

First Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 18, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)INFRASTRUCTURE AND
TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order. 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 previously agreed, questions for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Good morning. I'll start off here, Mr. Minister. I've got a few questions in regards to some things in-happening in my constituency.

PR 310, from Highway 12 to the border, is approximately two and a half miles. On the Canadian side it's a 74,000-pound road, is what I call it, and on the American side it's an 80,000-pound road. And I've had a lot of concerns from constituents how that can be rectified, because it's only 6,000 pounds, but in the trucking industry it does make a big difference when you're hauling a lot of miles, you know, for your net pay on that.

And I've toured a lot of the roads in the area, like the road that goes through Vassar. It's up-it's-the road is not as good shape as even as the 310 is, the 89 south of Piney. So I'm just wondering, is there anything we could do? I know, you know, not necessarily to rebuild the road, but if it had to be patched in a few spots, but is there any way we could get that road upgraded to an 80,000-pound road?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Yes, I appreciate the member raising the issue. It's not unusual. Some border situations, both interprovincial, you know, with Saskatchewan and Ontario, also internationally as well, you know, and, in fact, we have numerous cases where the opposite is the case, you know,

where our highway's higher loading is a better highway than in the neighbouring jurisdiction.

Certainly, on the—in the Canadian context, we've moved to some harmonization with Saskatchewan, which is helping in terms of border, particularly on RTAC, but I'll get a bit of detail on that highway, and I'll certainly get back to the member, and I appreciate him raising it with me.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, the Trucking Productivity Improvement Fund, how many dollars does that bring in in a year?

Mr. Ashton: We have currently 17 companies. I'll get the exact amount. We did read it into the record, actually, yesterday. And just on the Highway 310, just to give the member some sense of the kind of dynamics there, B and B1 road that—you're talking about a million dollars a kilometre in terms of getting, you know, to the kind of level you're talking about. So, you know, there is a cost issue, and, again, it's similar to what we deal when we look at the highways capital project list throughout the province. You know, it's getting a balance.

Oh, and if the—if it would be okay with the member, I was going to read some of the answers from yesterday, which may be useful for follow-up questions for members.

Cost pave one kilometre of highway, and staff advises me that the most important thing to say is, it depends, which I, actually, I would have said myself, but they have "it depends" with numbers to back it up.

Resurfacing a two-lane highway, you're probably in the range of about half a million dollars kilometre.

A new two-lane gravel highway is from 1 to 1.5 million dollars kilometre. A new two-lane paved highway, 2 to 2.5 million kilometre. That includes, of course, the whole thing.

And a four-lane is between 4 to 5 million dollars a kilometre. That doesn't include bridge crossings, any train issues, construction in remote areas. So it's, again, it—and it's in quotation marks—it depends.

Long combination of vehicles on two-lane highways, general not recommended. We are

undertaking a pilot on Highway 6. Part of the issue is whether drivers expect to see LCVs, but, you know, standard length semi-trailer units are what people are expecting to see, so safety's compromised. And also a high volume of traffic magnifies this concern. Some two-lane routes have significant weekend volume peaks as well, too, so that becomes an issue: 16, 3 and Highway 1 east of Falcon Lake, so that's some of the rationale there.

And on the issue of extending the 110-kilometre section on PT 1—Highway 1, Highway 75, again, we're evaluating what's happening where we have already extended it.

And so I did give the member the number of firms involved, and I can get the dollar amount on that trucking improvement fund.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, going back to the three—the PR 310, it is a short piece of road, and there are several other areas that have a less standard of road that I think are in poorer shape than what that road would be. Is there any way to just reclassify those two and a half miles or anything that, so that—because I know that it's probably going to be a few years before the money'll be available to rebuild it. But has the department ever thought of looking at the road itself? I mean, it's classified as a B1, but have they ever thought of reclassifying it just for those two and a half kilometres to—because it does make a big difference for those trucks that are coming off 12, like, and it's—it is only 6,000 pounds. Is there anything that they could look at for that?

Mr. Ashton: Well, again, you know, there are issues that we also look at and I go—you know, and I'm advised through it, you know, the US border thinks restricted hours, you know, so that's probably what's taken into account in terms of setting of priorities.

* (10:10)

But I'll—what I'll do is perhaps take the member raising the issue as having raised the issue and certainly appreciate him raising that. As I said, it's not unique to border situations, both with the US and within Canada on the provincial boundaries, so we'll certainly take it under advisement.

Mr. Smook: Regarding spring road restrictions, if a business is surrounded totally by 65 per cent roads, what are his options to be able to move freight in and out of his business in the springtime during restrictions?

Mr. Ashton: It's a hypothetical, but I suspect it's a real situation, so I'm wondering if the member wanted to put it in terms of the actual situation. It might be easier to respond.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Go through the Chair and let me first recognize you. And also consider a minister as third person as compared to saying "you." Say "the minister" or "he." I think that's the procedure and we should follow that. Thank you.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, it—the situation is that there's a business that's off of Garvin Road. The municipality has all of their roads at 65 per cent, and that stretch of Garvin Road is also at 65 per cent. They used to be able to get a permit from the department allowing them a couple of trips a week in and out of there. But now they've been told they can't have a permit anymore. They have to go to the trucking productivity; like, the permit would be, I guess, for just to bring him up to an 80 or a 90 per cent?

Mr. Ashton: I assume what it is, is the directions go through the trucking improvement fund where essentially we—the companies are part of it—we do allow greater loads, and there's a payment to the fund that reflects the impact on the roads, either in terms of additional maintenance or impact on the road.

And one thing I can tell the member is, if you have a road that's restricted, it's for a very good reason. You know, vehicle traffic has an impact, but trucking, in particular, has an impact, and you can have one—one truck can be the equivalent of, you know, a thousand cars in terms of wear and tear on a road, and particularly at vulnerable times, you know, during the spring when you've got, you know, wet base, it can be a real problem.

So I'm assuming what's happened in this case is they have been referred to the trucking improvement fund which is, as I said, I think there's 17 firms that do partake in it, and it does allow them to pay somewhat more into a system that does allow them to do two things: one is to have the additional weight, but also gets them some revenue back into the road itself to either repair it or, down the line, reconstruct it.

Mr. Smook: On page 16 of the grey supplementary, it lists major projects. What are they? Eleven major projects.

Mr. Ashton: I assume the member's referring to the—there's 11 full-time positions? Yes, so you just want a description of what major projects refers to?

Yes. There are—this refers to the project managers for major government projects in what's essentially the government services side. We do have some significant projects—I think they are listed—you know, the more general description is on 98, so it's—you know, we have 11 of them. There's project management; also have the—you know, the technical section of the branch. And we, just to remind the member, we do—this department does deal with everything from jails to post-secondary colleges, as well as the transportation side of the department which deals with, obviously, significant transportation-related policies.

Mr. Smook: These 11 positions, would they be just term positions, or are they part of government at all times?

Mr. Ashton: Full time. Yes, I mean they're full-time staff, fairly senior staff, that do co-ordinate very complex projects. Of course, we do access consulting company services, and it's obviously the construction that takes place. But our department does basically take the lead on the construction side of these projects.

And so that's the kind of thing, I think, to give you some sense of the kind of projects we've been involved over the last number of years, some significant corrections facilities. And I'm sure the member's aware of a number of them that have been opened the last several years, significant college facilities, Assiniboine Community College, in particular. And we're now currently involved with a major construction in terms of the University College of the North, both in Thompson and in The Pas. So those are the time—the type of some of the, you know, major projects that are a significant part of this department's mandate.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, on page 16, 15-4(b), maintenance waterway projects. Could you give us a list of what they are?

Mr. Ashton: It's—yes, this is maintenance on the entire provincial system. So anything that's in the provincial system, provincial drains, I guess reservoirs, anything of that nature, this is the maintenance section. So probably the easy answer would be if you look at what is provincial, part of the provincial system, that's where the maintenance takes place.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, on page 34, Lieutenant-Governor's operations, when was the last time the Lieutenant-Governor's car was upgraded?

Mr. Ashton: It was purchased by the previous—under the term of the previous Lieutenant-Governor. So that gives you some idea of the vintage, and it is maintained regularly. And we follow the same sort of approach we do with, you know, fleet vehicles. I mean, this is, you know, a life cycle for vehicles. They're maintained over that period of time. So, in that particular case, you know, the point in time where the vehicle is in need of replacing it, it's 'replained' on a—replaced on a routine basis.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. On page 39, division executive office. What changes in staff, if any, occurred in this department?

Mr. Ashton: What I was going to suggest what we did yesterday, if it's agreeable with the member, I'll sort of take questions and as I get the answers. I can, you know, provide additional information, rather than take up the valuable time with the—with pauses that, you know, don't actually provide much opportunity to ask questions.

So we'll follow through as we're speaking, and if we don't get it right now I can also provide information, you know, either at a follow-up meeting or in writing to the critics or members.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. That will be okay.

On page 49, 511 road conditions, is there any pending updates to the website?

Mr. Ashton: Well, we've, as the member knows, rolled out the 511 service as being quite well received. I mean, I think there'll be more use of it this upcoming year because there's more awareness. And it is a very, you know, it's a very useful tool, particularly in the winter when weather conditions can change very quickly. And we do maintain it based on the changes in source information.

* (10:20)

The key thing here, too, is the—in addition to the web-based at the side that you have a menu-based phone system that does allow people to get their direct information. So, if you wanted to, in my case drive home to Thompson, you know, you can go through the various menus. You can get very up-to-date information on the weather and highway conditions. So it's—the key element of 511, of course, is that interactive phone—well, it's the interactive

phone system. It's very specific and allows you to get targeted information.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, page 52, bridges and water dam maintenance: Which dams will be upgraded in 2012-2013, and at what cost?

Mr. Ashton: I'll see if we can get a list of some of the activities in that area for the member.

We—in a general sense, I can say we've been very much focused on both the capital, maintenance side with bridges. We have identified 80 bridges that were flood impacted, that—a lot that require a complete replacement or a significant repair or, in some cases, some degree of minor repairs. But there's at least 80, and that's just flood related.

But, of course, we have ongoing issues related to bridge not all of which are structural. Some are, obviously, condition of the bridge deck, you know, so it's—so I wouldn't want people to always assume that we have structural issues we're dealing with. And many cases, too, the activities are precautionary; you know, they're done not to—they're not based on any imminent structural problem with the bridge, but, you know, to maintain the structural integrity over time.

So I can get the member, you know, a list of some of the kind of projects that we're involved in, but it will be fairly extensive, because we are—we're involved not just with the flood but, you know, with a comprehensive program with bridges. And what it does reflect, by the way, is an increasing part of the capital budget, which has increased overall, but an increasing percentage of the capital budget that's involved with both maintenance of bridges and capital construction of bridges.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, dam maintenance was one of the questions in there. Like, is there a fair number of, like, which dams—are there any dams in there that will be upgraded in two thousand—like the bridges, but are there any dams as well?

Mr. Ashton: I'll get the member a list of all of the water infrastructure that will be maintained.

And there is a significant review that does take place, and we have a lot of water works in the system. And again, we do have an ongoing maintenance project—oh, you know, which is obviously not specifically related on the, you know, the capital side, which is also fairly significant as well.

So I'll get the member a list of some of the focuses and it may, probably, not be available till either next sitting of the committee or, you know, in writing if we've completed the Estimates consideration.

Mr. Smook: On page 56, what is the infrastructure deficit on bridge repairs and upgrades? Is that in—going to be included in that what you'll be provided us?

Mr. Ashton: You know, I—the term infrastructure deficit is a good concept, but how useful it is in reality, I would question and it's speculative. You know, I could give you numbers in the billions; I could give you numbers in the hundreds of millions. It really depends on how you define what the infrastructure deficit is. Do you—you know, is it highways, bridges, you know, structures that need some repair work? Is it things that we would like to have or be, you know, part of a wish list and that?

We're not—the reason I say that is I—there is an infrastructure deficit and—but it's easier to get a sense of that, by the way, more at the specific project level, and the real issue there is if we're making progress or not. To give you some sense with bridges, for example, [*inaudible*] the focus of the questions, we have moved very significantly to inspect bridges. We have a significant bridge inspection program. I can give the member details in that if he's interested. This predates the impact of the floods of 2009 and this past year. So we have a significant inspection program. We've been putting in more and more work on bridges that reflect replacement or repair of bridges. We have bridges in the system—I think, our oldest would—we've had bridges going back to the 1920s, although I wouldn't want people to assume that's necessarily the bridges that need replacing.

Sometimes our older bridges are actually in better shape than some of the ones that were built 40, 50 years ago, but—go figure. That's, you know, maybe a comment on the construction lifespan that we have nowadays, the, you know, perceived lifespan.

So, you know, if you wanted to get into some of those challenges, but you then also end up with, you know, some of the issues related to, you know, bridges that we might build in the future, and their—areas that we are under, you know, pressures—I give the member example of Norway House. We have a bridge into Cross Lake, a community of about six, seven thousand people. There is a ferry into Norway

House. Norway House will also be the terminus of the east-side road in that region.

So, down the line, we've already identified there might be a need for a bridge, but you include that in the infrastructure deficit.

Just to give you, by the way—and actually, I do have some of the details that might be useful to give you some sense on the inspection side. There's over 1,500 level 1 bridge inspections, over 640 level 2 bridge inspections and 34 level 3 inspections that were completed, and this is from 2010-2011. There are over 2,000 level 1 bridge inspections, 650 level 2 bridge inspections in 2011 and '12, and due to the flood, this is, again, over this past year, another 300 affected—over 300 sites were inspected.

I can give the member the regional breakdown. I'm not sure it would be really useful to get into all of the bridges, but if you look at the volume, you're seeing it's pretty well—you know, it's the entire inventory that we're going through over that two-year period.

So flood inspections—the Red River region, there were 80-plus sites that were inspected; Interlake region—50-plus sites; and in the western region—200-plus sites. So that gives you some sense of the geographic impacts.

Major structures were visited at least once a day during the peak flood events, and bi-weekly outside of the peak events, minor structures were visited at least once a week. So that gives you some sense of the fact that it's not just a one-off, and these are, kind of, some of the unsung heroes of the flood, if you like. We mobilized seven inspection crews to assist with flood inspections and the crews were mobilized for periods of one to five months for on-site inspections.

So, looking ahead, we're looking at approximately 2,250 level 1 and 640 level 2 inspections in the upcoming year.

To give you a bit of a background on how many bridges and structures we have in the system, there's over 3,800, and so there's a—you know, it's a series of things we look at. They range from, you know, as the member would know, concrete, steel, timber, et cetera.

So this is part of our—you know, you get some sense of our current policies, and just to give the member some further detail on what the policy is, all major bridges on provincial trunk highways are

inspected at least every 24 months. That's—there's 396 of them. Major bridges on provincial roads and main market roads—every 48 months and 602 of them. The minor bridges—every 72 months and there's 345 of them. So there's an ongoing, regular inspection program.

As you can see, we've added additional inspections for floods, and this has been in place for a number of years. And out of that inspection, obviously, the vast majority of our bridges are not impacted—don't have structural problems. But it does give you some sense of, you know—80 bridges we've identified already from the flood and why there's also, you know, that thorough inspection program where you're seeing more and more identification and work that's required under the capital budget.

*(10:30)

So, you know, the inspection is the first step, but it is driving more expenditures there. So, you know, it—to put a artificial number on infrastructure deficit really depends on your definition. And the key thing we're focusing on is maintaining those bridges. We have some new bridges that are being built or some replacement bridges that are being built to a higher standard. And that basically is, you know, the quick summary of our bridge policy.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Speaking about the east-side road project, what will be happening in 2012-2013 as far as the east side? Are there any specific plans?

Mr. Ashton: The minister responsible for the East Side Road Authority is the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson). It does—you know, there's capital funding that's identified through this department, but he's the minister responsible for the East Side Road Authority.

There is a significant amount of work that is being planned. Member's probably aware there's—a route selection has already taken place, and I believe there's in the range of 80 to 85 million dollars budgeted for what's a very historic project this year.

And in terms of details, he would be able to provide more information—or directly with the East Side Road Authority. I think most of their plans have been, you know, publically available, but I'm sure would there be no difficulty providing the member with a detailed update on—in terms of where the East Side Road Authority is at.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Motor carriers. What are the fuel tax dollars received from other provinces or states, and what is the dollar amount we send back to other provinces or states for fuel taxes?

Mr. Ashton: I've got the trucking improvement fund numbers, so I'll perhaps read that in the record and then respond: 2011, okay, the revenue including interest is \$108,570; total fund balance is \$1,072,762. And, again, some of that is being used for highway renewal. Again, I mean, the whole intent of the fund is to balance that out.

Now, I want some clarification in terms of what the member is talking about, fuel tax revenue.

Mr. Smook: On page 59—sorry, on page 63.

If Mr. Minister is not able to find it, it's—could be because this is a—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, appreciate the member identifies—on—the section on page 62 under motor carrier permits and development. Yes, we'll get the details.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): And I had a few questions related to the east-side project, and you indicated that the planning was being done through Aboriginal affairs. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: The east-side road is being built by the East Side Road Authority, and the minister responsible for the East Side Road Authority is the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Mr. Wishart: And the tendering process, then, Mr. Minister, is handled by them, or is it handled by MIT?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, they do their own tendering directly, so it's through the East Side Road Authority.

Mr. Wishart: So any questions regarding that tendering process, we would have to go to them. That's not something they're going to refer back to you?

Mr. Ashton: It does appear on our website, but they basically have full authority, both budgetary and the authority to do the tendering. So we, yes, we wouldn't be in a position to answer those questions. But the minister responsible for the East Side Road Authority will.

Mr. Wishart: I just wanted to touch again—and you did give us an update on the emergency channels that were done last summer and into the fall, Lake

St. Martin to Big Buffalo, and then the following one, Big Buffalo to Lake Winnipeg.

The licensing processes that will have to follow, because they were done on an emergency basis, could you enlighten us as to what we will, or what you will, have to pursue in terms of licensing for that?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we were able—I mean, it's a different circumstance, as the member knows; he identified it quite correctly, between the emergency situation and the more normal situation. We did consult and have significant discussions with the federal agencies that are involved. DFO, of course, is always involved, and very involved, and I do want to put on the record that it was very clear identification by the federal agencies of the emergency nature of the project.

I'm not sure if the member's talking about moving to a permanent channel, or a permanent operation of the channel. Once you're outside of the emergency situation, you would have to go through the normal processes, and the key thing I want to stress is that what we are going to be doing is we have the ability to close off the channel. We're certainly not going to be bulldozing it in. It will remain in place and what we are going to be doing is twofold. We are going to be doing a fair amount of assessment on the environmental impacts. I don't want to understate them. I don't want you to make any assumptions that there weren't some environmental impacts. When you have a major project of that nature, you're bound to get some impacts. That's important because if we do proceed to, you know, any further developments, any further outlets, that will be very important information.

The second thing is we do have that independent review that is taking place, of flood mitigation, and I'm fully anticipating, even though it's an arm's-length process, that they will address some of the related issues, you know, related to the outlet, including permanent outlet or not or any extensions to the outlet or any other issues related to additional outlets from Lake Manitoba combined with, you know, additional relief out of Lake St. Martin.

So I'm fully anticipating that that will be a part of it and, indirectly, I would assume the regulatory review that's taking place on the regulation of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, that they will probably address some of these issues as well. I don't want to, again, tell them what to do or not to do. That's—it's an arm's-length process, but I'm fully

anticipating that they will be predicating their ability to maintain a lake level on both those lakes on, you know, what the situation was before with flood—with water infrastructure, what the situation is now, post the outlet, and what the future situation might be in terms of, you know, additions to that structure. Because clearly we—even though it was done for emergency purposes, if we needed to do it again in another emergency, we could, without permanent structures. I mean it's a very—the member's probably aware, it's a fairly straightforward process to open and close it, and what, to a certain extent, happens, as well, too, is once the level of the lake comes down, the level in the whole systems comes down. So there's a very significant difference between what you might see during peak period and what you see when it's eventually closed off in order from the Hoop and Holler, which is, you know, almost in the member's back yard—well, not too far away.

*(10:40)

So my sense is those'll be very important considerations of those independent reviews, and just to confirm again that the latest information we have is that they will be proceeding to public outreach fairly shortly—I'm assuming early in the summer, from the information I have. I'm not going to pre-empt what they may announce, but they've certainly indicated, in some of the information we have from them, that they're looking at a fairly comprehensive set of meetings in the summer which, of course, is very shortly.

Mr. Wishart: And thank you, Mr. Minister, for the updates. So no applications for more permanent licensing for either of these channels will be moving forward until after the entire review process is completed, is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, that's a correct statement, largely because there is that overall review, as I said, and we might be moving to a more permanent structure, but also because the infrastructure that's there that was done, remains there, could be used again fairly easily in the case of an emergency. So I'm assuming one of the big issues that will come out of this review is do we need to move to permanent structures or not, and what the time period might be for permanent structures.

I mean, I do want to stress that if we had to do a project like this—you know, we did much of the same sort of review we would have done for the project, but we did it in a very short period of time, and we

had excellent co-operation from, you know, the federal agencies.

And it's not that we didn't do environmental work; we did identify environmental issues. The actual construction was very cognizant of environmental issues. The operation of the structures was very cognizant of environmental issues. I don't want to underestimate, you know, the fact that we're dealing with, you know, community fisheries, you know, and a lot of other issues that are important along with the flooding. So it's not that we didn't do that, but we didn't have the same, more lengthy, more formalized approval structures.

So, yes, the bottom line here is we're not moving immediately to any permanent usage or starting those processes, but we're certainly not ruling it out. I would assume that will be a part of the recommendations coming out of the report, whether we actually need to do that or not.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, what is the deadline for applications under the disaster financial assistant program, for people affected by the 2011 flood?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, similar question was asked recent. We have not moved to deadlines, recognizing that we have many areas of the province where people are only just getting back in and able to assess damage. We still have some areas that, quite frankly, even that's not necessarily possible. You know, we have 2,400 evacuees currently, so as we do with similar situations, and we—as we've done in the past, there's no immediate deadline. But at some point in time we will move to, you know, to a deadline, but not at this point.

We want to make sure that people have every opportunity to apply for DFA coverage for eligible costs and, as I mentioned, when we had some more detailed discussion on this, we're already at about \$650 million worth of overall expenditures. And DFA is a very significant part of that. I did read in the record the number of claims that have been processed and completed, some of the open claims that are still out there, and some very significant payouts that have already taken place, particularly, by the way, to municipalities. There's been some very significant municipal damage, but we've also had significant payouts to individuals as well.

But there's no cut-off that's imminent. We want to make sure everybody has every opportunity to get the coverage they're entitled to.

Mr. Smook: The legislative lock replacement program, could you give me status on it?

Mr. Ashton: I know they have been replacing the locks with a more secure electronic system that reflects the heritage 'nater'—nature of the building. I know that because my lock has been replaced. I assume the member's has as well. And I can probably get some details on that for the member, maybe not today, but, yes, the intent is to move to a more secure system. I can say generally, by the way, in terms of the Legislature, there have been a number of enhancements the last number of years. But, you know, we do continue to try and balance the public accessibility. But, certainly, compared to a few years ago, we now have, you know, a very significant use of security cameras, you know, up-to-date security cameras on the building, and it's amazing, if you talk to the security staff, what they pick up. There was a situation a few years ago where two young people were—should I put the term on the record?—were smoking up by the fountain. And one of our security guards did go out and just let them know they were on video, and I think did make some reference that, you know, it might be sent to their parents. I don't think they came back after that, but that's how accurate the security cameras are.

And what's happening with the lock enhancement, again, is to move to a more secure system. The key, as the member will know, is—does have a, you know, electronic ability to signal. But the key element there, by the way, is that we're trying to maintain the heritage nature of the building, so that's why there still is a key. There were a couple of other options they did look at that would have, you know, not maintained that heritage nature of the building. So that's sort of the broad discussion, and I know quite a few offices have been replaced. And I think my associate deputy minister is sending out a BlackBerry message as we speak to see if we can get some more detailed information.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. What is the budget for the provincial locksmith's office?

Mr. Ashton: I'll get that information for the member.

Mr. Smook: If the minister could also get it for the year of 2010 and 2011?

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

Mr. Smook: Could the minister also provide me with what the amount of dollars are being spent on outside locksmiths?

Mr. Ashton: It, again, I'm not sure how often an outside locksmiths would be used, and I'll check whether that even, you know, has gone through the department. You might get cases where I assume locksmiths are brought in, you know, for outside purposes. I mean, these things do happen. I know the washroom in my office, my predecessor—this is going back to '99—got locked in the washroom when the lock failed. You know, those heritage locks are—they're nice to look at, but I can tell you they are—they're not always all that functional. So he apparently was in there for some time, former member for Lac du Bonnet, Darren Praznik.

So—and so I can get a breakdown in terms of what, you know, how much is contracted out. I believe for the—some of the new security work is outside in the Leg. Yes, again, I mean you have people that are installing specific, well, call it technology now, with the new locks. So—but I'll get a better breakdown.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you tell me how often the provincial road maps are upgraded?

Mr. Ashton: Funny the member should ask that. As needed, and there'll be a new one coming out very shortly. We used to really be on a one-year cycle. It's more of a two-year cycle now, the difference being that more people access highway maps on the Internet than was the case before and there are more people using GPSs. Having said that, we're almost out of maps and there'll be a new one that will be printed and distributed very shortly.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister, because I know that there a lot travellers that travel through the areas; they'll ask for those maps—those.

On page 75, external engineering costs: Is there a need to hire firms from the city or outside the province, or do we have enough internal staff to handle all the needs for 2012-2013?

Mr. Ashton: Well, we use a combination of in-house engineer expertise and consulting engineering expertise. Probably the untold story over the last number of years with our significantly increased capital budget is the degree to which our staff has stepped up to the plate. I rarely put on the record, by the way, the amount of work that's been done over the last couple of years, both in terms of getting our capital program able to be delivered—you know, it's nice to have the dollars, but you got to deliver it. They've done a tremendous job, and a lot

of our engineering and technical staff have done a—just a incredible job on the flood-related issues.

* (10:50)

I also want to commend the consulting engineering committee, as well. I just had the opportunity to attend the awards banquet just recently. The consulting engineering committee has stepped up to the plate very significantly over the last number of years, and through both Manitoba grads, Canadian grads, but also the—I do want to commend them as having a model for recognition of foreign credentials, there—many foreign-trained engineers that they have hired and, of course, there's a programming—a program with the engineering profession, through the U of M. So we have, generally speaking, been able to get expertise both in-house and through consulting engineers from here in the province.

One I want to stress, too, by the way, is it's also a reflection of the degree that we have some of the best engineers anywhere here in the province. We have a significant expertise, I think, you'll find in the hydraulic area—geotechnical. But we're also—with a lot of the work now, we're getting a new crew of engineers, and many in the system for many years who are getting significant expertise, you know, in structural areas like, you know, bridges. So it's kind of—it's that, you know—it's the chicken and the egg here, you know, with the expertise to a certain extent, you know, and the opportunity to practise, we're now—we're able to provide significant careers opportunities, you know, to our—to new grads or other engineers coming to the province, and—but we need them, as well, right? So, it's a good combination.

But the bottom line is most of the engineering expertise is from right here in the province, and maybe some of the firms bring in some outside specialist, but I would say, probably, 90 per cent-plus of the engineering work is done by Manitobans, which is a really good sign.

Mr. Smook: Traffic engineering: How many projects are in the works for 2012-2013?

Mr. Ashton: I can get the information for the member.

Mr. Smook: Are there any plans to remove traffic lights on the Perimeter in order to prevent greenhouse gases? If so, when?

Mr. Ashton: In terms of the Perimeter, it's kind of—in a broader answer, we are looking at a number of elements on the Perimeter Highway currently and over time, which will deal with rationalizing, you know, the traffic structures, those issues raised earlier, you know, about St. Norbert bypass, various different things which are, you know, perhaps on the conceptual drawing board, if you like, down the line.

And, when we do move with major projects, for safety reasons, as much as anything else, we have been also looking at rationalizing access, although that can often be an inconvenience for people affected. And so, we are looking at some rationalization, whether it's on the Perimeter or other major parts of our highway network.

The basic principle, though, with traffic lights, is we have a warrant system. If there—we meet the warrant system, which is sort of a traffic flow that are required for safety purposes—we do proceed with that. We are very cognizant of greenhouse gases, et cetera, but the number—the bottom line here is safety, and I can probably get the member a bit of a briefing on the Perimeter—probably might be a bit more useful than just getting him a—you know, a brief answer here, because there is a significant amount of work happening on the Perimeter, both, sort of, in the immediate sense, but also down the line, of course, there's some focus on two of the bridges on the Perimeter in the last period of time. But there's also quite a bit of other work that's been happening, some of which has been identified in Estimates. So if the member's interested in a more general briefing, I can provide that, as well.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. What is the Churchill Gateway Development initiative?

Mr. Ashton: It is the entity that is responsible for, in this case, when we talk about Churchill Gateway—Port of Churchill, and it's been in place for a number of years now. I'm trying—*[interjection]*—and it's key role is marketing, you know, and then—and promoting awareness of Churchill. As the member would know, we—it's a bit of a challenging period for Churchill. On the one file with the Wheat Board, you know, losing the single desk—Wheat Board is 90 per cent of the grain traffic through Churchill. They've been a real, you know, significant supporter for the Port of Churchill. There's also some positive elements on the resupply to Nunavut, which has been a traditional, you know, backbone of the port as well. And we are engaged with the federal government as well, or the Prime Minister and the Premier have

committed to looking at further opportunities for Churchill which, again, this gateway council will be a, you know, part of as well.

But I don't want to underestimate the concern we do have for Churchill right now with the loss of the Wheat Board traffic, and we'll be continuing to promote Churchill, which is a huge asset for the province. You know, I've had the opportunity to be involved with the Russia file, for example, and the Russians, out of Murmansk have been seriously interested in marine shipping into northern Canada, particularly Churchill. And with all the things happening climate change, it's a lot of negative things, but one of the things that is happening is the opening of the ice cap. They also have the expertise in terms of icebreakers, so I wouldn't want to underestimate the degree to which Churchill has huge potential down the line for cross-polar shipping.

So this Gateway council played a key role in the past, but if anything, it's going to be playing an even more important role in the future.

Mr. Smook: Because of the significance of the Port of Churchill, are there any plans to do any upgrading on the railway line up there or anything to help the Port of Churchill, you know?

Mr. Ashton: We did have an agreement which basically did involve upgrade to the rail line and a significant part of that has been completed. It was cost shared between the federal government, provincial government and by OmniTRAX. In fact, the total agreement was \$68 million, I believe. Some of that went to the port as well, about \$4 million, and the last payment actually is 2011-2012 year. So there has been a significant upgrade.

I can tell you I have met with the—with VIA Rail and it has resulted in what is probably the most important thing is the ability to actually remove some of the speed restrictions on the rail line. And that is important both for—obviously for freight, but also for significant passenger traffic takes place. So we have been upgrading the rail line.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, auto dealer and salesmen permits: What is the current number issued and how does that compare to in the last four years?

Mr. Ashton: I'll track that information down for the member.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Minister, spring road restrictions: How many officers work in this department and what

was the dollar figure of—collected for overweight restriction?

Mr. Ashton: I will get the detailed information as well.

Mr. Smook: Government air services: Does the current budget reflect the 2.5 cent per litre fuel tax, and is it reflected in the budget in Estimates?

Mr. Ashton: The current budget reflects all the anticipated costs, et cetera, and I can give the member a breakdown if he's interested in the kind of costs that are attached. Obviously, we do have costs related to landing fees, for example, the various other elements in the system, but if the member is interested in a more detailed breakdown, I can provide that as well.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you describe to me the 50-50 municipal roads program and what projects are on the table?

* (11:00)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the—with the 50-50 program, I can give the member some indication of the—what happened in the past year. And I can also indicate that the responsibility for the 50-50 program has now been moved to Local Government, so they could provide background on—in terms of the upcoming year.

Again, this is a program that's been in place a number of years, working directly with municipalities. But, if the member's interested in some of the information in the past year, we can provide that.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm now going to turn it over to the Honourable Jon Gerrard.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Thank you, and let me start out with a question around Lake Manitoba. The—since 2003, the lake level has been managed between 810.5 and 812.5 with a view that it would occasionally go down to 810 and occasionally go up to 813. The—is that—that's the minister's understanding as well. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: There's a range that was set in our report that came in 2003. And again, I mean, you know, there's been some fluctuation over that period of time. It reflected really the experience from the early '60s on. But there is a range that was established in that report which really applied, you know, from '60, well, early '60s, '61, through to last year.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, and the government fully accepted the report of 2003, which recommended that that be where the lake level was managed for.

Mr. Ashton: The report was accepted 2003. It was—I was the Minister of Conservation at the time, and I can tell you it was probably one of the more controversial issues I dealt with, if not the most controversial. There was a lot of disagreement up and down the lake. And that report was accepted and it reflected the—what had been the experience really since '61, I believe, when the Fairford opened. Of course, prior to 1961, the level on Lake Manitoba was at flood level, you know, for an extended period of time. So we had a, you know, pre-'61 situation. But that report was accepted in 2003 as the targeted range, yes.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the people who is—who I've talked with about the flood says that the outlet at the Fairford, going just before the Fairford Dam, because of the silt buildup, that he's been told by Steve Topping that the water could never get down to 810.5 because of that silt or for other reasons around the Fairford dam. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: I did actually address this earlier during Estimates. We, yes, there's some silting around the Fairford structure. There was some talk—I don't know if it—we got beyond that in 2006, I believe, when the level of Lake Manitoba was quite low, in terms of removing that silt.

Of course, everything—anything and everything that could potentially be done has to reflect both the feasibility but also potential environmental issues, including with DFO. And I would anticipate that this'll be one of the issues again that will be looked at in the consideration of the report that we'll be getting back on flood mitigation issues is whether anything can be done in that nature.

I do want to stress that, you know, we did look very significantly. For example, the—some of the silting stayed place in the Assiniboine in, you know, going back to 2011. And a lot of it really is looking at the feasibility. We thought it wasn't particularly feasible, very expensive—again, not even getting into the environmental issues on the Assiniboine. And a lot of it, really, it depends on the level, you know, whether sediment would impact. You know, it depends on the level of flow.

But I'm fully anticipating this will be one of the issues that will be addressed in that report, whether

there's anything that can or should be done in terms of that sediment.

Mr. Gerrard: Is the statement correct or not correct that the water would have trouble getting down to the 810.5 level because of the sediment deposited in front of that dam?

Mr. Ashton: Approximately in that range. You know, that's—the member is correct. It's approximately in that range. I mean, it's—you know, whether it's 810.5 or 810.6, that's the point at which there is some impediment, yes.

Mr. Gerrard: So the water could flow down to 10.6, 10.5, but not below. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Ashton: Again, it would be—I'm advised it'd be an impediment at lower levels, in and around that range, but wouldn't necessarily restrict flow, but it is an impediment in and around the lower level, 810.5.

Mr. Gerrard: Okay. Thank you.

Now, on Lake St. Martin, from the minister's comments, it's my understanding that the goal is to be able to balance flow into Lake St. Martin with the flow out of Lake St. Martin so that you can maintain in the future the level of Lake St. Martin in a—well, in the desired range, without having it go up as high as it did this year. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Just on—just one further bit of information, by the way, on the 810.5. Obviously, the lake level can and will go below 810.5 through—due to other processes, you know, like evaporation. There's significant amount of evaporation last year, for example, that, in addition to the outlet, made a difference on the lake levels.

But the key issue of Lake Manitoba is Lake St. Martin. The member is quite correct.

You essentially—if you look at what happened this—the history of Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin—1961, the Fairford Dam would be, what, 1970, I believe, '71, the Portage Diversion inlet and outlet from Lake Manitoba, but no artificial outlet from Lake St. Martin. Was examined in 1978 by the Water Commission, was rejected. I comment on the record on—in Estimates, a lot of that was to do with, probably, a very different scenario in terms of cost-benefit around the lake at the time. And what we identified for the emergency outlet was, again, the need to ensure that whatever happened out of Lake Manitoba, you know, was not exacerbating the situation on Lake St. Martin.

So what it really comes down to is, as the member saw, we moved to the outlet. It allows—allowed us to use the Fairford structure to its maximum physical capacity without having to restrict it, particularly in the winter. And it all comes down to that balance of what goes out of Lake Manitoba—and, in fact, I had to put on record the current flows and some of the flows over the last few months—and Lake St. Martin, they're interconnected.

And at this time, we're getting—and we did go through some detailed questions in terms of this—it is spring runoff. It's—flows have increased generally into, you know, lake martin from some of the—Lake St. Martin and—to Lake Manitoba from some of the tributaries. Particularly, you know, the Waterhen has been at historic high levels, you know, with inflows over the last period of time.

So, the bottom line really is, again, we were able to significantly increase the outflows at lake—you know, through Lake St. Martin. And I'm anticipating, again, this report—the two reports, actually, will also address the issues of both the physical infrastructure but also the actual regulatory range itself. I mean, the one report we're going to get back will clearly establish, you know, recommendation on that regulatory range that was adopted in 2003.

*(11:10)

Mr. Gerrard: The minister's talked all the way around, but just a clear answer to the question—the goal, as I understand it, of the minister is to be able to balance the outflow with the input into Lake St. Martin so that you won't get these high peak levels that we saw this year. Is that right?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, generally speaking, that's correct.

Of course, flows do vary throughout the year; you know, there's the spring runoff so you will get times where there's greater or lesser flow. That's just the reality of what you're dealing with, but again, you—there are various elements in the flood control system that do allow some balance for that. If you look at the Shellmouth, for example—you know, so water retention in that particular case. But the key issue was, and continues to be, with this outlet, the ability to get an—the artificial outlet out of Lake St. Martin, because we had a—you know, the inlet and the outlet for Lake Manitoba but no artificial outlet, just the natural outlet.

So that is the goal, yes, to get—and, in fact, we did that during the flood situation. We were able to get significant additional flows out of Lake

St. Martin. So the member's quite correct; that's the balance we needed.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, now, the minister has indicated that the general goal is to be able to have the flow out of Lake St. Martin balancing the flow in so that you don't have extremely high levels. My assumption, but maybe I'm wrong, is that the minister would also like, particularly in the case of the Portage Diversion, because it's, you know, an artificial not a natural flow into the Portage—into—from the Assiniboine to Lake Manitoba, to be able to balance, at a minimum, the extra flow coming through the Portage Diversion, with the ability to have that flow go all the way through Lake St. Martin to Lake Winnipeg an equivalent rate. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Again, these are issues that will be addressed by the—you know, the task force on mitigation, which will look at the whole system, and indirectly by the—you know, through the report we're going to get back on the regulatory level.

The key issue on my mind with the Portage Diversion is support and recognize that there was a natural inflow into Lake Manitoba when there's been historic flooding levels, I believe in what, the 1890s? [*interjection*] 1892 to be exact. So, you know, in historic flood levels we've seen that there is a natural inflow into Lake Manitoba. The key challenge of Lake Manitoba, and again, this will be addressed by the task force—it's a very—it's a big lake but it's a very shallow lake, as everybody's aware. And again, I mean, we had a flood system and a regulatory regime that essentially worked from '61 to 2011. It didn't work in 2011, and that's where the considerations of these two reports will, I think, address. I mean, the one is the target level, the regulatory level. And the second is, obviously, how do we manage it, and are there other options out there that we can look at?

I do want to stress, though, again—and I know the member has, you know, stated that in his question—Lake Manitoba is interconnected with Lake St. Martin. You know, the—you can't fix the problem on one lake without fixing the problem on the other lake. That's what we did in 2011; we had something that benefited both lakes, and again, that will—I assume, will be a very significant part of the recommendations.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I mean, even if you take away the potential, relatively small, comparably, flow which has occurred, and you referred to 1892—flow

from the Assiniboine to Lake St. Martin relatively small compared to what goes through the Portage Diversion. Even if you decided to balance, right, the flow through the Portage Diversion minus that flow which has occurred on occasion, historically, from the Assiniboine to Lake Manitoba, it would seem to me that one must have a goal of trying to be able to balance that additional new flow, which is due solely to the presence of the Portage Diversion, with the capacity to be able to put that water through Lake St. Martin to Lake Winnipeg.

You know, are we on the same page? Or is the minister in a completely different space here?

Mr. Ashton: Well, first of all, there were significant natural inflows ranging up to 20,000 cfs. The Waterhen, in particular, has been at unprecedented levels. So there was a significant natural inflow.

The second point that's really important to raise, as well, and I think this is again something that we should also keep in mind—prior to the construction of the Fairford structure and outlet in 1961, there was very significant historic flooding in the 1950s on Lake Manitoba.

So, with no Portage Diversion and no Fairford structure, no Shellmouth Dam, there was major, in fact, chronic flooding in the '50s. What happened in the '60s is you had first the outlet built and the inlet built and the one thing that was not done, and I've already stated this but I want to restate, was not having an enhancement of the outflow of Lake St. Martin.

That, to our mind, is the key element to be addressed by a lot of this review, and we did it on an emergency basis, but do we need this on an ongoing basis that's—in fact, just to—and I've got the specific numbers. In the 1950s, Lake Manitoba was above 814 feet for three years. Okay, so, if you put it in context, what would be considered flood level today, for three years we had flooding levels on Lake Manitoba.

And that really leads to, I think, a broader sense of the fact that we have a flood system that worked. It was overwhelmed by historic flooding, and when I say historic flooding—when you're dealing with a flood of one in 300 hundred years on the Assiniboine—actually one in 350 years is probably where the Souris meets the Assiniboine so if you look at the historic levels on that watershed, it was a very historic flood on Lake Manitoba. I think we're

considering in the range of one-in-400-year flood on Lake Manitoba, if not, you know, greater scale.

So what it comes down to is, is we've already made a significant improvement and we're looking to the report to see if there are other ways we can do it. Nothing is being ruled out. Quite frankly, there's a lot of other suggestions have been made. I can tell you from our scrutiny last year, a lot of what are the simple solutions aren't that simple when you look at the actual impacts. Some of them are very expensive; some of them don't provide much relief.

But we have an independent review—we're allowing them to do the technical work, and I fully anticipate they will be addressing exactly the point that the member's, you know, raising is—are there other ways of enhancing the outflow from Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin or are there other ways of managing the inflows in historic flooding situations?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the—I think it's important to clarify this a little further because, you know, I remember when the minister and I and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) flew along the Assiniboine River and we were over the Portage Diversion. And I thank the minister for that opportunity in the spring of 2011 to see what was happening with the flood.

But I distinctly remember that the minister commented that the flow through the Portage Diversion was almost irrelevant in terms of contributing to the lake level on Lake Manitoba, and yet, you know, detailed analysis has shown that that's clearly not the case—that the—probably 70 to 80 per cent of the rise in the level—and it wasn't 814, it was up to close to 818—was due to the impact of the Portage Diversion.

That analysis was made by one of the senior flood forecasters in the minister's department and has been circulated. And it's been corroborated by analyses done by others.

* (11:20)

So, I mean, we're dealing with a situation where the Portage Diversion is making a major contribution under circumstances like the 2011 flood, to the level of Lake Manitoba. And, clearly, that needs to be acknowledged, and as I can see it, then, that being the case, that there needs to be some ability to be able to move additional water when you've got the Portage Diversion running full tilt, as it was fuller

than full tilt, actually, in 2011, to be able to move more water from Lake Manitoba to Lake Winnipeg.

Mr. Ashton: I believe the flood where we did was in April, which is prior to the extended rainfall we had in May, prior to the third crest on the Souris, prior to the surge of water that we dealt with in that extended period throughout the entire Assiniboine River system and prior to the continued flows that we also had from the natural 'tributories', which were, again, impacted by the significant rain, not just here in Manitoba, but throughout the watershed.

So, early on, the level of the lake was being influenced by other factors in addition to the Portage Diversion. There's no doubt that that overflow over time was very significant, and, for example, the actual volume over time by the Waterhen and other tributaries was—*notwithstanding* all the flows in the Portage Diversion, was about two-thirds.

We had record high natural inflows, and that's not to say there wasn't record flows on the Portage Diversion, but it was not—in fact, the majority of the flow through Lake Manitoba was—two-thirds of it, was from natural inflows. I'm talking about what would have happened, no matter what. Without Portage Diversion, you would've seen those very significant flows.

So that's the key point. When we went up in April, it was early on. Traditionally, by the way, the Portage Diversion, in a normal year, is operated for, you know, a relatively short period of time, if it's operated at all. It's one of the three major components of our system. You also have the Shellmouth, which does hold back a significant amount of water. And the Shellmouth was a huge factor in flood management this time, as the member knows. And I can tell you that the *[inaudible]* between the Shellmouth and the Portage Diversion, it was that continued massive inflow of precipitation and massive inflow of water through the watershed all the way through, really until August, you know, in terms of—well, July-August, in terms of rainfall, but it's continued high flows even beyond that that led to the historic flooding on Lake Manitoba.

And I'm sure one of the key issues that these—that this report will address is to what degree we can manage the system better, but it's not necessarily going to be through the outlet alone. I think probably the bigger question, as well, in addition to, sort of, looking at is—are there other outlets? Is our—you know, is there a need to manage the lake differently—you know, to manage it at a lower level over time?

There are people around the lake that would like to see that. There are other people that, historically, have opposed maintaining the lake level too low because there are users around the lake that could be significantly negatively impacted by that.

Quite frankly, same thing in Lake St. Martin, as well, there is potential impacts in terms of fisheries. But those are the kind of questions we're looking to this independent advice. We do have our analysis of what happened this year. They obviously have got all the technical expertise they need to do that, to analyze it. But, the outlet, yes, that's part of, obviously, what I'm expecting to look at, but I'm assuming they'll look at other factors too, such as retention and the actual management regime of the two lakes.

Mr. Gerrard: I have a little bit of advice to the minister. I don't dispute the contribution of natural flows, but what happens when you've got water flows, it's the last 10 or 20 per cent which do most of the damage, right? When you've got peak flows, because those give you the—normally, the highest flow rates, but—and those areas where you've got the highest levels.

Now, in the date that we were flying over was in the first two weeks in May. It was at a time when we were there because the Hoop and Holler cut was being considered, or maybe was already just made, actually, and the—when we flew over the Portage Diversion, it was right up to the brim. It was flowing close to its maximum amount, and I think that the minister does himself a disservice by not recognizing that there was an artificial contribution to this flood from the water going through the Portage Diversion. And as long as the minister keeps on forgetting about that and talking around it and not directly acknowledging it, then he is completely offside with a large, large number of people around Lake Manitoba.

And that it would be far better for the minister to take some time if the minister wants, but to acknowledge that there is and was a major contribution through the Portage Diversion, and—instead of skating around and talking about every other source for the water. That when you're talking about a situation where, yes, the first two-thirds—you know, I don't have the precise calculations here—may have been natural flows, but, because you have the capacity naturally to deal with a certain level of significant flows down the Fairford River and out into Lake Manitoba, that last contribution, well, the

last third, is the third which—you know, which is the most problematic third. Because that's the third which causes the most trouble, because there's no ability to compensate for that by being able to, you know, move that on the next step.

Now, in terms of the ability to get water from Lake Manitoba to Lake Winnipeg, you know, obviously what has been addressed so far is the flow from Lake St. Martin to Lake Winnipeg, right, and that's been enhanced with reach 3 and reach 1. I understand reach 3 is near completion but not actually in use. And there have been at least two major proposals in terms of where water could flow to supplement the flow from Lake Manitoba to Lake St. Martin. One of those is this channel going just north of the Fairford Dam, and the other is a channel from Watchorn Bay through Birch Creek on Lake St. Martin.

You know, I was at a meeting quite recently, I think it was Tuesday evening this week, where this was discussed by the flood rehabilitation committee for Lake Manitoba, and the—there was a lot of concern about the route just north of the Fairford River and the Fairford Dam because of the potential to cause increasing problems around Lake Pineimuta; but there was a lot of enthusiasm and support for the channel from Watchorn Bay to Birch Creek on Lake St. Martin. Perhaps, I could ask the minister the current status of their assessment of these two options.

Mr. Ashton: Well, on the broader question the member raised in terms of artificial flooding, we have considerable experience in terms of what is artificial flooding from the Red River. When you look at what is artificial flooding, there is actually definitions in the act. We also have it now, you know, in terms of Shellmouth. What you do is you look at all of the elements in the flood control system, what would happen without those flood control elements.

*(11:30)

So for example, the Red River—city of Winnipeg, in this area—it's—yes, it's the floodway, but it's also the Portage Diversion and it's also the Shellmouth Dam. The three components combined are the key elements of the vision that came out of the major flooding in the 1950s and the action that was taken in the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s.

When you're looking at Lake Manitoba, Lake Manitoba had an artificial outlet with a controlled

structure essentially, built in 1961, opened in 1961. I mentioned before—in the 1950s there was flooding for three years, 814 feet above flood level. So, when you're looking at that, when you're looking at, as I said, I've identified the thing that was not moved on was the—an outlet on Lake St. Martin which was bit of a restriction. But prior to the opening of the Portage Diversion there was, well, you know, an artificial channel. There was also, you know, the opening of the Fairford.

So all of these issues and, you know, the holdback in the Shellmouth, it's no different when we look at the Red River Valley or in around the Shellmouth area. There's a whole definition of what's artificial flooding, and you have to also include the fact that in a one-in-a-400-year flood, if we saw flooding in 1892 that flowed naturally into Lake Manitoba, there's every indication you would have seen a natural inflow this year.

And I want to stress one thing, by the way. An uncontrolled natural breakout of the Assiniboine River would have been disastrous last year downstream from Portage. It would have had devastating impacts in terms of the valley. But I can tell you also, with the Portage Diversion itself, I couldn't begin to picture what would happen without the Portage Diversion, if we had an actual outbreak from the Assiniboine River to similar to 1892. And we do have the patterns, we do have the—you know, there was a steamboat that went from the Assiniboine River into Lake Manitoba.

So the general principle here is you're better off to control it, and that was the logic behind the Hoop and Holler. Control it—that was the logic behind trying to keep the Assiniboine dikes, keep the integrity. And, quite frankly, even with Lake Manitoba, compare it to the 1950s, we have controls.

Now the system was overwhelmed between 1961, you know, and 2011, it worked. But it was overwhelmed last year. It's not much different, by the way, with the regime in the Red River Valley in 1997. In 1997 we came that close to having our flood protection systems overwhelmed in the city of Winnipeg. Now, I wasn't the minister; I wasn't in government. But I know the member was in, in part of the federal government at the time, and would have been probably even more directly, you know, briefed than I was at the time.

And what it was, it was a combination of 100-year flood and a one-in-10,000-year wind event. It's very similar, by the way, to what happened in

Lake Manitoba last year. The biggest damage around Lake Manitoba was the combination of lake levels and, of course, the windstorm in May, prior to actually the real peak levels, you know, the—that we saw.

So what happened out of '97, we then assessed what we needed to do to improve things in the future. We now have the dikes; we now have the floodway expansion. I was minister responsible of that for a considerable period of time. My deputy was actually part of the—one of the key players, technically, in terms of that.

It's sort of what we're doing now with Lake Manitoba. We're recognizing there was a system that included artificial inlet, an artificial outlet from Lake Manitoba and an artificial inlet into Lake St. Martin and no artificial outlet from Lake St. Martin. So we're going back to the drawing boards. We have this report that will make series of recommendations, and our goal is to improve things significantly in the future.

But I do think it's important to put on the record two things: one is without any of the artificial elements, with much lesser pressures on the tributaries in the 1950s, we had flooding for three years. So you can't net out some of the enhancements to flood protection and only—you can't just talk about only the inlet, you've got to talk about the outlet as well, if you're talking about sort of the more esoteric elements of artificial flooding. What we did though, is last year we recognized it was very significant flooding, and it was a unique situation.

And I'll tell you one thing: Regardless of this debate over was it artificial or not, and I respect flood victims. The No. 1 rule I've got is flood victims have entitlement to say whatever they want, whatever they feel is right. Not every flood victim agrees with every other flood victim, but you respect that. So people say it's artificial flooding; they believe it's artificial flooding. I respect that.

But what we did say is people built around the lake historically but, particularly, a lot of development took place between '61 and 2011 based on the, you know, good faith, based on the regulatory regime, based on the building codes that were in place. It's no different than the Red River Valley pre-'97. And that may change and we've got the—interim policies are in place, you know, for the rebuilding.

But we put in unprecedented programming that goes beyond DFA that reflects some of the damages faced by cottage owners. Compensation, by the way, that's not available to similar situations elsewhere in the province, and I know that's a concern. I hear it at Lake Dauphin, et cetera. But it was very much based on that basic principle. So we can get into a debate about what is artificial, what isn't artificial flooding. There's technical analysis that looks at that.

I do point out, by the way, that—and quite apart from all of this, you know, the flooding didn't just start at Manitoba because somebody pressed a switch, okay. The flooding was cross base. Minot was devastated by flooding; 3,100 homes devastated on the Souris. There was very significant flooding in Saskatchewan. And I was recently at the federal-provincial ministers meetings for Emergency Measures ministers, and in Manitoba we got hit harder on the broader scale, but they had some pretty devastating damage to affected communities. So there was a massive event.

And we will look at all of the technical issues. We will have a full report; we do after every flood. And we'll look at all the elements of the decisions that were made or not made. And I want to stress, that quite apart from this debate on what is artificial flooding and what isn't artificial flooding, it's quite legitimate to get into that.

I will put on the record that I do believe that our staff and I expect—I accept responsibility as minister. So, collectively, we had historic flooding. We had dealt with a lot of challenges and a number of moves were made that I think made a dramatic difference.

Was there damage? Yes. But was there significant mitigation of that? Absolutely, not the least of which is the outlet.

Now, on the issue of further outlets from Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin, we've identified some of the options through the engineering work that was done last year. We've not ruled out a further outlet. There's a number of options there. Again, it all comes down to Lake St. Martin. Without the ability to move additional water out of Lake St. Martin, you end up potentially decreasing levels on Lake Manitoba at the expense of Lake St. Martin, but we can't and we won't do that.

I'm fully anticipating that this will be one of the key issues that the—both reports will look at, but particularly the report on flood management. And I don't want to just assume, by the way, that's the only

option. I'm anticipating they'll look at any and every option.

And I remind everyone, by the way, in '97 with the follow-up to the flood there, the IJC report that came out—it was KGS that did the report—it's amazing, actually, how people forget—wasn't a one-option report. They also had a further option of a significant diversion that didn't get into a floodway enhancement. That was rejected, okay. I'm fully anticipating that will be the case here, as well. We may get a series of options identified. But, again, when you have independent processes you let them do that work. They're going to have full public hearings, and we haven't ruled it out as a government, but we're looking to this report and the technical work associated with it. And the hearings, you know, with the effect—members of the public to come back with that the—according to what we did after '97, which is the next generation of flood mitigation for the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, one of the issues in relationship to the Lake St. Martin channel going from Lake St. Martin to Big Buffalo Lake and reach 3 is that these are emergency structures, it's my understanding, that they either have to be taken down or licensed. Are you look—is the minister looking for a recommendation from the review committees as to which route should be taken?

* (11:40)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I did mention this earlier, you know, in a similar question, but we certainly would be looking very much to their advice in terms of that. And the key element, by the way, with the outlet that was constructed last year, it's a very simple process of closing it off. It would be a very simple process of opening up again in the case of emergency.

The real question would become: Do you put in permanent structures? And do you go through all the, you know, the licensing and the various capital elements that will go with that? I'm anticipating that would be one of the key areas that they will make recommendation on.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, one of the people who spoke up fairly passionately at the meeting on Tuesday night was Matthew Traverse, who's the flood co-ordinator for Lake St. Martin. And he spoke passionately for, and others did as well, for the option of relocating Lake St. Martin to the east—the community to the east side of Lake St. Martin where, apparently,

there's higher ground. Is that an option which is still on the table?

Mr. Ashton: The—as the member knows, and I know he's met with First Nations in the area, and he's got a fair amount of experience in that area, in his previous life as well, which he gets reminded of on occasion in the House, but the whole concept of higher ground strategy has always been something that has been considered by the First Nations in that area, and I'm fully anticipating again in respecting, obviously, the First Nations and, you know, self-governing entities there—their desire in that particular case that that will be considered.

By the way, in post '97, that's—that was one of the elements. We didn't just build dikes. There were homes that were either bought out or relocated, so I'm fully anticipating that will be a part of it as well. What I do want to put on the record, though, is the degree to which the First Nations in and around Lake St. Martin—and I know there's some issues with various aspects of the flood and I respect that—but the degree to which they really became part of a solution was not only a solution for their communities, but also for the communities in and around Lake Manitoba should be noted.

And I think that's going to be one of the key things in the goal, for whatever happens has to be both, Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. We cannot have something that makes things worse for one or the other. And with its high ground or any of the other potential options that have been identified, again, those are issues that I am sure will be addressed in this follow-up, both by the report but also by the First Nations themselves.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, in the *Hansard* record of the answer—minister's answer to the question of the breakdown of the \$100 million cost of the channel from Lake St. Martin to Big Buffalo Lake, it appears in the *Hansard* transcript that \$60 million of that went for consultation and community, I forget exactly what the word was, enhancement, for the First Nations communities. I'm just trying to—I want to ask the minister. Is that a correct interpretation of what was in *Hansard* or did the minister say something different?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I could—I could read the information back in *Hansard*, but I think the member's correct in the fact that what I did indicate very clearly, and we've been very clear from day one that the total budgeting costs we had initially did

include all the rate of costs when dealing with First Nations. It is the constitutional right to, you know, constant duty to consult. We obviously respected that. We also felt it was very important to maximize the participation by the flood-affected communities on the construction phase, and it's reflected.

The community benefits agreement itself is \$16 million, but the member's quite correct, the, you know, the total cost figure we reference, and I put the details on the record, is not just a physical construction cost; it deals with all the interrelated costs of the project.

Mr. Gerrard: The transcript says, community benefits and consultation, \$60 million. So maybe the correction should be that that's \$16 million. Is that what the minister is saying?

Mr. Ashton: I give the member credit. I have not checked the *Hansard* but, yes, he's correct, so I appreciate him correcting the record on that. I'm not blaming *Hansard* here, by the way. This is rather different for me, but I've been told a number of times that I've been speaking too softly and *Hansard* can't pick up my comments. That's not usually the situation in the House, so I'm sure that must have been the case so I expect—I accept responsibility for that.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, this—to make this absolutely clear—I wanted to make this absolutely clear so that, you know, the \$60-million figure which was in *Hansard* was not going to be used erroneously. Okay.

The minister has talked about one in 3,000—sorry, one-in-10,000-year wind event, and from the minister's comments today, it looks like that was a reference to the flood of 1997 and not to the flood of this year. You know, it was not a reference to the fact that the wind event on Lake Manitoba was a one-in-10,000 wind event. I don't think that anybody's saying that. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: I was referring to '97 but the—there is the other element though that—you know, the significant damage that occurred in May was partly due to lake levels but also the very significant windstorm that took—did take place.

Now, windstorms are not unique around the lake, but it was a very significant one, and I—*[interjection]* Yes, what was particularly unique was for spring. You know, it's not unusual in the fall and again, the honourable member knows Lake Manitoba quite well, but that was the reference I made again,

too, which is even if you look at lake levels, it's a combination of lake level plus wind action. It's no different on Lake Winnipeg as well with some of the major events we've seen. You know, you can't just look at the lake level.

And, again, when we look at the future of flood mitigation and at rebuilding and the level at which people will rebuild to, we have to take into account not only the lake level but lake setup and potential impact from wind and wave.

Mr. Gerrard: Most people are focused on the, I believe it was May the 31st wind which caused so much trouble around Twin beach and St. Laurent, but it's my understanding that, you know, two or three or four days before that, there was a wind event which affected places like Big Point on the other side and that there were really two wind events, you know, which were not far apart, but both of which had significant impact, and I, you know, from my understanding at least, that's something that needs to be taken into consideration. Is that the minister's understanding as well?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I believe the member's correct. There was—it was a series of wind events over a series of days. I had the opportunity to visit in and around the lake right around that time as well, so it actually did vary according to different parts of the lake. And it's also—as the member knows, there's some parts of the lake are more vulnerable to wind events, flooding generally, not just because of elevation but because of the—the actual setup impacts—it's no different than Lake Winnipeg actually, you know, so the north basin, south basin—so that did have a differential impact around the lake. There were a number of events.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I want to ask a couple of questions about the geotubes which were put up in—well, in Woodlands area, pieces of St. Laurent, and it's my understanding that the—those geotubes have actually done reasonably well in surviving the winter and actually as being a, you know, a place where you get natural buildup of a berm, because when the waves come in, they tend to deposit sand and larger pieces.

So has the minister done any work to have a look at this, you know, and to assess the impact of the geotubes and to understand how well they worked or not, and that information that can be used well in the future or even right now?

* (11:50)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, in a general sense, I can tell you we are doing the assessment right now on what happened. The consultants will be looking at that.

A lot of what did happen was what we anticipated. There was a fair degree of success in the fall related to waves. Most of the damage, not all of it, would have been from ice. It was not—well, unfortunately, it was—we had some good developments with lake levels over the winter, both due to the lack of precipitation in the outlet and we didn't face some of the challenging ice conditions we often face in around Lake Manitoba in the spring. So, you know, it—the damage is there. It could have been a lot worse, and we will be assessing it.

I can say, by the way, just in a general sense, over the last number of years that what we have done is we have moved fairly significantly to use a variety of products. Obviously, we still use sandbags, super sandbags, brought in—simply enhancement of our ability to put sandbags in place with the sandbag machines last year. But whether it's the Tiger tubes, we used a few of the Aqua Dams as well, you know, on a trial basis, we've tried HESCO products as well, and, of course, this particular product, what is interesting is, you know, what was probably fairly new even 10 years ago has now become a—quite an industry in as of itself. And I think what it is, is it's a reflection of the degree to which these products aren't necessarily replacements for dikes or, you know, sandbag dikes but are, you know, are supplements to and, you know, where used appropriately can make a difference. So that was the case with these products from our initial departmental analysis, certainly has been the case with the Tiger tubes, which we've used fairly extensively in various different situations. And we're obviously going to be assessing some of the experience with the HESCO product this year, you know, because we used—or used it fairly—for the first time in 2011.

That's what we do with any of these products. We assess them, not just based on the manufacturing specifications but on the reality on the ground. And certainly, whether it's Tiger tubes or these products, they have proved to be somewhat valuable.

And we did get the approvals, which is advised as well, with DFO, and, you know, some—so that is an issue we were cognizant as well, is to sort of minimize the impacts on the environment.

I do know one of the issues that, you know, has been raised is sort of, why not use cement? And,

again, a lot of cases when we're dealing with water quality issues, we have to be careful of what may be a good structural product but can also have impact on water quality in the area.

So, general sense, they perform probably as well as, if not better than, was expected. But we'll get the final report and make our decisions on future deployment, I think, based on the full report.

Mr. Gerrard: The initial plan for rolling out geotubes was not completed. There's still lots of areas in St. Laurent and there may be other areas around the lake where there could be benefit.

Is there any consideration or would there be any consideration to complete it and that if the municipality or another municipality felt that was desirable?

Mr. Ashton: Well, the key thing here is they were deployed on a one-time use basis. So you're then into recognizing that if they are used you've got the cost, and I can get the exact cost if the member's interested. So that's my 'analysis'.

I mean, the key thing now is that the lake level's come down significantly. We're going to be below regulatory level by, well, before the end of this year if current trends continue, so the pressures aren't there.

But, again, we're going to go with our thorough review of what the experience was with the products, although the first indication is that they were useful, probably exceeded expectations.

Mr. Gerrard: The—I mean, most people are cognizant of the fact that we're still close to a foot above the upper end of the range of 12.5 and that there are, you know, ongoing risks or concerns. In fact, it's my understanding that even quite recently with the recent wind there were some properties which were significantly affected. And, I mean, while it may seem, you know, right, that we're completely out of the woods, that, you know, hey, particularly if there was another rainstorm it would be an issue. And, if these geotubes were put in place in part to help build up or rebuild the berms in many areas which have been degraded because of the situation, then it might be something which could be looked at.

And so I think that what I would suggest to the minister is that in the assessment, that it be an assessment not only of how well they've performed,

but of whether and when they might be used in the future.

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the advice, and just for the information of the member, the current level is 813.35. We are anticipating with the current forecast that we will hit 812.5, within the regulatory range by November 1st and, certainly, a big difference from late last year. That's the most important thing for people around the lake. *[interjection]*

Then, actually, I'm also advised that, again, it's not uncommon to be above 813. Since 1961 this is—since regulation, we've been above 813 feet at least 10 times. So I wouldn't want the impression to be created that the regulatory regime was always achieved. It was always the operating target and, you know, again, the member referenced the 2003 report before, but we've been above 813 feet 10 times since 1961.

So what you're seeing now is more, I would say normal. Normal, obviously, is below the 812.5, but it's not an unusual lake level. Last year it was a highly unusual lake level and, of course, when you consider that prior to '61, with the opening at Fairford, we were at 814-plus for three years. It really does put in perspective that we're below what, you know, was sort of the preregulation flood level which is 814 feet.

But I'm not going to get in what is the flood level until we get back to the regulatory level. It's not much of a consolation if people, particularly if they've been impacted by flooding last year, that, you know, it doesn't really matter what the definition of flood level is till we get back to the normal level. It—you know, that's the goal.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. Since 2003, when that report was there, how many times has the level been below 810?

Mr. Ashton: Yes. I could track that information down. And I appreciate the member asking the question because there, you know, there are times when the big concern around Lake Manitoba has been lack of water. It's hard to believe after the last year, but we even had a dry spell 2006, if I recall correctly, and there were very real concerns.

It's also one of the issues with the regulatory level. You know, there would be significant impacts if you reduce the lake level dramatically below its current regulatory minimum. And I, you know, I could just mention—well, fisheries, you know, impacts, for example. Because I know back in 2003,

that was one of the big issues, was, you know, the concern with fisheries both in Lake St. Martin, as well, by the way, and Lake Manitoba. Too low a level, you have negative impacts on the fishery, but there's also other users around the lake that traditionally have wanted a higher lake level.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I mean, the part of the point of asking this question—and I will wait for the answer which the minister will provide in due course—but is this: that there needs to be for the lake to operate some fluctuation, and that when the level is down that there is a natural, sort of, healing of some of the damage which was done at very high levels, and that is a buildup of the berms, a buildup of the sand and that buildup is then very important in mitigating problems at higher level, because if you've eroded a lot of that, the berm and the—you know, the sand, which is near the shore, which is—builds up at low levels, then you've got much less protection.

* (12:00)

And there's, you know, a fairly strong argument being made that in the period from 2003, all right, after that report, that the level has tended to be maintained up toward the upper end of the range, and that it hasn't gone down to the 210 or even 210.5 or maybe even 211. I don't know, precisely, the answer, but I would look forward to the information from the minister. And that in terms of cycling through, let me give you an example if I can find it. Here it is, and this is the response of the minister on *Hansard*. That, you know, once the levels—essentially, as I interpret this response, once the level leach—reaches 812.5 on Lake Manitoba that the minister will assume that everything is just fine and no more needs to be done. And many would argue that the lake would actually benefit from a period of lower levels, down at the 810.5, 811 range for some time to allow, as it were, for natural, you know, healing of the lake, and also allow for, you know, a time when people around the lake can breathe a little easier for a short spell.

Now, I—you know, I would ask the minister to comment on the view, which I think was part of the original 2003 report, that you needed to have this fluctuation between 10.5 and twelve point—810.5 and 812.5 for the optimum situation of the lake, but it seems from how the lake was managed that this was never achieved. So I let the minister have a chance to comment. Thank you.

Mr. Ashton: First thing I want to stress, by the way, you know, the operation of the emergency channel, it is based on the fact it's an emergency situation,

which allowed us to expedite it. And, obviously, with that channel, it—we would operate it under 'circumstances' up to and including when we hit the regulatory range maximum, so that—you know, where we do not have the ability to use it for normal management this point in time. This will be one of the areas that will be addressed by the two reports, and, certainly, we'll make decisions accordingly down the line. You know, whether we need to put in a physical infrastructure or go through the environmental licensing to operate it on a, you know, more active basis or enhance it. I mean, those are all different dimensions of it.

I think what the member is getting to, as well, is, again, subject to a lot of debate in and around the lake. The flip side of what happened last year is—you know, certainly, I've talked to scientists who've said that in terms of water quality, you know, ironically, with the flushing out it's probably had some impact on reducing some of the—you know, the saline issues, et cetera. Mind you, if you get areas where the water has receded you do—you usually get some salt deposits, you know, that can impact on land quality. So it—you know, it—again, it depends, you know, the actual ambient water quality versus the surrounding area.

I think one of the key issues, though, through the—through this report will be addressing not just the flooding issues but the broader issues. Again, that's why we've a separate report on the regulatory level. It's not just focused only on flooding, it's focused in on the—you know, the general regulatory framework, which will allow us to use all of these issues.

And, yes, my sense is we will have a very comprehensive report that will address a lot of the issues the member's talking about. And I do accept the point too, by the way, that there's the issue of the range, but, there's also the issue of the—if I could use the word "protocol" for how you operate, you know, and what the goals are, and, again, those are, you know, outside of the regulatory range that's adapted. We do—we'll have operating rules, et cetera.

The good news, though, is if we do need to move on an emergency or permanent basis with the outlet we have, one of the things that we won't have to deal with, necessarily, in—you know, emergent flood situations, is what we had prior to last year, which is the fact that we had to shut down but—not shut down, but significantly ratchet back the Fairford outlet in the winter to avoid huge problems with

the—you know, with ice-related flooding on Lake St. Martin.

So we do have one more tool in the tool box if we need it, and that may play a very significant role, I believe, in not only future flood situations, but the deliberations of this task force. So I'm not going to prejudge them, but I think they're going to address a lot of the issues that the member's talking about.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, two things, and I'll ask them both, although they're slightly different. One is we've talked about the lake level, the target lake level, 810.5 to 812.5 for Lake Manitoba, what has been the government's target level for Lake St. Martin for the last number of years, and second, on the government's record—NDP and Conservative governments in this province, on dealing with artificial flood to date, has not been a really good record. After the Red River flood, this wasn't resolved until, you know, there was a court action and, you know, the government was forced to admit that there actually was an artificial flood.

There's a situation at the Shellmouth Dam, which the minister's familiar with. It's been going on for, I think, about 41 years, and that's still not resolved, and I think that's before the courts right now. And I think that, you know, it would be—the government would be well to acknowledge that there was some level of artificial flood in figuring out, you know, how you actually respond to people on Lake Manitoba. And I'll let the minister comment on that.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I'm not going to get into blaming Premier Campbell for—he was a Liberal—for not building the floodway or any of the, you know, the things. Although, I do want to stress, by the way, that if we really wanted to go there, and if you actually look at the evolution in the—of this issue in the 1950s and '60s, and—I don't know if I should get into the partisan end of it here, but the member did mention that it was interesting because when it came to the floodway, actually, it was brought in by the Conservative government of the day, and the party that opposed it was the Liberal Party, and the New Democratic Party in the '60s, they had concerns about some of the expropriation issues. So I'm not sure if I would want to get into the historic partisan politics of flooding because, you know what? I think we've gotten to the point where people of all political stripes would say the right things have happened.

I do want to stress, by the way, that we did, as a government, bring in the legislation that provides

statutory compensation for the operation of the Shellmouth and—so I think that is something that's long overdue. I know the former member for Russell lobbied for years. Now, ironically, when he was a minister in government—and probably the first to say that it was an NDP government that brought it in—but the key issue, to my mind, is you start from two premises here. One is, I—you know—and I'm not going to repeat what I said on the issue of artificial flooding before, but the first premise is to improve flood protection for everyone. And not that we didn't do things this flood or had done things prior to the flood to make a difference with—they made a huge difference. But after a major historical flood, you sit down and you look at what worked, what didn't, and you come up with a—better systems in the future.

We have those two reports. We're moving very quickly, by the way, even more quickly than after '97. And it's not a criticism of, you know, post-'97. I mean, it's just a reality that we want to move ahead, and we want, particularly, the issue of building levels in around Lake Manitoba to be settled and also, you know, the related issues around Lake St. Martin. People just can't wait, two, three, four years. We've got to get that information. You know, we have the interim building standards, but people need some certainty. So we are going to proceed with it.

* (12:10)

The member did talk about Lake St. Martin. The range is, as he would know, 798 to 800. It's currently 801.25, so it's very similar to Lake Manitoba, still above the regulatory level, and until it gets below the regulatory level, whatever the future regulatory level is, it really is still having a significant impact on people around the lake.

Mr. Gerrard: One wind-up comment: Thank you for that. You know that the Campbell government actually asked for the commission which laid the foundation for building the floodway, so thank you.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Chair, I'm—in early May, your government made an announcement regarding assistance for municipalities around the lake that were impacted by flooding in terms of some compensation for municipal assessment write-downs, and you included a number of RMs, but left out three at the south end: Woodlands, Westbourne, and Portage.

I'm wondering what the rationale for including the rest of the ones around the lake and leaving those three out might have been.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I would recommend detailed questions to the Minister of Local Government which is administering the program and did develop criteria for the program, but we didn't make the announcement, so I will give the member a general summary.

The—they looked at, obviously, the impacts. They looked at the assessed tax base and identified the municipalities most affected by that shift. I mean, some larger municipalities, obviously you're dealing with a smaller part of the tax base, has less of an impact. But some of the smaller municipalities and some of the municipalities with limited assessment, you would have seen some very significant impacts on it. So that's the—that was the general rationale, was to identify the most vulnerable municipalities in terms of impacts on the higher assessments that would result from the lower—like, the shift of taxes, pardon me, from the fact that you'd have some higher assessed properties versus the, you know, flood-affected properties were lower assessed.

I do want to just add one other quick thing, and that is that it's been put in place for this year—it's certainly our goal with rebuilding the lakes to get the lake back to normal and one of the experiences out of '97 is that properties that might have been flood-impacted and, you know, the value of those properties might have decreased at that point in time, if you go to the Red River Valley today with confidence restored, you know, by some of the flood protection projects, the values have rebounded dramatically. Well, in fact, they significantly exceed what the values were, even pre-'97. So our goal here is to put some temporary assistance in place but to, you know, to rebuild the confidence in the lake and that will have impacts on property values and assessment.

Mr. Smook: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

On March 30th, I received a letter from Department of Labour stating that MIT has taken steps to assess heavy metal exposure levels within the provincial locksmith's office. I was just wondering if this has been done and when the results would be available.

Mr. Ashton: The member's already asked a number of questions about the locksmith's office. He seems to have a particular interest in this area, so I will get a comprehensive response including to this question.

Mr. Smook: In regards to Highway 59 from St. Malo to the border, and 201 from, say, 59 to 75 as an

alternative flood route, has there been any thoughts by the minister's department as to—about doing anything on those particular pieces of highway, especially like, say, the bridge, the Marais bridge at—between Letellier and 75?

Mr. Ashton: The key issue, of course, is when we do have a flood, it impacts on our main 'innerconnal' trade route, which is Highway 75. We do put in place a detour and it does provide continued access. It did last year; it has historically. And our goal is to reduce the number of days which 75 is closed, and the key is managing a lot of the hydraulic issues in and around Morris. But, notwithstanding that, what it leads to really is—I know there's been consideration of, sort of, 59. The reality is you wouldn't set up a alternate flood route that is actually longer and doesn't have the connections, to begin with anyway, than the alternate flood route that is set up during every spring flood in which 75 is closed.

And we have done a significant amount of work upgrading 59 south starting, actually, back in 2000. But there's a very significant difference in traffic volumes in the southern part of, you know, 59, and that's a factor we do take into account. And I know other MLAs have raised issues and their constituents were facing a lot of pressure. So what we look at with 59 is no different than we'd look else—at elsewhere. So that has been looked at, but just, as I said, the fact is there is an alternate route that's established every year. That's not the problem for us. The real problem is the lack—is the large number of days in which Morris is closed. And when I say a problem for us is a problem for the trucking industry, it certainly is disruption in Morris. That's our key goal on the flood side.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Way, way back now, at the beginning of this process, I did ask the minister about the hydrological study that was going to be undertaken in the Morris area, and it just—is the clock ran out. So I'm just going to ask the question again, as to when that study was originally to begin, I think there was a start date to begin the study, and what's the status of that study right now?

Mr. Ashton: It was delayed because of the flood. It's one of the numerous projects that we have had to shift resources into. When I say we, that includes the consulting engineers that are doing this as well. I am advised that it will start shortly.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, thanks. So the study has not begun. Can you indicate when you think it will begin then? Is there a timeline?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, in terms of the public we're anticipating a—well, certainly, the point of open house is within a year. So they're going to start shortly, obviously, to—you know, they do some of the internal work, but within a year so by next spring we're anticipating going directly to the public.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, well, in the interests of time, I'm going to move on to another question. I asked this question before, too, in regard to the Trans-Canada Highway and the junction of 330. And since the time that I asked the question before there's been another accident at that intersection, and I'm wondering what action can be taken now to address safety issues at this intersection such as, perhaps, a controlled intersection.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we do have a consultant working on this. We—that was actually meeting us as recently as yesterday on this. It's looking at ways to deal with that particular scenario. I'll undertake to keep the member informed as it proceeds. So they're actively looking at possible mitigation that area.

Mrs. Taillieu: Sorry, I just didn't quite hear what the minister said. Is he saying they're looking at an intersection in that area—a controlled intersection?

Mr. Ashton: They're looking at the intersection. There's a consultant that met with the department yesterday and they're looking at all issues related to safety in the area. They're not ruling anything in or out, but they're actively working on options in that area.

Mr. Wishart: And Mr. Minister, I'd like to go back to the Portage Diversion for a minute. It has increased its capacity on an emergency basis to something in the neighbourhood of 32,000 cubic feet per second. Will that be the permanent capacity of that and, if so, what are the plans to deal with the outlet structure which were originally constructed for 25,000 and has never been upgraded?

* (12:20)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I think this was seen during last year. The actual physical capacity is one issue, the channel. The member is quite correct about the control structure. There was some very creative engineering, technical work was actually done to protect the integrity of the physical structure, the controls, actually, during the flood period because there was the potential, actually, that the higher levels, the whole structure could be flooded itself. So that was done on interim basis.

These are issues I fully anticipate will again be part of these reviews that come back, and, hopefully, I'm anticipating they'll look at, sort of, the rated capacity—you know, the, well, historic rated capacity, the actual capacity in the last flood and whether enhancements need to be made or—you know, I'm not going to prejudge what they'll come back with, but they'll—I'm anticipating they will provide clear recommendations on these issues.

Mr. Wishart: So you were talking about the inlet in terms of improvements there, but I was also asking question related to the outlet of the diversion where it goes into Lake Manitoba and the fail-safe that's been, frankly, used almost as much as the outlet the last few years. What do I tell the people that are impacted by the fail-safe? That they should be moving to higher ground?

Mr. Ashton: Good point. I thank the member for clarifying the question. I—actually, again, this will be part of the overall review.

I mean, the member's quite correct; the fail-safe has been used fairly extensively and not just last year. I mean, it's been in use quite regularly over the last number of years, so we will look at that and I—his predecessor was a strong lobbyist on the Portage Diversion. I think if you check *Hansard*, you'll find his predecessor's name will appear next to it quite a few times. Seems like the tradition is continuing, and we're going to look at all the aspects of that.

We have done repairs, but the bigger issue is, you know, do you continue to operate and then repair or are there other ways in which we can deal with this?

Mr. Smook: I guess we're ready to summarize the line by line, whatever we need to do.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department. I will now call resolution 15.2.

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$76,003,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Highways and Transportation Programs.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$50,927,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Government Services Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$187,236,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Infrastructure Works, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,497,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Emergency Measures Organization, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$328,196,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$650,355,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 15.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in the resolution 15.1.

At this point we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this item—last item. The floor is open for questions. Question?

Mr. Smook: No, just that I'd like to thank the staff for participating in these Estimates and anybody who has participated in—over these last number of days, I'd just like thank them for all their help, and, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,903,000 for Infrastructure and Transportation, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

The hour being 12:26, committee rise.

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND LITERACY

* (10:00)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner and the floor is wide open for questions.

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Yesterday the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) had a few questions on the Bright Futures program. He was looking for some specific numbers that I have for him today.

So, if he would like, I could read those into the record now and I think I've got everything that he asked me, but we can obviously go over that and see that—if his questions have been answered.

Mr. Chairperson: That would be fine. In the past, information like this has either been read into the record or, if there is a document, it can be tabled and the Clerk will be kind enough to make appropriate copies, and we can do it that way, so.

Ms. Selby: I think it's probably easier if I read it in because the document doesn't have any context in it, so it might be a little obscure.

Mr. Chairperson: That's fine. Please proceed. Go ahead, or—again, honourable Minister, take it away.

Ms. Selby: The member was asking yesterday about the specific numbers at each program and the total number of young people involved in the Bright Futures program for the 2011-2012.

I do want to tell him that right now, the numbers that we have are still just the estimated numbers. They haven't been confirmed yet, but I believe it's confirmed through Family Services—children and youth, pardon me, because, of course, the Bright Futures program has moved over to children opportunities and youth.

But here are the numbers and the breakdown for Bright Futures as of 2011-2012. Wayfinders had 220 children. The bursary management SEED Winnipeg program had 400—I should say, young people. Career Trek had 208 young people. CSI, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg, had 720. Medical Careers Exploration Program, through the Pan Am Clinic, had 72. Pathways community education

develop association had 218 young people. Peaceful Village at the Manitoba School Improvement Program had 140. Power Up, the Boys and Girls Club of Winnipeg, had 290. And You Can Do It Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council has 320 young people, for a total of 2,588 young people involved in Bright Futures, as I said, estimated number of the Bright Futures participants for 2011-2012.

And the member was asking for the—I'm not sure and I'd have to clarify if he wanted the breakdown spending for each of those programs or if he just wants the total spending.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): If the minister has the breakdown for each, that would be great, and just also, the second part of the original question was also for '10 and '11 as well, for the numbers, so.

Ms. Selby: I will go back then and give the member the numbers for 2010-2011 for the students in each program, and, again, just saying that these are the estimated numbers and child—children opportunity and youth department, which has Bright Futures, would perhaps be able to confirm those.

The numbers for 2010-2011 for the Wayfinders, Seven Oaks School Division, 180 young people; bursary management SEED Winnipeg, 336; Career Trek was 460; CSI, Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg, 720; Medical Careers Exploration Program, Pan Am Clinic is 70; Pathways was 130; Peaceful Village, 80; Power Up! at the Boys and Girls Club, 260; and You Can Do It, Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council, 320. So the total in 2010-2011 was 2,624.

And the member was asking about the funding for those. So for the 2012-2013 estimated funding it has—and again those numbers could be confirmed with child—children, opportunity and youth—is \$1,964,860; that's the 2012-2013. I'm assuming the member wanted the 2011-2012 numbers as well; that total was \$3,645,348. And just to confirm, did the member want the 2010-2011 total funding? *[interjection]* No, he's good with the 2011-2012.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ewasko: For the Bright Futures fund, how do—what's the process for organizations or groups to apply to be part of the fund?

Ms. Selby: It's a rather lengthy process, but I will explain to the member. To be eligible for funding organizations are required to meet a number of

criteria specific to both the organization and the program. The applying organization must be a not-for-profit community-based organization or a school that has partnered with an eligible not-for-profit community-based organization. The fund will accept applications for both new and expanded programming. In the case of program expansions, funding will only be considered for organizations that are able to demonstrate success with their current programs. In the case of new programs, developmental funds will only be provided to established community-based organizations that have the capacity to deliver comprehensive programs.

Eligible programs must demonstrate several components as well, being community-based organizations and schools must be strongly connected. The programs must actively seek parental participation—and I can just, on a side note, tell the member that when Bright Futures was still under this department I had the opportunity to visit a few of them and the parent participation was a really wonderful part about it. It really brought the whole community together. The program must also address the following three needs: social supports in the form of mentorship, career exposure, advocacy or counselling; academic supports including tutoring and study space; and financial support, short-term support such as transit tickets, lunches as well as long-term support such as RESPs and bursaries. The programs must be aligned with the work of other community agencies and, where possible, they need to work together. The programs will provide short- and long-term goals and incentives for participants and will be established as multi-year commitments to the participants. Most of the students go through until they finish the high school level, and in this case the program prepares them to go on to post-secondary education.

The organization must indicate how they must—how they plan to measure success over the short and long term, and in accessing applications to the fund the following also must be considered: the social economic status and current needs of target students; secured non-government support, both in-kind support and financial contributions; the connections between the proposed program or expansion and existing community supports and programs; and opportunities for older youth and community members to be involved as leaders and mentors. And, as the program was fairly new but is starting to get to the point where some of the early participants are getting older and moving out of the program, it's

been a really great opportunity for them to now start to come back as leaders and mentors for what the program has brought them.

Mr. Ewasko: So I know that the program has switched over to child and youth opportunities, but has your department previously set up a tracking, or how they're going to get that data after the fact on how those students that participated in the program—how are they in regards to succeeding carrying on to post-secondary and into the future, or just tracking them as far as what they've—what they're doing after high school?

* (10:10)

Ms. Selby: There is tracking. There will be reporting on the students and what we hope, of course, will be their success as they graduate from the program. But the specific means are being developed by children, opportunity and youth right now.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, thank you minister. So I'm assuming then the first group of students graduating from the Bright Futures fund is going to be this coming June. Is that correct?

Ms. Selby: That is correct.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, then if we can then move over into some Student Aid questions.

I was looking back into *Hansard* from last year and had a couple of questions in regards to, I guess, the computer glitches or problems that they had in regards to—I guess it would be November of 2010.

Can the minister just comment just briefly? I did read over *Hansard*, but just comment briefly on if those—if there's been any more development or problems with that system.

Ms. Selby: We are currently looking into quality assurance with the new program and we are looking at a November 2012 for potential completion of the new system. At the time, the students right now are using the old system and will continue to use that for the 2012-2013 year.

We are looking forward to the new system, the renewal project. It will mean that students can access student aid and information about student aid more easily and it will be a more student-friendly technology and an up-to-date system. And I'm sure the member can understand that just like how buildings and infrastructure does need to be updated, databases and online systems don't last forever, need to be replaced. In the last 10 years since the first

program went online, we do see a lot more students using online applications. We're now at 90 per cent of all of our applicants for student financial aid are doing it through the Internet.

The old system, which is still working, is 10 years old and needs to be replaced. The phase 1 of this was on time and on budget and went online live November of 2010. But being that this is obviously a very large system, it's a rather complicated system and does involve very personal data, as the member can understand, of the students—their personal data, their financial data—that it's really important that this system is—has got the quality and the system in place to make sure those things are protected.

We did do a series of student test groups in March with the new system. Got a lot of critical feedback that will be used, of course, to keep improving it. But we do want to make sure that with all the personal information of students who access and use student aid, that it's really important that the system is running at an optimum level to ensure the safety of all the personal information.

The testing that we did do in March, the new application, everything looked positive. The feedback was very good. The students all said it was an easier program to use, but we do want to make sure that the transition is as smooth as possible, so we did identify that some additional programming would be necessary, and that work is under way right now. And as I said we are looking at November 2012 as the potential completion date for the brand new system to be fully operational and up and running for all students who want to access it.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay. So just going back into *Hansard* a little bit from last year. So the company that had, I guess, had the successful tender—and I apologize for pronunciation—but Dulette and Touche, I'm assuming, are close—when was that first tendered? Because from what I'm reading, we're talking probably back in like '09?

Ms. Selby: I'm not sure if my pronunciation is any more correct. We say Deloitte and Touche, but we may not be correct either on that.

And the member is right; it was first tendered in 2009.

Mr. Ewasko: So 2009—so the tender actually went out in late 2008, and the proposed budget for phase 1, from what I was reading, was 300 and—was not to exceed \$350,000. So the entire budget for that computer upgrade was what, from that initial time?

Ms. Selby: The number that the member is quoting was the price for the scoping of the project, and my staff is just currently looking for the breakdown of the two phases, and we'll get that number for you as soon as we find those details.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay. Now going back again into *Hansard*—and thank you, Mr. Chair, sorry for not saying that earlier—going back, the previous critic for Advanced Education and Literacy had asked if the project was on time and the minister had stated that the project was. It was to be completed in this year and we complete in this year. That was April 26th of 2011. So, going back, the tender process was opened up late 2008. This company received the tender in 2009, was to be completed June 2011, ready to go for the students to be using, and now we're saying that the project is not going to be completed till November 2012 and we don't know what the breakdown is on hand today as far as the funds go, as far as the projected amounts. Can minister clarify that?

* (10:20)

Ms. Selby: As the member can understand that we take a project of this size and the nature of the personal information that is related to this project very seriously.

Phase 1 was finished on time, on budget. Phase 2, we have encountered some challenges and thought it was more prudent to delay the live—going on live with the project until that we sure that there were—those challenges had been addressed. So right now we are in the process of doing a quality assurance assessment which will, when that is complete, be able to confirm the total cost for phase 2 and confirm the timeline. Right now we are expecting it to go live in November 2012, but the quality assurance assessment, of course, will confirm that for us.

Mr. Ewasko: So I apologize for asking this question in a different manner, Minister, but the total budget for a program of this magnitude and with this much detail, and we don't know what that total budget is; that's a little disturbing.

Ms. Selby: We do, of course, have a pretty strong approximate estimate of what the total cost will be. We expect it to be within the range as expected, but we did run into some unexpected challenges. Some parts to the program were out of the original scope and that is why we are waiting for the quality assurance assessment to confirm those exact numbers and the exact timeline. But as said, we

certainly think the project will most likely go online live in November of 2012. This is the date that we are still expecting it to go live, and the quality assurance assessment will give us the more specific details, including some of those unexpected challenges and some parts of the program that were out of the original scope.

Mr. Ewasko: We're going to go around and around on this for a little bit, but—and I'm just backing this up and just making sure I've got the timelines correct. The tender went out—opened up late 2008. The tender was issued early 2009. It is now May 2012. The project was supposed to be completed June 2011. It's still not completed. We're looking at November 2012 possibly if the ducks and the checks and all that are in a row. Definitely, we on this side of the House do not want to see anything go wrong as it did in phase 1 with personal information and credit problems with potential students.

I just find it hard to believe that we do not know and that the minister cannot give us an amount when there was three companies that tendered the project, two were—seemed to show that they could actually carry out the project, one was given the tender. What was that amount that they tendered?

Ms. Selby: As the member knows, phase 1, of course, was on time and on budget, went live in November 2010, but, of course, because we're dealing with such sensitive information, we do want to make sure that everything is in place before we go live entirely with the new project. Of course, we know that the project's costs is in—is approximately \$15 million, but we're waiting for the quality assurance assessment in order to get those specific numbers for phase 2 in that we did have some unexpected challenges that will have to be addressed. And that will give us the specific numbers according to that.

And also, as I said, we are expecting it to go live November 2012, but we won't go live with the program until we know that all the checks are in place to make sure that this very sensitive information is protected. As I said earlier, we did have a series of student test groups in March with the new system. The feedback was very positive but it also identified a couple of areas that we want to make sure are addressed before we go live entirely, and that is why we thought it was prudent to continue with the old system until all those checks and balances had been addressed.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, thank you, Minister, for that number. Is that a ceiling number, is—or is it going to go higher?

Because last—just looking back in *Hansard*, April 26th, 2011, you mention that the contract—everything was on budget, the timeline was looking good, that it was a fixed-price contract. And I quote the minister: "As I mentioned earlier, once the project was tendered, the budget was \$14.3 million and it remains on budget." And I know that you said approximately \$15 million, but seven hundred grand, to me, is a big chunk of change.

Ms. Selby: This is a big, complex project. As I said, I gave them—the member an approximate number within the range of \$15 million, and that is because we are addressing some unexpected challenges. There was some out-of-scope issues that need to be addressed as well. It is also why we're doing the quality assurance assessment right now, so that we can definitely nail down the more specifics. We are looking at less than 5 per cent variance at this point, but the quality assurance assessment will give us those numbers, specifically, and also be able to confirm the launch date of when we go live with the program.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, thank you, Minister. Just going through those quality checks, then, looking for that 5 per cent variance, can you possibly share as far as what some of those issues that are holding this up?

Ms. Selby: I just want to confirm that it's less than 5 per cent variance that we're talking about right now, but that's exactly what the quality assurance assessment will do for us.

It's going to be able to take stock, identify the particular issues. It will look at the things that are both in-scope and some unexpected out-of-scope challenges that we've also seen. It will be able to give us an exact reading of where we are, how far along. And, as I said, it will be able to confirm those final numbers, taking into consideration some of the out-of-scope challenges that came up, but also to confirm the timeline. Right now, we are hoping to go live in November 2012, but we will confirm that with the quality assurance assessment.

* (10:30)

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, so just—and thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Madam Minister, for that answer.

The company Dulette and Touche—and I'll get that eventually—[interjection] Deloitte? Okay, that sounds good. Thank you. Deloitte and Touche. The company had won the tender early 2009. From what I'm reading back here in *Hansard* from this time last year, they weren't necessarily the cheapest out of the three and, actually, out of the three, there were only two that were really being considered.

So we're talking—by the time this launches in November 2012, and that's not a for sure because of all the checks and trying to get the variance to less than 5 per cent—we're talking almost a five-year project for a 14—oh, sorry, approximately a \$15-million project, and the Bomber stadium is getting built faster than that. So, I know it's an interesting concept, but we're talking a lot more money for the Bomber stadium, yet it's getting done faster.

So, if we're looking back in time to the initial awarding of this tender, did we maybe—or did the department maybe make a mistake in choosing this company?

Ms. Selby: I'm sure I don't have to point out to the member that comparing a student aid online assessment system with the Bomber stadium's a little apples and oranges. And while the Bomber stadium is not only an exciting project and large project and one much like the MTS Centre that will change the face of Winnipeg, and I know that Manitobans are excited to be seeing their Bombers play, and I think it will rejuvenate the team as well, but it, of course, does not deal with the sort of sensitive information that a student aid system has to.

And that is why it is important that we're diligent, that we make sure all the security and systems are in place and that—although the students who have tested out the system in March found it an easier to use system, they thought it was—it was good from their point of view, but we have a responsibility to protect that important information and we take that very seriously. And if that means delaying the system to go live November 2012 to ensure that we have all those checks in place, then we will definitely do that.

I should explain to the member that IEM was a joint project with them. They're the experts in technology in government. We're the experts on helping people get to school and to keeping school affordable and accessible for all our students. But we're not the experts on the technology and that's

why we went in on this project with IEM who are the experts.

My understanding, Deloitte and Touche had a competitive bid. There are many criteria that we look at when choosing which tender to go with. The one thing that's important about Deloitte is that they are experts on the SAP computer system and, again, not being the technical expert, I can't explain too thoroughly what that exactly involves. But they do have the experience and the expertise on the SAP system and this project is also on the SAP computer system, and that is why their bid was such a competitive one. It was a competitive bid, but, given that they had that expertise as well, it made them the first choice.

And I would remind the member that phase 1 was on time and on budget. We have come across some unexpected challenges, some things that were out of scope. But it's really important to make sure that we keep in mind that with information of this sensitive nature that the most important thing is to make sure that this project is running smoothly, will be a benefit to students, but also protect that sensitive information.

Mr. Ewasko: Now, I'd like to ask the minister if she could possibly—some of those out-of-scope challenges—if you could possibly list them off. What were some of the challenges that those students encountered when you were doing the testing March 2012?

Ms. Selby: We did choose to go live with a select number of students in March of this year for exactly the reason that you would expect; so that we could see what the program works, not just in the lab when it's being developed, but with real people with varying degrees of computer experience and expertise. Those registering to be computer programmers probably have a different experience than those registering to be in fields that won't be computer related, although I'm not sure how many of those there are nowadays.

The students did respond favourably. They said it was easier to use. They thought it was a superior system, which is, of course, exactly what we want. But we do want to make sure that it is student-friendly system for students of all levels of learning, and if students are having trouble finding particular things or if it's not responding as well, then that has to be addressed.

One thing that came out in those tests in March was the search function had some issues. I don't know how specific the member would like to go, but there was issues with the hover function, so when the cursor is over a particular area there was some issues in that. And if students are having a difficulty finding the information that they need or if it's not as readily available, obviously, that's not as good a system as we would like to see in place, which is why we are doing the quality assurance assessment right now to thoroughly identify all these—both—what could be just little annoyances when using the program. But also, of course, the more important issues of making sure that this very sensitive information is protected and treated with the sensitivity that it needs to be, security being, of course, the most important thing, but functioning being, you know, almost equally important for students because if the system is difficult to us or confusing in any way, we know that that won't be a thorough and easy way for students to get through it.

* (10:40)

And, as we know, 90 per cent of students are using the online service now, which is different than 10 years ago when our old system came into play. So it's really important, as I said, that that system can address students of varying needs and varying computer literacy, I guess, would be the word for it.

Mr. Ewasko: So some of the issues that are coming out with the program—what is the range or the demographics or the age of the students that you have in the test plot right now or under that test project?

Ms. Selby: When we conducted the tests in March, we tried to select a sampling of students that's representative of those who do use Student Aid. We selected a number of students in a broad range of age categories because, of course, there are people of all ages that are eligible to use our Student Aid program but with more young adults than older ones because that tends to be the clientele that we serve and work with at Student Aid.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, so, Deloitte and Touche—*[interjection]* Is that better?

An Honourable Member: That's great.

Mr. Ewasko: Deloitte and Touche again won the tender out in 2009. It is now May of 2012. The minister has stated that they're hoping to go online November 2012, if the quality assurance checks—is able to get in under 5 per cent variance.

Now, are we putting—is the government and the minister and her department—I don't want to say stalling, because that's not the correct word—because we want to make sure that quality assurance and the students' personal information is protected, but is this coming from the fact that the minister said that phase 1 came in on time, came in on budget, but had some major problems in regards to students' credit checks and all that type of stuff—financial credit?

Ms. Selby: And, as the member said, it—certainly, when you're dealing with such sensitive information, it's prudent to make sure you take the time to do it right. We certainly—it would do nobody a service to go online before some of the kinks are worked out in the system that could put some of that sensitive information at risk.

The quality assurance assessment that we're doing right now, of course, will look at the scope of the problems and make sure that security and functionality are both as strong as one would expect and want in such a sensitive program.

And, certainly, we've upped the level of oversight knowing that this is a big project and we want to make sure that it's running at optimum levels to ensure the safety of all that personal information, but, as I said, it's also the functionality; we need to balance the two of them.

Overall, we've had a lot of positive feedback on it, but to ensure that the system is serving the needs of students best in terms of its functionality and, I would say as minister, the responsibility of the security issue being foremost in our minds, that we are looking at November 2012 as the potential completion date. But the quality assurance evaluation exercise that we're doing right now will confirm that all of those checks, balances, security and functionality are in place, before we give the go-ahead to make the entire phase 2 system go live.

Mr. Ewasko: I can definitely appreciate, Minister, the—not necessarily the urgency, but the—I guess, the way that you're going about with phase 2 and phase 3 of this project, making sure that all the quality checks are being done, because in phase 1, with the Equifax issue with the students' credit ratings and all that type of stuff, we wouldn't want anything like that happening again, so I definitely can see why we're making sure that these checks are put into place.

Back with those thousand-plus-odd students—were they all contacted? Because I read back in

Hansard that you were in the process of—your department was in the process of contacting them and making sure that their credit ratings and all of that from that glitch—even though I know it wasn't you, personally, that caused that issue, but the department was just going to make sure that their checks were getting done and that those students' personal information wasn't compromised.

Ms. Selby: Certainly, upon learning of the error that had happened, Manitoba Student Aid immediately informed Equifax and began working with them to resolve the error. They did so by providing a list of the affected clients.

Manitoba Student Aid also requested that that incorrect information be purged from the credit history, and, of course, it was, and the company, Equifax, confirmed that all the erroneous information was purged from the client credit history on March 25th of last year.

Mr. Ewasko: So the company, Equifax, and Student Aid got together and made sure that the—this information was being taken out and everything was getting fixed.

Were the students themselves contacted to say that—you know, whether that their information possibly was compromised and their credit rating could be affected but that Equifax and Student Aid were doing everything in their power to make sure that that type of problem doesn't happen again? And that those students on the individual basis were going to be, I guess, cleared of any type of issue from this glitch?

* (10:50)

Ms. Selby: I think the member understands that this was, obviously, a very unfortunate incident and something that Manitoba Student Aid was quick in addressing, and as soon as was notified of this error, immediately contacted Equifax to correct the misinformation. It was a short period of time between learning about it and getting the fix in place.

But, of course, that is still very sensitive information and an unfortunate situation. But it was addressed on March 25th by Manitoba Student Aid contacting Equifax, working with them to resolve the error and, of course, providing the list of the affected clients, correcting the information, and Manitoba Student Aid, of course, asking that the incorrect information be purged from the credit history.

Equifax confirmed that they did do that—that the erroneous information was purged from the client history on March 25th. And, certainly, which is why it goes back to what we were speaking about earlier, the importance of making sure that security, functionality, that a project of this size going live is more important to make sure that the checks and balances are in place than to rush that date. And in November 2012 we do expect it to go live, but that's after our quality assurance will have confirmed that all the checks and balances that are necessary are in place.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister, for that answer again.

So here's the question: Were those students whose information was compromised contacted on an individual basis from either Student Aid or the Equifax? Yes or no?

Ms. Selby: Of course, and certainly the minister's office takes a situation like this very seriously. We know that Manitoba Student Aid takes it very seriously, and soon as we were notified that this error had happened, we were quick to act. They immediately contacted Equifax to correct the misinformation. It was a short time that the—that this information was wrongly in effect, although, for a student certainly not acceptable to either our department or Manitoba Student Aid. When they contacted Equifax, they began working with them immediately to resolve the error. They provided—Manitoba Student Aid provided the list of the affected clients, definitely requested that the information be purged and Equifax confirmed that that information, the erroneous information, was purged from the client history on March 25th of 2011.

Certainly, important that we continue working on our quality assessment evaluation that we're doing right now to ensure that we have security in place, that we have all the checks and balances, and that we address any issues from security to functionality so that the system is a strong system, it's a robust system, it's a secure system and a system that is beneficial to students in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: So do you think if we just wait till Tuesday and get the answer as far as whether those students have been contacted personally and this has been cleared, would that be a good enough timeline for the minister to get that answer back to me on the—whether the students were contacted on an individual basis?

Ms. Selby: Of course, we are always happy to provide any information that the member would like about the work that we're doing at Advanced Education in our Student Aid area, or any other area. We're always pleased to come back with some detailed answers for him, and always happy, of course, to talk about Advanced Education and our support for post-secondary education and students in this province, whether that be student aid and the bursaries that we've added since we've been in government or the increases that we've seen for funding. Certainly happy to speak to the member Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, right through the weekend if he wants to, about Advanced Education and Student Aid.

Mr. Ewasko: All of that within the next few days, Minister, is not necessary. But the one question that I did have, again, was whether those thousand students, that their information was compromised, their possible credit rating was compromised, all I want to know is if they've been contacted by, whether it was—been your department, Student Aid, Equifax. I just want to make sure that those students are aware that it happened, and that if they have any type of problems in the future that they have all the assurance that they can contact your office or the department to get that cleared up. That's all I want to make sure that that's what's going to be happening.

Ms. Selby: As I said, that we're always happy to answer any questions that the member may have and get back to him with any details, as we did this morning. I know when we spoke yesterday, he had some very specific questions on the Bright Futures program that we brought in this morning for him, and I'm sure he was happy to see the number of young people in our province who may not have considered post-secondary education, that now will be, perhaps, going in that direction, supported both through the mentoring of the Bright Futures program, but also some of the financial support that's there as well.

And, as he mentioned, we're seeing that first batch of participants just graduating this year, hoping to see what the future holds for them. I've had the opportunity to meet with a few of them when the Bright Futures portfolio was still within this department, and really some remarkable young people and remarkable parents as well. And I'm surprised the member doesn't want to talk a little bit more about some of the other exciting things going on in the department.

But I'm sure we'll get to them. I'm sure he'll want to talk about the fact that we've increased funding to post-secondary education by 90 per cent since we've been here. When we're talking about student aid, I'm sure the member will want to ask about, you know, the bursary program that was not in place in the '90s that is now in place and, of course, helping many students who might not have had the money to go to school but have the passion to learn. And those are the students that we certainly don't want to see the door closed.

And, unfortunately, that did happen in the '90s, but with the bursary program, we see them now having that opportunity to excel and to reach their potential. I'm sure the member will want to talk a little bit more about tuition and how although there is a very robust student aid bursary program in place, we've kept tuition low in the time that we've been in office, and that has helped many more students to go through university and to come out with some of the lowest debts that we see in the country as well.

And all of these things and more, I'd be happy to talk to the minister about, globally or in—the minister—the member—about globally or in detail any day of the week that he would like to.

Mr. Ewasko: Minister, I really do have quite a few other things I do want to talk to you about. So I'm going to leave this point with this final question, and when you get back to me, I'll be much appreciative of the answer to this question, preferably, you know, by the time the Estimates process is done for Advanced Education and Literacy.

But my question again, simply: Have the thousand-plus students whose information, because of the Equifax glitch in the phase 1 of the new computer program, have they been contacted?

I'm going to make it even easier than that: Have the thousand-plus students whose information has been compromised and possibly their credit rating has been compromised, have they personally been contacted by somebody from your department, Equifax or Student Aid, and when can I get that answer?

Ms. Selby: And, as I said that this situation was taken very seriously when it was brought to the attention of Manitoba Student Aid, they acted immediately upon it. As soon as they learned about it, Manitoba Student Aid immediately informed equinox of the error and worked with them to resolve it, but, by providing a list of affected clients.

Manitoba Student Aid requested that that incorrect information be purged from their credit history and that—confirmed that that erroneous information was purged from the clients' credit history on March 25th of last year.

* (11:00)

Certainly, a situation like that is taken very seriously, which is why, when we're looking at phase 2, we are addressing any concerns that have been brought forward, both in the testing with the students in this last March to ensure that security is at the utmost, that functionality is in place so that the entire system can move ahead smoothly when we go on live as anticipated in November of 2012.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm not quite sure if I'm ever going to get the answer to my question. But, that being said, I am going to take that as a possible, no, that I'm never going to get that answer.

But, that being said, with the company who was awarded the tender early 2009 the minister is saying, with the tests, trying to get the variance of glitches down below 5 per cent, possibly launching November 2012, is the minister quite confident or is her deputy—acting deputy minister quite confident, or anyone else in the department quite confident that this program is going to be up and running for November 2012 with a budget of approximately \$15 million, which is \$700 million—yes. What did I say? Now you've lost me, Minister.

Give me a second—\$15 million, up \$700,000 from this time last year, which was stated 14.3 as a budget, simple question: Are you quite confident that that program will be up and running November 2012, which is a five-year process?

Ms. Selby: I am quite confident that we will have a strong, robust student aid system in place, one that addresses the needs of students both in terms of the functionality and the security. It is of utmost importance to me and to the department that that system is in place, is—has the checks and balances to ensure that that sensitive information is protected, but also that students have an easy time using the program which, of course, is the most important.

Ten years ago, when the old program came in place, there were less people using the online system. Now we see about 90 per cent of students are applying for student aid through the online system, all the more reason to make sure that it is an easy-to-use system, that the 'functionality' is—functionality is in place, being that, of course, we'll

have students of all ages, of all experience of computer literacy. It is why we have a quality assurance assessment taking place right now. We're looking at a variance of less than 5 per cent for the total cost of the project.

But the quality assurance assessment will be able to pinpoint the exact number, keeping in mind that we've had some unexpected challenges and some out-of-scope issues come up that, of course, need to be addressed, but also addressing that timeline. And right now we are expecting it to go live in 2012—of November of 2012, is our expected completion date. The quality assurance assessment will be able to pinpoint that as it looks at timelines and takes into account both security, functionality and out-of-scope issues that were raised, as well as some of those issues that we spoke about with the cursor or the hover issues that came up when the students tested the program in March.

But it is important that we have that, and rather than give a concrete date at this time when we know there are some issues that need to be addressed, I would like to assure the member that the most important thing, being the security, the functionality and that this is a strong, robust system that students can count on to help them get—what can be a stressful thing, student aid and applying for it, and first time away from home just adds to some of the pressures on young students or students of all ages, of course.

Then that is exactly why we've ordered the quality assurance assessment, to look at what that variance will be that we expect to be less than 5 per cent, but to be able to give specific numbers and specific times as well.

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, I no doubt agree with the minister that if I had—if my department had the issues that they had with the Equifax problem, with the 1,000-plus students with their possible credit rating and information being compromised, I wouldn't want to necessarily put a concrete date stamp on the completion of this project either.

So moving on, can you—can the minister just highlight the improvements that this new program is going to have, considering it is being tested right now? What's the difference between the old system and the new system? I've had quite the experience with the old system, and so I'm interested to hear all the highlights of the new system and how this is going to make the process easier, faster for all involved.

Ms. Selby: And I'm delighted to hear that the member speaks positively of his experience with Student Aid and with the post-secondary education in this province.

We know that the new system needed to be replaced. Just like buildings and infrastructure, database systems and online systems also don't last forever and need to be replaced and, you know, some technology goes so quickly. You buy the new iPad and two months later it's barely compatible because the second iPad comes out, which is some experience personally at home with some technology.

Of course, systems of this magnitude, it's not quite that quick, but our existing system is 10 years old, based on technology that is not supported in the same way now. And also addressing the needs of many more students than it was. When the original system went in place, not as many students were applying online; now we know that we have 90 per cent of them.

The new project will mean that students will be able to access their student aid information more easily. It's a more student-friendly technology. It is, more importantly, a more up-to-date system. And as we have seen in the early testing with—which was quite a large number of students that tested it in March, from all age ranges and, expectedly, all different ranges of computer literacy, they did find it to be more student-friendly, easier to use. They certainly gave it favourable reviews, and anything that we can do to make the process more streamlined for students, make it easier for students.

Graduation rates and students' enrolment has been going up in the 10 years that we've been in government, and this is all part of our support to make it easier for students who have the passion to learn to go to school. And, if it means an easier student aid system for them to navigate, then that is, of course, in our best interest and in the province's best interest to see more students go into post-secondary education. We have a society now and business now that does expect to have a more highly trained workforce, and that's what we're providing through Manitoba's Advanced Education department.

So, as I said, it'll be a more friendly form. Students will be able to make changes online in ways that they were not able to before. There's going to be more information available to them and, indeed, the process will be faster than the old system as well.

Mr. Ewasko: Has the minister and her department chatted about the possibility of opening up the online application process earlier on in the year so that maybe some of that anxiety, even though the fact that students aren't accepted to post-secondary till after they've shown that they've graduated, but opening it up so that students know whether they're eligible for student aid earlier on so they can start making those plans in regards to housing, transportation, et cetera, for the following fall?

Ms. Selby: Just to clarify, is the member—the member's not asking about the new system; he's asking in general?

Mr. Ewasko: We'll go in general. It'd be nice if the new system was up and running, but I'm really hoping that my son, who's in grade 6, will have the opportunity to try out that new system, you know, closer to the time he's graduating, but, yes, more so in general.

* (11:10)

Ms. Selby: The timeline that the member's referring to is really—is not based on the system. It's based on the institutions giving us the information about their particular program that the student is applying for.

In terms of the expected tuition, the cost of the books for that program, fees that might be involved in learning, such as the lab fees that may be there, kit fees, of course, some of these things, of course, have been addressed since we've come into office, particularly with the legislation just introduced on freezing tuition to the rate of inflation. We know that students have predictability and, of course, accessible, affordable education—third most affordable in the country, in fact.

The legislation, of course, also addresses those things such as ancillary or other fees, so that if a fee is related to learning, it, it's—it be captured by the tuition freeze to the rate of inflation, as well. But it is the institution that gives us that information on what they expect the students' costs. As affordable as our costs may be in Manitoba, we need to have those numbers in order to evaluate what a student would need, and that's an important thing to have as we are looking at that.

So it's the institutions that are responsible for the timeline once they've given Student Aid that information. That is when that the bigger picture of what the students' needs are can be addressed.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister. Yes, you're still live. Oh, you're done; you're done. Sorry.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, so then you're saying that Student Aid cannot go live, or the application process cannot open up any earlier because of the post-secondary institutions not being—not giving Student Aid the price of books, the tuition, the housing fees and all of that. I'm just asking for clarification on that.

Ms. Selby: Well, for students who are wanting sort of a broad estimate of what they're funding, the federal government actually has a very handy website for that called canlearn.ca. It will give them a broad estimate of what their funding will be.

But in order to be able to give that accurate process, and that is important that we do that, we need to make sure that we provide the students with the money that they need to pay for the different things that will be needed in their education. It is important that the post-secondary educations are able to give us the specifics on the books and the tuition and fees such as, perhaps, lab fees, or I know dental hygienists need a kit—that sort of thing.

Some of these prices, of course, can change. Professors can and, of course, are encouraged to update their lessons so that it may require a different textbook from the year before. Some of the costs of those things may have changed; certainly know that the costs of some of the kits and that sort of thing that are bought en masse by the university still may have a variance, and it's important that we have the specifics and the details of all that in place.

But, if your son in grade 6 is—wants to have an estimate, he could certainly go to the canlearn.ca and get a sense of it, although, he may still have to re-evaluate again in a few years when he's ready for university or college, but he will be able to rest assured that, with the tuition policy in place, he'll have an affordable, accessible university or post-secondary education of his choosing.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that comical answer.

And just a quick comment: As far as the information that's coming from the post-secondary institutions, there are things that I'm sure the minister is aware of called Viewbooks, and in those Viewbooks for the students there are certain fees, prices. And I'm sure that they don't change quite that much within the, you know, seven, eight months that those Viewbooks are printed every year so that

Student Aid could possibly get the process going a bit earlier.

And just quick comment on CanLearn: The CanLearn website is fantastic. It is a useful tool to try to do some of that preliminary planning with students or kids or even adults who are going on to post-secondary, but, again, I'm not quite buying the fact that it's the post-secondary institutions that's holding this piece up as far as being able to apply earlier.

Ms. Selby: I would like to just point out that I certainly wouldn't agree with the member's use of the words "holding it up." I don't think the institutions, in any way, are trying to hold up students. I think that—well, I know that the institutions' goal is to have as many students as possible attending post-secondary education. We're always happy to see that their enrolments have been going up under this government. They did go down, actually, in the '90s under the former government, but they have been put back in the track that we want to see them going in.

Certainly, would not agree with the member in his categorizing it as holding up. But it is important that we have a detailed evaluation of everything that the students will be facing. I think it's important to, also, note that the folks at Student Aid work with students as individuals; they take into 'caccount' their particular needs, their situation. And I think they do a remarkable job of not seeing students as numbers on a page, but as seeing them as people that come with different needs, with different issues, with different supports necessary. And it all goes towards making sure that they get the right amount of student assessment and evaluation that will ensure that they have the money that they need, and to also keep in mind that we want to keep student debt low, which we do have amongst the lowest student debt in the country.

But reminding the member that that is why we're bringing in a new student aid online service, is so that we can provide faster, more information, and make the entire process as smooth as possible. We're never going to get rid of all the nerves of first-time students going to post-secondary education, particularly the young ones who may be leaving home for the first time; we probably can't get rid of all those nerves, but we can make the process as smooth as possible.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister and opposition critic. I wonder if I might have leave of

the committee for a brief five-minute recess. Amenable? *[Agreed]* Thank you very much.

The committee recessed at 11:19 a.m.

The committee resumed at 11:24 a.m.

Mr. James Allum, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The Acting Chairperson (James Allum): This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Acting Chair, and welcome.

Minister, when you say that tuition fees in Manitoba are third lowest in the country, and you stated that a couple times in the last hour or so, does this include college tuition fees as well?

Ms. Selby: Yes, it does, which is such great news for Manitobans.

Mr. Ewasko: That was a great answer; it was straight to the point. There was no 'extraneous' information there, it was just, yes, straight to the point.

Can you explain the tuition fee rebate? Oh, sorry—can you explain the tuition fee rebate?

Ms. Selby: Well, I'm always happy to talk about the fact that students, of course, get a 60 per cent tuition rebate. It's not actually out of our department that that happens; that happens through Finance, of course, because it is a tax rebate, so the specific questions would have to go to that minister. But let me take a moment just to talk about what an important program that is and how it's been so beneficial to so many students.

We know that students who decide to put roots down in Manitoba are eligible for a 60 per cent tuition rebate. This doesn't matter if they studied in Manitoba, in fact, we're encouraging students wherever they've studied, wherever they've lived, wherever they're from, if they want to put roots down in Manitoba, we're going to make sure that we welcome them for choosing Manitoba by giving them a 60 per cent tuition rebate.

That's put about \$40 million back into the pockets of about 43,000 graduates and I'm certainly excited to share those numbers with the member but,

as I said, for more specifics, that program, because it is a tax rebate, is handled through the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) and would have to be addressed to him if you're looking for more specific programs on—or specific questions on how the program works.

All I know, is that it encourages students to get a post-secondary education. It keeps it affordable in Manitoba and is a wonderful way to welcome those educated people who choose to make Manitoba their home, and what a better way to welcome them here than to give them the 60 per cent tuition rebate.

Mr. Ewasko: So, Minister, you made mention—but I'll just ask for this again: How many students claimed the tuition fee rebate in 2010-2011?

Ms. Selby: As I said, I'm always excited to talk about the fact that education is affordable, accessible and, of course, with the generous operating grants we've been able to offer, we've got quality education in Manitoba as well, but that specific would be through the Minister of Finance's department.

I do know some broad numbers, that we've seen about 43,000 graduates benefit from the program. But when the member's looking for the breakdown on the specifics, it would be better directed at Minister of Finance since this does fall under their responsibility.

Mr. Ewasko: So, Minister, you don't have any answers in regards to the tuition fee rebate, whatsoever? I'd have to actually go to the Minister of Finance?

Ms. Selby: The 60 per cent tuition rebate that's eligible to anyone who puts down roots in Manitoba is administrated and—is administered and funded through the Department of Finance. That's correct.

Mr. Ewasko: Minister, since you put that so eloquently in regards to the 60 per cent tuition fee rebate to newcomers in Manitoba, no matter where they've put down roots, is that advertised? How come we don't advertise that in regards to trying to increase the enrolment here in Manitoba at all of our post-secondary institutions?

Ms. Selby: It is actually advertised, Mr. Acting Chair. That information is advertised to make sure that people are aware of it, but my understanding that when people do their taxes, that information is also available. If they're doing their own taxes—whether they're doing it or having an accountant do it—but we do advertise it and we are always happy to brag

about the post-secondary institutions in this province. I think that we've got some of the best universities and colleges in the country, dare I say it, the world, and I will be happy to brag about them anytime, anywhere.

Mr. Ewasko: And thank you, Madam Minister, for that answer. Time management and workforce management software bought from Kronos: Is it used in Advanced Education and in Student Aid?

Ms. Selby: Student Aid folks are not familiar with the particular program that the member is mentioning and inform me that they do not use it at Student Aid.

* (11:30)

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, so the time management workforce management software that was purchased from Kronos or—hopefully, I'm pronouncing that correctly, K-r-o-n-o-s—nearly \$6 million, so you're saying it is not used by Advanced Education?

Ms. Selby: I wonder if the member could just clarify what page of the Estimates he's on so that we make sure that we are all on the same page as he is.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm just looking at some of the additional costs to the department. And I was just wondering if that possible computer software, accounts for some of the money. And, I'm just saying that the software isn't necessarily just for Advanced Education, it's also used in Healthy Living, MAFRI and MIT, so it is a joint venture.

Ms. Selby: I, again, would ask if the member could please point out which page and section of the Advanced Education Estimates that he's looking at so that we could give him a thorough answer.

Mr. Ewasko: Basically, I'm assuming that this number and this software isn't necessarily highlighted on the line by line in the book. I just know that the software has been purchased, and I was just wondering what Advanced Education would possibly be using it for. But, by looking at the faces around the room, obviously, Advanced Education and Literacy does not use this software, have not contributed to it.

Ms. Selby: It probably would be diligent if the member would, perhaps, table the paper that he's looking at so that we could give him a more thorough answer. As he's not referring to a page in the Estimates of the Advanced Education and Literacy Estimates, then it probably would be more helpful if he would table the page that he's looking at

so that we could follow up and give him a more thorough answer.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that.

What I'll do is I'll do some more looking into the question and I'll ask it again, possibly in a different way. If we have not heard from—heard about any kind of software purchase from that company, then I'm assuming that you're not using it. But at that being said, by your answer, I will come up with a better question.

In 2011 there was an announcement of working group including Canadian Federation of Students. I'm just wondering where that working group is at, how it's going and, basically, what they're working on.

The Acting Chairperson (James Allum): Member, if you could just repeat the first part of your question, please.

Mr. Ewasko: Oh, okay, sorry. Okay, so here we go again.

In 2011 there was an announcement of a working group including the Canadian Federation of Students. I'm just wondering where that group is at?

Ms. Selby: I'm just wondering if the member could be more specific. I meet with the Canadian Federation of Students very regularly, approximately every two weeks, when both of our schedules allow. And, as you can imagine, we have healthy discussions in my office on a regular basis, and sometimes, I have the opportunity to meet them outside of my office on their turf, as it would be stated. But I'm not sure exactly which working group the member is referring to. If he just means the Canadian Federation of Students and all the unions and our regular meetings, or if he has a more specific question.

Mr. Ewasko: It very well could be the meeting that you're having every two weeks. And I'm just wondering if there has been any concerns or decisions being made at those meetings and what they possibly are, and what type of initiatives are coming out of those meetings.

Ms. Selby: I think it is of the utmost importance that ministers of every department meet with their stakeholders on a regular basis. In my case, my stakeholders are, as you can imagine, a pretty vast number of people. It's potentially everyone in Manitoba, because we want to see anybody who has a passion to learn to attend post-secondary education,

and we've put supports in place to make that possible, both by having a tuition that is the third most affordable in the country, but also bringing in the bursary system that, unfortunately, had been dismantled in the '90s under the previous government.

So it is important that I meet with as many stakeholders as possible, including presidents of universities and colleges, the students. It's—it would be—I'd be hard-pressed to meet with every student in Manitoba, which is a good thing that there are too many to meet with. So, of course, I meet regularly with the student representatives of the various unions and including the Canadian Federation of Students. We have many healthy discussions. I think it would take up the entire rest of the Estimates time if I tried to give details of every discussion we have.

But, certainly, I take their advice on many things that students are asking for. Students—when I came into the office, students were asking about making sure that they had predictability in place for their tuition. That was one thing. The—with the support and advice of students, that helped form our tuition policy that has now become legislation, freezing tuition to the rate of inflation.

Many of the policies that we bring into place are, of course, a direct result of discussions of—with students, about students, and with the folks from universities and colleges. Certainly, students had been asking us to address such issues as student aid interest on their loans, which is something that we addressed in the last campaign, that we would bring student interest down to prime, something that we will be bringing in.

Also, students had asked us if we could look at allowing students to work a little more during the school year but not have that affect their loan, and we heard that and listened to them and have upped the amount that students can learn now and still not be penalized on their student loan.

Being that Manitoba has a fair number of students who travel in from rural Manitoba, we, of course, have rural and northern bursaries to support rural—northern students, but that does mean that we have more students driving in their cars. And they may not have the choice of taking public transportation as they do in Brandon or in—if they're living in Brandon or Winnipeg. So students had asked us to look at student loans evaluation of cars, and that is something that we're addressing.

I think one of the more important things that students have raised in discussions that we have addressed is the situation of ancillary or other fees, and making sure that those fees that are related to learning are captured by our tuition policy, and the new legislation that we're bringing in does that. It also addresses professional programs, something that students have talked to me about, and making sure that, in some cases, where there may be a need to increase those fees in order to stay competitive on the global stage, to make sure that those supports are in place for students that won't be penalized who, perhaps, are coming from a different social, economic background.

One of the important things that I know students were very excited about was when we brought in health care coverage for international students. We know that that makes a big difference for students coming here. And I've heard lots of great feedback about it. So, certainly, I think that discussions that any minister has with the stakeholders are some of the most important ways that they can learn about issues that are growing. Sometimes that's, of course, the people who can best identify changes that need to be brought in, more robust legislation in the—in terms of making sure that we maintain our affordable tuition, and our tuition policy does that.

So, certainly have very good discussions with students, and I just met with them yesterday to go over a little more detail of the new legislation. And being that they're students, they study well before they come in to meet with me, and have all their questions very well prepared, I must tell the member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Acting Chair and Madam Minister, for that—for the answer to my question. As you know, I wasn't necessarily questioning the fact that you do or do not meet with the representatives from the post-secondary—various post-secondary institutions, as I'm very much aware that yesterday the member from St. Paul had some questions in regards to you meeting with the president of Red River College. But I'm not going to go back into that. So I appreciate the answer in regards to the Canadian Federation of Students and the information that you shared.

You brought up the health coverage for international students. Roughly how many applicants do you anticipate each year? What are we talking about for '09-10, '10-11, and then the estimated for '11-12?

* (11:40)

Ms. Selby: It's a pleasure to speak about international students. I'm not sure if the member is aware of the amount of money that international students contribute to our economy each year. It's estimated at about \$74 million every year that international students contribute to Manitoba's economy. Some folks say that that's an underestimation, but I think it's certainly a healthy number.

But we know, of course, that we want international students here not just because they contribute to our economy, which is an important thing, but we know that they do more for us than that. They bring their culture. They bring a different perspective. Our classrooms are enriched because of that different perspective, and for students who in Manitoba, perhaps domestic students who haven't had an opportunity to travel, this does give them a view—a window to the world that probably opens up ideas and cultures that perhaps they wouldn't have had exposure to. And, as I said, we know that if those students choose to stay in Manitoba they are eligible for the 60 per cent tuition rebate and, more importantly, will continue to contribute to both our economy and our social fabric as well.

We have seen enrolment in Manitoba's universities increase for international students. We've seen it's growing quite steadily. From 1999 we saw about 726 students—international students—enrolled in Manitoba universities. We're at almost 2,800 for 2011-12. We have about 6,000, roughly, international students studying in total in Manitoba. That includes students that come here to study for K to 12, university, college, but about two-thirds of those students of that number would be eligible for the international health coverage of students.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister. It's interesting that the minister threw out the number of 6,000 students studying here in the province, including K to 12, because when I try to ask some questions, and I've heard at other times questions that maybe are outside of the minister's portfolio, I'm directed to go back into the other minister's session to ask those questions. But it's good information. Touché.

What is the anticipated annual cost?

Ms. Selby: I just wanted to correct something for the member. I am always happy to answer any question that pertains to my portfolio and try to give him

information if it's outside. But K to 12 in international students is in my portfolio. International studies entire—for its entirety—is in Advanced Education and Literacy, and whether that be students at the K-to-12 level or students at the post-secondary, they fall under the responsibility of this department, although, of course, we work very closely with Education in order to make sure that they are getting the quality education that we expect for all students, and I have the advantage, of course, of sharing; my acting deputy minister is also the deputy minister of Education. But K-to-12 international students do fall within this portfolio, and—but I would have to refer the member to the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) for the detailed numbers because, of course, the program was just brought in and the Minister of Health would be able to tally those numbers, I would suspect at the end of the year, in order to know what the claims were. I think it would be impossible for me to answer this right now, but the minister, as well, would have to have those claims in before she could probably give you the detailed answer.

But, as long as it falls within the parameters of the portfolio, Advanced Education and Literacy, I'm very pleased to answer and will do my best to answer questions that are outside the scope of the this department, but, of course, for more detailed responses it'd probably be best to go to the appropriate minister.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for the clarification, very well done.

So, since you brought up your acting deputy minister, if you could possibly just sort of go through the department and mention who's who in the zoo type of thing and some of the roles that they play.

Ms. Selby: I'm sure the member doesn't want me to name everyone in the department because then I don't know at what point we would stop. Would we name every professor that, you know, is somehow attached? Would we name everyone at Student Aid?

But I think what the member is probably looking for is, perhaps, maybe the bigger picture of—perhaps he wants to clarify.

Mr. Ewasko: I will clarify so that we're not here till Sunday afternoon.

I guess—you know what? Just if you highlight the political staff. I'll clarify, just even—I'll tighten that one up even more so. On the schematic for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy, how about if we just go through that page?

Ms. Selby: I think the member is referring to page 8, I think, in the book of Estimates.

Yes, so we have the chart here. Obviously, it shows I'm the minister in the chart. Below that is the chairperson for COPSE, which is the Council on Post-Secondary Education, Dr. Curtis Nordman. We have the acting deputy minister, Gerald Farthing. We have the associate deputy minister, Rory Henry.

Below that we have various sections, which of, I believe, everybody's here that is representing those various sections. We have a number of people here from the Council on Post-Secondary Education. Currently, the secretary position is vacant, but we are looking to fill that. Manitoba Student Aid Kim Huebner is here. Adult Learning and Literacy, we have Lynette Plett with us in the room. Corporate Services, we do have Darcy Rollins with us right now. Technical Vocational Initiative is Peter Narth.

And we do have some shared services of which financial, administration services, Claude Fortier is here with us at the moment. And within that we also see Aboriginal education and systems and technology.

Mr. Ewasko: Special assistant and executive assistant?

Ms. Selby: They're not on that chart.

Mr. Ewasko: No, that's true, and I did point to that chart. But can you just name them and tell me what, you know, who they are, and type of thing?

Ms. Selby: Yes, thank you very much. Yes, I do have a special assistant; Michelle Bowles is my special assistant, and Jill Stockwell is my executive assistant.

Mr. Ewasko: Just taking a look at the Estimates booklet from last year, 2011, we've—we—or shouldn't say we—you've added another position to the schematic, and I'm just wondering the role and the job of this individual.

Ms. Selby: I think that the member is probably referring to the associate deputy position. It's actually—it's not a new added position, per se. We don't have a deputy minister; we have an acting deputy minister who is the deputy minister of Education and acting deputy minister of Advanced Education and Literacy, but we do have Dr. Rory Henry who is in the position of associate deputy minister.

* (11:50)

Mr. Ewasko: Minister, and forgive me for not knowing, but is Dr. Rory Henry here with us?

Ms. Selby: No, he's not.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you. I just like to put faces to names in that type of thing.

So, by moving Dr. Rory Henry into this schematic, is he also in the schematic of—I believe he is in Education. So what is—what does—what role does he provide here in the Advanced Education and Literacy portfolio?

Ms. Selby: Of course, I think the member agrees with me that education is critical to the future of our province, and we want to make sure that our children get the quality education that they need to get a strong start in life and find their path to success.

Dr. Henry holds a Ph.D. on the history of higher education from the Australian National University. He has held several senior positions working with Cabinet ministers and the civil service. There were no new processes—new positions created in this process. There is one deputy minister, as I said, who's working for both Education and Advanced Education, but being that Education is an important priority for this government, Dr. Henry is able to apply his considerable knowledge and experience to strengthening the quality of our education system both at the K-to-12 level and at the post-secondary education as well.

Mr. Ewasko: So, since we're sharing the deputy minister and the associate deputy minister, how do the wages split out then? Do they get more because they're doing two portfolios or covering both portfolios?

Is that something that we can talk about, or?

Ms. Selby: We absolutely should talk about it. We want to be accountable to both the member, and to all members, the people of Manitoba—as we should be.

And the deputy minister assures me that, no, they don't get additional money. That is why it's important that—because we do have one person acting as deputy, it's important to make sure that the department receives the attention that it needs. And, having both the acting deputy minister and the associate deputy minister with the particular expertise in higher education means that we do have the critical experience and expertise to continue increasing the quality of education that I do think is

good in Manitoba. But, of course, as Manitobans, we always strive to do better and move forward.

Mr. Ewasko: So just for clarification: We have the acting deputy minister of Advanced Education and Literacy, and we have the associate deputy minister for Advanced Education and Literacy; they're not receiving any more dollars for tackling two portfolios, but, yet, then we have two separate ministers for both of those portfolios. Is that correct, Minister?

Ms. Selby: Well, as the member pointed out earlier, there is, of course, overlap between Advanced Education and Education, and it is really important that both departments work together. The obvious one being in international education; this department is responsible for students—international students—at all levels of education whether it's K to 12 or post-secondary. But, of course, in working with the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan), it's her role to help students be best prepared to get them ready to when they move into this department's responsibility.

So I 'thertainly' think that it is an advantage that we have everybody working together, that we have such direct lines of communication, that we have the level of expertise and experience that will bring the best quality education to students of all ages. And, certainly, wouldn't want to think that students would finish 12 and be separated as they go into post-secondary education. It's one continuous path of learning when you—whether you start in one of our—one continuous stream of learning, path of learning, when children—perhaps, when even as early as going into our licensed daycare system where we have a curriculum in place that prepares them for school, and then in school it prepares them for post-secondary. And we like it to be a smooth transition and each of those stages should support the next one.

So I think it's quite beneficial that we are all working so closely together to improve and constantly build on the quality and excellence of our education system in total.

Mr. Ewasko: And thank you, Madam Minister, for that answer. Yes, the team concept is very important; and, when we're talking about transitioning from secondary to post-secondary studies, it's nice to see that there's a continuation of support.

So, with that being said, how is the time of the acting deputy minister and the associate deputy minister, then, split between the—between both portfolios? And how are you keeping tabs on, sort

of—not necessarily tabs—I shouldn't say it like that. But how are you making sure that your portfolio is getting the same amount of attention as the education portfolio?

Ms. Selby: I can assure the member that I take my responsibility very seriously to the people of Manitoba. I think that the future of our province is absolutely dependent on the quality and success of our students. Making sure that they have a high quality education, making sure that they have an accessible, affordable education—I take that very seriously, and I can assure the member that I make sure that there is attention paid to our portfolio.

But I think that the member has sort of—has hit on it exactly, that it is a really good teamwork, that we work together on many issues. Of course, some issues are specifically education, some are specifically post-secondary, but because we're all working together a team, I think that the member agrees that when you have co-operation and teamwork, it's usually all the stronger for the individuals who bring their particular expertise and experience to the table, and is stronger than they would be on their own. So I think it's been quite beneficial to have this sort of level of co-operation between two departments that are so obviously linked.

Of course, you know, all departments—you can say that they're degrees of separation, but, in this case, the smooth transition for students being one of the most important things that we can do for them to make it easy and to have them prepared.

So the teamwork has been really beneficial and we've seen that having more eyes and more expertise on both departments has—or new eyes and new expertise on both departments has been beneficial for all of us.

Mr. Ewasko: And thank you, Madam Minister. I have had the pleasure now of sitting in on a few days—or a few different meetings with you and some of your staff, and I've seen upfront and personal the—your associate deputy minister in action, and I see the wealth of knowledge that he brings to these various meetings.

I guess, when we're talking about the associate deputy minister, you mentioned briefly qualifications, but if you could touch on those qualifications again, and also with a list of job description.

Just for clarification, Madam Minister, I misspoke when I was mentioning positions. I was meaning I've been in meetings with your acting deputy minister, not with the associate. And so the accolades that I was showing earlier was to your acting deputy minister.

I've never had the pleasure of meeting the associate deputy minister, so my questions are more so job description and qualifications on your associate deputy minister. Thank you.

Ms. Selby: And I appreciate the member's question. Certainly, I know that the member's leader had similar lines of questioning about the associate deputy in the Estimates with the Premier (Mr. Selinger). His leader described the associate deputy minister as very capable in the work that he does. As I said, he holds a Ph.D. in the history of higher education from the Australian National University. So pretty clear that someone who holds a Ph.D. in higher education is more than qualified to assist and advise and work with folks in Advanced Education. He's also been working with the government for the last 12 years, has held several senior positions and worked directly with Cabinet ministers and the civil service.

* (12:00)

And as I also said, and I should state again, that we did not create a new position, that there is only one deputy minister serving both Education and Advanced Education, and being that education is an important priority for our government, we know that Dr. Henry can apply his considerable knowledge and expertise to strengthening the quality. And I would agree with the member's leader who described Dr. Henry as very capable of doing the job. And I'm certainly—certainly would attest to that, that with the support of both the associate and the acting deputy minister, I think that only furthers to strengthen what I think is already a strong and high-quality education at the post-secondary level in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: After hearing—I personally haven't read the comments from my leader on Dr. Henry, but if that's what our leader have said, I strongly appreciate our leader's assessment, I guess, but, personally, have never met the associate deputy minister. And so with that being said, I'd just like to know job description. What is an associate deputy minister do?

Ms. Selby: So I guess what it would be—perhaps an easier way to explain it to the member is that a

deputy minister or acting deputy minister's role would be to advise government or the minister and also to administrate, do the administration for the department. The associate deputy minister assists the deputy minister, or acting deputy minister in this case, on those issues at the direction of the acting deputy minister.

Mr. Ewasko: Part of the reason for the question is in my past as a high school guidance counsellor and in regards to helping students with career choices and the like, it's just very interesting that when you can touch base on the 31,000-plus occupations and growing every year, it's just interesting to hear of these positions that sort of not necessarily pop up. I don't like to use that term, but sort of to give a fairly decent description as far as what these people do in those roles. So, associate deputy minister—what type of salary does associate deputy ministers make?

Ms. Selby: The salary range for an associate deputy minister would be about 102 to 110,000.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Acting Chair, 102 to 110,000. Okay.

So, when we go back up and—one of the questions I'd asked you earlier was your special assistant and your executive assistant. Specifically to you, Minister: What's the salary range for your special assistant?

Ms. Selby: Of course, salaries are related to the person's particular experience and background that they bring to the job, so there is a range of salaries that would be offered at the special assistant or executive assistant. I can give you a general—they're both in around the \$60,000, with the executive assistant usually being a little less, special assistant being in that. But I could get the member a more exact number, if he's looking for that, when we next meet.

Mr. Ewasko: I think the range that you have here is good enough for the next question that I'm going to throw out there.

So, from your job description points of the acting deputy minister, the associate deputy minister, I'm not seeing a whole lot of job description difference besides the fact that maybe one person has a Ph.D. versus—you know, between the special assistant for you and the associate deputy minister.

Can you elaborate a little bit on the difference between the two and the specific jobs that the associate deputy minister does?

Ms. Selby: As I said earlier, the associate deputy minister acts at the direction of the deputy minister. The deputy minister is in charge of advising government, advising the minister, administrating the department. The associate deputy minister assists the deputy minister in those areas at the direction of the deputy minister.

The special assistant is a—responds in direction to the minister. There's certainly a number of areas that the special assistant is responsible for. The special assistant has a role in correspondence, has a role in preparing the minister and briefing the minister. The special assistant has a number of areas—I could get the member the official job description of the special assistant if he would like and I could bring that to him in our next meeting.

Mr. Ewasko: I have no doubt—no doubt understand that the special assistant does quite a bit of work and various tasks.

I'd be more interested in the job description of the associate deputy minister, if you could provide that for me for next Tuesday or next time that we meet. If I'm just not personally seeing 50,000, roughly, dollars difference between the two positions, the special assistant to you and the associate deputy minister.

* (12:10)

What type—you mentioned some of the background of the associate deputy minister. Can you sort of elaborate a little bit? When was he appointed or promoted to the associate deputy minister position and what he was doing before that?

Ms. Selby: As I said earlier, Dr. Henry holds a Ph.D. on the history of higher education from the Australian National University, so, understandably, a perfect fit for Advanced Education, being that that's his area of expertise.

He did join the government 12 years ago, has held various senior positions, including working directly with Cabinet ministers and the civil service. As with all deputy ministers, Dr. Henry was appointed by Cabinet to serve as associate deputy with responsibilities to both Advanced Education and Literacy, as well as Education.

There were no new positions created in this process. There is currently only one deputy minister serving both Education and Advanced Education. And being that education is an important priority for our government, we know that Dr. Henry will apply

his considerable knowledge and expertise to strengthening the quality of our education system at all levels.

Mr. Ewasko: In regards to the daily work of the associate deputy minister, how does that—again I'm not quite sure. Did you mention when he was promoted to associate deputy minister?

Ms. Selby: I could get the exact date for the member, but it was sometime in early January that Dr. Henry was appointed by Cabinet to serve as associate deputy minister, with responsibilities to both Advanced Education and Literacy, as well as Education.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, and that would be great if you could get me that exact date. But just listening to past political activities and daily work for, you know, possibly involved in the Cabinet or political staff, does Dr. Henry provide any advice to Cabinet or political staff on matters other than those related to Advanced Education or Education at this point?

Ms. Selby: As I was explaining earlier, the act—associate deputy minister helps assist the deputy minister, at his direction, on things like advice to government and to ministers—to myself and to the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan)—also assists the deputy minister on the administration of the department at the deputy minister's request and, of course, shares his valuable expertise with the deputy minister and, as well, both ministers, as to areas of improving the quality and excellence of our school system entirely.

Mr. Ewasko: Moving away from that topic for a little bit, but we might circle back. So just keep that door open.

Back when the minister was chosen or appointed to her ministerial position, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) around the same time frame made a credit transfer promise. And the minister alluded to that—the credit transfer promise in her opening, wonderfully written speech yesterday, at the start of Estimates.

So I was hoping that the minister can enlighten me on the progress of the credit transfer.

Ms. Selby: And I'm delighted that the member asked about this because it is a really exciting area of post-secondary education for the Province. Certainly, our government does support a more transparent and easily accessible process for students to transfer their credits between institutions and programs.

We see this as a way of both helping students get through their post-secondary education in a more timely manner, but also, perhaps, lifting some barriers. There—nothing more frustrating than taking a few courses in one institution or one program, switching to a different one and being told you, kind of, have to do the same thing again. We don't want to discourage students in that way. It's a waste of their time, it's a waste of their money and, frankly, it's a waste of the university or college resources as well.

In June 24th of 2011, we did sign a memorandum of understanding for improving student mobility. It was signed by the presidents of all the seven publicly funded institutions. From that, a task group was formed and has met several times.

In February of this year, a final report was submitted which outlines the opportunities and the key elements for student mobility along—as well as some recommendations for upcoming steps of how we can keep moving forward.

I am really pleased. I've had several meetings with both representatives of the task force and with the presidents of the various publicly funded institutions, and actually managed to get everybody in the same room on a number of occasions which, I have to tell you, is one of the biggest challenges in the department is getting all those people who have some incredibly busy schedules all in the room at the same time. But I think that just shows that the level of commitment with our post-secondary institutions that this is a priority for them.

We've seen that the institutions continue to work together on credit transfers in articulation. As I said, I've met with the institutions on the committee report, and how we're going to use it. I'm feeling incredibly optimistic and excited about some of the information that we've talked about. I know that institutions have been formalizing some of their existing agreements. There actually was quite a number in place that just hadn't been formalized and some of them were a little bit word of mouth. We're going to see that be a little bit more standard so that it's something that is ready—readily available for the public and won't be just if you happen to hear about it from somebody which, of course, is a more important way to do it.

We're going to continue working on agreements in additional areas to see articulation agreements coming into play in the next few months. We know that every year Manitoba students benefit from these kind of credit transfer arrangements, with thousands

of credit hours being transferred within the post-secondary system as it is, and this will only build on that.

It goes towards bringing a more transparent system for credit transfer and articulation. It certainly helps students, I think particularly students who may be going back to school after of—an absence and maybe have a certain amount of education that they want to build on. It's a smoother process at any age, but, certainly, if you're already at the point where you have a family and a mortgage and responsibility, you probably have an accelerated timeline of what you want to do and you don't want to be repeating things that you've already learned. The credit transfer enhances the continual learning and supporting Manitoba students with completion and, of course, having them enter the workforce as quickly as possible, which is good for all of Manitoba.

I'm really pleased to see the collaborative approach that we've seen amongst the systems and I think that that will ensure that the right system is built in Manitoba. And I'm, as I said, feeling quite optimistic at the commitment that I've seen from all the institutions and the enthusiasm and support and the progress that we've seen so far.

Mr. Ewasko: Just going back to the, again, staying on the topic of credit transfers, are other provinces doing this already?

Ms. Selby: Yes, this is the direction that everybody is moving in across the country, at varying degrees. BC has been the leader, and we are so lucky to have two of our presidents of our institutions have come from the BC system and have been lending their expertise and advice to this whole process.

People are at various stages across the country right now. As I said, BC is the role model that many of us have been looking towards and, I think, at this point, that Manitoba has already been doing more of it than, perhaps, has been recognized. So we will clarify those programs that are in place and make sure that everyone is aware of them, but build on that as well. And it's certainly—it certainly is the future of post-secondary institutions.

*(12:20)

We know that students are—and much like we see how the job market has changed, there was a time—perhaps, the member's parents may have come from the generation where they got a job out of school and stayed with that job until they retired; and, perhaps, the member is hoping to have the

same—a similar type of career. But most people of our generation and younger do expect to have a few different careers in a lifetime, and it seems that students' learning is tending to go in that same direction. That they're, in many cases, starting at one institution and changing to another, or, perhaps at a later time, in life retraining as the job market changes or their situation changes

And so, we are seeing a need for students to be able to transfer between programs, between institutions, and it is something that seems to be an ongoing trend across the country at post-secondary institution level.

Mr. Ewasko: And so, the answer to my question was, yes, but thank you for that, Madam Minister.

So you mention that BC is the leader on this and that we have two presidents that are now working in the province. Who are those two presidents working in our province from BC?

Ms. Selby: I've been informed that Alberta, actually, has quite a robust credit transfer system as well. Dr. Deborah Poff at the Brandon University and Stephanie Forsythe at Red River College, and forgive me, I'm not sure if Stephanie is Dr. Forsythe or Ms. Forsythe—[*interjection*] Ms. Forsythe. Both have experience working in BC and have been strong voices on the credit transfer articulation process that we're in and have been able to lend their considerable experience in British Columbia's system as we go through the process of formalizing agreements that are in place and adding to those agreements as well.

Mr. Ewasko: It's nice to hear that we're having those consultations and you're able to get all of the people into the tent at times and have those conversations. And you said, within the next few months, so next few months meaning what? Getting this, possibly, set up for the next school year, the following school year, after the next election? Just asking.

Ms. Selby: As the member can understand, this is an ongoing process. It will never be finished entirely, because, of course, new programs will come in, new courses will come in. So, certainly, what we have seen is institutions are formalizing existing agreements. My understanding, there's something like—there's approximately 40 agreements in place between institutions that are—that have been in place, some in more formal levels, some less so, and we're certainly working on formalizing those agreements so that everybody coming to the table is well aware of them.

We are working on additional areas, and we will see a continuation of more and more of those programs—agreements being met and formalization. But I think it's important to know that this is a growing process that would not have an end date or a stop date, because, of course, we need our post-secondary institutions to be responsive to the workforce. I know that at the college level that can be a pretty quick process, and even at the university level there is continually growth and new expertise, new courses, new programs, new areas of study.

So we've seen progress; we'll see much more. But the member can expect to see this as a continuing, growing, advancing area that everybody is working positively and pretty excited about at this point.

Mr. Ewasko: Madam Minister, yes, I can definitely appreciate the fact that when we talk about credit transfers, whether it's at the K-to-12 level, whether it's, you know, in the post-secondary level, it's a process that, again, has to evolve and it's going to change over times with different programming and all of that.

I was just wondering, though, when you were first appointed minister, you made the commitment—that was, matter of fact, your first commitment on the day that you were actually sworn in—about credit transfers. So, if this is one of those things that continually evolves—so your commitment sort of has one of those open-ended, sort of whenever-it-happens-happens type of deals, or can you sort of elaborate on that piece a little bit?

Ms. Selby: And the member is correct; that is one of my early commitments, which is why I'm so excited that by June 24th we had managed to sign an MOU with all the publicly funded institutions. I think that, perhaps, it might be beneficial for the member, perhaps, to see a copy of that memorandum of understanding and I would be happy to have that. It does have some specific details marked out. Some of it was the early task of forming the task group that had the report that they brought in in February identifying where we are. That was one of the first things is to do, is to assess where we were and where we're going.

I'm happy to see that those approximately 40 agreements that were in place have already begun formalizing, but there were some specific details laid out in that MOU that we, according to the report from the task group, are well on 'tway' to meeting. And I can name a couple was doubling articulation

agreements in the province within four years. There were a number of very specific areas that we felt that, along with the task group and the Premier's Economic Advisory Council, who has a number of people in the business community, had identified as areas that should probably be focused on, that would be best—that would be the best areas to focus on to benefit our economy. But, if the member would like, I could arrange to have a copy of the MOU given to him, and he could see that there are very specific, tangible results expected within the four-year timing of the MOU's signing.

Mr. Ewasko: And, yes, Madam Minister, I'd like a copy of that if you wouldn't mind. And so, out of the seven post-secondary institutions, a memorandum of understanding is signed by all seven of them, as of June, 2011.

Ms. Selby: That is correct. The MOU for improving student mobility was signed by the presidents of the seven publicly funded institutions.

Mr. Ewasko: In regards to credit transfer plans, because it's a process that's always—and it's going to continually evolve, do you see any type of legislation coming forward in the future in regards to these plans being—as far as the credit transfers, being legislated?

Ms. Selby: At this point, we have been very excited about the signing of the memorandum of understanding. We see that the presidents definitely are very supportive of it. The task force has identified areas that are already in place, have moved forward with formalizing those agreements and have really laid out a plan of action that meets quite—that meets up perfectly with what the intention of the memorandum of understanding is. So I think, at this point, that we see that since we have such co-operation amongst those seven institutions—beyond co-operation, we have enthusiasm and strong commitment, that I feel quite confident that we're going to see this bringing in more transparency and more ability for—to students to transfer credits and articulation programs in place. I think that this collaboration is the right way to go about, and I'm quite confident that we are moving in the right direction and that we'll continue to do so and have the full support of the seven institutions. I feel quite confident that everybody is working collaboratively right now to the same end.

Mr. Ewasko: So, if the minister wouldn't mind if the staffer or somebody could send me an electronic

version so I could check that out, possibly, over the weekend.

Ms. Selby: We would be pleased to do that. We'll just ask that the member leave his best way to contact him by email, and I know that my staff will get that to him promptly. And then he will see that it is a very, very strong memorandum of agreement and there is some very specific tasks that need to be met within a timeline.

And as the member said earlier, I am very excited about it. I think it's a brand new world of education for Manitobans and will only prove to increase what has already been in—and a growing number of students that are accessing our post-secondary education since we've come into government.

Mr. Ewasko: And I would just like to thank the minister for getting that information emailed to me for the weekend so I can take a look at it, and I also—

The Acting Chairperson (James Allum): The hour being 12:30, committee rises.

FAMILY SERVICES AND LABOUR

*(10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Good morning. This section of the Committee of Supply will continue with the consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Labour.

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

This department is listed beginning on page 85 of the main Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. Floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Well, thank you very much Mr. Speaker, and good morning—or Mr. Chair, good morning.

Here we are on the eve of a, what should be a very nice Victoria week—long weekend, but we're stuck here in the—this morning, at least, going through Estimates for Labour.

I didn't know if the minister wanted any comments specifically about Labour, if she has any opening comments.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): I'll just briefly introduce the staff who are joining us in the Chamber.

I have with me the deputy minister of Family Services and Labour, Jeff Parr; the assistant deputy minister for Labour Programs, Dave Dyson; our Fire Commissioner, Dave Schafer; and the acting executive director for financial services for Labour, Tina Choy-Pohl.

And I will say, you know, the Labour Programs area of my department continues to be very active, continues to look at issues, mainly related to safety of workers. We continue to make progress, I think, in bringing down the injury rate for workers through the work in the Workplace Safety and Health branch for work focused on prevention as well as enforcement.

I think the member will have read about some of the work that we are doing to look at better ways to enforce the federal Criminal Code provisions for criminal negligence that results in workplace injury or death.

We also, of course, have the Employment Standards division that continues to serve workers and employers who call with questions about the Employment Standards Code. It is—it remains, I think, one of the most active parts of the government website, people going there to look for information, both on the employer and the employee side.

We will, shortly, be doing some more discussions in this Chamber on expanding the Sunday shopping hours, which is something that rests in the Employment Standards Division. They also work very closely with the Labour Management Review Committee and make sure that the folks on that committee have the information they need to provide good advice to me in my role as minister.

And, of course, we have the Office of the Fire Commissioner that is—I should congratulate the new Fire Commissioner, Dave Schafer, who is doing a tremendous job in that office and, of course, that office works in doing inspections. We now have the Inspection and Technical Services branch with the Office of the Fire Commissioner. They also work very closely with fire services in many communities across Manitoba to help with training. They work with municipalities on inspection issues, they work on fire prevention, for example, and they're often called out to help to fight fires, whether they're fires that we see happening lately in terms of grass fires, and they also do fire investigations. So that's kind of a nutshell, I think, of the Department of Labour.

We also have the Status of Women that are part of the Labour programs, but do function kind of cross-departmentally, and they're very engaged right now with other parts of the Family Services Department in doing a review of our domestic violence services.

So I'll leave it at that, sort of a summary of what we've been up to in Labour, and I look forward to the questions from the critic.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for those comments, and I certainly welcome staff here to the Chamber this morning as well.

Some of the questions I might ask, off the top, might be a little bit repetitive now that we're, you know, Labour is tied in with Family Services. And I know I had a look at some of the *Hansard*, some of the questions may have been covered, but if the minister will bear with me we just don't—make sure we don't want to miss anything in terms of the realignment within the department now.

And maybe I could start off kind of asking the minister her thoughts on the realignment now that we have Family Services together with Labour. You know, is there some synergies there that you're finding with this realignment or is there kind of a new set of challenges with, in essence, two different departments coming together?

Ms. Howard: I think so far it's been quite smooth. I think it helps that I had the Labour department previously and also the deputy minister was with the Labour department previously as well. I think, you know, the current ADM for Labour Programs has a long history within labour working as the executive director of Employment Standards, and I certainly welcome him to this new role.

I do think there are some interesting synergies that are happening between Family Services and Labour. I think one of the places where we see that happening is with the Status of Women program within Labour that had been working with other departments on issues of particular concern to women.

But now, being more close to Family Services and Family Services also having responsibility for the Family Violence Prevention Program as well as the funding for many of the organizations that work in this area, I do think it can bring some of the policy side closer to the service delivery side, and I think that's going to be very useful.

I also think, you know, one of the other things we have responsibility for is family service, and family services is child care. And we know that for many, many people entering the labour force child care is a big concern and having adequate access to child care. And we also know that, certainly, within child care there've been some real human resource challenges in terms of recruiting and retaining staff, and that's something that we have some experience with in Labour as well.

So I think that can be—there's interesting kind of overlap there that can happen. But I would also say that one of the things that I think unites the two departments is both departments, in their own ways, are looking out for the rights of vulnerable people, whether that be a worker is injured on the job, or a new immigrant worker comes to Manitoba and is protected under The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, or a child who's in need of protection, or an adult with a disability who we serve. And so that is something, I think, that unites the programs that I am responsible for.

* (10:10)

And I do think there are things that the folks who've worked in Family Services can learn from the people in Labour and vice versa, about how you have a system that protects vulnerable people, how you have a system of regulations. Sometimes it helps to do that, how you can enforce those regulations, how you set standards. I think there's lots of things that the two departments can learn from each other on that, and I think some of that is already happening.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for those comments.

I, too, want to acknowledge the staff within your department. Certainly—probably one of the more challenging departments within government, in terms of dealing with Family Services and some of the regulatory issues as well. So, you know, my hats off to those people that do those jobs day after day.

I wonder if the minister—I'll go through a few things here, and then, maybe—I, as I said, might be a little bit repetitive, but would the minister be able to provide a list of all Cabinet committees that are served on by the minister? And it may be something that the minister may just want to provide in writing it at a date down the line.

Ms. Howard: I am a member of the Aboriginal Issues Committee of Cabinet. I'm a member of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, and I'm a

member of the Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, in terms of the planning and—Planning and Priorities Committee, is that a new committee within the structure of government?

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister of family services and housing and labour.

Ms. Howard: And I just picked up a new responsibility.

That's a committee that replaced what used to be the Community Economic Development Committee of Cabinet. So it has many of the similar responsibilities, kind of looks at economic development broadly in the province, but also helps to look at what the policy priorities of government are.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, would the minister be able to say what other ministers serve on that committee?

Ms. Howard: I would have to get that information to you. I don't think my memory's probably totally accurate at this—I'm not done my latte yet, so—but we'll get that information to you.

Mr. Cullen: You may have to excuse me, too. I forgot my glasses this morning, so if you see me searching here a little, that's the reason for it.

I wonder when—if the minister's undertaking that, in terms of that, the policy and planning committee, I'm wondering how many staff are involved in that particular committee as well. If the minister could provide that to me, I'd appreciate it.

Ms. Howard: Yes, we can provide that also.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister be able to provide a list of all political staff, including names, their positions, and whether they are full-time within her office?

Ms. Howard: So I have in my office Felix Meza, who's a policy adviser—special adviser. I have Meghan Gallant, who's a special assistant focused on the Family Services side of the department, and I have Jeannine Kebernik, who's a special assistant focused on the Labour side of the department.

Mr. Cullen: I wonder if the minister would be able to supply a specific list of all staff in the deputy minister's office as well.

Ms. Howard: Well, we've got Jeff Parr, who's the deputy minister; Cindy Fawley, who's a secretary in that office; Sarah Obaid and Jan Doerksen, who are

assistants to the deputy minister; and Kim Stewart, who's an administrative assistant.

Mr. Cullen: I wonder if the minister, at some point down the road, would be able to supply the names of staff that have been hired in 2011-2012, including whether they've been hired through competition or appointment. Would the minister be able to undertake that?

Ms. Howard: Yes, just to clarify, are you talking about in my office; you talking about in the entire department?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, within the entire department, if she would undertake that.

Ms. Howard: Yes, we can undertake to do that.

Mr. Cullen: In addition to that, if the minister would provide a description of any positions that have been reclassified, and that might be an undertaking—I'm not sure what's happened here in terms of the transition. But I guess I'm primarily focused on the Labour side of things, so that's the undertaking that I would ask the minister to.

Has there been any major reclassifications or, should I say, restructuring within the Labour side?

Ms. Howard: Yes, we can endeavour to provide that. I just want to make sure I understand.

So the first question that you asked for was a list of all hires, and whether through competition. You just mean that in Labour programs, or do you want the Family Services side, as well? Because the Family Services side is quite—there's a couple thousand people that work there, so that would be quite a much bigger list, if it's both parts of the department.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, my concern is more with the Labour side of things, so that—make that workload a little easier for staff.

Ms. Howard: So we can provide that. We're looking for both new hires and method of hire, as well as any classification changes.

I will say the restructuring that happened within Labour was really moving—previous to the move of Labour to Family Services, there had been an ADM for Workplace Safety and Health. We now have an ADM for all of the Labour side of the programs, and there's an executive director position in Workplace Safety and Health.

We also recently created a new position that we and the Workers Compensation Board both—we fund, but is accountable to both us and the Workers Compensation Board, and that's a chief prevention officer. And their job is really looking at our prevention strategies for workplace injury, but looking at it both within the department but also trying to work more closely with the Workers Compensation Board on their prevention activities.

So there's been no gain in positions or no gain in people, but that's the restructuring that's happened. But we can provide that information in a written format to the member.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I had that on my list, actually, to ask. I noticed that in the orders-in-council, that Don Hurst was—appointment as the chief prevention officer. Was that something that—was there a competition for that particular position?

Ms. Howard: No, there wasn't a competition for that position. Don Hurst had previously been the ADM for Workplace Safety and Health and had had the role of looking at prevention—within government, looking at our prevention activities for workplace injury, and so he also had a role of directing the Workplace Safety and Health branch which looked at more enforcement activities and regulatory activities. And so he had the skills necessary to do that job, and really it's—it was focusing his position on prevention, and focusing in it on prevention, not only within government, but also the prevention activities that the Workers Compensation Board undertakes to try and bring those things a little bit more closely together.

We're, right now, launching a five—every five years, we have to do a review of the workplace safety and health regulations, and so we're, right now, embarked on that, and it just happens that at the same time, the Workers Compensation Board is doing a review of their prevention activities. So I felt that having a position who could bring those things together made some sense, and Don was the one that had the experience and so it was just a refocusing of his position into the prevention side.

*(10:20)

Mr. Cullen: Appreciate the minister's comments here. I'm trying to just maybe understand the relationship better between what he's doing for the department and what he's doing for the Workers Compensation Board as well. So he would have a number of staff under him in terms of developing

some of the protocols moving forward, or what exactly is he involved with?

Ms. Howard: So my understanding is that Mr. Hurst has one support staff that works with him, and really his role—previously the staff that would have worked for him were involved in enforcement of the act, and those staff are still in place, but they now report to the executive director of Workplace Safety and Health. And his role is really to bring a better coordination, facilitation, alignment between the prevention activities that happen in the department and the prevention activities that happen at the Workers Compensation Board. So he'd be able to work with all the staff in both places to do that. He reports jointly to the deputy minister and to the CEO of the Workers Compensation Board.

Mr. Cullen: Now, having said that, is workers compensation then—Workers Compensation Board paying something to the Province to provide this service? Are they paying part of his salary?

Ms. Howard: In this current year, the department is covering the cost of Mr. Hurst's salary. He's going to be housed at the Workers Compensation Board, and I think the support staff that work for him are also—is an employee of the Workers Compensation Board. As we move forward, we'd be interested in having a cost-sharing agreement with the Workers Compensation Board, but for this fiscal year his salary is within the Department of Family Services and Labour.

Mr. Cullen: Yes. I guess while we're on the Workers Compensation Board again, it's—maybe sometimes the lines get a little fuzzy between what the Workers Compensation Board is doing and the Province is trying to do. And I'm just wondering if you can kind of explain that relationship a little better and if there's any—you know, we've got prevention officers over there; you've got your own prevention officers. What kind of relationship is there and is there any crossing going back and forth there, or is the Workers Compensation Board paying the Province for any services that they may be providing?

Ms. Howard: The department and the Workers Compensation Board, I mean, there's a few different kinds of relationships, and probably some of his questions would be best addressed at a Crown corporations committee meeting when we have the CEO and the president of the board there. It is a Crown corporation, so there's an arm's-length relationship. They're independent from government, but accountable to me, as the minister. And I have

responsibility for overseeing the act that puts them in place.

I would say, over the last decade we have tried to forge a closer working relationship on the prevention side. I think the Workers Compensation Board has really seen the value of doing prevention work and the businesses that they insure have seen that value, as well. There's been tremendous involvement by industry groups that have put together their own safety organizations, and I think one of the results of that is not only that we've seen the injury rate decline, but people have seen their assessment rates decline.

I can't remember the numbers off the top of my head, but I know that for a number of years that rate was frozen, and then I think in the last couple of years it actually decreased. So if people had a good safety record at their place of business, they may have actually seen their WCB dues go down over the last decade. And they deserve a lot of credit for that. The Workers Compensation Board, certainly, has really embraced prevention.

Part of putting in place the new chief prevention officer is to strengthen that further. There is no staff that cross over that work for both places. The chief prevention officer is certainly the first time that we've tried that model. The Workers Compensation Board does transfer money to the department. This year, it's just over \$10 million to fund Workplace Safety and Health activities, the enforcement, the regulation mechanism, the worker adviser office. And the worker adviser, of course, is housed within Employment Standards and those staff help Workers Compensation Board claimants who are having difficulty accessing benefits, questions about the system.

All of our constituents, I know, have made use of those offices when they've run into difficulty accessing Workers Compensation benefits. It's the model all over Canada where Workers Compensation boards will fund those kinds of activities within government and it's the model here, as well.

So, yes, I would say we work closely with the board. They have their own board. They have their own CEO. They're a Crown corporation and so that's how they're accountable to government. But we do want to work more closely on the prevention strategies. We think that we have made good progress on prevention of workplace accidents and injury. But we do think we need to go farther to do

that, and that if we're working more closely together and we have a chief prevention officer like the province of Ontario does, that we can facilitate that kind of co-ordination.

* (10:30)

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for those comments.

I wonder if the minister would undertake to, you know, provide me that kind of a detailed statement—how much the Workers Compensation Board transfers to the Province, and, as a result of that, what kind of obligations that the Province has to the Workers Compensation Board. And further to that, I'm interested in, you know, what that means to the Province in terms of staff. Like, how many full-time staff has the Province committed to providing that service for the Workers Compensation Board? Is that something that the minister could undertake at some point in time?

Ms. Howard: Yes, we can undertake to provide that.

Mr. Cullen: I just, you know, want to make sure that, you know, we as a—everybody's getting value for their money and that there's not being money transferred to the Province for anything else than what the services are expected for. *[interjection]* That's good. I appreciate the minister undertaking that.

The other thing, getting back to the orders-in-council here, and this—I've never asked this question before, but in the salary there's usually a salary range for people that are hired on or employed. Who makes the determination where a person would fall in terms of that salary range?

Ms. Howard: The—so the classification range is set by Treasury Board and the Civil Service Commission, and the Civil Service Commission would be involved, often, in setting what step in that range somebody would be hired at. It would depend on things like if they were being recruited from another job. Generally speaking, it's hard to recruit people and pay them less. So you want to make sure that they're not losing by coming into government. I imagine other things that the Civil Service Commission would be looking at is level of experience, level of responsibility in that job. But generally speaking, those are the factors that would be involved in setting the pay rate for someone.

Mr. Cullen: Maybe—while we're on salaries, maybe the minister could explain to me where we're at in

terms of our contract with the MGEU and employees. Whereabouts are we in that current contract, and, I guess, along with that, where are we at in terms of the salary freeze?

Ms. Howard: Yes, I'm going to refer the member to the Minister responsible for the Civil Service Commission. That's who has responsibility for the collective agreement with the MGEU and that would be the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers).

Mr. Cullen: Has the minister—in her Estimates here, has there been a money budgeted for increase in salaries within her department?

Ms. Howard: So the general wage increase for this year is 2.9 per cent. There will also be merit increases. My understanding was that there was a two-year wage freeze that had been agreed upon, and this year is the first year outside of that. Those increases, generally, are offset within the department by staff turnover where you'll have people leaving who were at a higher stage in the classification range who come—and then you hire somebody comes in at a lower range, as well as vacancies that occur in the department and take some time to fill.

Mr. Cullen: How many people does the minister have in her staff right now? What's the total 'numble'—number of full-time staff that are currently on salary? And if the minister could, if she could tell me what number are in the Labour side as well as relative to the total number.

Ms. Howard: So, in the entire Department of Family Services and Labour, we have 2,339.69 FTEs, and in the Labour side we have 193.1 FTEs.

Mr. Cullen: Does that include the people within the Office of the Fire Commissioner?

Ms. Howard: So the Office of the Fire Commissioner is a special operating agency, so I'm not sure you'd find that in the supplementary Estimates. But I'm informed that the Office of the Fire Commissioner has his—the special operating agency, which also includes the inspection and technical services side, has 115 FTEs.

Mr. Cullen: So just to clarify, you're saying that the Office of the Fire Commissioner has 115 staff in its employment?

Ms. Howard: Right, it's 115 positions.

Mr. Cullen: So as a special operating agency, it doesn't fall in this Estimates here. I was trying to figure out where that would fill in here. I see there's a

community service delivery, that doesn't include the Office of the Fire Commissioner, then, because there's quite a few staff in there and that's probably more on the Family Services side. So maybe just, if the minister could, you know, explain to me that, obviously, people that work for the Office of the Fire Commissioner are being paid by the Province, so is there a separate reporting entity then that we would find the information for the Fire Commissioner's office?

Ms. Howard: I think if you look at page 143 of the purple book, you'll find a section on the Office of the Fire Commissioner that will outline, sort of, what they do, their organizational chart. There's a financial information that is there, as well, that you can look at, and different kinds of information about the agency, notes to the financial projections. So there is quite a bit of information that you can look at there.

And the member is correct in that—in those 2,300 FTEs, that community services delivery is a huge section of that, and those are people that deliver front-line services on the Family Services side. So we're talking about people who deliver employment and income assistance and other services.

So the—it's very—I think in the supplementary Estimates the staff years are very separate, whether Family Services or Labour. You wouldn't find in community the service delivery side, I don't think, anyone delivering Labour programs. They may know about them. I hope they know about them and I hope they're talking to their clients about them, but there's—all the staff that deliver Labour programs are represented in that 193 FTEs.

* (10:40)

Mr. Cullen: Yes. I'm still a little unclear about, you know, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, and I guess it goes with any special operating agency, how it relates to the department. You know, if it's not showing up—you know, if the staff aren't showing up on page, you know, 18-19, where do they show up here? I—obviously—or, in my mind, and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong here, those 193 that are employed by the Office of the Fire Commissioner, which should show up as payroll under the office—under the Department of Labour—is that correct?

Ms. Howard: And I welcome all the people in the gallery. 'Dist'—you're here for Estimates, which is a little different than what we normally do in here, so we're just going through line by line the budget of

the Labour Department. So you picked a most exciting day to come and be here at the Legislature.

So, the—on page 152 of the purple book, part of the report on the special operating agency, there is a section called salaries, and there you will find the number of FTEs for the special operating agency. And—now, those people are employees of the Province of Manitoba, but the way the special operating agency works is it generates its own revenue.

So it—when you look at the—if you look at the financial statements, I think you'll see that. So they generate revenue through things like fire inspection fees, boiler fees, college tuition—this is also where the Manitoba Emergency Services College is located. The special operating agency is run by an advisory board, so there's no transfer from the general revenue of the Province to the operations of the Office of the Fire Commissioner. They generate their own revenue and they spend that revenue on their programs.

And they're accountable, of course, to me as the minister, and we have this discussion here, accountable to the Legislature, but it's not quite the same as a—as the department, where they get their money from the general revenue of the government.

They also put out an annual report every year, and you'd be able to find more information there. I generally table that in the House, and I imagine their annual report should be available on the website. So you could find more information about them there as well.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you, very much. That certainly helps clear that up for me. And I wondered if the minister would endeavour to provide me with the latest report from the Fire Commissioner's office as well. I probably—assuming that there's a tax, if you will, on fire insurance policies—I think it's—is it four and a half per cent? I'm assuming that—is that money transferred into the Office of the Fire Commissioner as well?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Chairperson: Before recognizing the honourable minister, I would just like to, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly, welcome the grade 5 and 6 class from Inkster School, who are constituents of the member for St. John. I welcome you all here today.

* * *

Ms. Howard: I don't remember what the question now after that, but could you put it again? What were we talking about?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, we were talking about the tax on insurance policies. I think it's four and a half per cent. And I see in the document here there's other sources, revenue. It looks like \$50 million, so maybe we could just clarify if that represents—or a considerable portion of that is represented by that insurance policy tax.

Ms. Howard: So we look at page 151, the Fire Prevention Fund levy, the rate is currently 1.25 per cent and that revenue goes to the Office of the Fire Commissioner. It does provide for a good portion of the funding for the Office of the Fire Commissioner. It looks like the projected revenue from that is \$6.7 million for March 31st, 2013.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that, and I'm not sure how detailed the annual report will be there but obviously there's another—appears to be \$8.5 million of other source revenue there that may come into play. I'm just wondering if the report doesn't spell that out specifically, if the minister could provide me a detailed explanation of what the other source revenue would be for the agency.

* (10:50)

Ms. Howard: So, on page 151 to 152, I think those are the things that go into the other source revenues. We talked about the Fire Prevention Fund levy and then the next item would be revenue from Inspection and Technical Services Manitoba, and so part of that would be from building permits and that represents just over \$2 million. And then there's another \$5.2 million that come from permits for mechanical or electrical equipment, inspections, examinations, for people to get licensed in some of those trades.

And then there is \$1.25 million that comes in through the Manitoba Emergency Services College for tuition and other contracts. And I think if you add all that up, you should get pretty close to \$15.3 million. But we can provide you kind of a written summary of that as well.

Mr. Cullen: I see the—by the document, too, that the agency was approved for 115 full-time equivalents. I wonder how many staff are in the office now.

Ms. Howard: So I'm informed that there are currently about 15 vacancies in the office. So that would mean there's a 100 filled positions right now.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you. Is there a plan to infill those 15 positions in the near future?

Ms. Howard: I am assured the Fire Commissioner's working hard on filling those positions.

Mr. Cullen: Well, it is encouraging to see the—at least the fund has some surplus money to work with. It's gone a little bit different than what the government usually operates. So my hat's off to Mr. Schafer and his department for running a positive budget.

Recognizing that there was quite a substantial change in terms of the role of the Office of the Fire Commissioner, in terms of providing inspection services, was there a transfer of positions from the department into the Office of the Fire Commissioner?

Ms. Howard: This—so this transition happened last year, I think last fiscal year actually. And we transferred 32 positions from the department to the Office of the Fire Commissioner for the Inspection and Technical Services side.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister would be able to provide a list of all the inspection services that the Office of the Fire Commissioner provides. And the reason I ask this, I want to be clear which inspection services the Department of Labour are providing versus what the inspections and the role of the Office of the Fire Commissioner. If the minister could help me get my head around those issues, I would appreciate it.

Ms. Howard: So, under the Office of the Fire Commissioner, they provide building code inspections, fire safety inspections, elevator inspections, amusement ride inspections, electrical inspections, boiler and pressure vessel inspections, and gas inspections.

In the department we provide inspections related to workplace safety and health, and those are sometimes preventative inspections. We go and make sure people are following the code, and sometimes those are inspections after an accident or a fatality. And we also do inspections under the Employment Standards Code which are sometimes complaint driven—initiated and sometimes are pre-emptive investigations to go and make sure that employers are following the code.

And, really, the change was made to get all of the building and safety-type inspections, with the exception of Workplace Safety and Health, into one

area. The Office of the Fire Commissioner was already doing fire inspections, for example, but we would also have, you know, the boiler and elevator inspections in the Department of Labour. And so what we're attempting to do is to try to get those inspections closer together to really, I think, make it easier for businesses who have to go through multiple inspections before they can open up, and other individuals to try and get those centralized as much as possible and, hopefully, provide a better service to people, but also to provide for the people who do that work to be cross-trained so they can fill each other's role. These are oftentimes people with very technical expertise and there's not a lot of them, and sometimes if you don't have a vacancy filled you can get behind on those inspections, and those are—that's inconvenient for business.

So that's the rationale and our attempt to try to make it easier for people who are being inspected.

Mr. Cullen: I think this whole transfer kind of get precipitated back—I understand maybe a year and half ago, back when we had department staff who were able to provide inspections for boiler and pressure equipment. And as a result of living—losing some of the staff within the department, as a result, we lost our accreditation to provide some of those inspection services. And it seemed to me it was a bit of a reaction, I guess, and hopefully, to fill in the gap on some of those—that process, at least. You know, as a result, we're currently in a suspension in terms of having that accreditation.

Is the department working on getting that accreditation back so that either the Office of the Fire Commissioner or the department could provide those inspection services to those pressure-vessel businesses and operations in the province?

* (11:00)

Ms. Howard: So, yes, we had some issues with people in place in the department who were certified to be able to do certain kinds of inspections, and that led to the loss of our ASME certification. And so, what we did to deal with that in the short term was to make arrangements with Saskatchewan, which is an ASME-certified organization, to conduct those kinds of inspections for Manitoba clients, and we contacted those affected clients. We're picking up any cost differentials in order to do that, but, in the meantime, we've also taken steps to recruit and train our staff so that we will be able to, in the near future, regain that certification in Manitoba.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for the comment. So is that being undertaken within the department, or through the Office of the Fire Commissioner?

Ms. Howard: Those inspectors are housed in the Office of the Fire Commissioner and so that's where that work is ongoing.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I understand it's a bit of a process to get everything in place and it takes some time and have—to have the right qualified people, and it's quite a process. When do you, the minister, think that those 'qualifications'—qualifications may be met and we can expect to get our accreditation back? And being aware that you'd probably have to reapply for their accreditation, and that process, alone, may take some time, can the minister give me any idea when they might be in a timely fashion to actually make the application to get the accreditation back?

Ms. Howard: It is a lengthy process, and it involves training of staff and then the staff have to write tests and get accredited and pass those tests and then there's a application process, so it does take some time to regain that. And not all of that is within our control, but my hope is, I would be optimistic, that the next time we meet in Estimates, if the critic asks the same question, I'll have something positive to report.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much for that. I think that's, you know, certainly important for a lot of the business community in the province here. Does the minister have any idea how many businesses were directly impacted by that, and, if so, how many inspections were required from out of province?

Ms. Howard: We may be able to get you the exact number before 12:30—we're looking for it here—but our recollection is it was less than 10 businesses that were affected by this. It's a small number of business. Eight, in fact, which is less than 10, so it was eight businesses that were affected by this change. And the way that we accommodated them, nobody was sent out of province to get inspections done. We brought inspectors here from Saskatchewan to provide that service, and we picked up the difference in cost between what someone would have paid had the service been available in Manitoba by a Manitoba inspector and what was paid for travel or other costs to Saskatchewan.

But it was a small number, but for those businesses that were affected, it was very—it was an anxious time to make sure that they could get the inspections that they needed to carry on their

business. And I think we did our part and the Office of the Fire Commissioner did their best to make sure that as much as possible there was no interruption in the services needed and the inspection services needed by those businesses.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister be able to provide me how many inspections, then, were done in the province, and I guess the—probably the important question to taxpayers is how much did that cost? And, again, was that a cost that was borne by the Province or is that something what the Fire Commissioner's office is picking up the tab?

Ms. Howard: We can try to get you a more exact number, but, on average, the department had been doing 35 of these inspections a year, and the amount of money during 2011 that was paid to bring inspectors from Saskatchewan was just over \$15,000. And that money would've come out of the budget for the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

Mr. Cullen: I'm wondering why that money would be coming out of the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

Ms. Howard: The Office of the Fire Commissioner is where those services are located—the Inspection and Technical Services Manitoba, and in order to ensure—and they are the ones that have responsibility for providing those inspections. And so in order to ensure that there wasn't a gap in those inspections for the businesses that were affected, it was the Office of the Fire Commissioner who entered into an arrangement with the Technical Services branch in Saskatchewan to make sure that they were provided.

Mr. Cullen: Will the Province of Manitoba be backfilling to the Office of the Fire Commissioner for those expenses?

Ms. Howard: No, these are costs borne by the Office of the Fire Commissioner and it's the Office of the Fire Commissioner's responsibility to provide those services. And so those costs for those services come out of the Office of the Fire Commissioner. It's a very financially healthy organization and don't think there is any hardship caused by having to pay this \$15,000 to ensure those inspections happen for businesses.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, in my view, you know, the department kind of took their eye off the ball on this thing and allowed this lapse to occur, and now the expenses are being picked up by the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

* (11:10)

And now the Office of the Fire Commissioner, as well, it sounds like they aren't going to be forced to have the additional cost of training and getting this whole accreditation back. It just doesn't seem quite right, that it may have been a—in the past, a provincial responsibility, but now we have a special operating agency here who's being forced to pick up the tab.

Ms. Howard: I wouldn't describe it the way the member opposite has described it. I think those inspection services are still a provincial responsibility, even though they're delivered through a special operating agency. That special operating agency is still accountable to me as a minister, and I would expect if the members opposite had questions about any of those inspections they're going to ask me in question period, and expect me to be responsible for them.

When inspection—when the Inspection and Technical Services were transferred to the Office of the Fire Commissioner, those services both bring revenue and cost. Those services or fees that are generated by providing those services, and there are costs to providing those services. So when the transfer was made, the Office of the Fire Commissioner now collects the fees, and keeps that revenue, and out of that revenue provides for the costs of delivering those services.

So I think it's entirely appropriate that the same place that gets the revenue from providing service also bears the costs to provide that service. And, as I say, the Office of the Fire Commissioner has been able to accommodate the \$15,000 in cost to make sure that those businesses had uninterrupted access to the inspections they need to carry on.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I guess, you know, I look at how the Office of the Fire Commissioner's funded, and it's quite clearly funded a lot different than the Department of Labour through taxation. So that would be my point. We'll probably disagree on the interpretation on how it should be handled. But, certainly, I hope the Office of the Fire Commissioner will have some positive news for us over the course of the next year, and we can move forward and get that accreditation back and hopefully make it easier for people doing business in the province here and the export market as well.

There was some concern, and this goes back probably a year and a half ago, in terms of the

inspection process on different things, as you mentioned earlier, on the different areas, such as, you know, elevators and amusement rides and boiler inspections and whatnot.

Would the minister be able to provide us a bit of an update in terms of where we're at there, now, in terms of inspections? Are we kind of on par? Are we caught up on a timely basis, or are we still somewhat behind, in terms of those inspections?

Ms. Howard: This is an issue that's arisen before, the progress of inspections, and I would say, first off, that one of the ways that the inspectors handle it is by 'priorizing' places that require inspections. I think that the reality is there's always going to be some amount of backlog in the inspections. One of the reasons for that has been that you become aware that a—that something has expired on the day it's expired, so by definition you're always have some backlog unless you can be at the place on the day that something expires. So there'll always be some backlog.

We have made good progress on the elevator side, and I think that's because we've brought on board four additional elevator inspectors. So in—if we go from December 2010, the number, then, was 735 buildings that were requiring inspection. The latest number we have on elevators is 347 buildings. So that has come a long way.

On the boiler side, we've got more progress that we need to make. The latest number that I have is there's 1,987 requiring inspection. We're currently recruiting three additional boiler inspectors. Hope we've—there's money in this year's budget to hire those people, and hopefully we can get them in place and start to bring that number down. It's been very challenging to recruit and hire those inspectors. They have very specific technical skills that are required, but I'm hopeful that we'll be able to get those people in place and begin to see a decline, also, in the number of boiler inspections that are outstanding.

Mr. Cullen: You know, earlier we talked about the 15 vacant positions there or so. Is this something that the Office of the Fire Commissioner will be looking at in terms of those 15 positions? Will those be inspectors that will be able to provide those types of services?

Ms. Howard: Right. Some of those vacancies are inspectors—will certainly be the three boiler—the three new boiler inspector positions that I was talking about. And so those are the vacancies that the Office

of the Fire Commissioner is looking to fill as quickly as possible.

Mr. Cullen: Well, certainly, there sounds like there's a considerable number of outstanding inspections there, and, you know, we hear stories from time to time about various companies or government agencies, you know, who are forced to start up—run their operation. You know, how is the department handling that? I—you know, there must be some potential liability issues here. I'm sure you must have had those discussions.

* (11:20)

Ms. Howard: One of the things that we are undertaking, should be launching within weeks, is a technical safety review where the Inspection and Technical Services Manitoba is going to be gathering feedback from stakeholders and experts in the field to make sure that we have an appropriate level of inspection for the risk that's involved. There may be some instances where, you know, technology has changed and construction has changed and the standards have changed, and things don't require as much inspection as they once did. We want to make sure there's an appropriate level of inspection to ensure safety. But I'm sure the member opposite has heard, as I have heard from some business owners or individuals who feel that our standards haven't really kept pace with the advances in the industry, so we're taking a look at that.

We are also able to be within the Office of the Fire Commissioner—very responsive to urgent issues. And that happens, from time to time, where we will hear from a business or an individual that needs some urgent attention because they're trying to start up or they're trying to get going and they've waited for an inspection, and so we are able to be responsive to that.

Also within the Inspection and Technical Services Manitoba, they've been undergoing an operational review to look at all of the procedures that they use for inspections with an eye to try to minimize any unnecessary delays. They're also recruiting an engineer to help with the quality assurance program.

But, in addition to that, I would say that building owners also have a responsibility to be doing the preventative maintenance for their boilers. Certainly, our inspectors are not the only time that somebody should be looking at their boiler. They should be doing that on an on-going basis and making sure that

they're maintained, and really our role is to ensure that those things are happening, to do a quality assurance test.

I know, from being the executive director of a clinic in a very old building, that the number of times we had people in to look at our boiler and elevator was far, far beyond the number of inspections we had from the Department of Labour. But that was what was necessary to ensure that those things were in good working order.

But, you know, we have some work to do in this field, and I think through the technical safety review, better aligning our inspection protocols with the standards in the industry, and recruiting more staff, I think we'll be able to provide more timely service to businesses.

Mr. Cullen: I think I seek some advice from the minister on this one. We, as MLAs, get inquiries from time to time about this specific issue, about, maybe, somebody putting a new installation in. And they want to get up and running as soon as possible, you know, heating and cooling, and those sort of things, so, it's fairly timely.

What advice would you provide MLAs in terms of, once we receive those kind of calls? Who—how should we handle those calls? Who should we direct them to?

Ms. Howard: Well, those concerns have come in a variety of ways to me. I've had, certainly, had conversations in the loge with some of your colleagues about issues that they're dealing with, and usually we've had pretty good success at being able to get those things resolved. So we can—you know, you can continue to talk to me about it or my office.

You can also call the Office of the Fire Commissioner directly and talk to the Fire Commissioner, and he can also try to point you in the right direction.

You can send me an email about it and we'll make sure that it gets followed up, but that's how we've sort of handled it in the past, and usually we can have a successful conclusion.

Sometimes it is a situation where there's just a difference of opinion between the owner of a property and the inspector, about how much inspection needs to happen, and whether something is safe or not. And in those situations, I tend to side with the inspector in terms of safety. But sometimes, when it is a situation where somebody's needs to get

up and running and has been waiting and wants to know what's happening, usually we're able to successfully conclude those cases by letting the Fire Commissioner's office know about it, and they can get on top of it.

So, you can talk to me, you can call my office, you can send me an email, or you can talk directly to the Fire Commissioner.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that advice, and I've had the opportunity to talk to Mr. Schafer a few times over the last couple years, and he certainly has been helpful in providing advice on the number of occasions.

And I appreciate the good work that the people within the office are doing. They're certainly—I've been involved in the fire services locally for quite a number of years, and I think the Office of the Fire Commissioner has a lot of respect out there, in terms of the rural communities. So we appreciate the good work they are doing.

Unfortunately, there's a bit of a blight on the Office of the Fire Commissioner here, just in the last couple of years. And my understanding was, there was going to be a review undertaken of some of the events that unfolded in terms of the senior management there at the Office of the Fire Commissioner. Could the minister provide me an update in terms of where that review is at?

*(11:30)

Ms. Howard: I would certainly say that what had happened in the Office of the Fire Commissioner is extremely unfortunate, and the member opposite is correct. It is, I think, tarnished the reputation of that office, which is unfair to the vast majority of people that work there that do very good work. Certainly for me it was extremely personally disappointing, and some of the people that were involved, and I think a good lesson to me in terms of—well, and I mean, just being, you know, having people let you down sometimes.

I would say the way that this unfolded, I think, does point to some of the strengths of the internal controls within government, because the way that some of this came to light was through internal audit in government that had noticed some discrepancies in the financial reporting and took action on that. And that action, I think, was quite swift and appropriate. It resulted in four staff leaving the Office of the Fire Commissioner, and I'm not going

to get much farther into any personnel issues with regards to that.

It also has resulted in a great deal of work from the acting Fire Commissioner, who's now the permanent Fire Commissioner, and his staff to strengthen the financial controls within the Office of the Fire Commissioner. Provincial audit has been involved in that. The provincial comptroller has been involved in that. The Auditor General is undertaking a forensic audit to also look at that. As well, we sent from the Department of Labour additional financial staff to ensure that the proper financial controls were in place and that there was a good system there to make sure that future abuses couldn't happen.

The provincial comptroller—we have been reporting biweekly to the provincial comptroller on the progress made. They are now satisfied that the appropriate financial controls are in place within the Office of the Fire Commissioner. They'll be doing further follow-up in the summertime just to make sure that they're still on track.

But I would say we've taken what was a very unfortunate and very disappointing situation, and full credit, I think, to the current Fire Commissioner and to his staff, who've managed to turn that around and to make sure that the appropriate financial controls are in place in that office and that they're able to do the work that Manitobans trust them to do in terms of upholding the safety of all of us.

So it's been very challenging, very difficult for that office, very difficult on the staff in that office, and something that is entirely regrettable, but I think also something that does point to the mechanisms for monitoring and control within government having caught this situation and having been able to respond.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for her comments.

I wonder, will there be some kind of a public document brought forward so that, you know, we can have a look at it, and so that we are pretty clear in terms of what steps have been taken to make sure that this sort of thing doesn't happen again. Will there be some kind of an independent report brought forward?

Ms. Howard: Well, as I said, the Auditor General is currently involved in this situation, is undertaking a forensic audit. And I would certainly look to her for advice on how and when she might want to do a report on the situation in the Office of the Fire

Commissioner. I think that's probably the most appropriate, most independent way to do that.

Mr. Cullen: So the auditor hasn't indicated to you what, when, or if she will be providing you a report?

Ms. Howard: Yes, I know the member opposite knows the Auditor General has the full capacity and ability to provide a report on any aspect of government operations.

She's been involved in this situation. She's currently—my understanding is is that she's currently involved in doing a forensic audit of the Office of the Fire Commissioner. And I would look to her, upon conclusion of that, as to how she would want those results to be made public.

Mr. Cullen: Yes. In a situation like this, maybe it's a bit of a justice question, but is there any criminal charges resulted out of this situation?

Ms. Howard: I don't think that's been determined yet. I think one of the things that would help determine that is the completion of that forensic audit by the Auditor General.

Mr. Cullen: Yes. I guess in terms of a process, I'm not sure if, when or if the RCMP would be involved in a situation like this. Is it up to you as the minister to, you know, if you suspect something has been gone awry—whether it's an obligation on your behalf to bring in the law authorities on something like this?

Ms. Howard: You know, the best advice I've received on this issue is that, really, the completion of the forensic audit is what would be required before a decision would be made to proceed with criminal charges. And the Auditor General is undertaking that, and we're awaiting the completion of that.

Mr. Cullen: The minister mentioned, now, four staff, and I'm not sure that the term she used. I don't know if those four staff, were they the terminated or whether they resigned. Is the minister able to comment on that?

Ms. Howard: I'm going to be very cautious about getting too much into personnel matters on the record. But I think that it's the information, I think is public information, is that there were three terminations and one retirement.

* (11:40)

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I just want to go back to the minister's comments about the RCMP. Who do you—who would you seek advice from? Would you talk to

someone in Justice about, you know, your particular role in calling the RCMP in this investigation in this regard? Or, you know, just what process would you, as a minister, follow?

Ms. Howard: Certainly, in this situation, because of the involvement of personnel, the Civil Service Commission was very involved in making decisions about how it would be handled, as was the Labour Relations secretariat. And, certainly, in past instances, where there'd been allegations of criminal behaviour, they would be involved in talking to the police about how to handle that.

And, in this situation, the information I've received is that criminal charges are still a distinct possibility in this situation, but, in order to proceed with that, we need to wait for the results of the forensic audit, which is being completed by the Auditor General.

Mr. Cullen: Well, thanks, and I appreciate the minister's being 'forthright' on this one. You know, and having said that, I think there would be some urgency to have the Auditor General complete the audit. You know, has the minister had a conversation with the auditor when—to undertake when that audit might be complete?

Ms. Howard: I'm sure the Auditor General is treating this with the required urgency. I trust her judgment on those things, and my understanding is that she should be—her office should be completed with it by this fall.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much, and we'll certainly be interested into follow up with the auditor as well to see how that all unfolds.

So, is it your undertaking, then, it would be your responsibility, or would it be the Civil Service Commission to make a recommendation after that report comes forward in terms of maybe further or any criminal actions being brought forward, or further investigation by the RCMP?

Ms. Howard: I think, you know, generally speaking, in government, and I think in—you know, for the opposition as well, we leave the decision on whether or not to lay charges to the police and to the Crown attorneys—certainly would not interfere in those decisions. I don't think it would be appropriate for any government in a democratic society to tell the police who to charge and who not to charge.

What my understanding is, is that what would be required for that decision to go forward is some

evidence, and evidence—the evidence that we need is the completion of the forensic audit, and that evidence is being collected now.

I suppose, you know, the other thing that would happen is potentially a review by civil legal services to determine if there's any civil course of action that might also be taken by government. I think that's also a possibility depending on what we see in the results of the forensic audit.

Mr. Cullen: Well, you know, certainly, the clock is ticking and time is going by on this particular situation, and it doesn't sound to me like any of the authorities have been brought in to discuss this. And, you know, obviously we're not asking, or I don't think you would be directing the police to lay charges, but the police, in this case, haven't been brought forward to actually do any investigation on this. That's my understanding of what the minister is saying.

And is there not a responsibility on behalf of the government to, you know, to notify the authorities that there was some wrongdoing and then the possibility exists there could be—there could've been some criminal activity?

Ms. Howard: So I would say for the member opposite, generally, in these kinds of situations, especially where personnel matters are involved, they are handled through the Civil Service Commission, and they are handled through the Labour Relations Secretariat. They're not handled directly by the minister, for obvious reasons. I think that there are very sensitive personnel issues involved, and you want to make sure, especially in the case of terminations, that all of those rules are followed. And so that's how this one was handled.

In terms of criminal charges, that is still an open possibility, but my understanding is that what would be required in order to proceed with that, is that there be some evidence provided. And the way that that evidence is being collected is by a forensic audit by the Auditor General, and that should be complete this fall. And then we can make a determination from there of how it's handled.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate that and, certainly, will look forward to that report and be following up from our side as well.

But, you know, moving forward, I certainly still want to say the positive things that are happening in the Office of the Fire Commissioner. And, hopefully,

we can get that particular issue resolved and get it behind us and move forward.

In terms of the facilities in Brandon, I wonder if there's any changes coming forward in terms of the operations out in Brandon, in terms of the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

Ms. Howard: So I'm informed that that Brandon facility, that the capital program that was going on there is completed. It was—cost about \$1.8 million. There's no immediate capital upgrades planned. The focus now will be on enhancements to the programming in that new facility.

Mr. Cullen: Certainly, it's a very good training facility and they've got some great staff there in training a lot of firefighters. I'm just wondering, the minister talked about enhanced training activities. What would be involved in that?

* (11:50)

Ms. Howard: The Office of the Fire Commissioner is working with fire services in Winnipeg and Fire Paramedic Service in Winnipeg, Brandon and Saskatoon on developing training for their fire officers.

There's also work going on for—to develop fire officer training for rural officers as well as career firefighters. And, as well, the office—the college is working on its accreditation, which will be coming up in 2014, preparing to be reaccredited with the international body.

Mr. Cullen: That's certainly encouraging to hear, as the commissioner will know that some of our existing trainers out in the rural areas are—some of them are getting close to retirement, and I'm sure that they're looking forward to having some qualified staff be able to provide that training. And it's nice to have that training provided locally so that we, you know, we keep our fire services intact in rural communities. In fact, just this past year, my son actually attained his level 1, so he was pretty excited about that.

In terms of some of the building codes that were changed—and I'm referring to the—on the farm side of things—I understand now the Office of the Fire Commissioner is responsible for potentially inspection—inspections and approvals of some of the farm building codes now that fall under provincial regulation.

Just wondering if you could comment on how that's working out.

Ms. Howard: I believe those regulations came into place in 2010, and we worked very carefully with producer groups in developing those regulations, try to make sure that we had something that made sense for people, that would also protect the safety of agricultural workers.

We are currently in the midst of reviewing those regulations. There's a subcommittee that's been put together under the Building Standards Board that represents producer groups and others who are interested in that regulation. And some of that we'll be looking at what its application has been on the ground. There are, from time to time, been concerns with how it's being applied, and so we want to hear those and take a look to see if we need to make changes to the regulation.

I think we said when we brought it in it was a new area of regulation for the Building Standards Board and that we were going to, you know, proceed in a way that if there were problems with it, we would be open to making changes with it to make sure that it could serve the purpose which is to protect the safety of people who work in those operations.

We also have dedicated staff, one in Brandon, one in Winnipeg, to working with people who are constructing those buildings to make sure that we have some consistency in the advice that people are being given in how to meet the code, but I'll be very interested to see what comes forward as—from that review and what changes we need to make to those regulations.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, maybe the minister could clarify a process for me as much as anything. And I'm assuming there would be an application that a producer would make to construct a building once it's over that certain size, fall under the regulations, then just wondering what role the Office of the Fire Commissioner takes. They have a process to approve the application, and then is there a subsequent inspection done prior to the—I guess one would say, the official go ahead to use the facility? Is that how the process works or is there anything in there that I'm missing or is there any requirement for the Office of the Fire Commissioner to do inspections as the construction of the building progresses?

Ms. Howard: I think the process is probably similar to other buildings that fall under the building code, so if somebody want to build a building, they'll apply for a permit. The Office of the Fire Commissioner, in this case, of agricultural buildings, will review the

plans to make sure that they conform to the building code and then the Office of the Fire Commissioner will inspect throughout the building process with the goal—and, in the past, we've seen where, you know, people are able to work together at the planning process to make sure that, as much as possible, we're avoiding costly issues when a building starts getting built and things have to be changed.

* (12:00)

We've also, I think, been very open to other ways of doing things where, you know, it might—call them like a substitution or a different way of meeting the code than what is prescribed. Certainly, building officials are able to help to deal with that as well and, then, I guess, there'd be a final inspection and then it'd be—the permit would be provided.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I thank the minister for the comments. And I assume that's the same process that's undertaken for commercial buildings as well that that would fall under the provincial fire code. That's the intent is to have inspectors ongoing at facilities to check to make sure construction is being handled properly.

What is the onus of the Office of the Fire Commissioner if they see something isn't being done and either appears to be not up to code or something might be being done to short circuit the—what would be normal practices in construction? What undertaking does the office have at that point in time?

Ms. Howard: I'm informed that the usual process would be that either officials with the Office of the Fire Commissioner—sometimes, they're building officials with municipalities who have the authority to do those inspections. They'll inspect a project throughout the building of it. If something is found that isn't up to code, then they have the obligation to require that it be brought up to code to let the builder know or the permit holder know that they should be doing something to bring it up to code. And, I guess, ultimately, the building official or the official with the Office of the Fire Commissioner won't provide an occupancy permit until it is brought up to code.

Mr. Cullen: In terms of the application process, can the minister comment in terms of where the office is in terms of the timeliness of responding to applications? Do you have a criteria that you work towards meeting? You know, I'm just kind of interested in that process. I know, sometimes, you hear, you know, that we're having trouble getting a

response back from the Office of the Fire Commissioner that—some of those issues in my area go back some time. So I'm just wondering if we're dealing with those applications now, and approvals, in a fairly timely fashion.

Ms. Howard: I know the Office of the Fire Commissioner certainly strives for a timely response to people's applications for permits, and I know that people want to—often in Manitoba, the building season is short, and people want to get on with it. Sometimes, what can take more time is, you know, if it's a particularly complex or unusual project.

But, certainly, if the member has some constituents or some people who are having to wait in an inordinately long time. If you want to let me know, or you can let the Fire Commissioner know, we can try to find out what the delay is and make sure that people are getting that response in a timely way.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much.

I'm just wondering if the minister is looking at any change in regulations here over the next period of time, anywhere within her Department of Labour. Can we expect any regulation changes, any surprises along the way?

I know we're looking at, in terms of legislation, we're probably going to have some Sunday-shopping issues come forward. But I just wonder if there's other regulations that the minister might be thinking. And, I guess, I, you know, look back to—now we have the Fire Commissioner here, if there's going to be any changes on that side as well.

Ms. Howard: Well, certainly, I can't provide an exhaustive list of every regulation or piece of legislation we might do. It wouldn't be a surprise if I told the member everything that was coming.

But some of the work that I'm familiar with, that's ongoing, the Building Code has just recently updated, and it's on a five-year cycle, then. The National Building Code gets updated, and occasionally, we'll make changes that are specific to the situations in Manitoba.

I know in the past we've had some issues where the National Building Code will require something that, because of the climate here, is impossible or doesn't make sense to do, and so we'll make changes. But I believe the Building Code has recently been updated and I don't think we're looking at anything in the near future there.

I did speak earlier about the technical services review that is ongoing, to make sure that our inspections are aligned with the risk assessment and the technology, and where the field is at, in terms of boilers and elevators, and, all of the kinds of inspections. So, there may be some regulation changes that come out of that.

The Workplace Safety and Health review is ongoing and there may be regulation changes that come about as a result of that as well.

The Labour Management Review Committee is looking at a number of issues; Sunday shopping is one of them. But they've also been asked to look at any changes that we might make to deal with long duration strikes and lockouts.

I think we've also—I don't know what else we've asked them to take a look at. We ask them to take, from time to time—there are changes, labour law changes, in other jurisdictions, that require the Labour Management Review Committee to meet and discuss whether this would be something that Manitoba should do as well.

And then, I imagine, there will be some issues that we'll need to respond to. But that's my current understanding of where the department's focused on looking at regulatory changes or updates.

*(12:10)

Mr. Cullen: I thank you, Mr. Chair; I thank the minister for that response.

Just in looking at the organizational chart in the Estimates booklet, there's certainly a number of boards that, I guess, the minister is responsible for, assuming that the minister—and she can clarify that—that she will be responsible for appointing the members of those boards.

Would the minister endeavour to supply me a list of those people that she's appointed to those respective boards on the organizational chart?

Ms. Howard: I am responsible for appointing members of these boards, and we can get you a list of those appointments.

I would say that a number of these boards, their appointments are determined by stakeholder groups, so we'll ask, you know, we'll ask, for example, the Manitoba Labour Management Review Committee. We ask management to name some representatives; we ask Labour to name some representatives. I appoint them, but, really, I take my advice from the

stakeholder groups, and I think that's true for many of these boards, The construction industry, Wages Board, operates in the same way; the advisory council and Workplace Safety and Health, the Manitoba Labour Board, so we can provide you with the names.

I also believe that many of these boards should be on the government website for agencies, boards and commissions, which should have a membership list, but we can also provide you with the membership of those boards.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you, and I appreciate that, if you would.

There's a policy and planning group within the department there. Could you—is that policy and planning just within your particular department? Could you explain the—little more the role of the policy and planning committee?

Ms. Howard: The policy and planning area that the member's looking at is on the Family Services side and so they're responsible for policy initiatives within Family Services.

In the past, I think they've been involved in supporting things like the anti-poverty initiative of government, the ALL Aboard Committee. I think they've done—they're doing some work with the Domestic Violence Review of services. They're not in any way attached to the planning and priority committee of Cabinet.

Mr. Cullen: Is—within the department, and, again, looking on the Labour side of things, is there any secondments to the department from any other department? Or, I guess, in that matter, as well, from Workers' Compensation Board, if there's been any staff seconded by the department?

Ms. Howard: The only secondment that I'm aware of is Tina Choy-Pohl, who joins us at the table, who's on secondment from Finance and who is working in the financial division of the Labour program side.

Mr. Cullen: So has there been any people from your department seconded to any other department that you're aware of? And just—I did mention the Workers Compensation Board. Is there any secondments either back or forth there?

Ms. Howard: There are no secondments between the department and Workers Compensation Board, and I'm not aware of any secondments from the department to other departments. There may be some

internal movement from position to position, but I don't think that would qualify as a secondment.

Mr. Cullen: Has the minister had any out-of-province trips in relation to the Labour file?

Ms. Howard: I did travel a couple weeks ago to Halifax for the Status of Women federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting, and I did travel the year before to also the Status of Women federal-provincial-territorial meeting, which was held in Gatineau in Québec.

And we had a Labour ministers' meeting that was held in Winnipeg, so that was easy to get to, and the previous Labour ministers' meeting, I think, was in Ottawa, I believe—was in Ottawa. But I think that's the sum total of my travel on behalf of the Department of Labour.

But we can—I think those—there is a disclosure on the web as well. If you go to the departmental website, there is a disclosure there of all my travel, and, except for the trip a couple weeks ago, I think it's all up-to-date, so you should be able to find everything there.

Mr. Cullen: Yes. Was there any travel by the Premier (Mr. Selinger), or a delegation led by the Premier, that was paid for by the Department of Family Services and Labour?

Ms. Howard: No.

Mr. Cullen: Would you be able to provide a list of senior staff who have retired from the department in 2010-11 and 2011 and '12? And, again, my interest would be on the Labour side.

Ms. Howard: Thank you. I don't have that with me but we can provide that to you.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister be able to provide a list of individuals that have been hired on a contractual basis by the department over the last two fiscal years?

Ms. Howard: Just for clarification: Is the member asking for staff positions that we contract for, like term positions? Are you looking for external contracts or—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Spruce Woods.

Mr. Cullen: Yes. I would—I'm interested in any staff that are working on that contracted basis as well, if you would.

Ms. Howard: I'm not aware of any, but we'll certainly double-check, and if there are, we'll provide you that information.

Mr. Cullen: Yes. I'm thinking about fees here that may be charged by the Department of Labour for inspections and, you know, notwithstanding, I know a lot of the fees will be collected by the Office of the Fire Commissioner for the role they play. But is there fees collected by the department themselves for any—any services that they provide? If the minister would endeavour to get that for me—I don't need that now, but if she could provide a list of those fees and what they're in regard to.

Ms. Howard: Yes, we can get you a list of fees from the Department of Labour. I think they would primarily be in the area of the office of the superintendent for pensions. There's some fees charged for the registration of pension plans, and I think there are also some fees charged in the Employment Standards division for inspections and things like that, but we'll get you a list of them.

* (12:20)

Mr. Cullen: I'm wondering what—I know there's a reference in the Estimates book to some—it would pertain to advertising. There's some programs in their set-up to specifically let people know about the various items within the department.

I'm wondering what the department's budgeting is for advertising—if the minister could provide me a breakdown in terms of the programs that she will be advertising over the course of the year. And what are those? Are they going to be radio or print material? If the minister would be able to provide those figures for me at a point down the road?

Ms. Howard: Yes, we can provide that information. Our advertising tends to be pretty small within the Department of Labour, usually related to regulation changes that people need to know about. Like, we will do some advertising around the increase to the minimum wage; usually, it's print ads. I don't believe we do any radio ads about that—and on the website, and let employers know.

We did do—and I don't know if it was last year or the year before—we did some advertising around significant changes to The Pension Benefits Act and regulations and trying to, I think, with a goal to also try to engage people in learning about pensions. But I don't expect—we don't have any that I can think of, advertising campaigns planned for the next year, beyond letting people know about regulation

changes. If we carry out public consultations, we might do some advertising around that, depending on, I think, the results of the Accessibility Advisory Council's work. There may be some advertising related to that.

But we can provide you with some numbers, but it'll be very small, I think.

Mr. Cullen: I have a copy of a letter here that was sent by the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook) to the minister. And it was in regard to a couple of employees that were involved in a workplace over at the Norquay Building regarding some metal—or, pardon me, some locksmithing operations, and I understand there's been some changes over there. And then we did have a response back from Mr. Hurst just, here, at the end of March, and I'm just—it sounds like there's certainly some, you know, some potential health issues there that have been impacted by people that were working for the Province.

And I'm just wondering if the minister is aware of that situation and that everything is being done within her department to address the—those respective issues pertaining to those people.

Ms. Howard: I do recall this letter and this situation, and I believe what we did was we certainly referred those concerns to Workplace Safety and Health. We have an industrial hygienist which—I can't tell you exactly why they're called that; I can never actually been able to figure out what industrial hygiene means, but we have had that person who, I think, specializes in things like air quality, attend to that building and do an investigation and other place from Workplace Safety and Health, and they would certainly be sharing any findings with—I think it's Government Services that would operate that building if there's any need to remedy the situation.

I can endeavour to get more recent information for the member and share that with him or share it directly with the member for La Verendrye. But I believe that's where that situation is at.

Mr. Cullen: Obviously, the concern I think that we would have would be, you know, the individuals that were working there in the past to make sure that, you know, whatever ailments or health issues that they have had related to their occupation be addressed.

So, you know, it appears that there—Mr. Hurst here, is sending us to Workers Compensation Board, and I just want to make sure that the minister is

aware of that and make sure that those people are dealt with at the Workers Compensation Board fairly and that's really the 'cruft' of the matter in this particular issue.

Ms. Howard: The Workers Compensation Board has a very good system of assessing workers who have been injured or who have industrial diseases, and they will do that assessment. There'll be some medical assessments generally carried out as well, and some assessment of what they're able to do in work, and then they'll make a determination of benefits.

I don't get personally involved in cases of the Workers Compensation Board. There is an appeal mechanism available for workers who feel that they haven't received the benefits that they're entitled to and that can happen. We also have the Worker Advisor Office which is within Employment Standards that these constituents could also contact if they're having difficulty accessing Workers Compensation, and we also do have staff that can also help guide those constituents to make sure that they're getting through the right door.

So, if there is a problem for them accessing those benefits, although I can't interfere in the assessment by Workers Compensation Board, we can certainly help make sure they're pointed in the right direction and that they're getting assistance that they require in qualifying for Workers Compensation benefits.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the minister's response there.

One parting comment I would like to leave with the minister, it's somewhat relevant to her department and I'm going to talk about the apprenticeship programs.

We have a number of people from my community constituency come here to Red River to take the apprenticeship—various apprenticeship programs. A lot of them are only, you know, eight-week courses, and the challenge for rural people coming to the city is accommodations.

As you can appreciate, it's almost impossible to find a—an apartment to rent for eight weeks at a time and it's a challenge for rural people to take the apprenticeship course, and I would hope in discussions with other ministers within government that we look at something in terms of short-term housing relative to, you know, Red River community college.

I wonder if the minister would pass that on to her colleagues.

Ms. Howard: Thanks very much for that feedback. I do—because, as the member opposite knows, I grew up in Brandon, so I am aware of some of the challenges when you have to come into Winnipeg to take courses or do other things, particularly finding accommodation.

I know we are very keen to have more people participate in apprenticeships. That's why we've expanded the number of apprenticeship opportunities and very keen also because we all know that we need those skilled tradespeople to build the economy, but, also, certainly to fix things around our houses.

So I will raise that with my colleagues, but also encourage him, perhaps, to also raise it either with the Minister for ETT or Advanced Education. I'm not sure where—I had thought, at one point, Red River College was looking at some student residence options. I'm not sure if they still are looking at that. That might be—if the programs are at Red River, that might be a possible solution. But I agree with the

member that finding accommodation in Winnipeg is very, very challenging, especially on a short-term basis.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I see we're pretty well out of time for today, so I just—I guess in closing, I want to thank the minister and her staff for our discussion this morning. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss some issues within Labour.

Certainly is a lot of other issues out there we didn't get to, but, anyway, I appreciate the discussion we had and certainly hope you all have a good weekend.

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Tom Nevakshonoff): The hour being 12:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday. Have a good weekend.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 18, 2012

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