oswald: And, again, I appreciate the member's point about how important it is for us to be gathering evidence about outcomes, about service, to enable us to go forward in the best manner possible for Manitobans.

Certainly, again, when we're talking about, you know, bang for buck, we know that the original intent of the access centre, to co-locate services so that it would be a one-stop shop for individuals that are coming to the centre or to the clinic, again, through that patient satisfaction survey, has been highly successful.

We know that, you know, there were times when individuals were going to five different offices to get the services that they need. And now, locating them all under one roof, enabling people to make appointments to see professionals and to access those services all at one time has been, you know, an enormous benefit for, you know, a young mom that might have to seek child care, or, even if she's bringing, you know, baby with her, getting in and out of transportation five separate times can be very challenging.

*(15:00)

So, indeed, we know that that has been very successful. And I think it's also really important as we're doing an analysis of effectiveness of care and—against cost, that we need to remember that not all the services that result from the existence of an access centre take place in the clinic per se. We know that home care is housed there, public health, community mental health, and much of the outreach that happens, indeed, does occur outside of the confines of the access centre and right in

communities. So that would be a really important piece of any evaluation of outcomes as well.

And, again, you know, we're going to continue to go forward, as we do across many, many programs, in looking at staffing complements, the costs thereof, the delivery of service, the expansion of programs, the expansion of services that are provided to people. This would be pretty important.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate, for the three access centres, what \$800,000 in one year of travel would be made up of?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I can endeavour to find more specific information for the member, but I can say that much of the costing in that particular line concerns funding travel for individuals that are providing home care and public health, senior services and so forth. So, again, I can find some more specifics. We also know that, you know, we are highly supportive of community-based care and, you know, wouldn't have any expectation that these individuals would, you know, be covering the costs of the travel to provide that care in community. But, again, I can look more closely at it, but in the past, we know that the vast majority did fall under the issue of compensation for services that were being provided in community from professionals.

Mrs. Driedger: And between the three health access centres, approximately \$800,000 was spent on the health and education levy. Can the minister indicate what that is for?

Ms. Oswald: I'm informed it is a levy on payroll over a certain amount. So, as any employer would do, they pay that levy on the payroll.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate, is that anything like the payroll tax or that's something totally different?

Ms. Oswald: I'm informed it is the same thing.

Mrs. Driedger: Those were all the questions I had for now on health access centres.

My final set of questions are round the issue that Lyn Delorme brought forward on medical instruments, and as the minister knows, he was the senior surgical instrument technician at the Health Sciences Centre. His job was to repair surgical instruments. Many of the instruments that came his way were supposed to have been cleaned and sterilized, but he found that they were actually contaminated with blood, flesh and bone or were corroded and I have seen some of the pictures—in

fact, a number of pictures that he brought forward for me to see. And he's been documenting and raising concerns with his superiors for 10 years, but he says that he's been reprimanded for overstepping boundaries and being disrespectful.

Now, he did submit a written report to the Ombudsman last year, but the Ombudsman said that because there was no existing federal or provincial regulation or statute on this matter, that no offence had been committed with respect to his allegations. But also, I know that the minister confirmed that the WRHA was going to be following up on that, and at that same time, the minister had confirmed that there was no province-wide policy.

So I understand that the WRHA did release a report, and it was, I believe, released last week on the safety and cleaning of medical supplies used in hospitals around the city. And the report followed an audit that was conducted after Mr. Delorme had complained about the equipment not being handled or cleaned properly. And I understand that, according to the report, at some sites, the cleaning and removal of blood and organic matter was not as thorough and timely as possible, and I also understand that the WRHA will act on all of the report's recommendations.

First of all, I guess, I would like to ask the minister whether or not that report has been made public.

Ms. Oswald: The WRHA received the final report, I believe, it was April 30th, and released it on May the 11th, and it's my understanding that it is on their website.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether there is going to be now some type of provincial or province-wide policy and regulations developed around the cleansing of instruments? And would you be able to take the report just from what the WRHA in their RHA had found? Is there enough information in there that this information can be utilized on a province-wide basis?

Ms. Oswald: So, of course, we know that families and patients deserve the highest quality and safest care that Manitoba has to offer and that, of course, includes the appropriate use of medical supplies and equipment.

As the member has referenced, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority brought in an external reviewer, an expert from British Columbia who is indeed an expert in medical device reprocessing and

infection control. The WRHA did this as a result of allegations brought forward, but they did expand the review to all of their surgical sites, not just the ones that were raised.

And the report did find that overall cleaning and disinfection practices for medical devices demonstrated a high degree of compliance with standards and that nurses consistently and thoroughly inspected devices for sterility before use. HSC itself was found to exhibit many examples of best practices, and the reviewer also concluded, and I'm quoting: A unique strength of HSC reprocessing—the reprocessing department—is the involvement of biomedical engineering that inspect and refurbish the reprocessing equipment.

But certainly the reviewer did make some recommendations concerning some practices in other sites. There was an acknowledgement that the evaluation, you know, was a snapshot in time and certainly there was the wish that, you know, more work would go on among different experts in the variety of sites.

*(15:10)

I can also inform the member that some RHAs, at the time that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority was undertaking this review, opted in as well to have a review of their sites. As a result of the report, we are asking all regional health authorities, where applicable, to engage with the reviewer to have this really, kind of, fine-tooth-comb analysis done because the recommendations were very good and, as you acknowledged, the WRHA has accepted all these recommendations and has, indeed, already begun implementing a number of them.

So this evaluation process by this expert is really going to help us inform any policy and guideline that we will have across the province going forward. I think we've learned much from this review and there is an opportunity here for us to move forward with the potential setting of guidelines or policies as we go forward. So these reviews are going to take place in short order and then we'll be moving into different work going forward.

Part of a protocol that we have set up already in terms of critical incidents reporting is also the opportunity for sending out any alerts that could be discovered so that it would be an immediate kind of find-and-fix mentality across the region. So we wouldn't have to wait for any guideline or policy or procedure to be developed, but we are looking very

closely at what the next step will be as a result of the findings of these reviews.

Mrs. Driedger: I would note that the report had indicated that at most sites there was appropriate management of sterile supplies and management of the used instruments at the end of surgeries, so, it also leads us to believe that not at all sites. And then it also indicated that at some sites, the cleaning and removal of blood and organic material was not as thorough and timely as possible.

So, in fact, I think what the report must be saying is that, in fact, Lyn Delorme did have reason to be concerned, and yet for 10 years nobody seemed to want to listen to him. And it sounds to me like we do owe him a bit of gratitude for what he brought forward and for, actually, the personal stress that he went through in trying to bring his concerns forward. He did end up with medical issues because he was so diligent about his work and he was so concerned about the outcomes and patient infections and any other problems because of equipment that wasn't properly cleaned and sterilized.

So I guess my question to the minister would be, and I don't know if anybody can answer it: Why was he not listened to for 10 years? He was trying to blow the whistle and it was—it had fallen on deaf ears. And yet it seems like he's been exonerated to some degree by this report.

Ms. Oswald: And, again, certainly, when issues are raised concerning patients' safety or, you know, infection control or any such matters in the health-care system, I believe it's very wise to take them seriously. And the allegations that were raised by Mr. Delorme, indeed, I am informed, there had been quite a lot of work done on the issues that were raised, even prior to the review being done.

Interestingly, the evaluation of HSC on these issues was quite strong actually. They performed very well in the case of the review, probably in no small part to issues that he had raised and that had been dealt with at the facility level. I think the WRHA was very wise to expand the scope of the review to other surgical centres where some concerns were identified. And that abundance of caution, I think, has resulted in recommendations coming forward and immediate action, in most cases, being taken.

So, again, I mean, certainly, it has been reported to me by the member, and by others, that this particular individual felt that he had not been heard

over a period of time. And whether or not that, you know, can be measured to be, you know, an accurate statement or not, is kind of immaterial if the individual felt that he experienced a lot of stress over not being heard.

In actual fact, as I say, the HSC site was, you know, one of the star students, and he's to take a lot of credit for that. And, as a result of some items that he raised, not all of which were substantiated, but many, we were able to discover some problems elsewhere. And I believe that as we expand into other regions in the province, if they have not already acted on the recommendations that have been brought forward, that those things will be caught, and they will be amended as well.

So this individuals and others who have brought their concerns forward, I think, are a great service to Manitobans, and that's why we took them seriously. That's why the WRHA did bring in an expert with, you know, no axe to grind, you know, from another venue, and that's why these issues were discovered and amended.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any further questions? Seeing none, I'll ask a question of my own. Is the committee ready for the resolutions? *[Agreed]*

Very good. We will then proceed with resolutions for this department.

Resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$73,892,000 for Health, Provincial Programs and Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,120,000 for Health, Health Workforce, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$42,174,000 for Health, Public Health and Primary Health Care, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Oh, yes, staff can certainly leave now if they need to. Thank you.

Resolution 21.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$18,655,000 for Health, Regional Programs and Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,090,000 for Health, Office of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

* (15:20)

Resolution 21.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,650,617,000—did I miss one?

We'll just do that all over again. It's a big number.

Resolution 21.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,650,917,000 for Health, Health Services Insurance Fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

How far off was I? That would do it.

Resolution 21.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$111 million—111,890 thousand dollars for Health, Capital Funding, for the—\$111,890,000 for Health, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,301,000 for Health, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$813,000 for Health, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 21.1.(a) the minister's salary,

contained in resolution 21.1. The floor is open for questions, if any.

Seeing none, thank you very much.

Resolution 21.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,977,000 for Health, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Health.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for Legislative Assembly.

What is the will of the committee? Shall we have a brief recess to change the people involved?
[Agreed]

Okay. This committee is in recess.

The committee recessed at 3:23 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:26 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates for Legislative Assembly.

Does the honourable Speaker have an opening statement?

Hon. George Hickes (Speaker of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly): I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Mr. Hickes: Okay. Good afternoon. I will be defending the Estimates of the Legislative Assembly.

As is now the practice in Manitoba, the Speaker is the permanent defender for the Legislative Assembly Estimates. In my role of Speaker, I take my responsibilities for the Legislative Assembly very seriously and work hard to ensure that good services are provided to the members and that the independence of the Legislative Assembly is respected. Over the years, we have been able to accomplish many good things for members and we hope to continue this in the future.

In the past year, we have seen some enhancements to the Members' Allowances office in accordance with the audit performed by the Auditor General. We have also seen some changes in staffing due to retirements, with appointments of a new Deputy Clerk and a new Sergeant- and Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms. We also had new pages and legislative interns during the past year and they, too, have provided great services for members, as do all Legislative Assembly staff.

I would like to thank the staff of the Legislative Assembly for all the hard work they do on behalf of all the members.

We also have had new timer clocks added to the Chamber, and from speaking to members and staff, it's been very popular with the members.

And I have in attendance with me today, I have Ms. Patricia Chaychuk, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly; Mr. Fred Bryans, the executive director of Administration and Finance; and Ms. Debbie Campbell, manager of financial services.

I would be pleased to answer any questions that members may have. Is there any questions?

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable Speaker for that.

Does the honourable member for Morris have an opening statement or comments?

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): And I just want to thank Mr. Speaker for his good work in the House. It's much appreciated. And he's been the Speaker now for as long as I've been here and longer, and we certainly want to wish him well in his future endeavours.

I'd like to also thank the staff here today. And I know that I've been told that, in past, you prepare for these Estimates and very seldom do get any questions, and I'm not going to deviate from that pattern today. So—but I do thank you very much for your work today.

I know that there's been some challenging times in regard to the changes and the new rules in members' allowance, so appreciate—we do appreciate the work that you do. Sometimes it's not always that apparent, but.

So, with that, I do not have questions, so we can proceed to pass the Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: Not seeing any further members who wish to comment or offer a question, we will

proceed to the resolutions if that is the will of the committee. *[Agreed]* Okay, very good, now proceeding with resolutions.

Resolution 1.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,512,000 for Legislative Assembly, Other Assembly Expenditures, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

* (15:30)

Resolution 1.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty, a sum not exceeding \$6,489,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Auditor General, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty, a sum not exceeding \$3,042,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Ombudsman, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty, a sum not exceeding \$1,497,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty, a sum not exceeding \$2,864,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Children's Advocate, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty, a sum not exceeding \$60,000 for Legislative Assembly, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2012.

Resolution agreed to.

Thank you, everybody. This now concludes the Estimates for this department.

The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are the Estimates for Infrastructure and Transportation.

Shall we now briefly recess again to allow for changing of staff for this transition? *[Agreed]*

This section of the Committee of Supply is now in recess.

The committee recessed at 3:33 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:53 p.m.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

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

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): When we left at our last review of the Estimate process, there was a number of questions that were tabled. Would the minister like to do that now or do you want to wait till another time?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Yes, the key staff have been—a lot of them are tied up with the flood, so I must apologize for not having them prepared in advance, and I do want to thank the opposition for delaying the start of Estimates. Most of them predated some of the more recent events, so the answers will be forthcoming, but my apologies, again, that staff are tied up right now.

Mr. Eichler: We're certainly pleased to work with the minister. As he well knows, we're focused on the flood as well, and we want to make sure that the minister has the time to be able to deal with those issues as they come forward. I know it's a very trying time for all Manitobans, so we can appreciate what the minister's going through, and that'll be fine. We can wait for the answers. Hopefully, we get them in a fairly timely manner once we get this back into order.

My first question would be, would the minister provide an update on the outcome of the legal proceedings undertaken with respect to the south Perimeter bridge project? Did MIT recover any monies from the contractors with respect to that, and if so, how much? And how much was spent on legal fees?

Mr. Ashton: Those are fairly detailed questions. I know the member's quite aware of the background. I will undertake again, when our Transportation side of the department is perhaps a little bit less busy right now, to get that information, and will add it to the list and provide the information as soon as it becomes available.

Mr. Eichler: I have a number of others that—along the same lines. Maybe what I'll do is I'll just write the minister and put them on the record that way rather than put them on the record this way. Whatever's best for the minister.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I certainly have no problem if the member wants to perhaps raise various questions. I'd—some of them I may be able to answer correctly if there are perhaps less detail or issues that I've been briefed on recently. But maybe we'll go through and there may be a certain repetition in my answers, but worth a try.

Mr. Eichler: Okay, what was the original estimated cost of repairs to the Pierre Delorme Bridge and what was the final cost of that project?

Mr. Ashton: I'm not sure on the original estimates, but I do know—when we released the—when we opened the bridge, I believe the cost was in the \$12-million range. I could provide a more detailed cost if the member would like, but going from memory, I believe that was total cost. What was remarkable about it, by the way, too, was the speed at which it was put back in place, just in time, as it turned out, for the spring flood season. So I do want to thank everyone that was part of making that happen. It was very important to people in the area.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, if we could just get the final cost, that would be great, and if it was over budget or close to budget would also be useful.

Also, in regards to Highway 75, if the minister could say how much money has been spent to date by the federal and provincial governments on this particular project, and what's budgeted for this upcoming year.

Mr. Ashton: I can get the detailed information. I can indicate we're probably approaching the hundred million dollar range. I can get the specific breakdown in terms of federal provincial cost-sharing. Certainly, we have prioritized it, and when I'm talking about the work, that includes the work that we're also going to be completing this year. What will most noticeable, I think, to people is the work on the highway right through Morris itself. We've received a lot of complaints about the condition of the highway. The main reason the work is being timed for this year is because the Town of Morris required the time to do the work on the services, and obviously, when you reconstruct a highway, that's an important part of it. So you will see a noticeable improvement in the condition of Highway 75 this summer.

And just by way of information, Highway 75 is going to be reopened as of tomorrow and, again, I want to thank all the staff that have been a key part of that. The closure time was a little bit less than 2009, but clearly recognize the difficulties that that closure did create.

And, of course, I won't get into a lengthy answer on the current planning and work that's being done on coming up with a solution on that, but I will indicate we did have an open house last year. The member's aware that I actually attended. Directly, we've narrowed it down to options that involve a combination of different potential elements, and the hydraulic work is being done as we speak. I want to stress that when I say hydraulic work, it's not a—academic study. It's based on determining exactly what the hydraulic situation is, and how we can significantly reduce the number of days that Highway 75 will be closed. And so that will be a fairly extensive project once it's completed the design stage, maybe also environmental approvals, but that's the continuation of the work on 75 which, quite frankly, is based on very clear principle: to bring it up to full interstate standard. And I think the member, I'm sure, has had the opportunity to drive 75. We've made significant progress already.

Mr. Eichler: On the main drag going through Morris, is that going to be upgraded—I understand the minister correctly on that—this year?

Mr. Ashton: That's correct.

Mr. Eichler: Well, then, the federal-provincial share, how does that formula work? Is it a 60-40?

* (16:00)

Mr. Ashton: I'll have to get the exact information; I have global information. I can indicate, by the way, on 75, but also more generally, where we have received federally funding. It varies by Infrastructure programs, so we—they're not all from the same source. For example, one of the areas where we have been receiving federal funding and the program right now is insurance at border crossings, so I want to acknowledge that. We also have significant federal funding for CentrePort Canada Way, a number of highways throughout the province.

So what I could do, actually, if the member's interested, I could provide a full—full information on, not only where the work has taken place, but the source and cost share.

Mr. Eichler: That would be appreciated if the minister would agree to share that. That would be useful. On the rest area, there, as you come in, is that cost-shared as well? Is it a provincial-federal cost share?

Mr. Ashton: I'm not sure exactly what the member is referring to, but I can get a detailed response to that as well.

Mr. Eichler: When you first come into Manitoba, after you clear custom, there's a rest area there that's on the edge of Highway 75, and sometimes it's open, sometimes it's not. But I was just interested to know whether or not it was a cost-shared project for the Province and the federal government.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'll undertake to get back to the member on that.

Mr. Eichler: In the budget speech, the government indicated it would continue to partner with the City of Winnipeg on priority streets, such as Plessis Road. Can the minister provide an update on these project, such as Plessis Road underpass, and is there any indication that that underpass might proceed or there are discussions still under way between the three levels of government?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I thank the member for the question, and I know it's an issue that the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) and the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) have raised quite extensively. The situation with the underpass is it has been identified by the City as a priority project, as I understand it, for Infrastructure funding. We have also identified it as a priority project; in fact, we made specific reference in the budget speech to the underpass. But we not only identified it in terms of the Throne Speech; I have issued a statement, as Minister responsible for

Infrastructure, that we would also be agreeable to flowing it from the Building Canada Fund or any other infrastructure program that the federal government would identify, because the key thing to understand with any Infrastructure project is it's, you know, when you deal with a three-way process, you know, everybody has their lists. Question is: (a) is it on their list; (b) is there money to get it done?

So I'm satisfied that the City has made a commitment, the Province has made a commitment, and it now is very much up to the federal government. I would be surprised if they did not agree to it, largely because there are some parallels—you know, Kenaston underpass, I think, is a direct parallel. It's an important issue in the area, in that part of northeast Winnipeg, and the funds are available.

So right now I would suggest it's about two-thirds there, just remaining—you know, just relying right now on what the federal government will do. Once that is determined, then, obviously, the City would go to the next step in terms of detailed construction over the next few years.

So we're ready to go, and the next move is up to the federal government. And we have not received any formal agreement or disagreement in terms of any documentation from the federal government, but I would anticipate we'll get a response from them fairly soon. To be fair, they just were—they just went through an election. There will be some changes, including the minister because of retirement, so we're not anticipating us sort of getting an answer immediately. But, to my mind, usually, when you get that kind of agreement, it's—it would be—I think it would be rare and certainly unfortunate if the federal government didn't come through. But I have no reason to believe that they won't. So we're two-thirds of the way there.

Mr. Eichler: Just on the Building Canada Fund that the minister made reference to, how's that formula established? Is it so much for the City, so much for the Province and so much for the federal government? What particularly does that look like?

Mr. Ashton: I think the member's on to—you know, there's an allocation both for the City and also for the rural areas. We've seen, also, both rurally and in terms of the City, there's often projects that don't proceed. So there's often reallocation within that. That certainly would be, you know, why we made it a priority. In this case, we said not only it's a priority for us but we would back it up by the Building

Canada Fund. And, you know, it's hard to describe, actually, how the process works, because we have upwards of 11 infrastructure funds. Each one is different; different decision-making processes; some of them have very different protocols in terms of communication; some are more targeted than others. So it's very difficult to provide a general description.

However, I do want to put on the record that, certainly, over the time of the stimulus program federally, they—we had remarkable co-operation between federal, provincial and municipal officials. They really have stepped up to the plate. Certainly, our view would be that there's a strong argument there for ongoing federal involvement in infrastructure. Road infrastructure is obviously the winner but, dare I say, with the current flood situation, post flood, we're clearly going to be looking at the needs out there in terms of water controls, flood mitigation. And we don't have a dedicated fund for flood mitigation. A lot of it, including the flood protection program we announced, part of which is cost shared with the federal government, you know, post 2009, a lot of that is coming from existing infrastructure programs.

Having said that, you know, we do think there is a real need out there for ongoing infrastructure investments. And if you look at most flood infrastructure—as you can see, I probably have floods on the mind right now—a lot of it was cost shared initially with the federal government, a lot of it through more strategic initiatives: the floodway, the floodway expansion. The PFRA was a huge part of funding dikes, Portage Diversion, the Shellmouth Dam, and if we have one concern over the last few years, it's the degree to which the PFRA has disappeared off the radar screen.

I'm told that there's one small element of it left, but we don't even have the PFRA involved any more in terms of rural water supply. The member will be aware that, even until a couple of years ago, we were able to partner with them to extend rural water supply, particularly for farm operations. A lot of our livestock operations have benefited very significantly from that, as well as general farm operations.

So that's one of the key challenges for us, is significant infrastructure needs and, quite frankly, you know, with the winding down of the stimulus program, there could be a noticeable difference in the level at which we're seeing federal funding on important projects. So we continue to call for both a dedicated mitigation fund but, also, quite frankly, for

a more general extension of infrastructure programs so we can continue this historic level of investment.

Mr. Eichler: Just, you know, coming back to reference what the minister was talking about with the PFR water program. When I was the critic for the Department of Agriculture, I know that the federal government says, what's your government's priorities, and you can put the money where you want.

And Saskatchewan still has a water program. It's just that the Province of Manitoba decided, on that block funding, they didn't want to fund a water project, so to speak, was what the Minister of Agriculture said at that time. So my understanding was—is quite clear that it was up to the Province to decide what block funding they wanted to spend on what. But I know Saskatchewan still had their water programs. That was one of the projects they thought they wanted to put it towards in the block funding.

So that was my understanding on that. And the stimulus program, I know that deadline was extended to offset some of those projects that were still outstanding. Is there a deadline for the Building Canada Fund program?

* (16:10)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can get the deadlines in terms, you know, the various different funds. The stimulus program, the member's quite correct, was extended into October. There were a number of projects, I know, that were, you know, of concern. In many cases, by the way, it was totally understandable, you know, elements behind the delay. But I can get that information for the member for next sitting.

Mr. Eichler: On the stimulus money that comes from the federal side—and I think I have a pretty clear understanding, but I just want to make sure I do and it—that it's on the record. The Province allocates a—the life span of a particular project and cost-shares that over the life of that project where the stimulus money from the federal government comes as a lump sum. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we capitalize our assets. The federal government provides it as a direct payment towards the project recognizing that the project, as a provincial asset, is amortized provincially.

Mr. Eichler: Is the total project then capitalized, including the federal government portion, or just that portion of the provincial contribution?

Mr. Ashton: Well, we capitalize the project itself. It's one of the most significant differences that we have currently, in comparison to, you know, when we came into government. I remember when we came into government in 1999 I was just amazed that we actually had an accounting system that treated Highways' capital investments as operating investments. And what that meant was there was significant pressure on the department to not spend its full capital allotment. And, you know, and if it was year-end, you would see money not spent.

One of the main areas we really improved in, it's not only the fact that we have a plan now, a 10-year plan, and, you know, we're releasing our new five-year plan in the next few weeks, but what it really comes down to is the ability to amortize means that you can spread out the benefit of the specific projects over time. So it's made a huge, huge difference in our ability to do that. Now, having said that, we still have to—we have to come up with the payments. It's no different than getting a loan; you have to have the ability to carry the payments and that's reflected in our Estimates.

I think the member's probably gone through the detailed Estimates. That is a significant part—and not just on the highways side, by the way. We're doing the same with government buildings, including everything from jails to colleges, and either come out of this department's jurisdiction. And it's really important as well for another reason, not just in terms of the accounting treatment of it; it also allows you to budget for the life cycle of an asset. The staff we have dealing with our capital investments will tell you that that's one of the advantages of looking at the amortization, as you can also flow out the, not just the immediate, you know, in the long-term benefit, but the amortization.

And, quite frankly, one of the big advantages of the amortized system we moved to now is that we're able to—we're talking this year of we have \$363 million. We've been able to take our capital program and virtually quadruple it in the last decade. And that means we can tackle some of the significant projects we're dealing with. You know, the member's is—be aware of some of the bigger projects, such as Highway 75 and CentrePort Canada Way. But the major improvements on Highway 6 I know he's, you know, raised issues related to Highway 6. We're probably in the \$100-million range on Highway 6 right now; probably more than that, with some work starting right from the Perimeter and some work continuing right all the way to its end point

in Thompson, and Highway 10, very similar investments. We've done major work on Highway 1.

So that amortization has made a big difference in our ability to step up to the plate and have a historic capital program. And I've always, by the way, made a point of acknowledging the federal contribution and, in fact, put on the record again, we would love to have that contribution on a regular basis, would even give the Prime Minister naming rights.

Well, in all seriousness, we note that the federal government does do a good job at, also, branding what it does. But it's made a real difference. You won't see a region in the province that hasn't benefited from that kind of federal investment. So, all kidding aside, I do want to put on the record that we recognize and give full credit to the federal government for the work they've done.

Mr. Eichler: On the announcements that the Province makes—the minister just made reference to a couple of them—those announcements when you're announcing a project include the federal dollars, does it not?

Mr. Ashton: Well, what happens is the federal government, through various programs, does have funding available. Because of the shovel-ready requirement of the stimulus program, we did move to accelerate some projects that were clearly shovel-ready. We did not want to lose one cent of federal money. I guarantee we're not going to leave one cent, not on the table, and the total cost reflects its whole cost to project.

It is a provincial asset, you know, the municipal side—if you have a municipal asset and there's infrastructure funding—for example take Plessis Road. That will be a municipal asset and will continue to be one. So it'll be reflected on their books as well but absolutely, yes, we—when we're looking at the costs of the item, we reflect the full cost.

Mr. Eichler: So using that example just—we'll just use Plessis Road because it's easy to identify. It's what we've been talking about. So the total cost of that project—it would be announced for the city portion, the provincial portion and the federal contribution, just so I'm clear.

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Chair, on that Plessis Road, probably—you're probably looking at—in the range of \$50 million, just from the experience of other underpasses, you know, to mention the Kenaston underpass. So what would happen then if this was approved and the federal government did move to

the approval stage, the City would then be responsible for the asset—would bring in whatever contractors would then be necessary to build it and the money would be flowed to them—just in the sort of fashion all the other infrastructure projects, you know, over time.

So we're talking—actually we're talking about any transportation infrastructure within the city of Winnipeg; it's the responsibility of the City of Winnipeg. It's quite different than rural Manitoba, you know, the 196 other municipalities. You often have significant road infrastructure going right through the municipalities. Certainly, the member knows from his own constituency how important that is.

It's quite different with the City of Winnipeg. We do transfer significant money to them for roads and bridges. And I'm not just saying this as the former minister responsible for municipal affairs or Intergovernmental Affairs, but over the last couple of years we've actually contributed more than 50 per cent of the money for regional streets and bridges in Winnipeg through direct transfers from the Province. And I say that because even though the City's responsible for all the roads within its jurisdiction, there's a very significant transfer. And so we're looking at Plessis Road, and the fact that there are such programs available and there are funds that are allocated for the City of Winnipeg just makes sense to us.

When it's a city priority, it's a priority for us for northeast Winnipeg, and if they—if the federal government's in agreement, we'll proceed to build it, not a minor investment but \$50 million. We think that that would be well spent to significantly improve traffic flows in an area of the city that's growing quite significantly. I don't know if the member's had the opportunity to visit out in that area. I have and there's a lot of new developments around there. Traffic flows have changed quite significantly, and we want to make sure that we continue to have that area of the city and also Winnipeg, generally, as a good area for the three class 1 oil companies, particularly CN in that area but also CP—their ability to, you know, to function in the province.

And we—I can indicate just how—if the member's interested as well. I did meet with the president of CN in Montréal a few months back, and we had a joint planning session with our senior staff and their senior staff that really focused in on some of our capital expenditures, some of theirs as well, and I

mentioned Plessis underpass but there are many other areas.

We can even see, you know, potential for rail line abandonment and relocation of rail that would open up very strategic real estate for commercial, residential or green space use. So, you know, we're working not just with the city, but we're also working with the rail companies as well.

* (16:20)

Mr. Eichler: The minister talked about the railway and, of course, that I was going to do a little bit later on, but I might as well do it now since it's on his wavelength there.

And that's on rail line abandonment, and I noticed Saskatchewan just announced a significant contribution towards shortline infrastructures. The Province looking at doing something similar?

Mr. Ashton: Well, with shortline we've been working on a case-by-case basis. We have been significantly a part of maintaining shortlines in this province.

It's really interesting, by the way, if you look at the situation we were in a few years ago, how we've seen some clear business cases that have worked, and we're certainly also committed on working on shortlines. And, of course, if you were to look at the Gimli line which services Diageo, there's an example of where, the member knows, there's a lot of local effort going into maintaining that rail service. So we've been dealing with it on a case-by-case basis and we've had some success, as the member's aware of them.

And I want to note, by the way, the—what's really developed last year is there's been, in many cases, producers themselves who have been able to not only make a new business model work but see some significant improvements in their own bottom line, and we continue to believe that rail has a very significant role. I mean, trucking, obviously, is probably about 85 per cent of freight movement in the province, but the big advantage, you know, where we do have continuing rail service is often the economies of scale, the actual, you know, cost per tonne of freight is still quite inexpensive, not the least of which is all the benefits on the climate change side, I mean, the energy efficiency. So that's our approach in Manitoba is to deal with that.

And we have been involved, by the way—I guess we have a long shortline, if you want to call the Bay

Line a shortline. And again we partnered with the federal government. We committed to a \$68-million upgrade of the port—about \$8 million of that is the port, \$60 million for the rail line—and that's split three ways, and it's making a big difference on improving the condition of the Bay Line, which is important for the communities served by the Bay Line. I represent three communities that have no all-weather road access served by the Bay Line. It's important. It's important for the shipment of grain and other commodities and it's also important for tourism.

So, you know, we're investing on a case-by-case basis and we'll continue to treat rail as a priority for transportation in the province.

Mr. Eichler: I was at one of the seminars where you were speaking in regards to the Port of Churchill and transportation over the Arctic, and one of the questions that came up was the rail line that goes into the Port of Churchill. Has there been any application or anyone looking at, out of your department, at putting infrastructure dollars into upgrading that particular rail line?

Mr. Ashton: Well, as I say, we already have been part of a \$60-million investment on the rail line, \$8 million on the port. We continue to work through the Churchill Gateway council. We continue to work directly with OmniTRAX on opportunities.

What I reference—and I know the member is probably referring to the comments made about the potential for Arctic shipping. It's really important to note, if you look at the trend over last years and the projections over the next few years, there's a significant opening up of Arctic ice. And I had the opportunity to visit Murmansk directly. They have significant experience with Arctic shipping. The Russians have an extensive history with ice breakers, so they know, also, the technical side and the shipping side. There's real potential for that to open up and, quite frankly, even the Northwest Passage could open up, conceivably, to shipping in the next few years.

The key issue for us is to make sure that we maintain the Port of Churchill. One of the key elements there, by the way, is maintaining the current structure of the Wheat Board. I can't stress strongly enough that the Wheat Board is critical to the Port of Churchill. The vast majority of shipping through the Port of Churchill is shipments on behalf of the Wheat Board.

If we don't have a single desk in the Wheat Board, it could be devastating for not only producers, we believe, but also here in Manitoba both the head office jobs and also, quite frankly, the Bay Line itself. So in addition to the work we're doing on the infrastructure, we're continuing to push on the political side because certainly we know there have been some rumblings out of Ottawa on the Wheat Board, and I'm not talking about barley. I'm talking about, you know, wheat itself, and I can't stress firmly enough that if we're going to maintain the Port of Churchill, the Wheat Board is a key part of the solution.

Mr. Eichler: The minister—you'd mentioned in one of your comments earlier in regards to Diageo. Is there a financial commitment been made there to assist in either purchase or continuance of that line?

Mr. Ashton: We've been working with local residents and stakeholders, and at this point in time, the key issue has been developing a business plan, but we would certainly continue to be part of that process. We've done that elsewhere as the member knows some of the success stories that are out there, and the committee-driven, the stakeholder-driven process has proven to be very effective, we feel. And that is an important strategic rail line as the member knows coming from that area.

I know the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) is, you know, constantly raising it as well. So, you know, we will continue to work with stakeholders on potential business models to keep it going, and quite frankly, we were part of significant efforts a few years ago. I was actually Highways minister at the time when we did work with the rail company itself before current discussions. So we, you know, our approach, and it's worked very effectively I've found, is to work with local stakeholders in communities, and we will do that on this particular line.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the minister for that. I'm a strong believer—it's kind of like a tree, it takes a long time to grow it and very little time to take it down. So when it comes to rail line abandonment, I always think we need to take a second, hard look at it before we make a decision to get rid of it. It's a huge undertaking and property rights and all those other things that come into play to—once you lose those, I think it's something that we always need to make sure that we do everything we can in our power to ensure that the rail lines stay.

Also, maybe just moving from trains to bicycles brings me to my next question—*[interjection]* There

you go. And I guess the question would be on the bicycle path that was built over Highway 59. What was the total cost of that project?

Mr. Ashton: I can get the dollars and cents on that. I'll get the member at the next committee hearing.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you for that. That would be useful. Also, the bridge projects that were undertaken in Brandon over the past number of years, in particular I think, 18th Street and of course, you know, we have the flood situation there as well. Is there a cost, updated cost, on those that the minister could share with us as well?

Mr. Ashton: I will get the detailed costs at the next committee hearing.

Mr. Eichler: We've had a number of vehicles colliding with bridges over the last period of time, and I was wondering if the minister could provide us with an update on the dollar value of those values to the bridges, and if they're projected in the 2010-2011 budget cost or where would those show up.

*(16:30)

Mr. Ashton: Just to clarify, the member is asking about vehicle accidents damaging bridges, like past information or insurance. What I'll do, I'll—the member's indicating in the affirmative—so I will see if we have that information readily available. It may take a bit of time to break it out so we may have to follow up in a separate letter.

I think, at this rate, the next response is probably going to—I'm going to have to ask leave so I can speak for 45 minutes just in answering questions next Estimates, but we'll try and answer that question.

Mr. Eichler: Because of those accidents where, you know, trucks or other things have caused damage, is there normally insurance recovered as part of those costs for repair of those bridges? And also, has there been any charges laid under The Highway Traffic Act for those drivers colliding with a bridge—with such bridges?

Mr. Ashton: I'll make sure that we also provide that information in our response.

Mr. Eichler: In regards to the Manitoba Trucking Productivity Improvement Fund, how many firms used the program in 2010-2011?

Mr. Ashton: I'll add that to the list, if that's okay with the member.

And I want to thank my Associate Deputy Minister Paul Rochon, who I failed to introduce earlier, who is directly responsible for the other side of the department but is doing a tremendous work here becoming an instant expert on transportation at this committee hearing. So I thank him.

And I thank the member for his indulgence as well. Normally, we'd have the staff that are able to provide the detailed information directly with us, but virtually all of them are 24-7 on flood stuff right now.

Mr. Eichler: I can certainly understand, you know, in light of the situation. You know, we're prepared, more than prepared to work with the minister and his staff in regards to try and get the questions answered. Of course, they're very important questions and we would encourage the department, you know, as soon as time permits to try and get back to us in a timely manner.

Just—maybe just to follow up on that just a little bit more: How much money from penalties flowed into this fund for 2010-2011 as well? And also how many projects had been funded as a result of the monies flowing to this fund? If they could take notice to add that as well.

Mr. Ashton: We'll definitely add that to the list.

Mr. Eichler: Green Building Policy. I don't know if we—if the minister has a lot of staff on that, or if he has the—[interjection] Since 2007, the provincial government has established a Green Building Policy whose goal is, and I quote: is to create cost-effective building that respect the environment and contribute to the healthy and more sustainable communities. End of quote.

And I know that, through freedom of information, I know there's a number of issues in regards to this. It's a very complex program, a very detailed program, and I believe—the minister can correct me if I'm wrong—but I think there's only two buildings in the province of Manitoba that's actually made the requirement of the Green Building program. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Just in a general sense, and I hope the member will indulge me, but I actually do have a detailed briefing note in front of me. I'm not going to read all of it, don't worry. You might actually miss asking questions. I take it as notice from the other side of the department.

Just to give the member some sort of sense of where we're at, we recognize that this is an ongoing incremental effort. The key issue here is when you have existing buildings, the degree to which you can upgrade. We also, of course, have the new buildings that are being constructed, you know, if you have more efficient units that can offer—result in 15 to 20 per cent efficiency.

So above and beyond that we've done a number of things. We've an annual program for upgrading buildings and we're having some success, by the way, in terms of mechanical, heating, ventilation, air-conditioning systems, just simple things like using digital control centres. It's just amazing the difference we're seeing on consumption. Water efficiency, a top priority; Power Smart, it goes without saying that's been a huge issue; recycling, we've been—do an extensive program, have developed in that. A waste-trim initiative; we now include green cleaning supplies and practices in our janitorial contracts; we used—we've shifted our use of pesticides and herbicides.

So, for example, and I know this question actually came up in the House, not from the member, but we actually, on the Legislative grounds, have used a natural turf practice of changing cutting heights, aeration and an organic fertilizer. So we are now well on the way towards eliminating all phosphates from lawn fertilizer.

Now, in terms of major capital projects, we've targeted LEED certification for a number of significant buildings, including ACC, the trades building in Brandon; at the Advanced Knowledge and Skills Expansion at Dauphin; also, the admin centre, women's corrections facility in Headingley; Le Cercle Molière, a new theatre; University College of the North, Thompson and The Pas campuses, and, by the way, construction is under way in the Thompson campus, I just thought I'd throw that in; and the Milner Ridge correctional facility, we're targeting a LEED for existing buildings; Brandon, same thing, the correction facility and the A.A. Heaps Building.

So we're particularly in a position to make a significant difference on new buildings, and I could mention all sorts of other initiatives, but we're making incremental progress on existing buildings and we are targeting LEED certification with the new buildings I referenced.

Mr. Eichler: In regards—you did bring up the ACC, you know, trades and technology building, and, even

though that was announced, did it actually meet the requirements for the Green Building Policy?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's going through the certification process, would be likely to receive LEED Silver. It meets the requirements for LEED Silver, which is a—it's a reflex building. It's a great asset. And it does meet the LEED certification standards. It's just a matter of the final accreditation for it.

Mr. Eichler: So, then, am I to assume then that we have three projects that's actually met the LEED certification then?

Mr. Ashton: They are not officially certified but they do meet the certification requirements. And, obviously, as we see the completion of the projects I referenced earlier, you will see a significant increase in the number of LEED buildings. So they're not officially certified, but we have every confidence that they meet the requirements and will be certified.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Chair, then maybe help me through understanding the process. They meet the requirements but yet they don't get certification.

So we have the Dauphin community cinema in Dauphin, the Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre in Thompson, and now the Len Evans Centre that is hopefully going to make that. So how do you measure, then, for the greenhouse gases, then, for that calculation? If they don't—if they meet it but yet they don't, how do you do that calculation?

Mr. Ashton: Well, what I'm passing on to the member is that it's really at the accreditation stage. It's not that they don't meet the requirements; they do. Once we go through that process, then they will get that specific regulation. But they are designed for that standard. They meet that standard.

And I referenced a series of capital projects that are under way right now that we are also targeting to meet those standards. I certainly know, just having been at the UCN campus groundbreaking in Thompson just recently, but also, the work that's taking place in The Pas campus, that they are definitely—the new structures a both communities are targeted for this level of certification.

* (16:40)

And what I think has really shifted, I was Minister of Government Services when we built the Red River College campus downtown. Some very cutting-edge stuff that was, you know, put in place there was something you really had to treat as an add-on to the construction program. At that time, we

basically saw the wisdom, calculated the payback costs, there was some federal assistance through a couple of programs, so you go to it now and it's seen as a, you know, visionary, state-of-the-art campus.

However, what really we've seen as a shift over time now is with the focus in on the various LEED certification levels. A lot of it now is something that we are [*inaudible*] major capital projects as a given. We're starting with a target. I mentioned the specific facilities.

We—by the way, I mentioned about the record capital budget on the highway side. We've got a record capital budget in terms of government buildings, and whether it's adding additional Corrections spaces—which is important given some of the needs to house inmates currently—or that's building campuses, in each and every case what we're doing is we're trying to maximize the—not just the LEED certification but the underlying sustainability elements. And one of the shifts that I mentioned earlier—I think I'll just reference it again on this side of the department—the ability to amortize and capitalize over an extended period of time.

Also, obviously they did with one of the paradoxes with a lot of the energy investment that we're seeing, for example, just take the conservation or even water conservation: A lot of cases there were things that could be done over an eight-or-10-year period that perhaps, starkly, weren't done because of the fact it was an operating expenditure.

When you amortize, the sense of paying something over eight or 10 or 12 years becomes very obvious. It always struck me as, you know, quite absurd that we can capitalize a hydro dam for 40 years, but we can't capitalize or we couldn't capitalize expenditures that would pay back far more quickly on the energy-saving side and conservation side than the hydro dam.

That's changed, and we both—we now have both the standards that we're aiming to meet and we also have the ability to flow the costs over an extended period of time. And we made a significant—we made very significant headway over the last number of years. You're going to see, over the next few years, with the major projects that I listed—seven different categories of them—we're going to significantly increase the number of government buildings that meet LEED certification standards.

Mr. Eichler: I know, in my area, there was two schools, one was Balmoral, one was the Stonewall

Collegiate, and both of them failed to meet the necessary requirements to be LEED certified. The gymnasium in Stonewall, in particular, it was because they didn't have the proper window system in it.

What is the goal with those projects that don't meet the LEED certification, and how are you going to roll those into your greenhouse gas program, far as the calculations are concerned, for future reference down the road?

Mr. Ashton: Well, of course, public school capital is not within this department. I can only comment on what is in with this—in this department, and I do think you're seeing some very significant progress. We do have a green building co-ordination team, by the way—I should mention that—and that is very important.

And we're also—you know, I just want to indicate we're also targeting LEED for existing buildings, you know, operate some maintenance certification across our owned portfolio is important and, of course, you got to recognize we have both owned and leased buildings. I gave you some of that information at the start of the discussion with my opening statement.

So, we will, you know—it's a priority for us. The good news, by the way, is there's a lot of better practice now that's out there. We found that, certainly, with UCN, what may have been cutting-edge innovation—it's still state-of-the-art—but it's not unique. A lot of the measures we're looking at there. A lot of the design elements on the UCN campus in Thompson, for example, go into designing which way the campus faces, you know, building and utilizing natural light wherever possible, both for, you know, solar heat but also for, you know, for lighting to reduce electricity costs.

So, even outside of the structures, we've got a huge ability now with some of the knowledge we have to—take Thompson, the coldest city in Canada, cold-weather testing capital of Canada, and come up with an energy efficient campus that actually is functional as well. So I wouldn't underestimate the degree to which, you know, our staff are, you know, working on this, and also, you know, the contract architects and engineers that design buildings.

We work with a number of firms, you know, through the tender process. You'd find very difference—a very different situation 10, 20 years ago. I just recently attended the consulting engineers' awards ceremony here, which gives awards to, you

know, consulting engineers. Many of the projects actually fall directly under our—this department and what was interesting is the degree to which many of them actually were involving sustainability.

So, you know, there's some creative solutions that are coming from the architects, engineers and other technical staff out there as well.

Mr. Eichler: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I understand, if I remember correctly, I think there's around \$260 million that's been allocated under the LEED program for different projects. So a project, let's just walk me through one—it doesn't matter which one you want to use—but a project that was approved for provincial funding, is there a penalty if they didn't meet the LEED certification? Or do they pay a penalty back to the Province, or is some of that funding pared back? How does that work for us?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there's different situations, different projects.

Some of the accelerated capital projects we've had, we have moved ahead and we're going to look at probably getting closer to LEED certification standards following the construction through Power Smart, other areas. As the member knows, we've had some, you know, some fairly significant pressures on the corrections side, just as one example, which does mean we need to invest, you know, fairly significantly in an accelerated capital program. So, it varies by project. Through the normal capital construction process, it's a priority.

And on the bigger question of contract employees, that's really a—if there's any LEED standards that are part of the design process, any of the penalties and sanctions that would be available, you know, as us in this particular case being the client, you know, vis-à-vis the contractors, would apply as well. But, you know, we've got a regular working relationship with the various construction companies, engineering firms, architectural firms that are responsible on the design side. So we certainly, you know, where we've been able to target LEED certification, we're starting to see some real success on that.

A lot of it, again, is the—is a significant and growing expertise out there. A lot of this is not a matter of reinventing the wheel; there are a lot of very good ways that have been developed over the last number of years of energy conservation, water conservation, you know, use of natural light, I

mentioned, as some of these already that can make a real difference.

Mr. Eichler: Turning back to the provincial funding for these green buildings projects, and was there any project where money was not fully released because it didn't make the necessary certification process, or was there a project that—where they had to pay money back that was advanced to them as a result not meeting the certification?

*(16:50)

Mr. Ashton: Actually, I just want to stress again that where we're able to target, I don't know—that's just some reason for the expedited construction. If we set the targets—we have been setting the targets, they—that's part of the design of the building itself. It's not a conceptual design. It's something that's actually built into it, you know, to reflect the design standards, and we would, you know, certainly expect that the contractors would abide by those standards.

So it's really not an issue of companies in this case. It really is just separating out, as I said, what do you have? You know, they—we don't have the time to go through the full design process because we need that facility right away. Like, just say, the example, the corrections facility, some of expansion we've done there, you know, it's in the public interest to move more quickly. It doesn't mean we're not working afterwards on significant improvements in sustainability, but it does mean there, you know, will be some cases where we just don't have the time to do all the design elements on the LEED certification that we might otherwise follow through.

But you're going to see a significant increase in the number of buildings, especially the ones where—you know, they're important, but they're not on—they're not being built on expedited basis because we're—I mentioned earlier the list of buildings where we've targeted this, and we're having, you know, I think, some real success at the design level, even with projects that haven't been built yet, every expectation that they will meet those LEED certification standards.

Mr. Eichler: Would it not make more sense, then, to change the policy somewhat so it's not so stringent to meet those requirements? I mean, if you don't have the time or the effort to make those requirements become policy, have you looked at changing the policy so it's not so strict?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I think what we have is, we have a flexible imitation of the policy, so I'm not sure if

it's really that different what the member's question leads to. I mean, if we need to build something and we just don't have the time to do the full design elements, we're going to build it. It doesn't mean we're not going to work on many of the elements of those standards afterwards, but any time you have a fracture into the design process, clearly that adds more complications.

So, if we need to expand the correctional facilities coming out of the recommendation for the Minister's of Justice's department, certainly, the, you know, the requirements, you know, to deal with the current number of inmates, there are cases where we're going to have to expedite, and we've done that, you know, to deal with potential overcrowding. So, at that point, obviously, that may override kind of more lengthy design process. But, having said that, we can still do a lot post-design, and even when we construct we're—our sustainability levels are much higher than, say, 10 or 20 or 30 years ago.

And I mentioned some of the items in the beginning with my more general comments. I feel like a lot of our government buildings—I'll take the provincial building in Thompson, which I know fairly well. When it was built in the late '70s, very different approaches on management of buildings, and you really, you know, see out of those days the bigger concern was to keep fluorescent lights on all the time because it was less wear and tear on the fluorescent lights.

We've done a lot of work on, you know, basic systems, but buildings like that, digital controls, for example, are making a huge difference. And the way we design buildings, currently, are certainly better. I mean, I remember being at meetings on the top floor of the building and complaining it was too cold. Well, of course, to get the regular heat on the third floor of the building, that meant that the people in the basement would be in a sauna. It was, again, lack of controls.

So, you know, apart from the Legislature, which is the last vestige of, you know, poor heat management and control, you know, air conditioning, I suppose we could maybe agree on the public record here that maybe we should change that. I don't know if the member wants to put that on the record, or maybe it's too early. You know, maybe when we hit 25 degrees later on this week we may remember that, but it really is ironic that this building is—it's a wonderful building, but it's circa 1919 for building standards; it's not 2011, and a lot

of the work we do for HVAC systems, heating systems, cooling systems is also done now with energy efficiency and sustainability of the building and having a healthy building design as well.

Mr. Eichler: I would have to concur. I think there's a lot of things need to be done with this beautiful building—it is a beautiful building—but it is somewhat dated. Far as upgrades are concerned, I know it's a huge undertaking and somebody's got to do it one of these days. There's no doubt about that.

With the—has your department looked at various other green programs? One maybe, in particular, is like the Green Globe club program rather than the LEED program. Maybe it would be something that we could hang our hat on rather than—you know, I'm really concerned about the overall number of projects and whether or not, you know, it's sustainable long-term.

So where is the department going? What is it looking at long-term—maybe switching over to the Green Globe? I'm not saying that's the one we have to take a model from, but where's the department leading—or leaning towards going in the next five, 10 years?

Mr. Ashton: We—yeah, it—that is something we are looking at. We're constantly looking at ways which we can improve in this area generally. I'm advised that we do work very closely with Manitoba Hydro on, especially on Power Smart. We're already building in features such as geothermal, which is—actually Manitoba is a lead—I don't mean LEED, L-E-E-D, but a lead, l-e-a-d jurisdiction when it comes to geothermal, quite remarkably, you know. So if you look at it—and we're looking very much at that in terms of buildings.

And I wanted to just add on the geothermal side, one of the biggest barriers has been in terms of the specific expertise in construction ability that's out there, and really it's come to the fact that Manitobans have embraced geothermal very extensively. So we're no different. Wherever possible, we're building it into our building design and plans.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Lakeside, might need to be a short question—given time.

Mr. Eichler: Okay, just in regards to the LEED program, I think that the biggest issue that I've been talked about was the number of professionals that are available to work on the LEED program, where the Green Globe system seemed to be one—a little bit

open, where you can have more people, more professionals to work with and to draw from.

Mr. Ashton: I think the member's identified a key issue I mentioned about geothermal. You could apply the same to the design elements as well. I think that's a good observation.

Mr. Eichler: So just to summarize then with the Green Globe system, do you have an anticipated time that that might be able to come about, or is it something that the department wants to move on fairly quickly?

Mr. Ashton: Ongoing review is probably the best way to summarize it.

Mr. Eichler: So I'll expect an announcement before the election?

Mr. Ashton: Hope springs eternal. Seriously, we are looking at it—not in a political way but just because it makes sense.

Mr. Chairperson: All right then.

As was previously agreed. For the information of all present, this was agreed to in the House this afternoon: this section of the Committee of Supply will meet again at 9:30 tomorrow morning to continue consideration of the Estimates for Infrastructure and Transportation.

Therefore, the time being 5 o'clock, this section of the Committee of Supply will now recess.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson: (Marilyn Brick): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 41 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Good afternoon, Madam Chair. I have a few questions throughout the Estimate book here, and we'll sort of end up on Rural Initiatives at the end, if I may. And, on page 10 of the Estimates book, there is a pie graph there showing various expenditures of the department, 2011-2012. Agri-Food and Rural Development is pegged at 19 per cent. Is that more or less or how would that compare over the last number of years?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): It's always tricky when you deal with percentages because we have been able to squeeze out more resources for the department overall, one year to the next, which probably reflects a very slight decrease in this percentage because last year, I understand, the percentage for Agri-Food and Rural Development was 19.1 per cent, and now it's at 19 per cent. But, again, I want to caution my friend across the way that we're dealing with percentages, and one of the things that we have been successful in is getting more money into this department that then can be used to help farmers and ranchers across the province.

Mr. Pedersen: And I understand the difference between percentages when you're dealing on a—as your budget increases. Hopefully, it would remain constant, but I was sort of interested in the trend of it. But I guess it's not easy to do that unless we break down in dollars figure, but then dollars doesn't necessarily buy you more. More dollars doesn't necessarily buy you more either, so I'll just move on.

Page 27 of the Estimates book, you have under developing climate change adaptation strategies, and you have a strategy to implement ecological goods and services. Can the minister give me an outline what an ecological goods and services strategy would look like?

Mr. Struthers: We are committed to moving forward on an ecological-goods-and-services approach. As the member across the way knows, this got started with a pilot project in the RM of Blanchard known as ALUS, Alternative Land Use Services, a pilot project that I think a lot of people from not just the provincial government, and not just our department, but others and other levels of government, I think learned a lot from and we've been looking for ways in which we can broaden out from that pilot project.

We all know every level of government, every third party that we've worked with, understands that

this is going to cost a bigger amount of money than what has been earmarked for this in the past. We have a working group that has been coming out of that pilot project, a working group within the provincial government that has been meeting. The MAFRI staff are part of that working group, Water Stewardship staff, Conservation staff, Finance staff, Local Government staff, just to name—I hope I didn't forget anybody in there, but they've been tasked to come back with an approach that we can implement and we're—I'm looking forward to the advice that that working group brings to us.

I don't want to set this up as to some certain date way down the road that they finally come to me with some recommendations. I mean, there's good ideas that are being talked about now that I've been keen to move on, and the pot of money that we can use to do that has been growing forward; \$117.5 million that federal government and the Province of Manitoba have committed to, to Manitoba producers that can be accessed for many of the projects that would find its way under an overall umbrella known as ecological goods and services.

I know we've worked with, I'm—if my memory serves me correctly, Schweitzer-Mauduit accessed some of that money, or we worked with Schweitzer-Mauduit. You know, we get a lot of calls when there's farmers burning stubble. It's frustrating because I've often thought, why can't we do a different approach on that. We do have some rules in place through our sister department, but here's Schweitzer-Mauduit accessing money through what would eventually be the umbrella of a ecological goods-and-services approach, turning that stubble into fire logs, turning what many people see as a waste product into something that represents another revenue stream for the farmer. And I'm all for both protecting the environment and putting a little green stuff into the farmers' pocket.

So, that's an example of how we have used some of that Growing Forward money to work towards an overall kind of an EG and S approach. Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable member for Emerson.

An Honourable Member: Carman.

Madam Chairperson: I'm sorry—Carman. Excuse me.

Mr. Pedersen: Close. We're neighbours.

I don't believe, though, and the minister can certainly correct me, that the FlaxPower fire logs has not received any provincial money in—the project in Carman, it's called fire log. That's using the—making of fire logs from flax 'shives.'

* (15:00)

Mr. Struthers: And, of course, I was very pleased to join with the member for Carman right out at Schweitzer-Mauduit a number of months ago, where we did make the announcement. My staff is looking to confirm whether my memory is correct or not. The—what I—it may not be this fiscal year that there was money put towards. We're going to check to make sure. We're going to confirm my memory, yes or no; thumbs up, thumbs down.

But my point is that these are the kinds of projects that I would foresee being part of a—what would eventually be a successful ecological goods and services kind of program, the type of program that we'd certainly want to encourage and work with both the federal government and the private sector in terms of solving environmental issues, Madam Chairperson. But I'll endeavour to confirm the Province's support on this for the member for Carman.

Mr. Pedersen: Just to make sure that we—you're aware that Schweitzer-Mauduit, you were out to the plant and there was an announcement there with Candice Hoepfner and the federal government, but FlaxPower PowerLogs is a different company and it's just down the road from them, and I don't believe that you've been there, from my understanding. But, if you would, you know, perhaps, off—after here or off the record, if you would give me a contact person that Kevin Lumb, who does operate PowerLog, that he can contact your department because his—like you say, his flax log, his fireplace log certainly would fit in with this ecological goods and services. So, if I can get a contact to pass along to Kevin to contact your office, because I'm sure with the high-powered help you have sitting there, that they will—they can tell me if I'm wrong but, to date, I don't believe the Province has been involved. The federal government has been involved in the PowerLog, but not the Province. So, I will—we'll get that one straightened out.

On a somewhat different—just going back to talking about the ALUS program in the RM of Blanchard, is that program still running?

Mr. Struthers: A contact that can be used by his constituent is Eric Liu; L-u-i, I think, is how you spell his last name. He'd be a very good contact in the department.

And the ALUS program has run its course. It was a three-year pilot project. Those three years have expired, and, as I said earlier, from that came the working group of provincial departments and representatives of those departments to plan where we go from here.

Mr. Pedersen: So, on page 43, and I—as I read through this Estimates book, I saw climate change adaptation strategies about three times in here, and climate change mitigation strategies about the same number of times. It certainly makes for a thicker book when you keep talking about the same thing over and over, but can you tell me what the difference is between adaptation strategies and mitigation strategies?

Mr. Struthers: But when we talk about mitigation what we're talking about is taking steps to actually reduce the number of greenhouse gases that are created in Manitoba, in this case, through agricultural practices.

I can give a couple examples. We've been working with a number of people to replace coal with something that's more organic, something that's more environmentally friendly. We've been working with a number—I think it's some very good results, actually, in his area, the member for Carman's area, with the Hutterite colony, the Rosebank Colony—*[interjection]*—yes, the Rosebank Colony in his area where we have made those kinds of improvements. Another example he'd be well aware of is zero till, and the number of farmers that have adopted that practice to mitigate the impacts of greenhouse gas effects.

On the adaptation side, these are management practices that we would take on almost in response to an increase in greenhouse gases that we have seen occurring over the decades. I can throw out one example here, and it's directly related to the amount of research and development that we do with all of our partners, and we've been looking to develop varieties of grains, the varieties of grains that can handle greater heat levels, especially when they get to the flowering stage. Those sorts of things, that's an example of adapting to the increase in terms of greenhouse gases.

* (15:10)

Mr. Pedersen: Page 57, there's an—it talks about an expanded soil survey program. Can you give an update as to where you are—an example of what you're doing? Who is doing the soil surveys? Who is doing the mapping? What is the progress to date on this?

Mr. Struthers: We believe that we've got—had some real good progress, that our teams involved in the soil surveys have really been working well. We've increased the number of people and the number of teams that are doing this work, work that I want to stress is important. It's important to get good data in place so that we can make good decisions.

There's really a couple of levels: one is at a higher reconnaissance level, and that work has been done throughout the province; what we're working on now, and have made good progress on, is the more detailed kind of surveying that still needs to be done. Our goal is to continue to work forward to make sure that we can put that together with the higher-level reconnaissance work that has already been completed, and that'll give us a very good picture of the details that we need to make decisions through our department, or, if other departments are asking questions and doing work, it'll be there for all of us.

Mr. Pedersen: So who is doing the actual—who is down on the ground doing the soils—taking the soil samples? Who is doing the analysis? And is there any particular area of Manitoba that you're doing this in or is it all over Manitoba or what—are you contracting this out to individuals, or is it individuals within the GO centres that are doing this? If you could explain to me, who is actually doing the physical work here?

Mr. Struthers: We have, right now, in the province, three teams. They're based between Minnedosa and Shoal Lake. Each team is composed of a professional soil scientist and a technician. These folks are the ones who dig the holes and develop the profiles of the soil. They send—the work that they do is sent to the soil survey lab, which is located here in Winnipeg. That soil survey lab analyzes the raw data that they get. They analyze the samples that they get and they produce soil survey reports, which are then available to, I understand, everyone. It's public; it's—farmers can access it; other departments can access it. We have a whole host of consultants in Manitoba; they can access it. But that gives the member for Carman a little idea of what those soil teams look like.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, two questions arise out of this. First of all, are you doing any extra concentrated work in terms of historical data in the hog moratorium area, which we take is, basically, from Highway 13 and east in Manitoba? And are you doing it on a historical basis so that you can gather some analysis of changing soil fertility levels or is this just random around the province?

Mr. Struthers: First of all, the soil survey teams, they're looking for actual physical characteristics as separate from fertility. Soil fertility, farmers know what they're doing on that and that's separate from what we're doing.

The member asked if we're doing some work in the hog moratorium area. I do remember where that is, Madam Chairperson, and I also remember a few years ago when the debate of a Bill 17 was raging in this House that one of the things I remember is being impressed by the amount of work that RMs had already done in terms of soil surveys and that kind of work in that part of our province and in other parts of the province. But much of that work has been done already.

To give the member a bit of an example. In 2011-2012, soil survey maps and reports will be completed for the RMs of Springfield, De Salaberry, Ritchot, Turtle Mountain, Roblin and Blanshard. So you can see that that's a bit of a cross-section of agri-Manitoba, some within the moratorium area, but most in that list outside of that area.

*(15:20)

Mr. Pedersen: So has the department been working with—the organization that comes to my mind is Deerwood Soil and Water Management, and I realize you're talking about soil structure, not soil fertility. They have 20-plus years of data out there. Is your department partnering with them at all, in terms of using the information and the incredible amount of data that that organization has? Does your department work with them at all?

Mr. Struthers: The very quick answer is yes. To add a little bit to that, though, the Deerwood group, we've been—as a department, we've been working with for a number of years. We have a great deal of confidence in the work that they do. We use some of the data that they have worked on, and we share some of the data that we've worked on. They've made presentations to me in the past, both as since I became Agriculture Minister and the job I held previous in Conservation, and I think that—well, I

know I have a great deal of confidence in their ability to put this data together and to analyze it and make it work out on the ground level, which is always important to me. It needs to work on the landscape, and I think our ability to work on the landscape is only enhanced by working with this particular group.

Mr. Pedersen: And, while we're speaking of Deerwood Soil and Water, the Tobacco Creek water management group has applied for some national funding. Has the Province been there with a letter of support, or has they—have they been in public support of this application for this grant money—study money, I should say?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we've put a letter of support together that Tobacco Creek is—I encouraged to use. We've done even better than that. We've helped them develop their proposal. We've worked with them along the way. Again, Tobacco Creek, I think, has got some good experience in not only finding ways to gain money for projects but doing some very good on—out-on-the-landscape kind of work. So that makes it very easy for us to put together letters of support and to work with them on their proposals.

Now I believe that this isn't the first time that we've worked together with them to try to locate some 'rejerch'—research dollars, or study work that they can do. I think a group such as the Canadian clean Water Network, we've worked with this group to make sure that they get consideration.

Mr. Pedersen: Would the Boyne Valley Water Initiative—in a previous life, it was known as the Treherne Dam, but it's been rebranded—would that project qualify under either the climate change adaptation strategy, climate change mitigation strategy? Where does that project fit in scope with the government right now?

Mr. Struthers: I think, probably for two reasons, this is a project that we're interested in. One, as the member for Carman has suggested, it may fit into a climate change mitigation approach, a climate change funding approach. The other reason is, a good, old-fashioned water management approach. I think, you know, one of the things I think we can see happening every spring, this spring no exception, is examples in our system of where we can better manage water, whether it was this year or last year with all the rains, or even years before that where farmers have come to any of us in this Legislature to talk about better ways to manage water in our areas.

For me, the key to that is to have it based on a watershed. Watersheds just don't drain; watersheds drain and they retain. And I think there's some—when you look out in terms of conservation districts and the kinds of work they're doing in all parts of our province, that's the basis upon which they work with farmers to make good decisions.

With respect to this project brought forward by the member for Carman, we helped in the initial stages, in terms of some money for some of those early geotechnical studies that they were doing. That's the logical first step that a project like this needs to get going with. And we thought it was a good role for us to be playing in terms of helping them get started with some very basic information.

Right now they're in a—they're—the part of the process that they're in is a consultation process, meeting with RMs in the area, meeting with First Nations, meeting with others to see if there is support for the project on a local/regional basis. And when they finish that part of the process, I can imagine they'll be coming back to talk with us to see where we want to go from here with this project.

Mr. Pedersen: So what is the government's plan for the long-term support of this project?

Mr. Struthers: That's going to depend on what this group learns through the consultation process. I know that there are some RMs in the region who have some very real concerns that they've put on the table. I think there's going to need to be a lot of work done by the proponents to mitigate those concerns, to work with the RMs in the area who do have concerns. And I think should they sort through some of those obstacles, which are very real, then I think they'll be coming back to us to speak with us about where we go from here.

Mr. Pedersen: And I appreciate your comments about rural municipalities possibly having some concerns. I think maybe some of those concerns might be changed—changing now that we see somewhere in the neighbourhood of, whatever it is, 56,000 cfs coming down the Assiniboine River. I—one of my goals this summer is to figure out how many seconds it would take to fill the Boyne Valley Water Initiative dam under 56,000 cfs, but I'll work on that on my own. But I—certainly any help that the government can be to this project would help it in the long term.

* (15:30)

But I'm going to move ahead to another topic on page 96 of the Estimate books. There is an objective in there to increase the number of new entrants, farm and farm labour, into primary agriculture. And I'm particularly interested in new entrants into primary agriculture from the farm side, not the labour side. Has your department worked with Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade in this project?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we are—we've teamed up—the specific question was on whether we've teamed up with ETT, the answer is, yes, we do business—farm business-start workshops and projects like those in conjunction with E, T and T.

We also work with Labour and Immigration Manitoba, with new Canadians who wanted to enter farming. We have, I think, a very good relationship with Keystone Agricultural Producers. We helped host the Canadian Young Farmers conference. I think it was out of Portage, wasn't it? Yes, the Young Farmers Forum—Canadian Young Farmers Forum out at Portage in the brand-new—oh, I'm sorry—KAP's youth forum was in the brand-new recreation facilities in Portage. The young—the Canadian Young Farmers conference was here in Winnipeg.

The Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation has a number of programs that it works with in terms of encouraging new entrants into farming. The young farmers women's training program, even more specific, helping young women enter into farming. And I know that members opposite understand that this is an important activity for our department to take on. The average age of farmers is on the increase, and we want to make sure that young farmers have every opportunity to enter what is a very honourable profession.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chairperson, to the minister for that answer because I asked the same question in Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade Estimates and they haven't got a clue about this program, and I'm glad you're working with their department because I asked him—I asked the minister and nobody could find it, and that was a week ago; I still haven't got a written answer back. So I'm glad that you're really up-to-date on this and running two departments here. It's working much better than E, T and T. *[interjection]* Well, as a—I'll let you decide on where we're going with that one.

But I'm going to keep—in the interests of time there, I want to keep moving because we—I do have a few more questions, and I'm sure the critic is just bursting at the seams to get back here. So, on page

117 it says: Elevate Farm and Rural Diversification Centres to regional hubs of local activity. It's right at the bottom of the page, on page 117. Am I reading something in there that you're going to further amalgamate GO centres into regional centres? They're somewhat regional right now, but am I reading something into this?

Mr. Struthers: This is a building up of the centres that we have now, enhancing those centres to do yet more and more good work in the regions that they're at. It's not a—as the member was asking—it's not a re-organization of what is out there.

We have, in places like Roblin and in Melita and Arbrog and Carberry, we have these centres that I think do some very good work. I've toured through a couple of them, including the one right in my constituency of—in Roblin. They're doing a lot of innovative work with the private sector, with partners. They are—the decision-making is—has farmers right in the mix. They have boards that work and set where they're going. My recommendation would be for anyone to knock on the door and go and take a look at what some of these centres do. It's very good work. I think it is a good strategy to elevate and enhance and build those centres. But it shouldn't be looked at as weakening anything else in our system.

Mr. Pedersen: So, just for clarification now, we have our GO centres across rural Manitoba. So this would be like an—you have GO centres and you have enhanced GO centres? Is that my correct interpretation of this?

An Honourable Member: Super-size GO centres.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, super Walmart.

Mr. Struthers: Those are separate. GO offices are out there. There's extension services that we do. There's a lot of information exchange. Think of these more as separate from that and—based on research—and separate from what the GO offices do. Some of these happen to be in the same communities as what GO offices are, but they're very different and they have a different purpose. And they're—and I really want to stress, they're—to think of these in terms of centres for research.

Mr. Pedersen: So where does the funding come from then, for these regional development centres?

Mr. Struthers: Another good example for the member to think of this is in terms of, they do the same sort of thing as the university field station—that I think is located in his constituency—that kind of

research that helps us in our decision making. The funding is through this department in combination with money that we receive through Growing Forward, and that's been increasing.

* (15:40)

And we've been increasing that funding and we also have what I think is a very, very good advantage, and that is to bring in third-party funding, quite often on a project-by-project basis, or—there are groups, right now, interested in finding out whether we can grow a lot of camelina and what we can do with that camelina and what impact that has on a farm operation, maybe a little more money in the pocket for the farmer. But these fuel stations, these centres do that kind of work. A lot of plots for all kinds of different—in Roblin when I was there I saw a lot of blue fruit plots. I saw some hemp being grown, different varieties of wheat; one variety of wheat that dated back to what the Egyptians grew years and centuries ago. This is a good opportunity for us—right—a good opportunity for us to plant and research and learn, and we continue to fund that and increase the funding to it.

Mr. Pedersen: I was kind of disappointed in the minister. I thought he would say there is federal money involved and there is even private corporation money involved in those. So it's okay to say those kind of things.

Is there any ARDI money in—A-R-D-I, ARDI money?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I'm trying not to be very partisan about these Estimates, but if the member would like—mind you, when—every time I defend the federal minister on things like cattle programs, one of his colleagues throws his federal minister under the bus and says, why did it take so long, when it was the feds we were waiting for. So I was trying not to get into all that.

ARDI does help in terms of funding on specific projects. We worked very well together with ARDI on a number of different—in conjunction with ARDI on a number of different projects and I certainly encourage my federal counterpart to stay committed, as he has been, to these kinds of projects and to levels of funding from Ottawa that is certainly very much appreciated here in Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: And if I can turn to page 160 of the Estimates book, Madam Chairperson, Regional Development Corporations, you provide grant money to them, but you reduced that from—my

understanding is you reduced them from \$74,000 to \$66,000 last year and you also cut out, entirely, the Community Profiles website. Where is this—what is the long-term project? Where is this going in the long term for the government? Where does the government see this project three and five years down the road if—under their direction—where they're going right now?

Mr. Struthers: First of all, the question of the Community Profiles website came up—I know the member has brought it up in question period—he brought it up last year in our Estimates—*[interjection]*—here, here. They're very, very persistent on the part of the member for Carman.

What we've been told, and I've been told at AMM conventions and other opportunities that I've had to speak with municipal peoples involved, is that they much prefer to do their own website, their own community websites, and I've got to say, there are some very good community websites out there. I would reference the City of Dauphin as a prime example of a very good community website. The City of Dauphin very clearly wanted to do their own rather than what was being offered here. So be it with that.

As a view down the road, I think we need to recognize that there are some regional development corporations that are really knocking the ball out of the park. They're very well organized. They reflect their community's wishes and desires. They've learned a lot of lessons along the way that they're actually helping other RDCs who aren't quite at that level. I've seen a lot of good work being transferred, one RDC to the next.

I foresee down the road a much—I think a much stronger co-ordination in a region of all the different things that we have happening. In some regions you can look and see a number of economic development officers in—representing a number of different communities or a number of different RMs. And what you end up with are a number of different economic development officers competing with each other rather than putting forward a regional approach that then can really pay off for the communities in that region. Sometimes you then lay over top of that the tourism structures. I think there's a lot of opportunity for a stronger organization at the regional level, a stronger participation at the regional level which will, I believe, accrue more benefits at the regional level for all those communities in whatever region it is.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So I think that the RDCs in Manitoba will do—will continue to evolve. I have a confidence in the people and—that we've been working with in each of the different RDCs, and I am confident that staff in MAFRI will continue to work with these folks to make improvements to our regional development corporations. And I encourage RDCs to be in contact with our staff because I've seen good things come of that kind of a relationship. So that's where I see it going a few years down the road.

Mr. Pedersen: Would you be able to give me, then, what each regional development corporation will receive on an individual basis for the fiscal year 2011-12?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I can do that. The total that we're giving to all of the RDCs together is \$490,100. That's split along the following lines: Eastman Regional Development Incorporated, \$65,100; Pembina Valley Development Corporation, \$66,000; Central Plains Incorporated, \$69,600; Interlake Development Corporation Incorporated, \$66,400; Norman Regional Development incorporation, \$75,700; Parkland Regional Development Corporation, \$72,000; and the Southwest Regional Development Corporation, \$75,300.

And those numbers represent agreements that we've come to working with each of those individual regional development corporations. This isn't a kind of a number that I waved a magic wand on. This is worked out in agreements with the RDCs.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, was there consultation with them, then, as to how much money they would receive? Or was this an arbitrary number that you put out there and said, this is what you will get this year versus last year.

* (15:50)

Mr. Struthers: These numbers that I just read are based on an agreement that we made with the RDCs a number of years ago, and the commitment has been that we would be within that—within a reasonable level compared to the agreement that we came to a number of years ago.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. I'll just wrap up, then.

Right early in our discussions we were talking about FlaxPower and one of your staff employees, Eric Liu. If you—your staff would just send me the note as the person's name and the phone number, and

I will pass it on to Kevin Lumb, and then we'll go from there. I'd appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Chair.

Mr. Struthers: I'll make sure that that happens, yes.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Minister, that early May snowstorm and high winds that hammered certain regions of the province took a toll on a number of livestock operations. Does the department have a preliminary estimate of how many cattle and calves were lost to that storm? And what is the estimated dollar value of those lost animals?

Mr. Struthers: We are in the process right now of verifying numbers that have been struck. We know that producers have received a hit on this. We—right now we believe we're in and around the number of 2,000 but are still contacting producers in Manitoba to see how accurate that number could be.

Loosely, this translates into—we would believe just shy of a million dollars, and these are calves and cows and steers and lambs and sheep. We had reports all over the province—predominantly, though, I would say that western Manitoba where the snow was the deepest. I knew there were going to be consequences when I was shovelling that snow off my driveway in Dauphin. This was one of them. The amount of water produced is another. That was an awful blizzard that we got and farmers took it in the neck on this.

My commitment has been that we would not leave farmers hanging on this and that we would be very thorough in making sure that we have accurate numbers. But I want to stress that that process, it's continuing; we're still looking to make sure we have an accurate number. I don't want to miss anybody out on this.

Mr. Graydon: I can assure the minister that we have lived through these as well in southern Manitoba, in 1997 where we saw calves freeze standing up and cows freeze standing up. So it's not a pretty thing to see, and the losses really do add up.

Hearing the minister suggest that he's not going to leave farmers hanging with this and knowing full well that Saskatchewan has announced a program under their provincial disaster assistance program, can the minister then suggest that he's doing the same here in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Struthers: When I say we're not leaving farmers hanging on this, we will be stepping forward with a program. We want to make sure that it's an

accurate program. Like I said, I don't want to miss out on anyone who's suffered losses. I understand that Saskatchewan has moved forward. That's good; I'm—that—I'm fine with that. I want to move forward with all our ducks in a row, making sure that we've got our bases covered and that we're not leaving anybody out.

Mr. Graydon: I certainly appreciate the minister's approach to this terrible catastrophe. I'm just wondering if he has let producers know in any way, because I haven't seen anything that doesn't mean that it hasn't happened, but what do food producers need to do in order to be eligible for cover and—or coverage and when will that be announced?

Mr. Struthers: Well, we've been very consistently getting the message out for producers to contact their MAFRI offices that are close to them. We've had good contact with the Manitoba beef producers and we've asked that the Manitoba beef producers and other groups work with us to identify their membership who have suffered these losses. I know we had a news release go out and I did a number of interviews to talk about this, and I know some of the producers heard that because they approached me on the weekend to make sure that they—that I knew they had a claim that they'd be coming forward with.

As with any other program and been—if a farmer comes forward, we'll ask them to declare what their losses were. If I was a producer, I'd be looking for any kind of way to make sure that I got what I deserved in that—in terms of money for losses. I don't—I wouldn't want to be missed out, and, as minister, I don't want to miss people out. So, I would be documenting—if I had pictures, I'd be getting them; if I had a vet that could—that I could work with, I'd be doing that. But I want to make—I want to stress that we will be fair with farmers on this. We understand that they took some heavy losses and that they need to be compensated for that.

Mr. Graydon: Well, I thank you for that approach, Mr. Minister, and I guess I wonder if—because this is sort of precedent-setting in the province, I don't think we've done this before in this type of a scenario, but there's—there are other scenarios that producers have lost animals that were not due to their management whatsoever, but, at the same time, they are weather-related. And I'm just wondering if something like in the southeastern Manitoba, for example, there's a serious issue with liver flukes, and many producers have lost a lot of cattle; they are documented. The vaccine to protect these animals

wasn't available in Canada. It is now, apparently, being—you are able to bring it in, but I'm wondering if the minister is prepared to extend that type of disaster assistance to those people as well.

* (16:00)

Mr. Struthers: In dealing with the losses that—due to the blizzard, I think, we've been very clear that we were going to make sure that that whole event, the blizzard, the excess moisture, everything connected to that extraordinary—those extraordinary events would be treated as a special compensation approach. Having said that, I understand that there—that that—there have been other incidents around the province not connected to that extreme weather event that, I think, we'd be asked for. And I guess this is an example of that.

I don't want to take away from the extraordinary nature of these weather events that we've been dealing with this spring, so we were very clear that the compensation that we're talking about would be swift and it would be fair, and we intend to come through with that.

The member has met—has brought the case of liver flukes before. I understand he brought them up in the Conservation Estimates, as well. I admire him for his tenacity and persistence. I don't see that in the same category as what we're dealing with here. I understand that there are federally reportable diseases; we've talked about anaplasmosis, the member and I, in the past. There's other hardships that farmers face that really does need some attention from the federal government in terms of these federally reported diseases. Anaplasmosis is federally reported, but liver flukes and—I should be careful with what I say, Mr. Acting Chairperson.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, no, no, no.

Mr. Struthers: Oh, no, just keep going. Yes, thanks for that encouragement over there. The point I want to make is that the—what we were dealing with in the one example is related to extraordinary weather events. The example that the member for Emerson brings forward isn't and is, in fact, more of a persistent—I hear from him annually—I'm assuming it is an annual problem.

Mr. Graydon: It is certainly a problem. It's been precipitated by the unusual wet weather in southeastern Manitoba. It has persisted for a number of years. I might point out that we also had a snowstorm in southeastern Manitoba. I hope that the minister isn't eliminating the compensation to

somewhere west of the Red River. There is people on the east side and they did have snow over there as well.

The liver flukes are part of the—the reason that they're there is because of the wet weather and the extreme population, large population of deer. And, consequently, they have cost a lot of money for individual producers, and through no fault of their own.

When you mention anaplasmosis, I fully appreciate you bringing that up. It is a reportable disease and there is compensation from that from the federal government, likewise, with TB. But, in this situation, the reason I brought up the liver flukes is because of the abnormal rainfall. It has been in the southeast for a number of years. It has persisted there when it hasn't in western Manitoba. And this is—this has allowed this little creature to propagate and cause the trouble that it does cause. And the pastures are wet, they graze, and the cattle ingest these, and then, this little monster just runs through their livers and kills them. If it doesn't kill them, it does stop them from gaining. It impedes their ability to put on weight and a number of other economic factors then kick in.

So that was the reason that I brought it up, and I hope the minister appreciates that. He may want to change his view on this.

Mr. Struthers: Well, the one thing I want to be very clear about is we—I mean, if the member is thinking that we would ignore his part of the province, which also, he's correct, had snowfall at the same time, and there were losses, whether they be calves or cows or feeders or lamb or sheep, we're not going to exclude his part of the world.

What I was referring to was the severity of the snow storm, and even, I believe, it's being reflected in the numbers of deaths, livestock deaths. It appears to us that the brunt of this mistake—and on further west in Manitoba and into Saskatchewan. But don't, for one minute, assume that we're going to leave out a producer in Vita who lost livestock in that blizzard.

My advice to farmers, wherever they are in Manitoba, is to hook up with some of the very hard-working MAFRI staff in any of our offices, all around agri-Manitoba. Talk to our staff, make sure they know the details, make sure they know your losses. And we'll deal fairly and swiftly with any

farmer, in any part of the province, that suffered as a result of that blizzard.

Mr. Graydon: I think I'd like to go to the Assiniboine River dike breach. Many concerns about that dike breach on the Assiniboine River and its impact on the agricultural producers that are going to be downstream for that.

Did the agricultural department provide any input about the proposed location where the dike would be cut?

Mr. Frank Whitehead, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Struthers: Well, let's be very clear. That decision was taken, not so much on the advice of this minister, as engineers who took a good, hard look at the Assiniboine River, took a good, hard look at the best location engineering-wise, the best location impact-wise, and then, made that determination based on engineering experience and training that engineers go through.

We, from Agriculture's point of view, from MAFRI's point of view, our role was to, when you look at maps, as to where a possible controlled release would take place, our role was, take a look at those maps, get in contact with the people who could be impacted, the farmers who could be impacted, the ranchers who could be impacted, the colonies that could be impacted, the vegetable growers that could be impacted, the agri-businesses that could be impacted, and work with them to minimize that impact.

* (16:10)

I'm really confident that the location that was chosen—and the member for Emerson and I stood right on that road last Tuesday evening, and I think we could both see that there was merit to that particular location.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

I always find it's much easier to view that right on the spot rather than working off of maps. I think we could all see there were some real advantages at the Hoop and Holler Bend, given the oxbow that was there, in relation to the Assiniboine River itself. I think, looking at the maps, it was easy to see that that would impact the fewest number of producers if a—knowing all the time that if an uncontrolled breach, if mother nature just decided she was busting out somewhere, these farmers could be impacted, plus a whole lot more.

So we've—I think we moved forward as a department in such a way that, first, we work with farmers to prevent and get them ready, get feed to cattle, cattle to feed, move some—work with the Armed Forces to get dikes around a number of the farm operations in that area.

And one of the things that I was very impressed with yesterday, when I was through there, was the amount of work that I had seen happen from the Tuesday night visit that we did right around to yesterday afternoon when I was in that area and I met with the Sunnyside Hutterite Colony. And, you know, the amount of work that has happened with the Armed Forces, Manitoba volunteers, the municipal people who've been working on this, really, I think, produced a much better outcome for the farm community in that area, so hats off to them.

Mr. Graydon: So, then, from that answer, Mr. Minister, it would appear that you've been in contact with each of the operations to offer assistance, to help them to get ready for the proposed breach prior to the breach, if I understand right? What type of assistance did you offer them?

Mr. Struthers: We got off the mark really quickly and made contact with livestock producers in the area. I think the member would understand that that would make sense to be in contact with them first. They had some of the greatest challenges in this release area. We contacted every producer. And our goal, in contacting every producer, was to work with them to assess what the best options were. It may be moving some animals; it may be diking and protecting the farm. We have daily conference calls with Keystone Agricultural Producers, Manitoba beef producers, Manitoba Pork, chicken growers, egg farmers. We have a long list of groups that we check in with on a daily basis to make sure that things are going as they should.

We were in contact with grain elevators in terms of movement of grain and any decisions that needed to be made for that kind of protection. We were in contact with our sister department, Manitoba Infrastructure and trade, and also in contact with municipalities having to do with roads and getting ready, I suppose, before any decisions are made, to release the water, but, also, that continues.

I mean, I mentioned in the House the other day that we've worked to ease some restrictions, for the time being, to make sure that we don't run into those kinds of hassles. When we try to move animals or move feed to animals, we want to make this as easy

as possible to get ready for the possibility that we might have to do a controlled release. I'm confident that the best decision was made in terms of the location of that release, that it minimized the number of people that it would impact. It minimized the number of farms, including livestock and vegetable growers and grain growers, that would be impacted, and that we move very quickly to get ready should that eventuality occur. And I have to say I was very impressed with what I saw yesterday, in terms of the amount of preparation work that has gone on, in that controlled-release area.

Mr. Graydon: A number of the horticultural operations employ immigrant labour. And, if suddenly the crops are lost, how will these operations be impacted with their labour force that they have brought in? Is there some plan for that, because I'm sure you're aware that there are a lot of temporary seasonal migratory workers that come to Canada for this particular reason?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we work really well with Manitoba Labour and Immigration. We're working to minimize those kinds of impacts. Again, I go back to the decision, in the first place, to minimize the impact of that water on these operations so that we don't—we minimize the interruptions that would take place for farmers in the area who depend on foreign workers. But we work very well together with Labour and Immigration Manitoba to put good rules in place and, when it comes time to consider, I think, what we're leading to here is a discussion about compensation. We've been very clear that we will be speaking with individual farmers to make sure we have a complete understanding of the impacts, the economic impacts, that each farmer has run up against.

So, again, I would encourage farmers to be in contact with us. Everything that impacts them we want to know about so that we can incorporate that into our decision making, whether it be to prevent losses in the first place or compensate losses that do occur.

Mr. Graydon: Yet, the housing for these temporary migratory workers or migrant workers, if that housing is impacted and the workers are here, are they going to be housed in hotels much the same as we do when we have—for example, Roseau River First Nations had to be evacuated because of the roads being impacted by flood waters? Would the migratory workers, then, be put up in hotels at the expense of the provincial government?

* (16:20)

Mr. Struthers: Well, I think the member from Emerson can understand that his question might be a little bit premature or hypothetical. When we were there yesterday, one very strong impression that I got was the number of houses that we saw with the—those water tubes and sandbags, dikes that have been built encircling each of the houses. We, in the travels that we did in and around the release area, I don't remember seeing a single house that wasn't—that either the military or volunteers hadn't been to to do some work to protect.

If we get into a situation where this does become a problem and the—we want to hear from the employer right away, we want to hear from the farmer right away, and then we can make some decisions from there. But I'm really very confident that the kind of preparation work that was done in that area and, also, given the controlled measure by which this water is moving from that Hoop and Holler Bend onto the farm land, is being done in a very controlled fashion, that we, as engineers told us that it should, I think we're just a little premature in thinking that. But I want to reassure the member for Emerson that all eventualities are thought through and the key is going to be if there—does a problem like this arise, that the farmer needs to be in contact with us, with our MAFRI staff, and then we can work on it from there.

Mr. Graydon: Would it be fair, then, to say that the migrant workers would be treated the same as the—as resident landowners of Manitoba?

Mr. Struthers: I'm not sure I entirely understand the question. I just—in where the member's going, but—I—the farmer will qualify for compensation. The farmer needs to be in contact with MAFRI staff so we understand exactly the economic impact that any water would have on his operation. I think we need to understand that the needs of a vegetable grower are going to be different than the needs of a—someone with livestock, which maybe, you know, different again from a grains and oilseeds producer. The—and should there develop a problem with housing and with anyone with immigrant workers or else—or others, we—our goal is to, first and foremost, protect people that live in that area, but also treat them fairly if they, you know, should qualify for any kind of compensation.

Mr. Graydon: I think the minister knows full well what I asked. I asked if these migrant workers would be treated the same as a farmer, a resident farmer in

Manitoba. And, if that resident farmer needs to evacuate his home, then he has to have another place to go, even though they're ring diked and his property isn't going to—the access is cut off, and then he's evacuated. Does he go to a hotel, and, if so, what is—what's the rate that you pay in the hotel? You must have that.

Mr. Struthers: Well, I think the premise is that we're not going to leave anybody out there just sitting on their own. We had a—on the weekend I was at the—at Lake Dauphin, in the Ochre Beach area, and there was a cluster of about a dozen homes that were very much being threatened, and there was people working on sandbagging those homes.

But one of the roads leading in there, the only road leading in there was in danger of being overrun and become a problem. And so the discussion was about evacuation. And I know in talking with a number of the homeowners, they were—first and foremost, they were looking to see who they could bunk in with in Dauphin, or relatives they had in Ste. Rose, or wherever in the area. So, to a certain extent, this is going to depend on your own circumstances. And we have—the provincial government has people that would work together with people who have been evacuated, and there's been a number in this province this spring who have had that unfortunate circumstance.

So I think the main message is that whether it's a—if you're a person and you're impacted by the flood, you're not going to be just left there out there on your own. But, again, we need to know, we need to have people hook up with MAFRI staff and other provincial employees, emergency medic—emergency measures folks, who've been really working hard on this, so they all understand what the needs are. Whether you're a resident of Manitoba or whether you're a temporary worker, a foreign temporary worker, we need to know what your circumstances are so that we can best work with that person to make sure they're safe.

Mr. Graydon: Now that we know that there is a deliberate breach in the control structures, there's certainly going to be an impact on producers. And, at this point, we don't know how many producers or what that impact may be. But, at the same time, these producers are businessmen. And is there going to be a business risk management program that kicks in?

Mr. Struthers: We've been really clear. We've said that there will be a special compensation package that we'll come forward with. It's based on the

premise that people living and working in this area have taken a hit on behalf of the rest of us in Manitoba. That's a very persuasive argument for a compensation package, and the Premier and myself and other of my colleagues have been very clear that that compensation package will be fair and it'll be swift.

* (16:30)

It would—it includes the individual circumstances, economic circumstances of the people who have been impacted, if they're impacted, and we intend to bring that forward. I have indicated to my federal counterpart, the Honourable Gerry Ritz, that, you know, that we were pleased with the way we worked together last year on a couple of AgriRecovery programs that him and I announced. I've indicated in a letter to him that we would be willing to do that again. I've indicated to him on the phone, very good conversation with him last week, that we want to move ahead quickly. I have said this publicly. I have been impressed with the answer I get—answers that I've got in the past from Gerry Ritz in terms of supporting the Manitoba farmer. I have no reason to believe that he won't be there this time again. I think there are some programs—some costs that would fall into the category of AgriRecovery and subject to a 60-40 split between the feds and us. I think there are some expenses that would fit into the disaster financial assistance category which has a different split, a 90-10 split. I think the, well the AgriRecovery program is part of that business risk management suite of programs that have been put in place. My other commitment has been very clear that any of those programs that can be utilized to help the Manitoba farmer will be utilized by this government.

Mr. Graydon: The minister mentioned AgriRecovery and the 60-40 split as well as the DFA with the 90-10, and I can well imagine the separation that will go into determining which is which and which it falls under. So I can see where that would probably be a bit of an issue to try and roll out money in a timely fashion. It takes some time to do this type of paperwork. But I have one question on the AgriRecovery. Would it be the minister's intention to charge a penalty as he did in the past?

Mr. Struthers: The member, I think, meant to say deductible rather than penalty, Madam Chairperson. I think that's what he was talking about. Those kind of determinations haven't been talked about with our federal counterparts at all. We simply put in writing our request that we negotiate an AgriRecovery

program and that—in the conversation I had with Minister Ritz, he asked me to make sure that I keep him updated on what we're up against here in Manitoba.

I hope it's not the intent of the member across the way to roll into this flood event his disagreement with me over whether or not a deductible should be applied. I think there's—this isn't the time for those kind of debates. I think this is a time for us to figure out the best way it is to be helpful and to prevent the loss of homes, the loss of livestock, prevent that from happening. And then work together to make sure we put together a special compensation package designed specifically for the events of these weather events that we're—this huge weather event that we're facing.

Mr. Graydon: Does he—maybe the minister can tell me or help me through the process, walk me through this process. We have a catastrophic event that we've had and it's certainly not over. We're working with unknowns. We're working with unknown damage, unknown compensation, unknown a lot of things. Does the minister then—does he go to a Cabinet committee in his caucus and say, look, it's approximately this? Or do you have to have the numbers, all your ducks in a row, and go with your total numbers and then you go to a Cabinet committee or to a Treasury Board? Just walk me through that process in a, you know, in a thumbnail overview.

Mr. Struthers: Well, the first step in this is to assess what the—as much as we can—the economic damage that has occurred. In the area of agriculture, it's up to me, then, to make sure that my federal counterpart is kept up to speed on exactly what that is. You—the member will—would realize through other AgriRecovery announcements that the federal government needs to—of course, they have their processes. They need to assess what the damages are. They're not—they're just—they're not going to just write a blank cheque; they're going to work with us to make sure we assess what those damages are.

So we are in the process of doing that. Other ministers on this side of the House would be in contact with their federal counterparts. For example, on the DFA side, that would be something that we would work together here interdepartmentally, but the—my colleague responsible would keep our federal colleague apprised of where we're at in that process.

I think the member for Emerson's right on a number of the unknowns that he has spoken of, and

that does make it—it makes it a little more difficult here. But I can only imagine it makes it even more worrisome for producers out there. But one thing that's not unknown is this government's commitment to special compensation, and to make sure that it goes quickly and that it's a fair compensation. Our Premier (Mr. Selinger) has been very clear about that in this House.

Gosh, I was watching the news the other day and there came our Premier talking about and being very clear about compensation and, you know, very much showing a high level of leadership on this file. So we do have to have authorities in place. Nobody wants to just see this minister cashing cheques left, right and centre, writing cheques left, right and centre. We have authorities that are in place and it includes Treasury Board and Cabinet. And ministers involved with the different avenues of compensation will be making recommendations to all of our colleagues on this side of the House. So those authorities will be put in place. We're going to do that quickly, and we're going to do it fairly.

Mr. Graydon: A simple question, and I thank you for walking me through that. A simple question, then, is for this Cabinet committee: Is there a chairperson for that?

Mr. Struthers: Well, we—the authorities lie in—at Treasury Board and from there to Cabinet.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chair, in the budget there was the core government budget of \$228,299,000 and then the consolidated impacts were \$200,883,000. And I'm having some difficulty in identifying the—what all this 200 and—200 or 201 million represents. And so I brought it up in, as you may well know, I brought it up in Finance and it was suggested that I talk to the Minister of Agriculture because he would know and, if he didn't, he had a very competent staff that could brief him. And so I saved the question especially for the very competent staff.

However, one of the things that did come up in Estimates with the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), was that she felt that there was a fair amount of that money went to the racing commission, and perhaps the minister can explain that.

* (16:40)

Mr. Struthers: The first thing that should strike the member for Emerson is what a solid amount of

support that is for our Manitoba agriculture, a core budget of \$288 million.

I do want to say that the—my colleague, the Minister of Finance, as usual, is thorough and accurate, especially when she included the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation as part of that \$200-million figure that the member from Emerson was asking about. Almost all of that is money that goes to MASC, almost all of that amount. The Horse Racing Commission is a tiny, little number out of that amount, and I don't have that number with me, but I can endeavour to get that for the member. I want him to know that that's—we'll be asking staff to burn the midnight oil to get that. It's a complex process to distill that number out of that, the Horse Racing Commission number out of the \$200 million. But, if he wants that, we can attempt to do that.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Madam Chairperson, I certainly want to thank my colleague from Emerson for bringing up the horse racing industry here in the province of Manitoba. And I know, and I think the minister knows, that there's certainly some challenges in the industry in the province here.

And I just want to, you know, get his feedback in terms of what role his department has been playing in trying to develop long-term solutions for, you know, not just the standard-bred industry but also the thoroughbred industry here in the province of Manitoba. And I think both industries are looking for some type of a long-term, self-sufficient type of operation that they can sustain both industries here in the province over the long haul. And I'm just wondering what role the Department of Agriculture's playing in that regard.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we know that—we know the industry, not just here in Manitoba but even wider than that, has some very specific challenges that it's facing. I don't want, I wouldn't want, us to leave the impression that it's the Manitoba standard-breds, thoroughbreds, the whole industry here in Manitoba. I don't want people to think that somehow something's going wrong there that isn't impacting racing around North America.

It is a big challenge, and I appreciate the member for Turtle Mountain understanding that and putting that on the table. We as a department want to be helpful. We want to work with all of the different facets of horse racing in Manitoba, whether that be in the rural circuit or whether that be at the Downs, whether that be some ideas that come forward,

whether from the Jockey Club or others. We want to find a way to make sure we make the most of that critical base that we might be able to build in this industry.

We do help out with funding. We help out with—a fellow from our department, from the name that—David—David Miles, trust my memory—David Miles, who, I think, has a lot of good advice and has met with me, and I've done the tour out at the Assiniboia Downs and met with, I think, all the groups now, as has David. And we try to make sure that we can introduce some stability to a very challenging industry.

We have been clear in this budget and in statements that we've made with the industry that we're committed to funding rural harness racing. I think that, for the 2011 race year, we've made some announcements in terms of racing out at the Downs and commitments to this 2011 racing year, whether it's the Manitoba Great Western horse racing circuit or other stakeholders. We've brought them together to talk about developing a business plan that might be workable on a province-wide basis. I think that that's important. It's facing challenges, and we need to talk about a business plan that might make some sense. So our people from our department are willing to work with the stakeholders on that.

* (16:50)

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for those comments.

I know the frustration is there. I know we had a situation a few years ago where the industry had found an organization that was ready to come to the province and bring an investment of \$15-to-\$16 million and establish a harness racing park near Brandon. And, at the time, the government of the day saw fit not to accept that particular offer.

And now we've had discussions over the last, oh, approximately a year, I guess, in terms of both the Jockey Club and the Harness Horsemen and trying to get an extended meet going for this fall. And our understanding, as of last week, that particular meet in the fall is off, and that's the message the Lotteries Corporation was providing to the Harness Horsemen.

So, obviously, we're challenged in terms of a long-term commitment here, and I guess today, you didn't mention that you have committed to the Manitoba Great Western for this season. My understanding is the Manitoba Great Western haven't

had anything official from your office to verify that the funding would be available for this summer. I just wonder if the minister—what his intent was in terms of verifying with the Manitoba Great Western that funding would be available for this season and if the minister knows what amount that particular funding would be?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we've sent the Manitoba harness racing people confirmation that there's \$525,000. I believe if I have this right in my memory, it's \$450,000 dedicated to them and a number of—and some of the remainder dedicated to quarter horses and—but that confirmation has gone out. Maybe they haven't received it yet. If there is a snag in that I'd like to know. If the member has—the member has been very good at getting information to me on this so if there's a problem with that confirmation, I'd appreciate knowing.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for those comments and I certainly will make sure that they have received that letter that's gone out. The point that I want to make with this, it really is a timing issue. And I know the member for his particular area too, in Dauphin, in terms of the ag society and turf club there, you know, these ag societies and turf clubs all across the province have to make commitments early on in the year. And obviously, unless they know for sure the funding is going to be in place, they can't make those particular commitments going forward. So it makes it very difficult for the rural ag societies to commit on that basis.

You know, ideally, it would have been nice to see a long-term program so that, you know, the industry doesn't have to come to the department each year to beg for fundings to make the operation run. And it does come down to an important timing issue as well and I wanted to make sure that the minister was aware of that.

Part of the challenge the industry, the harness racing industry, is going to be looking at this year is, as an additional decision made by the federal government in terms of the Canadian Pari-Mutuel Agency's, I guess, inability or, will I say, their decision not to fund the testing, and, obviously, now that considerable extra expense is going to be felt by the industry to do that testing that's now required. And, obviously, that funding will come out of the provincial allocation that's been provided to the industry.

And I know the minister has sent a letter to Mr. Ritz back in January on this very issue, and I thank you for that. I just wondered if the minister has any further updates in terms the federal decision in that regard.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, on a couple of issues that the member brings up, the—whatever it is that we can do to get our decision making into the hands of these stakeholders, whatever we can do to enhance that, I'm all for it. The sooner these folks can know that we're making these commitments—\$525,000 is a substantial amount of money, and I want to make sure that we get the best bang for that money when we send it out to these groups. So anything that we can do to make that turnaround quicker, we want to keep looking to do that.

But the member knows—and budgets are introduced in April and a certain amount of time is spent in deliberating on budgets and that sort of thing, but, as quick as we can get that out to people, I want to get it out. I appreciate his comments in terms of the withdrawal of equine drug testing service. Some of the changes that the federal government put forward, I think, will work negatively on our industry here in Manitoba.

The member's right. I did put pen to paper and get a letter to Minister Ritz on that very issue. Maybe Minister Ritz has been out for the last five weeks door knocking and hasn't been able to get back to me, but I haven't heard from him. I'm sure that I will. Minister Ritz isn't exactly a wallflower. He'll get back to us good, bad, or otherwise, I'm sure. I'll endeavour to keep the member apprised when that happens.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you much. I appreciate the minister's comments there. I guess the next question, quickly, is: Are you as the Minister of Agriculture going to take a lead role in terms of trying to get the various stakeholders together so that we can actually develop a long-term solution to the horse-racing industry here in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we've been doing that already with the stakeholders plus I'm just reminded my deputy minister has met with Winston Hodgins, head of MLC, to talk about—to brainstorm about some ways we can move forward. I think we need to get everybody together to design a business plan that makes some sense, that makes some economic sustainability sense and, I think, try to build some kind of a critical mass in the industry so that, instead

of continuing to decline, we can turn that around. But, yes, we've been doing that already.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable member for Turtle Mountain, short question.

Mr. Cullen: Does the minister have a time frame when he's looking at trying to get all these stakeholders together to have further discussions?

Mr. Struthers: My thinking has been that if we can make clear that this race season we are committed to and then we take that time this summer to make sure

that we get people together to talk about a business plan and a long-term strategy.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour now being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned, stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 16, 2011

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