

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	Ind.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: On a matter of privilege.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, a matter of privilege is a serious thing and, under section 34 of our rule book, should be taken into consideration immediately. The two conditions that must be satisfied in order for the matter to be raised are: (1) according to Beauchesne's section 115, a question of privilege must be brought to the attention of the House at the first possible opportunity; and (2) whether there is sufficient evidence provided to establish a prima facie case of privilege.

First, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the Chamber the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) rose to respond to questions that I had asked about the Ombudsman's report issued April 1st, 2014. I listened carefully to the response of the minister and I became concerned as she was putting incorrect information on the record. When the Hansard for yesterday's question period became available I took the opportunity to review it and I verified the minister's comments. I also took the opportunity to reread the Manitoba Ombudsman's report issued April 1st, 2014. Having taken these steps, I am now raising the issue. I would submit to you that this is my first opportunity to raise the matter.

On the second matter, I thank you for the opportunity to demonstrate in this context that there is sufficient evidence to establish a prima facie case of privilege. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, in question period I posed questions to the Minister of Finance

on the subject of the recent Ombudsman's report dated April 1st, 2014. The minister rose and responded to my question, and she said the following, and I quote: I do want to draw the member's attention to what the Ombudsman report actually says. What it actually says is that Manitoba Finance has no records. And she concludes remarks by saying that this was the finding of the Ombudsman's report. End quote.

I am very concerned about the information that the Minister of Finance has put on the record. She clearly indicated in her response that she was citing the finding of the Ombudsman's report. However, a quick review of the report reveals that the minister did not quote from the findings of the Ombudsman's report. Rather, what she quoted was the section of the report early on where the position of Manitoba Finance is established.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The Ombudsman's report follows a structure. It includes a summary of an issue. It includes a complaint. It includes the position of the party against whom the action is initiated, and later on the report includes an analysis of issues and findings and, finally, there is a summary of findings.

When the minister replied yesterday she led members of this Chamber to believe that she was citing the information from the summary of findings. She said, and I quote: "That was the finding of the Ombudsman's report." End quote. However, what she was doing was restating the position of her own department.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister has the right to restate the position of her own department. She has the right to speak with people within her department. She has a right to understand better what the department has or has not done with respect to this matter. But what she does not have the right to do is to quote one statement from an Ombudsman's investigation and report, to take it out of context, to convey it to this body of legislators and to suggest, to state, that what she is doing is citing the conclusion of the Ombudsman.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister said she was—the Minister of Finance said she was saying what the Ombudsman's report actually found. In fact, the

summary of findings of the Ombudsman's report is very clear. There were two findings; they are reported on page 5 of the report and neither one of those findings supports the minister's claim. The minister made the assertion not once but twice. There can be no defence that her actions were inadvertent or unintentional. She knew what she was doing and she chose to restate her position in her supplementary response.

Mr. Speaker, I say again, this is a serious issue. The Minister of Finance misled this House and knowingly put false information on the official record of this Legislature.

And it is obvious that the minister did not appreciate the line of questioning that I was pursuing yesterday in question period. I would submit there are many times when government ministers would rather not answer the questions that are posed to them by myself or my colleagues. But the foundation of our parliamentary system is that ministers do respond to the questions that are posed to them in the context of these proceedings. The fact that I was asking her questions about the Ombudsman's report that are—or the fact is that I was asking her questions about the Ombudsman's report that are exposing a clear sensitivity on the part of this government. That does not give her a right to put inaccurate information on the record.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this matter meets the fundamental test that it makes it impossible for me to carry out my duties as a parliamentarian. I take very seriously the responsibility that I've been charged with as a member of this Assembly, and I know that all of my colleagues here on this side take their responsibilities like that very seriously. As a member of the Assembly it is my responsibility to bring forward concerns on behalf of my constituents and on behalf of all Manitobans, and when the minister knowingly puts erroneous information on the record it makes it impossible for me as a member of the Legislature to perform my duties. How can constituents, how can Manitobans have confidence as I bring forward information if the minister plays fast and loose with the facts in order to gain political advantage and curtail discussion and employ strategies by putting false information on the record? It makes it less likely for Manitobans to bring forward information because they feel disenfranchised and discouraged and believe that their concerns won't meet a fair hearing, that their information will be altered, misused, distorted or diminished.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the minister's actions display a fundamental lack of respect not only to the opposition party and not only to this Manitoba Legislature but to the Ombudsman's office. The Manitoba Ombudsman takes his role very seriously on behalf of Manitobans to operate at arm's length as an independent watchdog acting on behalf of Manitobans and keeping their best interests at heart. It is reprehensible that the hard work that went into this report, the phone calls, the investigation, the background, the fact-finding is undermined by a minister who misstates the findings of that very report. In the same way, the minister's actions display a disregard for the civil service.

*(13:40)

Mr. Speaker, facts matter, and this minister has tried to play fast and loose with the facts. This minister is welcome to her own opinion, but she is not welcome to her own facts.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to rise and set the record straight.

Therefore, I move, seconded by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that this issue of the Minister of Finance's inaccurate information placed on the record with respect to the findings of the Ombudsman's report be referred to a committee of this House.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): I'm happy to rise and clarify for the member the remarks that I made yesterday, and I will admit that perhaps I made a mistake in paraphrasing the report, and so I will read directly from the report for the member.

On page 2 of the Ombudsman's report it says, in terms of the public body's position that records do not exist, Manitoba Finance indicated that it has no records of a 9 per cent RST proposal being requested or put forward for consideration as part of the budget process. In other words, there are no records that reflect the possibility of a 9 per cent RST or that indicate the government or department considered proposing a 9 per cent RST.

Now, it could be that I should have read that directly. I will accept that as a future reminder that for this member I should stick directly to the documents and not attempt to paraphrase things for him. But when I look at that and also when I looked at the fact that the Ombudsman upheld the position of Manitoba Finance in the complaint, my conclusion is that the Ombudsman would not put the position of Manitoba Finance in there if he believed

it was a false position, if his investigation did not bear that out. Perhaps I'm wrong about that, and I am happy to discuss that with the Ombudsman if I am.

But, clearly, Mr. Speaker, this is nothing more than a dispute over the facts, and, frankly, for a member who spent most of his time in Estimates denying that the recession ever happened, an accusation that I'm playing fast and loose with the facts is a little bit rich.

Mr. Speaker: I will hear the honourable member for River Heights if he has some information that perhaps has not been already shared with the House at this point.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker. I think that the clarification that was needed and came in part from the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) was that this, in fact, was not the Ombudsman's finding. It was the report from the Minister of Finance and her department to the Ombudsman that she was quoting, and so there was some, you know, misleading of the House in the fact that it came across as if this was a finding of the report.

I think that the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) has, you know, put this well, that the—this matter has been clarified and, you know, it could go to a legislative committee to work out some additional details of how things should be presented in the future.

But I think we do have a clarification from the minister that she was actually talking about her own views, not necessarily the Ombudsman's views. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: On the matter of privilege raised by the honourable member for Morden-Winkler, I thank all honourable members for their advice on this matter.

As all members know, I take matters of privilege and points of order very seriously, as I've indicated before, and it is my intent to take this matter under advisement and to consult with our procedural authorities to make sure that I can bring back a fair ruling for the House, and I will do just that.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills? Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions. No petitions?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Third Report

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Chairperson): I'd like to wish—to present the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Third Report.

Meetings:

Your Committee met on April 8, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration:

- *The Appointment of the Children's Advocate*

Committee Membership:

- *Hon. Ms. BLADY*
- *Mr. BRIESE*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Mr. JHA*
- *Hon. Ms. MARCELINO (Logan)*
- *Mr. MARCELINO (Tyndall Park)*
- *Mr. NEVAKSHONOFF*
- *Mrs. ROWAT*
- *Hon. Mr. SWAN*
- *Mr. WISHART*

Your Committee elected Mr. JHA as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. MARCELINO (Tyndall Park) as the Vice-Chairperson.

Motions:

Your Committee agreed to the following motion:

- *THAT the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs recommends to the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council that Ms. Darlene MacDonald be re-appointed as the Children's Advocate.*

Mr. Jha: I move, seconded by the honourable member for the Interlake, that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Any further committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, tabling of reports.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table the fourth-quarter financial report for Manitoba Public Insurance, 12 months ended February 28, 2014.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports? Seeing none, ministerial statements?

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: I have no guests to introduce at the current time, so we'll proceed directly to oral questions.

PST Increase Apology Request

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I want to offer my thanks to the member from 'southwood' for her apology yesterday. I think it was the right thing to do and I respect the fact that she offered the apology. I know others have criticized her for the delays in offering it, but she did offer it, and I respect that, and I thank her.

I want to say also that I think it's important for all of us to remember that our words have consequences, not just for people here, and when we engage in partisan rhetoric, of course, we understand that we may well hurt one another, and at times we do, and perhaps unnecessarily so. But we must always bear in mind that there are others outside of here who pay attention to these proceedings who we may hurt as well, and it's important for us to reflect on the reality that words can hurt. They can also heal.

The Premier has promised repeatedly—he did promise repeatedly he would not raise the PST. The member opposite took a couple of weeks to consider and then to apologize. The Premier has had a full year now to consider, and he needs to understand that his words have consequences.

I would like him to offer his apology to the people of Manitoba for increasing the PST when he said he would not.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have certainly expressed my regret about catching Manitobans by surprise on a very serious situation we had prior to the last year's budget where it was

very clear that we had a report that came in three weeks before the budget that recommended up to \$1 billion of expenditure on the flood.

We saw the economy recovering more slowly than anticipated, and we believed it was necessary to have a very clear focus on an agenda for jobs and the economy, including infrastructure, and to do it in such a way that we did not impair our ability to offer essential services to Manitoba, and continue to build schools and hospitals.

But I do say to the member opposite, if he wants to lead by example, it was the Free Press that on January 13 asked him to apologize for the comments he made about a letter he sent to the editor implying that some Manitobans were not being served in terms of health care based on need but that other factors were determining who got access to health care. And I want to offer him the opportunity today to apologize for that. Now it's—and now we've been now waiting for three months for that apology.

Mr. Pallister: I won't apologize for rhetorical questions, but the Premier should apologize for actions, actual actions, which reflect in a real way on the people of the province.

So the PST was hiked. The PST was hiked and the Premier promised he wouldn't hike it. That's the reality. He also knew well in advance that he was considering. As his colleagues know, they were fully considering raising it before the election. The went to the doors of the people of the province and this city, and they said they wouldn't. They made a solemn vow. But then they proceeded to do so. They broadened the PST immediately after the election. They then raised the PST a year later.

And he says he's surprised by a report on a flood, and that's his excuse. But that's all it is, Mr. Speaker. It's just an excuse, and a pathetic excuse.

The real consequences for Manitoba families are being felt. The Premier needs to apologize. If he recognizes the damage he and his government are doing to the people of Manitoba, he will now apologize.

* (13:50)

Mr. Selinger: We did go out and consult Manitobans about the 1-cent-on-the-dollar increase in the PST. And Manitobans said to us, if you're going to do something like that, make sure it goes—they said to us, make sure it goes into critical infrastructure. We heard that message.

Critical infrastructure means flood protection for Manitobans, and we committed very early on in the budget process. After the budget of spring '13, we committed to \$250 million for long-term flood protection in the Assiniboine valley, Brandon, Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

We launched a more vigorous five-year plan on infrastructure this spring in our budget where every dollar, according to the Conference Board of Canada, will generate \$1.16 in benefits, \$6-billion lift to the economy, 58,900 jobs. And we've been out listening to Manitobans about what specific infrastructure projects they would like to see mounted.

We did an announcement yesterday in Steinbach with the mayor and council of Steinbach to repave the main streets, the main intersections where there are safety concerns. We moved over to Ste. Anne and talked about Highway No. 12 on both sides of Ste. Anne, and then the minister—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the trouble with the Premier's logic, his conference-board logic—a dollar spun into gold, a buck sixteen when he spends it—is it didn't do any analysis of how much good that dollar could have done on the kitchen tables of Manitobans when they spend it. That's the problem.

From a government that doesn't understand gross and net and doesn't get the difference in a dollar in the hands of a Manitoban versus them, I would have to ask the Premier: Does he understand that Manitobans are losing money as a consequence of his decisions? Manitobans have less money to spend; Manitobans can contribute less to the growth in this economy.

And when he puffs his own ability at the expense of others in this province, he is demeaning and belittling them. That's what he's done. But most importantly, he's shown disrespect to those same people by promising he would not do these things and now making excuses when he does them after.

Now, the fact of the matter is this government can't get its 'sory'—its story straight. The song is the same, but the story itself changes. Two days ago the Finance Minister said that they were raising the PST so that they could protect front-line services—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition's time has expired.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that when you have a stimulus program, 5 and a half billion dollars invested in infrastructure, and that's going to generate 58,900 additional jobs in Manitoba, that means Manitobans are getting a paycheque to take home. That means there will be increased productivity in our economy.

As the American economy, North American economy recovers, we will be able to ship goods to market more efficiently. And particularly during times of floods, the roads will be in better shape, at a higher level of quality, at a higher level, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, and that will make a big difference not only in the short term but in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite were demanding infrastructure investments every single day in this Legislature. Now they're voting against it and objecting to the resources we've dedicated to that.

We're doing it to keep the economy going. We're doing it to create good jobs in Manitoba. We're doing it while keeping the cost of living in Manitoba affordable. The disposable income has been increased by 70 per cent for Manitobans. It went down 30 per cent—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable First Minister's time has expired.

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

PST Revenue Government Intention

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, it's, again, an example of the lack of integrity of this government which now tries to hang its hat on a promise to spend money on something it didn't spend money on for years.

The reality is this government underspent by 27 per cent. Every \$4 since this Premier came to office that was promised to go to infrastructure, the government spent less than \$3—less than \$3. The only department in this government that's been underspent has been Infrastructure, and now the Premier wants to claim he's the saviour of Manitoba's infrastructure, which he's neglected and ignored for years. So it's an infrastructure lie, and that's a fact. This government's tried everything else and now it's trying another line of attack.

But the other day the Finance Minister said the PST was hiked to protect front-line services. Now,

either she's right or he's right. The Premier told me in Estimates every dollar was going into infrastructure; the Finance Minister says it's not.

So who's telling the truth here, the Finance Minister or the Premier?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we're both right and the Leader of the Opposition is wrong. That's the result.

The resources, the additional resources, as requested by Manitobans, are being dedicated to infrastructure, an additional \$1.5 billion in infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, we've also dedicated another \$420 million over and above that to match the Building Canada Fund from the federal government, which is less than 5 per cent of the total program we've put forward. We've maintained the \$720 million in the base, so we're ramping it up: \$5.5 billion over the next five years, including the PST. That will make a gigantic difference in the quality of life, in the productivity of our economy, in jobs for Manitobans, in economic growth.

That is the direction that all Canadians are asking their governments to take right now. We're moving on that in Manitoba. We hope to do it not only in Manitoba but across the country. It's critical that we keep the Canadian economy growing, including the Manitoba economy.

Infrastructure Spending Request to Table Projects

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): What's critical for the Premier is selling Manitobans on the PST, nothing more, nothing less, and that's why he's making the argument now that he failed to support with his actions for four years.

Now, Saskatchewan spent 1 per cent less over those same four years, 1 per cent less than they promised they would spend, 1 per cent less.

This government spent 28 per cent; \$1.9 billion they promised to spend on infrastructure was not spent on infrastructure. Now they want us to believe they're going to spend it on infrastructure.

I asked the Premier for a list of the projects that were cancelled or postponed over the previous four years in Estimates just so we could do an analysis of which of these promises they're only keeping belatedly, and the Premier declined on seven occasions to commit to provide that information, yet talks about transparency and talks about openness,

yet refuses to provide information that is requested of him.

Now, I ask him: If he wants to be believable, try harder to be believable. Provide us with the information we ask. Will he do so?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we have said in the five-year plan we will be fully accountable for the money that we spend in the five-year plan.

The member knows that the trend line—and I provided him a document to show that—is an increase in infrastructure spending every year. There are some times when it goes up and down, but the clear trend line has been up over the last several years, a very significant lift in infrastructure spending in the economy for roads, for flood protection, for hospitals, for schools. All of these things had been invested in and the trend line was there. I provided that evidence to him in the House, and he is fully aware of that. I also made it clear to him that if he has a specific project he wants to know about, we'd be happy to provide that to him.

We are saying that we will be accountable for the 10-year program that we've worked up—rolled out on the PST. It's a 10-year program; we're into the first year of that program as we speak. We're rolling out specific announcements based on what Manitobans have told us are their priorities.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that. He still has the option today to make his apologies for statements he's made for which he has never apologized.

EMS Patient Safety Concerns Highway and Road Conditions

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Well, it's obvious that this Premier and this government does not know the meaning of the word of accountability, what it means.

Indeed, patient safety is a priority of paramedics in Manitoba. That patient safety is compromised by Manitoba's crumbling roads. Paramedics are hard-working hard to stabilize the patients as they are transported to medical facilities. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine the challenge of intubating a patient or putting in an intravenous line as you bounce around or drive around potholes?

This NDP government has ignored roads and critical infrastructure for years, underspending why—\$1.9 billion over the last four years.

How can this Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) ensure patient and paramedic safety when their government has ignored the roads for so long?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the opportunity to ask—to answer a question in terms of infrastructure in this House.

And I want to put on the record that when the members opposite were in government, they left with a \$90-million capital program; this year it's \$542 million.

And I don't know if the member opposite has been paying attention, a significant amount of it is being invested in Westman. We had a major announcement out in western Manitoba. We had a major announcement in The Pas last week.

But I thought what really summed it up was in Steinbach and Ste. Anne yesterday. In fact, I wish I had a copy of the clipping from the Steinbach Carillon because it stated and the headline, Mr. Speaker, was, Province pours money into southeastern roads.

*(14:00)

Mr. Helwer: Well, Mr. Speaker, again we have confusion on the other side of the House.

Perhaps we have a new Minister of Health, but it is incumbent on the Minister of Health to ensure patient safety. This NDP government puts patient safety at risk every day because they have failed to maintain Manitoba's roads. Failed promises and \$1.9 billion underspent on Manitoba roads.

Mr. Speaker, how can this Minister of Health ensure Manitobans that patients and paramedics are safe when her government has ignored roads for so long?

Mr. Ashton: Well, it's pretty rich, members opposite talking about infrastructure, given their record. And we know it's pretty rich for them to be talking about health care in this province, because what we've recognized over the last several years is the need for a long-term plan. In fact, you, Mr. Speaker, were a key part of that in your former role.

We put in place a significant investment. We took situations like Highway 75, which was an embarrassment in 1999 when we came into office, we're now upgrading it to interstate standards. We took Highway 1—we've already extended it to the

border of Saskatchewan. We're now investing more than \$300 million in that highway.

I could run through the list of capital projects, but, again, members opposite talk infrastructure; they voted against every single one of those projects.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, paramedics often have to perform life-saving interventions in the back of ambulances as they bounce down Manitoba's pothole-filled roads.

This Minister of Health has put patient safety at risk. Core infrastructure has been damaged by years of underspending, \$1.9 billion dollars underspent.

Does this Minister of Health track any serious or critical incidents involving ambulances, paramedics and patient transfers that have been impaired or impacted by poor roads?

Mr. Ashton: You know, Mr. Speaker, they didn't do it when they were in government; they did not invest in infrastructure.

Over the last number of years, what they've done consistently in question period—once in a while, they advocate for a project, but, you know, when they had a chance last budget, and, you know, it was a difficult decision for this government, but when we put in place the 1 cent on the dollar that's going to provide \$300 million to invest in our infrastructure, what did they do? They voted against it.

So, Mr. Speaker—[interjection] Well, they applaud. I can't think of anything more hypocritical than voting against \$300 million worth of infrastructure and then getting up today and lecturing us on infrastructure.

I want to stress again, when it comes to infrastructure, when it comes to health care, we don't need lectures from members opposite.

STARS Service Age of Helicopter

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago this Minister of Health set off a political storm when, in answer to one of my questions, she accused the Tories of wilfully allowing babies to die.

I would like to ask that specific question again: How old is the STARS helicopter?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): I will answer as I did more recently in our Estimates that

we'd—happy to provide any information like that that she has.

We know that the helicopter is about—built in about 1991, I believe, but it has had some upgrades since then, including adding night vision to the helicopter service so that it can fly 24-7.

We know right now, of course, that the helicopter, on the advice of our medical professionals, is doing only scene calls, but we are working together with our Clinical Oversight Panel, with Dr. Brian Postl leading that panel, to guide us back into full resumption of service, because we know Manitobans depend on being able to count on the air helicopter service that STARS provides.

We know they provide a valuable service. We know they provide a front-line service to many rural Manitobans.

STARS Lottery Taxpayer Protection

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I was alarmed to hear yesterday from the minister in Health in Estimates that Manitoba taxpayers had to shell out half a million dollars to pay for STARS Lottery prizes.

One of the prizes was a \$1.1-million house. It appears that Manitoba taxpayers had to pay for half of that million-dollar show home.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us: Why were Manitoba taxpayers on the hook for paying STARS Lottery prizes?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Of course, our focus with STARS is on patient safety, as is theirs, and we know that part of their funding model is that they do some fundraising. Now, we know when they first came into the province, it didn't go as well as they thought. They know that as well.

But I will say today, as I said it several times yesterday in Estimates, Manitoba Health will not be covering any financial shortfalls or losses that may have occurred with the STARS Lottery. I said it many times yesterday and I'd be happy to say it many times today.

Mrs. Driedger: In 2012-13, STARS was supposed to raise \$2 million in fundraising to help pay for the service. They raised only \$177,000. The minister of Health said that they actually knew that STARS would have a hard time fundraising that first year.

She admitted her government knew that STARS would have a hard time.

So I'd like to ask her to tell us: Why didn't she and her government put in any taxpayer protection into the service purchase agreement at that time? Why should taxpayers now have to pay for a dream house, a Mercedes, a trip to Vegas or any of the other number of prizes that were offered? Where was the protection for taxpayers?

Ms. Selby: I will say it again for the member, clearly didn't hear me yesterday when I said very clearly that Manitoba Health will not be covering any potential shortfalls or losses that may have occurred with the STARS Lottery. None of those will be covered by government.

Agriculture Offices Update (Sanford)

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): While the majority of MLAs utilized the recent spring break to reconnect with constituents and communities, the Minister of Agriculture was busy closing more ag offices in the constituency of Morris. I'm not sure why the minister and his government are so determined on closing ag offices in my constituency, not sure if it's their unwillingness—the residents of Morris's unwillingness to vote NDP. But regardless of their motive, Mr. Speaker, the facts remain that closures have occurred and continue to occur.

Can the Minister of Agriculture advise when the ag office in Sanford is due for closure?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): Obviously, we've had this conversation with the member opposite a couple weeks ago. I thought I was fairly clear in my statement to the member opposite.

As we talked about, the Morris office is not going to be closed, whether it's the MASC office, the GO offices. I don't know how many times I have to repeat myself, but I do want to reinforce the fact that the Morris office is not going to be closed.

Mr. Martin: You know, I'll have to assume that the Minister of Agriculture is a victim of NDP education or the lack thereof. I mean, there is a little feature called Google Maps that may help the minister determine that Sanford is, in fact, not in the town of Morris. So he seems to be a little bit confused there.

So the minister is sending out news releases as recently as March 18th advising and encouraging producers to attend their local GO offices to find out

information, and yet when they go to these GO offices, they're simply told to go away.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Agriculture: When is the ag office in the community of Sanford, Manitoba, scheduled for closure?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Obviously, I think, as the member opposite lives in an agriculture area and really does understand or hopefully understands the agriculture industry, is that the individuals do not need to walk into every ag office, and, in fact, compliments to the members opposite where the producers today would love to sit in their tractor and use cellphones and talk to the ag office or ag producers. That doesn't necessarily mean that they have to be there in person. To have to jump off their tractor, get in the half-ton to drive to the ag, that does not exist anymore. The reality is what he thought was 20 years ago is not what the agriculture farmer does today, and until they accept that we will not see any change.

So right about now, Mr. Speaker, we are thinking about innovation ideas, and we want to work with the producers, but the end of the day we will be working with producers and we will continue to work with the producers. Thank you so much.

Mr. Martin: I'm absolutely shocked that the minister opposite would encourage distracted driving, obviously a scourge on Manitoba's roads and fields.

The minister continues to spout promises of due diligence and review, but it's pretty clear that his review is concluded.

I understand the minister's confusion about the status of ag offices throughout the constituency of Morris. Considerably, the list of 15 is growing, and maybe it'd be simpler if the minister simply tabled a list to this House of those ag offices that'll remain open after this recent rout of closures.

* (14:10)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Obviously, I think the member opposite's never had any grease or topsoil underneath his fingernails, because he does not know what it's like to be a farmer.

I'm going to share some information. Let me be honest with the member opposite. If he chooses to pretend to be a farmer, let him deal for 35 years of his life like I had to do, and we had to live through the situation.

Let me be repetitious. Let me talk about the great announcement we made today about livestock price insurance. We are there to help out the cattle industry. We were there to help out the pork industry. We are there to help out the grain industry.

And let's be very clear. What was the importance of the Canadian Wheat Board and the logistic grain movement that we see today? Where were the members opposite when we talked about Canadian Wheat Board and the situation the grain producers are?

That's my commentary. And get familiar with the agriculture, to the member from Morris.

Former MPI President Consultant Contract

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I'd trust any member on this side of the House to stand up for farmers better than that minister.

Mr. Speaker, on February 21st of this year, the president and the CEO of Manitoba Public Insurance retired, and I wish her well in her retirement. But a mere 30 days after she retired, she signed a contract as a consultant with Manitoba Public Insurance. This despite the fact that the Executive Council conflict-of-interest act says there has to be a one-year cooling-off period before a senior civil servant can sign on to another contract or get remuneration from the government.

MPI ratepayers want to know, and they deserve to know, why the NDP government felt the need to skirt the law to bring back somebody and hire them to a contract who had just retired 30 days prior.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Indeed, I don't believe the member opposite or any member of this House will disagree that Marilyn McLaren has provided over three decades of tremendous service to Manitoba Public Insurance. Over three decades with MPI, the last nine years as president and chief executive officer, and over that time, Mr. Speaker, in her tenure as CEO, Manitobans enjoyed a cumulative overall rate decrease of 14.9 per cent.

It is not unusual, whether it's a private corporation or a public corporation, that a resigning president stays on for a limited period of time to assist the transition to new leadership. That is a very routine thing to do.

We are satisfied that this is going to be good for MPI and it will be good for ratepayers. That's why I took the matter to Cabinet, as required by the act, and that's why Cabinet has agreed it is in the best interest of ratepayers.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, it's very unusual. That's why there's a law that says you can't do it.

The former president of MPI retired and then 30 days later she was hired back by MPI.

I want to ask the minister a simple question: How large was the severance package for the MPI president to retire for 30 days?

Mr. Swan: First of all, I will point out to the member opposite 19.1(1) of the act, which provides that if a CEO is to be retained, that can happen through approval of Cabinet. I believe that was the right thing for MPI to do for the ratepayers of this province.

And, again, this is a very common thing in major public or private corporations. And, indeed, there's a press release that was issued on Sunday, April 6th, by Potash Corporation in Saskatchewan announcing the selection of their new president and CEO and confirming that their previous president and CEO will remain employed with the company as a senior adviser through June 2015. I'll table this for the minister—or for the member opposite so perhaps he can be aware of how things actually work in the real world, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I'll call the police and tell them to stop the search. Whenever there's a law broken, we should have known, go right to Cabinet first because that's usually where the law is broken.

But the question still isn't answered, Mr. Speaker. The MPI president retired for 30 days, not a very long retirement, but presumably she got a severance package. And I want to know what the severance package was for retiring for 30 days from MPI. Ratepayers deserve to know because they're paying for this through their insurance premiums.

How much was the severance to retire for 30 days?

Mr. Swan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat, we are going to have Marilyn McLaren offering her expertise which has been gained over 30 years with Manitoba Public Insurance, including the last nine years as the chief executive officer—officer of MPI, a time when, once again, Manitobans have

experienced great service from MPI and also a reduction in rates that are unheard of in any other province in Canada.

And it has been put forward, and we have agreed that it makes sense, to have the new CEO and to have MPI—the ability to have Marilyn McLaren continue for a limited time to provide her expertise to make sure there's an orderly transition and make sure that Manitobans continue to have the best auto insurance in the entire country.

Manitoba Hydro Employees Pole Replacement Contract

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier talked about the changes he's making to Manitoba Hydro.

He failed to mention that while Hydro may be lowering the amount in the bookkeeping line called maintenance, Hydro is actually just transferring the expenses to the capital budget, and now actually resulting in an overall expense that is higher, not lower, because contracting out the replacing hydro poles is now a capital expense that can be two to three times more costly than doing the exact same job through internal personnel.

Why is the Premier saying he's going to help Hydro workers and then doing the opposite?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): As I said, Mr. Speaker, there's close to 700 additional linemen in Manitoba. We made a commitment in the budget to have linemen as a registered trade in this province, and across the country it'll be a Red Seal trade. There are many more linemen working right now.

And we expect Manitoba Hydro to do their job as efficiently as possible, and we expect them to use their existing workforce to do that when they can demonstrate that it's efficient to do it that way, and we fully expect them to follow up on that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I understand that on March 15th the Premier told the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers that he would support IBEW workers as represented by Ken Woodley, who is in the gallery today.

Yet, three days after this, on March 18th, IBEW was told that Hydro is accepting bids from private companies for a contract to replace 3,000 hydro poles a year for many years without even allowing IBEW to be involved or bid on the contract.

Will the Premier commit today to employing Manitoba Hydro workers for Manitoba Hydro jobs and actually honour his own words of March the 15th?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we have said we will have additional training for linemen in Manitoba so more people can enter that very valuable trade. We have said to Manitoba Hydro, to be as efficient as possible, use linemen. They've hired over 600-plus more linemen in the province of Manitoba. We'd like to see it a fully standardized trade, with proper qualifications, with the training program to go along with that.

We expect Manitoba Hydro to be as efficient as possible, to use their existing personnel to get the job done, and we ask them to look at that on a business-case basis.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro workers have been replacing hydro poles for decades. They are known for their expertise in Manitoba, nationally and, indeed, internationally. They were some of the first workers called for help in Toronto's ice storm, and many gave up their Christmases to help.

And yet this NDP government is making the decision not to employ Manitoba's Crown corporation employees but rather to contract the work out.

I ask the Premier, who loves contracting out work to out-of-province companies like STARS and Teranet: Why not let 'mydro'-Manitoba Hydro expand its capacity to keep the work and the employees in the province?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we've said. We've said that we will train more linemen in Manitoba. We will make it a fully acknowledged trade, a Red Seal trade. We've seen over 600-plus additional linemen hired during our time in office.

We expect Manitoba Hydro to work with their employee organizations, including the IBEW, to look at the best possible way to replace hydro poles, as well as refurbish the broader resources of Manitoba Hydro. We think it's critically important that we have additional transmission in the province.

* (14:20)

We think it's critically important that we build additional generation capacity in the next 10 to 12 years before we need it so that we can make profits off that in the export market which will pay

down the cost of new generation capacity. We expect Manitoba Hydro to work with its employee groups to look at the most efficient way possible to replace critical infrastructure. That includes hydro poles.

Antibullying Initiatives Resource Guide Launch

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, this morning I was able to attend Day of Pink at Lord Nelson School where the children did the whole program themselves, singing, dancing, Dr. Seuss. The emcees were both in grade 1. It was amazing and inspiring, and the message was Buddies, not Bullies. Just saying, good message for all of us.

And I'd like to hear from the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning about the Day of Pink that he attended and the announcement he made there.

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Every time the member from Burrows asks the questions, I realize how intelligent it is on this side of the House compared to that side of the House.

I was pleased to stand today with staff from the Red Cross, from RBC, from the—as well as my colleagues from St. Vital, Assiniboia, the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Blady), as well as the fine students and teachers from Lincoln Middle School to celebrate the Day of Pink, the International Day Against Bullying, Discrimination, Homophobia and Transphobia.

Mr. Speaker, since we passed Bill 18 last year, we have continued to build an antibullying action plan that expands the Tell Them From Me survey, has introduced a new provincial code of conduct, and today I was proud to announce MyGSA, a framework document to help students establish a GSA—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of Education's time has expired.

Water Services RM of Alexander

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, it's sad that the minister doesn't walk the talk.

Mr. Speaker, 82 residents have been on a water advisory since 2006 in the RM of Alexander. For the last eight years, the RM of Alexander has been trying

to get them potable water. I think eight years is long enough for these Great Falls residents.

I'd like to ask the minister: What is the plan to get these 82 residents in the RM of Alexander some drinkable water?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of potable water obviously is a priority for the government and it has been for many years, which is why there are record investments and commitments being made. I don't know if the members opposite saw the five-year plan for investments in infrastructure, but notably included in that plan were investments in clean water supply. That is a priority for this side.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, the RM of Alexander requires some additional funding for the 82 customers utilizing the proposed utility. They were unable to obtain an additional \$500,000 from the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro.

Why is this minister treating these hard-working Manitobans like this? What is the plan and when are they getting some drinkable water? I think eight years is long enough.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise the House that, as a result of discussions with the departments of local government—our Municipal Government and Conservation, we are tuning up to make sure that the Water Services Board indeed is able to attend to the priorities of Manitoba and make sure that those areas that are under boil-water advisories are prioritized to a greater extent than we have seen in the past.

But we will certainly take this question back to the department and to the Water Services Board to make sure that Alexander is being duly paid attention to and that the matter is being prioritized accordingly.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, eight years, it's almost sounding like this minister and his government has tuned out.

Mr. Speaker, the Rural Municipality of Alexander and I have received a number of formal objections—objections by email, objections by a show of hands at public hearings—and Manitoba Hydro has indicated they had the authority to discontinue supply of water as of December 31st, 2012, with no plans.

Why would this Minister of Manitoba Hydro do this to these hard-working 82 residents of Great Falls?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the member opposite that in last year's budget we had a \$4-million increase to the Manitoba Water Services Board. This year's budget had a \$2-million increase to the Manitoba Water Services Board.

He voted against both of those opportunities to provide water to his constituents. I hope he goes back home and explains that to his voters.

Cattle Enhancement Council Status of Funds

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Yesterday in the Estimates committee I asked the Minister of Agriculture where the \$7 million disappeared in the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. The minister replied that it was not \$7 million but was indeed \$5.6 million.

Will he confirm that it is indeed \$5.6 million that has disappeared in the MCEC bank account?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): Obviously, we realize the importance of the cattle industry in the province of Manitoba, as I would be very proud to make the announcement today when we talk about the importance of livestock insurance across western Canada, and we are moving forward to guarantee prices.

As we all know, and I'm sure the member opposite's quite aware of the fact, in order for any slaughter facility to succeed, regardless of where they are in the province of Manitoba, we must maintain cattle population. So we need to be proactive heavily. We need to have price insurance so it's bankable, so we can have an opportunity to bring back the young producers, but also, more importantly, we talk about community pastures. We talk about forage insurance program.

How much more does the member opposite need to be told of the importance of what this government's doing to sustain the importance of the livestock industry in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

Battle of Vimy Ridge Anniversary

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I rise today before the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to bring the attention of all honourable members of the important significance that the 9th of April will always hold in the hearts of Canadians and Manitobans. April 9th, 1917, marks the commencement of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, making today the 97th anniversary of this monumental battle.

The Canadian troops were ordered to march on Vimy Ridge, a fortified seven-kilometre ridge in northern France that held a commanding view over Allied lines. Four Canadian divisions stormed the ridge at 5:30 a.m. on the 9th of April, 1917. More than 15,000 Canadian infantry overran the Germans all along the front. Incredible bravery and discipline allowed the infantry to continue moving forward under heavy fire and capture the German machine-gun nests. This included Hill 145, the highest and most important feature of the ridge and where the Vimy monument now stands.

Three more days of costly battle delivered final victory. Not only was this a pivotal battle in the war efforts of the Allied forces, but it was a seminal battle for showing the strength, courage and capability of Canada as a nation and ally.

The battle of Vimy came with its costs. There were 3,598 men who gave their lives and another 7,000 who were injured. Today a memorial stands on Hill 145 to serve not only as a reminder of the valour Canada displayed in this battle but as a tribute to all those who served their country in war.

On behalf of the PC caucus and all honourable members, I would like to take a moment to honour our great veterans from the Battle of Vimy Ridge and all battles where everyday Canadians have answered the call of our country and fought for our freedom. For this, we are forever grateful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Victoria Buen

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors): Mr. Speaker, joining us in the gallery today is Victoria Buen, a creative and talented young graphic designer from my constituency. Victoria recently won Downtown Winnipeg BIZ' annual

Chinatown Banner Competition, which encourages local artists to submit banner designs that celebrate the Chinese zodiac.

Victoria's winning Year of the Horse design is currently on display in Winnipeg's Chinatown, and the 18 banners will fly for the remainder of the horse zodiac cycle.

Victoria is receiving this great accolade as she completes her graphic design studies at Red River College. As part of the program, she and her classmates each designed a Year of the Horse banner for the competition. Any member of the public can submit a design. However, Red River College students have become repeat contenders, as the graphic design program incorporates the competition into each year's syllabus.

This year Downtown Winnipeg BIZ received 48 design submissions, which were judged by a panel of individuals from the Chinese and arts communities.

Victoria's design captures the spirit of the Chinese zodiac and embodies the characteristics of the horse design. It communicates deep emotion, culture and meaning, and her bold colour choices—turquoise, gold and dark burgundy—symbolize the active and energetic nature of the horse and are visually stimulating when viewed from street level. The jury were particularly impressed by Victoria's intricate design that combines influences from western and Chinese culture to reflect the diversity of Canada.

* (14:30)

In recognition of her winning design, Victoria received an \$800 honorarium and the opportunity to attend the Chinese New Year banquet at Kum Koon Garden where the banner was officially unveiled.

Thank you to the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ for giving local artists and students the opportunity to showcase their work and for refreshing the look of our downtown each year with unique and intriguing artwork.

Victoria, I want to congratulate you for the incredible design of this year's banner. It is clear that you have a bright future ahead of you in graphic design.

Quebec Provincial Election

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, Monday night was a good night for Canada as

Quebecers sent a strong message with the election of a federalist government in the province of Quebec. It was an election that revolved largely around the question of Quebec independence. Overwhelmingly the people of Quebec said that they believe that their future is in a united Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the defeat of the Parti Québécois does not signal that the separatist movement is forever gone in Quebec, but it does signal that we are a long ways away from that difficult night almost 20 years ago, where the country hung in the balance and by a 50.58 per cent to 49.42 per cent margin Quebec voted to stay in Canada.

Quebecers also sent a message on Monday that they believe in religious freedoms. The proposed Quebec charter of values would have taken away the many—the rights of many people of faith across many religions to wear symbols of their faith. Federal political parties across the spectrum rightly saw this as not in keeping with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the values of Canada. We also hope that this message has been clearly heard and received by the new government.

Mr. Speaker, Canada is better when it's united with Quebec, and all of our provinces are better when we adhere to the freedoms that we value as a country. Monday, Quebecers stood to say that they are proud to be part of Canada and see their future in this country. We agree with them and are thankful and grateful to have Quebec and its diversity as part of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, our Canada includes Quebec. Long live a strong, free and united Canada.

Day of Pink

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, today is the Day of Pink, where millions of people around the world come together towards putting an end to bullying. We wear pink in solidarity with those who have faced bullying and discrimination. We wear pink to bring an end to homophobia, transphobia and all forms of discrimination.

Organizations like the Red Cross and Jer's Vision are instrumental in leading the celebrations for the Day of Pink. Jer's Vision founded the International Day of Pink and spearheads many antibullying and anti-discrimination initiatives across the country. The Red Cross Day of Pink helps Canadians celebrate diversity and tolerance by providing programs, resources and selling pink

T-shirts to raise money for organizations that tackle the issue of bullying.

Our government is also dedicated to helping kids feel safe, respected and included. Last year we passed Bill 18, a landmark piece of legislation targeting bullying and discrimination in schools and online. Our Safe Schools Charter has made it the duty of all school divisions to provide a safe and caring school environment for their children.

As part of Bill 18, Manitoba is the first province in Canada to provide Respect in School training to staff and volunteers to better understand and respond to incidents of bullying, abuse, harassment and neglect.

As part of this antibullying legislation and to mark the Day of Pink, we introduced new tools to teachers to help them and students develop student groups and equality, including gay-straight alliances. We worked extensively with Egale Canada to introduce this new resource guide, MB MyGSA. It has information designed to help students, counsellors and families understand and overcome the challenges faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, transgender or queer youth.

Mr. Speaker, bullying and discrimination only end when people stand up and speak out. Let's come together as ambassadors of change and let's put an end to homophobia, transphobia, racism and all forms of prejudice. It starts with wearing pink and ends in a better world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Corydon Comets

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, team sports and community involvement are a cornerstone of childhood development. With this in mind, I rise today to applaud the ongoing successes of the boys and girls Corydon Comets sports teams from our Corydon Community Centre in River Heights.

This year, the Corydon A2 bantam Comets won the city championships on home ice. The Corydon Comet's U12 girls ringette team won gold. The U10 Comet's girls ringette team won silver, and the members of the A3 novice female hockey team are city champions.

In the Assiniboine Park Hockey Association 7-8 House League, our Senators won the A side championship and our Canadians won the B side championship.

We congratulate these teams for not only displaying exceptional skill, but also for their teamwork and sportsmanship. I also want to commend and thank the parents, families and coaches for their commitment to our youth in the River Heights area. It really does take a community to raise a child.

I want to note that the wins of the Corydon Community Centre teams are the result of an effort at the centre which encourages participation, an effort at the centre which not only develops excellent but which also cares for every child, no matter his or her ability.

The Corydon Community Centre's mission is to provide facilities for accessible recreational opportunities, to enhance quality of life and promote well-being and a sense of community in the neighbourhood. Without a doubt, the Corydon Community Centre's now achieving this goal in River Heights. It stands as a model of how community engagement positively contributes to Manitoba.

This past weekend, I held a forum at the River Heights site of the community centre, and during that time the centre was alive with families involved in sports and in community centre activities. It's encouraging to see the positive impacts that even just one community centre has on a neighbourhood and how investing in our youth is investing in Manitoba.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Before I move to grievances, I know honourable members have had the opportunity to get to know many of our pages over the various sessions that members have been here, and we're obviously quite proud of our page program, and continue to be proud of the pages that serve us through this particular session.

But I want to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery, where we have with us Mr. Austin Amy, who had been a page of this Legislature in past sessions. Austin has been recently informed and I've been informed that he's been accepted to be a page in the Senate of Canada. So I'd like to congratulate Austin and wish him well in his future endeavours before the Senate.

All the best to you, Austin.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, we'll move on to orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): Would you please call Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker: We'll now resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

*(14:50)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors. As previously agreed, questions for the department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Member for—honourable minister—member for Charleswood.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Just a final question to yesterday's line of questioning at the end of the day, and that was the minister indicated that, while the government had to pay out half a million dollars in the STARS lottery in 2012-13, that it would not be happening again. Is there a document that was drafted that was signed by both parties? Is there a new clause in the agreement? How actually did that get put into effect?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): I can answer that for the member. There was a couple of other things that I told the member I would get back to her with today, and I wonder if she would like if I just went through all of that off the top.

An Honourable Member: Sure.

Ms. Selby: Okay. So the first thing would be that I just wanted to confirm that I used the right—the correct numbers today in the House, that the primary helicopter used by STARS in Manitoba was manufactured in 1991. In 2012 and 2013 it was retrofitted for critical-care transports and night-vision

capacities. The STARS aircraft is Transport Canada certified for operations and the STARS aircraft has also been inspected by the EMS branch and meets the legislative and regulatory requirements for operations.

On to the question that she just asked, STARS and fundraising, the fundraising expenses from STARS in 2012-2013 were primarily related to various costs associated with starting up their fundraising operations in Manitoba. The vast majority of expenses related to lottery were incurred by STARS in 2013-2014, and STARS has committed in writing to Manitoba Health that they are covering any losses arising from fundraising, of which the lotto would be one of them. STARS will be posting their 2013-14 financial information online in June.

The STARS Foundation model allows for patients, communities, corporations to participate in the program that helps—we talked about this—improve services, build infrastructure and offset costs to government. And also I think it's fair to say that STARS has acknowledged that their fundraising efforts have not been what they hoped. They have a very good track record of fundraising in other jurisdictions, such as Alberta. But they have indicated that they have had some successes, such as their CEO rescue on an island was able to raise over \$300,000 in one day. And we believe, and STARS believes as well, that they will be able to increase their fundraising in Manitoba and develop that same model of corporate sponsorship that they see exist in other provinces.

And I just have one more thing to add into the record, as was asked yesterday. The member was asking about reasons for transports and reasons why STARS may not transport when they've been dispatched. So I can tell the member that the count for a mission begins at dispatch.

When a call comes in and is triaged as qualifying call for STARS, an alert is issued. As the triage proceeds and the helicopter is given notice to prepare, the switch is flipped and it becomes counted as a mission. When the mission results in the transport of a patient to a health-care facility, that counts as a transport. But we talked about it a little bit yesterday that there can be a number of reasons why a mission might not result in a transport. So those reasons may be through continued questioning of the 911 caller; it may result in additional information to dispatch to allow it to stand down STARS.

An example—and I'm not quoting an actual patient right now—but an example could be that questions lead to the conclusion that someone is actually having heartburn and not a heart attack and may not be as urgent as was first thought. It also can be because changes in the weather. Obviously, STARS can only fly if the weather is the right circumstance. And the weather, as we know in this province, can change very quickly and without expectation and hard to predict and it can do that as well. Also that the patient condition might change. So we spoke a little bit that earlier, that change may happen as quickly as more conversation going on with the 911 call, but the patient's condition can improve, and they may not choose to visit a health centre, or they may choose to visit one on their own, and that does happen sometimes. Someone's a little bit better, they say, I don't need the whole helicopter, I'll find my way there. It's also—tragically, we do have to speak about the fact that there are circumstances when a patient rapidly declines and, unfortunately, has passed away, and then, of course, it takes a different turn at that point.

I think also that I should clarify that—it's a bit of semantics—but lottery and fundraising, of course, are not actually exactly the same thing. There's general fundraising and there is lottery as well. It's—fundraising is not specifically just lottery; it does include other such things as, you know, the CEO Rescue on the Island that we spoke of as well.

Mrs. Driedger: In the auditor's report on helicopter arrival delayed, the auditor was pointing out that the helicopter was taking a long time to be delivered, and I'm assuming then, too, that we're talking about a newer helicopter, that it wasn't available at the time. So what I understand is the government ended up getting a 1991 helicopter and then it was retrofitted. Was there not an opportunity to have a newer helicopter available right at the time, and is that why we had to accept an old one?

Ms. Selby: So, when we first worked with STARS—brought in the contract—we used STARS—the assets that they had on hand when we launched the program until we got our own helicopter. We did use their fleet until then, and then we got our own helicopter. That's the one I was referring to that was manufactured in 1991.

Mrs. Driedger: So can the minister just clarify for me, then: There isn't a newer one coming; this is it?

Ms. Selby: Yes. This is the helicopter that is primarily used by STARS, is the one we discussed—

manufactured in 1991, retrofitted in 2012 and 2013. And, again, I'll just let the member know that the aircraft is Transport Canada certified for operations and has been inspected by the EMS branch and meets legislative and regulatory requirements for operations.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm just curious, and I wonder if the minister knows: Are all of the STARS helicopters this old?

Ms. Selby: I would have to get back to the member with that information.

Mrs. Driedger: Now there's something interesting, too, in what the auditor is saying, and she's indicated that Health officials said they expected the helicopter would be available within six months of signing the service purchase agreement. So the government was really anxious to get that service purchase agreement signed.

It wasn't signed until February 2012, which is interesting, too, because the government was in such a rush before the election to get everything put into place, and yet the service purchase agreement wasn't even signed until February 2012, which makes me wonder about a number of things, and then the helicopter wasn't even ready. It was expected by August of 2012, but the helicopter was not delivered until November 2013.

*(15:00)

So the government was rushing to get this red helicopter up and working and saying that they brought in the STARS program when the helicopter—a helicopter wasn't even available or ready for use, which almost tells me that the government really didn't get its ducks in a row, and, as the auditor pointed out, there was plenty of time for a tender.

So can the minister indicate whether or not the helicopter actually arrived November 2013? It said that once it arrived it wouldn't be in service until it was tested and inspected, and, in the meantime, STARS was using a helicopter from its fleet. So it just—I mean, it makes a sham of, we have to do this because we want continuous service. They didn't even have their own helicopter until a few months ago. So is the helicopter, the one they bought, here now, tested and inspected and in use?

Ms. Selby: So during the time that we were waiting for our helicopter to arrive, we were using the STARS fleet helicopter and that's how we were able to provide that continuous care that we were—that we

wanted to do. That we knew that looking at either—well, when we talked to other providers outside of the province, it was going to be a gap in service for rural Manitoba. We knew that building one from the ground up was going to be a gap in service. And that is why STARS was the right one to go with, that we were able to use their fleet.

The current helicopter that we have is the helicopter—that the member's referring to—the one that was manufactured in '91 and upgraded, retrofitted in 2012 and 2013. I think this is actually one of the advantages of STARS is that if a Manitoba helicopter needs mechanical work, we're able to access their fleet so that, from time to time, if it needs to be down to do something mechanical, we are able to bring in one of their fleet helicopters to use.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister just indicate why it took—it looks like 18 months—for this helicopter to—that the government would own—for it to be put into action here in Manitoba? And Health's aviation consultant said that this delay is outside the norm. So 18 months waiting for its own helicopter does raise a number of questions. Can the minister indicate why it took that long for government to end up getting the—its own STARS helicopter?

Ms. Selby: So I guess it's important to note that as I've said, one of the advantages to going with STARS is that we were able to provide that continuous care. STARS came in in 2011 to help us with the flood. We saw the valuable work that they do. We know how difficult and remote parts of Manitoba can be and how important it is to make sure that we can provide front-line services to folks. And we knew that if we had built our own program from the ground up, it would take about 18 months or more. The advantage of STARS is that you have access to the fleet and so during that time, when we were able to use their fleet helicopters, over 100 patients were transported in that time.

I note that when the helicopter was purchased, it was not equipped with a medical interior. The interior had to be installed and configured consistent with existing STARS fleet and, of course, our required standards. It required medical upgrades to meet specifics for rotary-wing, emergency pre-hospital programming, also needed to make sure that it had two pilot operating controls, had to meet Canadian certification as well as other certification.

And that's kind of exactly what we've been saying is that we knew that building from the ground

up, it takes some time to do that, and we really thought it was important that we continue this life-saving service, that we're able to provide a continuation of service and that is really a good part about working with STARS is in that time 100 patients were able to be transported while we waited to have our helicopter—to make sure that it was up to the safety standards required both by Transport Canada and, of course, our legislative and regulatory requirements. But during that time we were able to move more than 100 people to get them to the care that they need. So I still believe that this was the right call to make on this life-saving service. I know opposition doesn't agree with it but this is the path that we chose.

Mrs. Driedger: And just to reiterate for the minister that all of that could have still been accomplished with an interim contract too because they were operating on, you know, the initial contract they had with STARS was five weeks and, you know, I mean that's how they were operating with STARS for a long time was just interim contracts. So it's not out of the, you know, out of the ordinary that they could have just kept on doing it.

So despite the rhetoric, and the auditor certainly has indicated that there were no excuses, legitimate excuses, to do what the government did, that in fact, that there was time, and there could have been other ways of ensuring continuity in service. It's just that the government chose, the minister's right, chose to go a different route, but that route, according to the auditor, was the wrong one. And it certainly has raised a lot of questions because even throughout this report it shows that the government was using STARS on interim contracts and that wasn't unusual. They just chose to try to hurry this up and still waited 18 months for the helicopter anyway so that even makes it stranger.

*(15:10)

The auditor also indicated that performance reporting was inadequate. Can the minister just indicate what will be done now to improve performance reporting so that it is an adequate framework in place?

Ms. Selby: As we have discussed here, our focus at Manitoba Health is providing the best patient care. We know that this is what families want. We know this is what matters most to them.

In some circumstances, and when it's in the public interest, when there's only one qualified

proponent, government may enter into a contract without a tender. We think this was the right call on a lifesaving service. The floods that we experienced in 2009 and 2011, we did partner up with STARS to offer that helicopter ambulance service in rural Manitoba. We know that they transported a number of patients, I believe—if I've got the number correct—in 2011 it was about 50 patients that were transported during that time with some very, very serious medical conditions.

We also know, and as the member has pointed out, that it would take 18 to 24 months for another option to be available. This is the advantage of going with STARS is that we were able to offer an uninterrupted service. We didn't have to wait those 18 months to build our own helicopter, we were able to use the fleet helicopter, and during that time between the announcement and the signing of the long-term contract, we saw STARS transport over 100 patients in that time, and I have no doubt many of those folks would credit their lives to this service. I don't think anybody would disagree that getting a highly skilled medical team to a patient as quickly as possible can make all the difference.

As for questions of performance—and really what we're looking at and what we're talking about is getting STARS up to full service. It is able to do scene calls right now. We're able to call STARS out for those emergencies that you just can't get a land ambulance to or a life jet to as well. But we do want to get it up to full service. We know that Manitobans want that, particularly in rural Manitoba depending on it. So that is just part of the role of the Clinical Oversight Panel under the guidance of Dr. Brian Postl. We have representatives from Manitoba Health, from STARS, from EMS, a number of experts with experience in critical care, in emergency medicine to come together to discuss patient safety, to discuss a number of things, recommendations that we want to take a look at including making sure that we're using STARS to its best. Certainly having it up to full service will make a difference.

I don't want to question the judgment of folks on the frontline. The folks in MTCC, our 911 dispatch centre who make the call, these people are the experts. They know what's best to send, whether that be land ambulance, helicopter or jet, and I'm certainly not questioning their judgment on that. They work in a very stressful environment and have to make these decisions very quickly. But absolutely we are looking at performance.

We're looking at more than anything though, of course, patient safety. It's certainly our priority and we know that it is also the priority of STARS and, of course, of everyone who's sitting around that table. That is exactly what they'll be looking at. They'll be looking at, well, a patient-focused guidance and oversight to returning to full service, to maintaining a strong service. They're going to look at training and accreditation for personnel, quality assurance for clinical operations and, as well, reviewing the dispatch as well to ensure that we are providing the best service to people right across Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: I don't think the minister has really answered the question. But she certainly indicated a lot of the important issues that are relevant around air ambulance.

Will there be a performance management framework actually put in place? And are there going to be performance indicators or metrics that could actually assess the performance, then, of the missions and of STARS itself?

Ms. Selby: I would refer the member to page 27 of the OAG report in the response to recommendations. One of the—the very first recommendation was that we recommend that Health develop and implement an ongoing quality assurance process to oversee STARS' clinical operations, and the response there is agreed as part of the EMS review of 2013. The need for Quality Assurance Program across the system was identified. Manitoba Health prioritized this recommendation for implementation, and it is expected early—well, actually, we were expecting to see that very soon.

The office of medical direction will be established. Their role will be to ensure consistency of medical training and practice across the EMS system. To ensure this consistency, monitoring and evaluation of the system's medical performance will, of course, be essential. They will be accomplished through the Quality Assurance Program as well as led by the medical—assistant medical director specifically tasked to the Quality Assurance Program. And the program reviews will be conducted based on reported concerns, requests to investigate, as well as randomly and will utilize dispatch records, electronic medical patient-care records. Findings from these reviews will be provided to medical professionals involved and will be 'nused' if necessary, to develop remedial actions, alter treatment practices and create and enhance educational programs.

But I should also point out that the Clinical Oversight Panel, under the direction of Dr. Brian Postl, also has its own standards of practice, which is seeking to assess and adopt an evidence-based practice based on standards from recognized professional agencies, pertinent research and practical experience. They have a commitment to excellence with direct personnel selection—and I talked about some of this already—education, training, retention, proficiencies. The clinical interventions will be defined by evidence-based practice, standards and curriculum, and, of course, patient-oriented outcomes, because we do want to do a patient-guided return to service for STARS. And it really is. Manitoba Health is always looking to do patient-guided, patient-focused and patient safety, you know, in everything they're planning.

The panel's also going to oversee continuous quality improvement activities and provide a forum for case-review discussions for the helicopter transport program, design an 'implementation' of the clinical education programs that utilize—recognize—curriculum development process, and, of course, proven adult education principles will incorporate learner assessments and program evaluation to ensure continual enhancements of content and formats. Of course, the WRHA quality assurance process would be in place as the service purchase agreement is transferred, as well.

* (15:20)

Mrs. Driedger: How did the minister notify STARS that they were being grounded?

Ms. Selby: The STARS CEO was notified by phone call by our ADM, Jean Cox.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister find it strange that there wasn't anything put in writing?

Ms. Selby: Given the nature of how serious this situation was considered, that medical advice had come to temporarily suspend the service, we thought it was very important that the ADM speak directly with the CEO.

Mrs. Driedger: There's a number of people in the community that are wondering if there is a hidden agenda by the government to get rid of STARS and take it over themselves. On behalf of the number of people out there that are wondering that, can the minister give some indication of an answer to that?

Ms. Selby: We know how important STARS service is to Manitoba families. I've heard from families, I've

heard from rural fire chiefs, of how important it is. We know that helicopter ambulance is an important part of any modern EMS system. There are times when you can't drive an ambulance to get to a patient. There are times when you can't land a jet and there are times that the only thing that can get to somebody is helicopter ambulance. It's why we are working with STARS to resume full service of them as well. I was pleased to be able to sit down with the CEO of STARS at a press conference not very long ago when we were able to talk about the medical concerns that were addressed to allow us to go back to that scene emergency call. We know that people were depending on it and we wanted to do that.

But we also know we want to return to full service, and that is why we've got the Clinical Oversight Panel. They are going to provide the patient-focused guidance and oversight for our helicopter air ambulance service. They're working with STARS; STARS is at the table. The oversight will include training and accreditation for personnel, quality assurance for clinical operations and, of course, guiding the eventual resumption of interfacility transfers by STARS in Manitoba. So, absolutely, we contracted with STARS originally because they provided excellent service during the floods of 2009 and 2011. But, certainly, we already have taken the first important step to getting STARS back into full service and that is to get it into the scene calls. The next important step, of course, is the work that the folks are doing around the table, STARS and Manitoba Health, the clinical oversight table as well.

But, no, there is no hidden agenda if that's what the member is trying to say. We are committed to STARS. STARS is committed to provide a good, strong, safe patient care. They've flown 676 missions—actually, I think the number would be up a little bit more from that because I know they've had a few missions, served emergency calls since that time they've gone back up then. And more than 400 people have been transported by STARS. We know how important that is. It's important to those families. It's important to us as well.

Mrs. Driedger: STARS has certainly taken a public relations beating with everything that's happened. Their reputation has been tarnished because of some of this.

Can the minister indicate whether or not if more due diligence had been taken by this government in the very beginning to ensure that the contract was

tendered, to ensure that all their ducks in a row—could all of this have been prevented by a more responsible government approach to getting helicopter EMS up and running in Manitoba?

Ms. Selby: I would remind the member of the Auditor General report, of course, that says that when medical concerns were raised, they were 'adeqly' addressed and that also, you know—we've talked about it here in Estimates, as well, that this is a very complex area of medicine. People who work in the front lines tell me it is the most challenging area of medicine, as well, and that is not surprising that there are sometimes different opinions. That's why we do seek external and internal advice. We know that sometimes people may have differing opinions. It's also exactly why we have the Clinical Oversight Panel together. The Clinical Oversight Panel is working to make sure that STARS is safer, addressing those concerns that were raised so that we can go back to full service, because we know that Manitoba families want to see it back in full service, and we, as much as they do, want STARS to succeed.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister tell us about the qualifications of Shauna Martin as the senior adviser to the Minister of Health? Can you tell us what her experience was and what her positions were before getting this?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, Shauna Martin has extensive experience in policy development and policy management in the public 'spector'—sector, rather—as well as the private sector. She has worked in ministers' offices, Manitoba Health, private sector organization as well as other provincial governments. Outside of government, Shauna Martin has worked to help recruit physicians to northern and remote First Nations communities, valuable work, indeed. She is currently filling a vacancy in our office. She's not in a new position.

Mrs. Driedger: And could the minister indicate what her most recent job was before this one?

* (15:30)

Ms. Selby: I would have to get back to the member with that title.

Mrs. Driedger: When Mrs. Feakes was here in the building, and even before she actually came, she had tried to call the NDP caucus office before she called us. And she was quite upset. And it was Shauna Martin that ended up phoning her instead of her own MLA, who was Matt Wiebe, or the Minister of

Health. It was Shauna Martin who made the phone call to Mrs. Feakes.

Is this normally the job of a senior adviser to the Minister of Health to handle situations like that?

Ms. Selby: Yes, that is not uncommon that a senior member—sometimes a deputy, it could be another member—would phone somebody. We get many, many phone calls, as you can imagine, and certainly not out of unusual that one of senior members of staff would speak to somebody about an inquiry.

Mrs. Driedger: Is there any reason that the minister didn't speak with Mrs. Feakes?

Ms. Selby: I have offered to speak with Mrs. Feakes or any of the families. Of course, I would welcome any of them if they would like to talk.

I—as I've said yesterday, I know that the words I said hurt them, and I never, ever wanted to make any of them relive the tragedy that they've already been through, and for that I am very sorry—that my words hurt them. And I would be—would welcome any conversation, or to speak to any of the families, if they wish to.

Mrs. Driedger: But I'm just wondering—and, sorry, I probably misworded it. When Mrs. Feakes had called at the very beginning and called into the NDP caucus office before everything sort of took on a life of its own here, would that not have been a phone call that the Minister of Health would have wanted to make and clarify with her at the time? Because she did want to speak to the Minister of Health, I understand, and no political—no MLA actually ended up phoning her; it was Shauna Martin.

At that particular time, right at the very beginning, I guess, is what I—wondering why the minister wouldn't have been the one to respond to that request.

Ms. Selby: I have offered to speak with Mrs. Feakes. We spoke very briefly. But I did offer, if she wanted to speak a little longer, if she wanted to sit down and have a more lengthy conversation. And I would extend that invitation to any of the families who would want to talk with me.

But, again, you know, on reflection and speaking with Mrs. Feakes, I saw that my words were very painful to her, and for that I am sorry.

Mrs. Driedger: The Manitoba government employees' union is really quite negative about the value of the STARS ambulance program here, and

certainly the president has indicated that that money could be better spent, and particularly indicating that in rural Manitoba they're short 80 paramedics.

Can the minister confirm if that is the shortage we are actually seeing in rural Manitoba, 80 paramedics?

Ms. Selby: I'm sure the member is aware that we have not long ago gone through an extensive review of our EMS system. We've added more ambulances and, of course, the EMS review spoke of hiring more paramedics, which is something we're absolutely committed to doing. But I should point out that our medics work together. We don't see whether our medics are on an ambulance, on a helicopter, or on the life jet. We don't see it as a competition; we see it as complementary that they work together, often, literally, going to the same scene to work together.

But I can give a little bit more detail on paramedics in rural Manitoba. We certainly worked very hard to professionalize rural EMS. We now have over 600 fully trained primary-care medics—paramedics plus nearly 300 emergency medical responders in rural Manitoba alone. There were only 200 in '99.

We have tripled the amount dedicated to paramedic training since coming into office, investing \$1.2 million to professionalize our workforce with these life-saving skills. There are advanced paramedics on our air ambulance transport planes. Those ones, of course, are dedicated to rural families.

Also—there is also a dedicated advanced care paramedic training program delivered through the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service. This also has—this program has seven dedicated advance-care paramedic seats for training rural paramedics and, of course, in 2007, we invested \$1.3 million to create the primary-care paramedic program at Red River College. So, in total, approximately 210 primary-care paramedics are trained in Manitoba each year through Red River College and four other institutions as well.

But I can get back to the member on those vacancy numbers if she would like. I'd be happy to do that if that's something she would like me to do.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, I would appreciate that, and I guess just a final question on that aspect of it is the MGEU president has certainly indicated that the money that the government spent on STARS would

have had more impact if it was spent on paramedics on the ground.

Has the minister had any conversations with MGEU further to those comments being made by the president?

* (15:40)

Ms. Selby: Certainly, I have met with MGEU and welcomed the chance to speak with and meet with MGEU, a medics rural urban paramedics association, of course; loved the opportunity to tell them what great work these folks do. I know that the branch does 'reet' monthly with MGEU and, again—and with the Paramedics Association of Manitoba also meets regularly with the branch and the deputy minister as well.

Again, I just would like to say that the EMS review—system review was received very positively by paramedics. They're well aware of our commitment to hire and train more paramedics.

And, again, I think we have a highly skilled workforce, whether that's on our urban or rural ambulances, on our helicopter with STARS, on our life jet as well. These folks work in very challenging situations. They do incredible work under very tense situations. We don't see this as a competition. We see this as a way that they complement each other, that—we spoke about this another day—that there are times when we actually send more than one. We may send a land ambulance and a helicopter for whatever reason if the folks in the front line see that as appropriate. So I think that there is in any modern EMS system makes sense to have a helicopter ambulance, as well as the jet, as well as the land ambulance. And I'm pleased to know that we have such a professionalized EMS system, that we have fully trained primary-care paramedics, that we've got emergency medical responders and that we are training more, as well, training and hiring more paramedics.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Well, I've got a variety of questions, but while we're partly on STARS here, I'm just wondering if the minister can tell us if there are different levels of service available from STARS and if we are a high-level, mid-level, low-level range of service that we've contracted for.

Ms. Selby: We have the same model in Manitoba as we have in—as STARS has in Alberta and Saskatchewan. It's not a lesser service.

But I can tell the member that, right now, STARS is only available for scene calls. This was on the recommendation of our medical advisers. But we do have the Clinical Oversight Panel, under Dr. Brian Postl, working to resume that full service, which would include the interfacility transports. So they are, right now, only responding to scene calls. But I'm not sure exactly if that's what the member was asking. Perhaps he can give me a little bit more detail.

Mr. Helwer: I'm told there are different levels of training and interaction with existing services that STARS is able to provide so that there is a more of a seamless approach as opposed to the fragmented approach that we have in Manitoba.

Ms. Selby: I'm still not entirely sure what the member means by that, but we do only have scene call available right now for STARS. It was on the advice of our medical professionals. They had raised some concerns. We addressed the concerns, enable—to allow it to go back to scene calls, which is—we thought was important to get to there, because we know there are times when the only available way to reach somebody is by helicopter.

But, as I've said, we do have the Clinical Oversight Panel in place. Dr. Postl is leading that, but there are representation there from Manitoba Health, from STARS. They are fully integrated in our dispatch system. That is different than how it is done in other provinces, which means when you call 911 and have an emergency in a rural or remote area, the folks at MTCC in Brandon will make the call of whether they would send an ambulance by land, a helicopter or by jet. We've said, sometimes they do more than one, depending on it.

So we are, right now, able to provide that service of scene calls, when you can't rely on anything else. But we are working with the Clinical Oversight Panel to address a number of things: training, education, retention of proficiencies—including dispatch as well—standards, curriculum, in order to go back to that full service. But it will be—it will remain being dispatched centrally through MTCC in Brandon.

Mr. Helwer: Well, since the minister's not familiar with that information, perhaps we can then move into paramedics and ambulances. And there's obviously been some discussion about patient transfers being affected by poor roads and the minister has bragged a lot about critical incident reporting, so are critical

incidents reported involving ambulances, paramedics or other emergency vehicles?

Ms. Selby: Yes, critical incident legislation does apply to ambulances as well.

* (15:50)

Mr. Helwer: So, then, further to that, and continuing the last question and repeating the last question, are there any critical incidents that have been reported involving ambulances, other emergency vehicles or paramedics over the last—shall we set a time frame of two years?

Ms. Selby: I would have to get back to the member with that.

Mr. Helwer: While we're reviewing that information, perhaps we could also include the dates and location of those critical incidents and if they were impacted at all by road conditions, whether they be damaged roads or icy or snowy, that type of information.

Ms. Selby: Critical incidents, of course, are all posted online, but we can look for information for the member.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I had a few questions related to personal-care homes and group homes. As the minister probably knows, it's pretty much 30 years now since the going home initiative moved many people back into the community, mostly in group homes, and a significant number are now getting to the point where they're aging out of those facilities, particularly on mobility issues, and many of them now are looking for alternative accommodations. We've seen some of them come into personal-care homes, and we have had incidences in our local personal-care home in Portage where residents came in there from group homes. Transition actually went fairly well for a few months, and then, for whatever reason—their medication or whatever was altered—they became agitated and became violent in a personal-care home.

We do not have psychiatric nurses in personal-care homes, and I would like to hear from the minister if there's any plan to provide safety, not only for the residents but for the workers in this situation, and what that might be.

Ms. Selby: I think the member probably knows, but I'll just make it clear that group homes, of course, are not under this portfolio, but we're talking about the personal-care-home side. Certainly, I agree with the member that personal-care homes should be a place

where the residents live with dignity and, of course, staff and residents need to feel safe and supported—deserve that. It's why we have added more staff to personal-care homes. We've brought in tough personal-care-home standards and established the Protection for Persons in Care Office. Now, of course, that's addressing the folks who are living in the home, to make sure that they have the protection in place. But I certainly understand and sympathize with staff. They have every right to work in an environment that is safe. They should go to work and feel comfort in that. It is why we're partnering with the Manitoba Nurses' Union to strengthen workplace, health and safety regulations, to help prevent violence in health facilities.

The changes that we've made meant that all health facilities do have to work within—with their health-care employees to develop a violence prevention policy and strategy which includes making sure that security assistance is rapidly available for staff should the need arise. And, as part of that, we've also dedicated \$2 million towards a Nursing Safety and Security Fund to help implement a violence prevention policy in health-care facilities across the province.

But I should point out, certainly, as we've been hiring more staff, we're also building more personal-care homes with an awareness that some of the needs are changing in personal-care homes, and that the needs of the residents and therefore the staff as well need to be able to feel that they're being supported and that they're safe when they're at work.

Mr. Wishart: I'm just following up on this specific incident, then, Madam—Mr. Chairman and Madam Minister, the—there was not enough staff available in the personal-care home to deal with this incident so the temporary solution that was brought in place was to bring in outside security, 24-7, for a total of five weeks before we were able to find another placement for the resident. Is that the type of response that we're going to expect should there be further incidents or do we have something more specific?

Ms. Selby: Yes, the member is discussing a specific case, and I understand that a long-term solution has been found now. But short term, I would actually like to commend the folks who responded very quickly to what was a difficult situation for staff and for no doubt for residents as well by putting the security panel in place around the clock to support staff. I think they made a right choice to respond quickly in that particular situation, but, of course,

that's not a long-term solution, and I know that the—that my office and the CEO of Southern Health work to make sure that staff felt safe and that the resident received the care in the appropriate place. I would also let the member know that he has written to my office on this particular issue and that we do have a response being sent to him as well.

But I think to also point out that in this particular case it certainly isn't the normal situation of what happens, and I think people responded very quickly to what was not a usual circumstance. But, certainly, as we are building more PCH beds, those are being included with behaviour—spaces for people with behavioural problems, with more complex or even violent patients. And, again, it's part of why we've been hiring more nurses.

We are actually a leader in the number of personal-care hours that we are able to offer per resident, and that is in no part because we have hired many, many nurses and still continue to do so as well as building more personal-care homes as well.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for her response. And, yes, it has been resolved by the resident being moved to a branch—the geriatric unit at the Selkirk mental hospital, which seems to have been well designed to accommodate her there. However, that is a very small facility and we are becoming increasingly aware that the kind of numbers that we may be looking at here are more than we feel the system is built to accommodate, so I would certainly encourage you to build more.

But, when you talk about training—or hiring more nurses, the nurses themselves in this case felt that they were not trained to deal with this situation. They are not psychiatric nurses, and I'm sure the minister is aware that psychiatric nurses have quite significantly different training in terms of their backgrounds and their ability to deal with those with mental health challenges.

* (16:00)

Is there any plan in place to staff facility, of any type, to deal not only with the residents that will be coming from group homes as they age out, but to have appropriate staff in place to help deal with that?

Ms. Selby: I think the member and I both agree that families have a right to expect that their family member is treated with nothing less than respect in a safe attentive manner and professional care, and that the staff deserve the same thing, to be able to go to work and to feel safe as well.

So I can let the member know that every health region in Manitoba has a variety of locked units available for residents who may require a secure environment. Residents, of course, are, in any of our personal-care homes, are assessed by professional staff to ensure that their needs are met, but also to identify any risks that may need to be dealt with in terms of protecting and making sure that the staff is safe as well.

In Winnipeg, we have nearly 400 beds for residents whose care requires a protected environment. Of the 400, about 10 per cent are for residents with very complex behavioural needs. As well, though, any personal-care home can have staffing increased and other changes made if the professional's assessment determines that it is needed, or, as in the case of the specific case that the member was referring to earlier, to make sure that the staff is feeling secure in their workplace as well. If the assessment determines additional staffing, above normal level is required, or other specific supports, additional measures are put into place.

And I did talk about this briefly, that personal-care homes in Manitoba are currently staffed at an average of 3.75 hours of direct care per patient per day. That is above the commitment that we have with 3.6 hours, and actually has us as the leader in Canada for personal-care-home staffing levels.

I agree with the member; we are building more personal-care homes and I'm pleased to be doing that. Last year we announced \$200 million in construction fund to add more beds to the province in support of increasing the number of seniors. We know there are more and more seniors. Medical professionals do tell me that they are seeing more complex needs with those seniors as well. We're also—that at the \$200 million to add more beds, is in addition to the 300 that are currently in development right now.

This construction fund will also include specialized spaces for individuals with those complex behavioural needs, and we are looking at whether existing personal-care-home beds could be enhanced for those with special complex needs as well.

I should also point out that we've been working with the Alzheimer Society in Manitoba to implement the P.I.E.C.E.S. dementia education program. These are folks who have a lot of experience working with people with complex

behavioural issues. This program provides essential Alzheimer's and dementia training to personal-care-home staff in all our RHAs, empowering the caregivers with tools and strategies to better identify and meet the complex care needs of these patients. So, after a recent six-month trial, I know at the WRHA, they found an innovative variation of the P.I.E.C.E.S. program. And because of the work that they're doing, they were able to reduce the use of antipsychotic drugs among their personal-care-home residents by 20 per cent. So I think that's a really positive thing moving forward.

Certainly, we want to make sure that the staff are feeling confident in having the skills to be able to work with folks and also, I think that that ensures a better quality and dignity of life for the patients as well.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister just made a statement a couple of minutes ago which is actually a mistake: all critical incidents are not posted online. In fact, very few are and it's learning summaries that are posted online.

So I wonder if the minister could speak with her staff and just clarify her misunderstanding of this statement, and indicate how do they determine which ones go online, because very few are. So she was wrong when she said all critical incidents are posted online; they are not.

Ms. Selby: Certainly, I would be happy to clarify for the member. We do post them online quarterly. They're not posted right away. They are all posted in quarterly batches.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I welcome the minister to her portfolio, and this is the first time I think I've had a chance to ask her questions in Estimates on this portfolio.

As the minister knows, I've been a strong advocate for effective newborn screening for conditions where we can make a difference in the lives of kids by detecting conditions early on. Last year, as the minister knows well, with all-party support, we passed a bill to bring in universal newborn hearing screening. For one area where we remain behind most other jurisdictions in North America is the newborn screening for diseases like sickle-cell disease and thalassemia. These are conditions where there's abnormalities in the protein hemoglobin in its formation or its production and this is a protein which is found in red blood cells and is very important for carrying oxygen. So it's

important to life and important to be able to identify these conditions early on because their treatment can then be improved, actually, very considerably now because of the information that we have.

Will the minister consider moving forward to look at initiating universal newborn screening in Manitoba for these hemoglobin—of these hemoglobin conditions like sickle-cell disease and thalassemia?

Ms. Selby: I thank the member for his welcoming words.

Certainly, we know that every parent wants to know that their baby is getting a healthy start in life. Certainly remember that when mine were little, how nervous every parent is when their children are born to make sure that everything's okay, and certainly screening for rare conditions such as the cystic fibrosis is important to ensuring that those conditions are identified as early as possible and that the newborns and the family get the support that they need. I think I agree with the member completely on that.

Our government has invested in newborn screening to ensure that families and newborns do have the best start in life. Screening for every newborn for rare conditions such as cystic fibrosis does give parents peace of mind and is able that way to catch those rare conditions as early as possible so that the newborn can get the treatment they need without delay and that the family can get the support that they need.

* (16:10)

I can tell the member that Manitoba is a leader in Canada of screening for cystic fibrosis and over 40 other rare conditions. We screen for more than any other province in Canada. Many of the conditions that we're screening for are not obvious at birth and, as we've said, that early diagnosis and treatment can really optimize outcomes for children found to be effective. Certainly, we know that it can help in the case of—mentioned cystic fibrosis a couple of times—but certainly know that early diagnosis and treatment can help to avoid irreversible and potentially life-threatening lung damage in that particular case.

Part of the health assessment performed after every birth, every newborn receives a simple blood test to screen for rare conditions. A positive screen triggers additional testing to confirm if that rare condition is present and, if it is, then the newborn, of course, receives care and treatment much earlier than

they would've if a family would've had to wait for symptoms to emerge later.

I do want to say that, again, the member raised the point that the parties—all parties worked together to pass legislation that will ensure newborns are screened for potential hearing impairment. The—certainly, right now, babies receive a basic hearing screening, with more advanced and universal screening in place in Brandon and several rural communities already and targeted, of course, at-risk newborns in Winnipeg and the rest of Manitoba. I think it's important that this is—that we're doing this. We understand that five other provinces offer it as a universal basis right now. We're proud that Manitoba is joining them.

But, as I said earlier, we are a leader in screening for more than any other rare condition than any other province in Canada. We will continue to offer the broadest newborn screening of any province, and we'll always welcome the advice of our medical professionals on how we can improve that.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I would recommend to the minister that she look into the screening of these hemoglobin conditions, like sickle-cell disease and thalassemia. There is now a fairly widely used screening procedure, and I think it is time that we, in Manitoba, look very seriously at this.

Let me move on to a second question. This deals with individuals who have latex allergies and, in certain circumstances, these—the latex allergy can be very severe. And one of the things that's kind of even unique in terms of latex allergy is this: that it's important to have a facility where somebody with a latex allergy can actually be looked at, evaluated, treated, both short term and emergencies, as well as in clinics and in hospitals.

And the problem, as opposed to, for instance, allergy to bee stings—right—there are not too many bees in hospitals, so you don't have that problem. But, when it comes to latex, it's very common to have latex gloves in hospitals. It's common to have other—well, catheters, for example. It's common to have balloons with flowers given to people in hospitals, and many of these contain latex.

Now, I mean, the good news is that there are, in fact, other alternatives, which are increasingly being used: latex—gloves made from non-latex products, catheters, balloons which are not made from latex. And so, when we're dealing with somebody who has a latex allergy, it's important that there be

somewhere—presumably in Winnipeg, where they can see a family doctor, somewhere where they can see a—go to an emergency room, somewhere where they can be seen in—you know, can go in hospital. And so, you know, this, you know, is not so complicated for a clinic or even emergency room, but maybe a little more complicated for a full hospital.

And I know that there has been some discussion of this area. We've even moved, in the Legislature, to decrease the use of latex products. It's probably not a matter of completely eliminating them, but of making the environment latex—what people call latex-safe, which is reducing dramatically the availability of latex products so that somebody who comes in the hospital or to a clinic or to an emergency room doesn't actually get sicker because of the environment contains latex. Instead of—what we'd like to do is to see people getting better.

So I—just asking what the status is currently of the situation in terms of latex-safe health-care facilities and where we are. Not, perhaps, at every facility needs to be, but at least there needs to be places where people can get access to help.

Ms. Selby: I just wanted to go back to something that the member was discussing earlier on newborn screening. We talked about the fact that Manitoba is a leader in the country for screening more than anybody else does, but there are several projects under way to assess the feasibility of detecting other conditions. I'm going to use the call letters because I don't want to try to pronounce it—I know this member could better than I could on that—example of SCID would be an example of some of the other conditions that we are looking at at Cadham Provincial Laboratory, because, again, I said we always welcome any way that we can make improvements and give kids in Manitoba the best start that we can.

I think it's interesting that the member was raising the point of allergies and a bee allergy wouldn't be, you know, probably as much as concern in a hospital. But I have found that our hospital staff take our patient safety very, very seriously. I have a wasp allergy and any time I've had to be admitted to hospital, I wear the allergy bracelet with the fact that I have a wasp allergy on, which I've often joked with them that I can't imagine that's going to be a problem. But they take patient safety very seriously, and because I have an anaphylactic allergy to wasps they make sure that that is identified, and I always appreciate that.

I would like to be able to give the member a more detailed answer on what we do for folks with latex allergies and what's in place to help them. I know that he has written to the office and is looking for more on that and I will get back to him with some more detail on how latex allergies are handled at our health-care facilities. But I can assure him first-hand that wasp allergies are taken seriously, even in the hospital.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, you know, and it's important that we know how to handle not just wasp allergies, which we do pretty well, but latex allergies. And, you know, if the first thing that happens when you get taken to a hospital is that people are using latex gloves and there is latex in the band which is used, I mean, this is a problem for somebody who's got a latex allergy. And, you know, we have to figure out a way to look after that allergy.

My next question deals with some issues that some people are bringing up, and that is that sometimes when an individual with a health-care problem goes to an emergency room, you know, there may be either a very long wait line or occasionally an emergency room may be temporarily closed, and that's—has to do with, you know, somebody who's taken there by a family member and gets to the emergency room and that it's not something which is acute, you know, that somebody's got to—just had a heart attack or something like that and they're transported to or they have to go to a second emergency room; that, you know, if they're driven by a family member and they can drive on to the next emergency room, it—and there's not something that's so dire that it needs to be immediately looked at then, you know, that's less of a problem. But sometimes we have people arriving, you know, by bus, you know, by taxi, by ambulance, and people are saying to me, well, you know, if that happens and we've got to go to a second emergency room, there is significant extra cost.

* (16:20)

Is that cost, if somebody goes to one hospital to an emergency room in an ambulance and then goes to a second hospital, the cost of going to the emergency room, maybe an individual or an insurance coverage to the initial emergency room—I know there's some instances where interfacility transfers are covered—but does this apply to somebody who comes to an emergency room and is never actually seen, is just told, well, we can't look after you, you have to go to another emergency

room? Is that person's costs, ambulance costs, then covered or not—or, you know, taxi costs, you know, if that's what's decided?

Ms. Selby: So the member said it, but I'll just confirm that interfacility transfers between hospitals are covered at no charge to the patient. If an ambulance is taking a patient who's been assessed and triaged at a nurse-managed care facility and transferred under that nurse-managed care to another facility that may be able to deal with whatever, a more particular serious incident, there is no cost to the patient in that case either.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has talked about the free tuition for rural medical students. I'm just looking for a clarification. Is this a single year of tuition? Is it all years of medical school? Is this for all rural medical students from rural Manitoba? Are there a specific number of students who will be covered?

Ms. Selby: I'm just going to go back a minute to something that the member was discussing earlier about patients getting the care that they need. Certainly, we agree that patients should get the right care at the right place at the right time. I can let the member know that the WRHA posts their waits—their ER waits online. As well, if you go there, you can see that they also offer other options such as QuickCare clinics. We know that there are times when someone may not have access to their family doctor and we don't want the emergency room to be the only choice for them should they not need that specialized care, which is why we're committing to building more QuickCare clinics so that people can get the care that they need that may not be requiring of an emergency room.

Also want to let people know, of course, that Health Links can provide patients with the best place to access the help that they may need. But I just want to go on record saying that, of course, if somebody has a serious medical condition they should be calling 911, and this is—we're talking about those things that may not need emergency care.

And I can also talk to the member a little bit about the tuition for medical students. The tuition is covered. All the tuition is covered for any student who agrees to return service in an underserved rural area.

Mr. Gerrard: Just when did this program start and how many students are being covered under this program today?

Ms. Selby: I can tell the member that the program began in December of 2010. I'd have to get back to him with more specific numbers on the students, but we certainly know that we are training more students in medical. We have 110 medical seats now compared to 70 when we came into office. And we had not long ago, within the last couple of years, graduated the largest class of doctors in the province's history, and we're making good roads in terms of retaining those doctors as well. So I can get back to the member with more specific numbers on how many students have gone through the program or how many are in it right now.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder whether there has been an increase in the number of students coming from rural Manitoba as a result of the program.

Ms. Selby: I would be happy to get back to the member with those—with that information.

Mr. Gerrard: Just a clarification on the specific return of service commitment that's being asked for students.

Ms. Selby: So, Mr. Chair, under the grant program medical students will be eligible—or are eligible to receive \$12,000 in funding in each of their four years of medical school. Each grant requires a commitment to return six months of service for an underserved population upon graduation. In the fourth year the students have the option of taking a \$25,000 grant by committing an additional one year return of service. In total, students will have access to a maximum of \$61,000 over four years in exchange for a two-and-a-half-year commitment to an underserved community.

* (16:30)

Mr. Gerrard: Earlier this week, we had the Canadian Diabetes Association present a diabetes charter. This was done across Canada. It is a charter in terms of the rights and responsibilities of individuals, of governments, and so on.

So my first question is: Has the minister signed the charter?

Ms. Selby: Certainly, we know that diabetes affects many Manitoba families. We continue to make it a priority to prevent and to manage this chronic condition; prevent, of course, being where we'd like to see, and manage though, for people who do.

We know we've made some good progress in that we see people are healthier overall in Manitoba and living longer. But there's more work to do.

Certainly, we congratulate the Canadian Diabetes Association on the development of the charter, their ongoing work on behalf of people living with diabetes.

I have not signed the charter but I—we do look forward to meeting with the local chapter of the Canadian Diabetes Association to discuss the charter. I'm eager to learn how it aligns with the work that's already under way in Manitoba, and also to talk about how it can help us guide us to future efforts towards our shared goal, because I certainly know that we have a shared goal of improving the care, support and quality of life for Manitobans living with diabetes.

Mr. Gerrard: I would hope that the minister will sign the charter and commit to her government to principles of the charter.

Let me talk about one of those. One of the statements in the charter is that governments have the responsibility to form comprehensive policies and plans for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diabetes and its complications.

Let me just focus in on the particular issue of prevention, and ask about, you know, whether the minister has a comprehensive plan in place for the prevention of diabetes?

Ms. Selby: I'm going to go back to something we were discussing a little bit earlier. I wanted to give the member a little bit more information on how latex allergies are handled.

I can tell the member, that all the hospitals in the WRHA have policies regarding latex-safe care, and each emergency department has a certain area with supplies that are confirmed to be latex safe for patients with latex sensitivities or allergies. I can see if that's the information that the member was looking for, but I'd be happy to give him some more details.

I also wanted to just confirm—I had said earlier that I'm looking forward to meeting with the local chapter of the Canadian Diabetes Association. I'm actually meeting with them on April 17th. It'll be a chance for us to discuss the charter. I look forward to seeing how it's going to align with work that's already under way here in Manitoba. And, of course, when we're talking about the future of diabetes and how we're going to care for people, we certainly look to folks in the community, people such as the Canadian Diabetes Association, to help us guide us in our future efforts towards what we know is a

shared goal: improving the quality of life for Manitobans.

We know that, certainly, we want to improve the quality of life for people living with diabetes, but we also want to do as much as we can to prevent it, and doing that, of course, we know, is important to have access to healthy foods, which is why we continue to support the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative and school nutrition programs. I'm sure the member noticed Budget 2014 commits an additional \$450,000 for child-nutrition programming, for students in low-income schools, also a new pilot program to help make healthy food like milk—including milk accessible to folks in northern Manitoba.

We also know, though, that, of course, for anyone living with diabetes or any other chronic condition, that early detection and ongoing management by a primary-care team is really the best way to avoid going into a more serious complication. It's part of our commitment to access for a family doctor for all—is also the creation of the My Health Teams. These are networks of primary-care providers—nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners, dietitians, whoever the community feels they need—to help manage conditions and help people stay healthy. There are certainly 14 teams currently being developed, along with 50 new health-care professionals, such as dietitians, that could help folks with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, in doctors' offices.

I, actually, this morning, spoke at a symposium of the College of Family Physicians, who are on the exact same page of the importance of a primary-care network in making sure that we're using it to best support patients—patient-focused, patient-centred care—to make sure that people have the tools they need to manage chronic conditions.

We've also got another—a number of other initiatives under way to support diabetes screening and management, including: training health-care providers on diabetes education and support; we've been expanding dialysis units, which also offer education to people with diabetes to help prevent kidney failure and the need for dialysis—if we can avoid that, of course, that's always the best thing we can do; funding pediatric insulin pumps, that we've been doing as of 2012; and a screening program for people with diabetes in northern and remote communities at risk for vision loss.

So we also do have an online diabetes risk-assessment tool available for people but, I think, important that we work with both our medical professionals and also those folks in the field who have a lot of experience and expertise to bring to this discussion.

And I look forward to my meeting with the Canadian Diabetes Association, to talk about how we can make sure we're providing the best care, support and quality of life for Manitobans with diabetes. And I have no doubt they will also have an interest in what we can do, in terms of prevention as well as managing chronic disease.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I thank the minister, and also for the answer about the latex-safe protocols, and if it's possible to get a copy of those latex-safe protocols, that would be very helpful, and would appreciate that.

Now, the question that I asked in terms of diabetes was, you know, does the minister—the charter talks about government's responsibility to form comprehensive policies and plans for the prevention of diabetes and its complications—just whether the government has—whether the minister has a comprehensive plan for the prevention of diabetes.

* (16:40)

Ms. Selby: We can follow up with the WRHA for that more detailed information the member was looking for in terms of what is done with folks with latex allergies.

Certainly, we have a number of initiatives in place. I talked about a number of them before. Everything—many of them prevention, but, as well—I talked about it—training health-care providers, expansion of dialysis units, making sure people have healthy food; certainly always welcome the advice of our medical professionals and folks like the Canadian Diabetes Association whom I'll be meeting with to learn how the initiatives that we have in place align with what they're doing as well. I think the member might also want to talk to the Minister of Healthy Living; a lot of—particularly in the prevention program falls under her chapter of the portfolio falls into it as well. But, certainly, we have a number of initiatives in place. In terms of prevention, we have a number of ways that we are supporting people, and we are adding to that in terms of what I spoke to earlier, making sure people have an access to a family doctor, making sure they have a

network of primary-care providers including doctors, nurse practitioners, dieticians to help them manage their condition and stay healthy as well.

But, certainly, always welcome the advice of experts in the field, including the folks who know first-hand in many cases of what it's like to live with this chronic disease, and I look forward to speaking with the folks at the Canadian Diabetes Association to see that we are on the same page in terms of what we know is our shared goal, but to also make sure that we're going in the right direction to make sure that we prevent and better support people with this chronic disease.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, I look forward to that. And, if the minister has a comprehensive plan for diabetes, I look forward to, you know, receiving more information of that and, you know, if it's written out, it would be nice to be able to have a copy and that would certainly be helpful.

One of the things which clearly is important when you have a condition like diabetes, where we've gone from 50,000 to 100,000 people roughly with diabetes over about the last 15 years—and, of course, it's been labelled provincially an epidemic for some time—is to be able to look at, you know, whether the numbers of people with diabetes in various parts of the province are increasing or decreasing.

What I would ask, whether the minister is aware of any communities where there has been a decrease in the number of people newly diagnosed with diabetes compared to previous years and whether there is some programs that we can look at as model programs for decreasing or preventing diabetes?

Ms. Selby: So our investments, we know, are helping Manitoba families stay healthy. We know that the 2013 RHA Indicators Atlas, as released by the Manitoba centre of health policy, showed that the incidence of diabetes is down and people with diabetes are living longer than before. Of course, when people with diabetes live longer, that does mean that we need to make sure that they're getting the care for the chronic condition that they have.

We certainly know that preventing diabetes is about living healthier; it's not about avoiding people with diabetes. It's why our investments will be continuing to improve the primary care and helping Manitobans make healthier choices. We know it's working; that's what the indicators atlas has shown us.

Every year we invest over \$600,000 in the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. This allows Manitobans living in northern communities to have access to healthy food through investments in school nutrition programs, gardening, composting, greenhouse, traditional fishing, hunting, food preparation and preservation. We spend over \$300,000 on school nutrition programs including a fruit and vegetable snack program.

I spoke about it a little bit earlier, though, but connecting Manitobans to a primary-care team, including our commitment to a family doctor for all by 2015, connecting them to a—the primary-care network of a nurse, a doctor, a nutritionist, other specialist, is really a key part of any plan to stay healthy. Our physician-integrated network sites help create a more co-ordinated and focused approach to chronic disease and diabetes, and also by using TeleCARE we're connecting patients by phone with registered nurses who can help them manage their condition. We saw TeleCARE—saw an 80 per cent increase in the number of patients getting help to manage diabetes. I mentioned earlier that we have launched an online two-minute diabetes risk test to help Manitobans identify and give them information on how they can reduce the risk for type 2 diabetes.

The regional diabetes program promotes prevention, education, care and support services across the province with more than 700 health-care professionals trained to screen Manitobans as well as teach them the risks for the development of type 2 diabetes and diabetes complications. The Manitoba retinal screening program screens people with diabetes in northern and remote communities who may be at a risk of vision loss, and we've opened renal health centres across the province that not only provide that life-saving treatment, but I think it's important to note that they also provide educational programs to help better prevent and manage diabetes so that patients—you know, the goal being that they get—they don't get to the point of needing dialysis.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, first a comment on the statistics related to the incidence of diabetes. There's some reason to be fairly cautious about those statistics. And, first of all, even if they are correct that the incidence of diabetes is still much higher than it was in 1999, as an example. And there are some concerns about precisely how the numbers are generated and precisely what they mean. But I don't think we need to get into that here, but I just give the minister a little bit of caution in interpreting that.

The—let me move on. In the minister's opening statement she talked about commitment to access to a family doctor for all and then she talked about QuickCare clinics. My understanding is that the QuickCare clinics are not—are for diversion of people from emergency rooms. They are quick care; they are not necessarily clinics where people would have a family doctor. But maybe I'm not correct, and I just—I'm asking what the situation is to the minister.

*(16:50)

Ms. Selby: We certainly have seen that our QuickCare clinics have been very successful. They've been very well received by the public. We've had 67,000 people already go through the QuickCare clinics. And I think it's important for people who maybe don't have an experience with a nurse practitioner—our QuickCare clinics are staffed by nurse practitioners, and for folks who may be unfamiliar with the work of a nurse practitioner, they can do much of what the family doctor can do. They can diagnose. They can treat. And they can certainly refer somebody, should they need more urgent care.

Certainly, QuickCare clinics are—part of the goal is to take the load off of ERs. We know that there are a number of times when someone may feel they have, perhaps, not as serious a situation that would require emergency room support, but still need to see someone. And we know that at a time when somebody, when a doctor's office may not be open, people still need to get to medical help. It's really about making sure that people get the right help at the right place at the right time. So, certainly, for people who don't have an emergency situation that may happen outside of the hours of their doctor's office, a QuickCare clinic is a good goal, a good place for them to be, as well, a good option for them to be able to get that care that they need.

Certainly, we see this as another way for our family doctors to be able to take on more patients. If someone is able to see a nurse practitioner without much notice or outside of office hours, it allows the doctor to be able to take on more patients as well to do those things that a doctor is able to do. It's a lot about making sure people are able to work to their full scope of practice, and we want to be able to allow doctors who have very specialized skills to be able to work to their full scope of practice.

Certainly, we want to see, as we're building more QuickCare clinics, that they—the goal is to have them linked with our primary-care network. But right now we've seen that 67,000 people have been to our

QuickCare clinics; we are hearing a very good response from people anecdotally of their experience there, and I certainly have found when I'm talking to people who may not have been familiar with a nurse practitioner, once they go through the experience of seeing a nurse practitioner, I've heard many first-hand reports of how happy people have been with the care that they receive.

So, certainly, part of being able to offer people the right care at the right place at the right time—QuickCare clinics are able to do that very well, and they've had quite a lot of success judging by the number of people who've been through those clinics in this time.

Certainly we know that we want to have more QuickCare clinics. We've got a commitment to building more. That's why we've added nurse practitioner training spots and grants as well to train more nurse practitioners to ensure that we can continue with this model of building more QuickCare clinics because it does not only help take the load off the ER, but does help people find the care that they need in the time that they need it.

Mr. Gerrard: I know the minister has almost certainly gone over very carefully the Auditor General's report on the lack of tendering of the STARS contract, and I'm just wondering if, in light of the comments of the Auditor General, if the minister were there in 2009, whether she would do it again as a—now, as a tendered contract or whether she would still have done it as a non-tendered contract.

Ms. Selby: Certainly, our focus is on providing the best patient care; we know that's what Manitoba families want us to do. In some circumstances, when it's in the public interest, when—as in this case there's only one qualified proponent—government may enter into a contract without tender. We think this was the right call for this life-saving service. We saw during the floods of 2009 and 2011; we partnered with STARS. We were able to provide a continuous emergency care despite the fact that in many cases there was literally no road and no place to land an airplane; STARS was able to get to people. And I know in 2011 alone, I believe it was 50 people that STARS was able to transport.

Certainly, at the time, knowing that the only option would be to either build our own or look outside of the province, we looked at it; we had some preliminary discussions with Ornge and Helijet, both who not able to immediately provide care to rural Manitoba. We saw the good work that STARS did.

We wanted to make sure that we could offer that continuing care; putting it to tender would have meant a break in care of 18 to 24 months. And during the time between the announcement and the signing of the long-term contract, STARS transported over 100 patients. So I absolutely believe that this was the right call to bring in this life-saving service.

I know that members of the opposition and perhaps this member don't agree, but this is the path we chose, and I think it was the right call to do in this case of a life-saving service.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, one of the areas that the minister mentioned was getting people with cancer from suspicion to treatment in 60 days or less. There have been some instances that I'm aware of where, for example, lung cancer from suspicion to treatment has taken considerably longer than that. And, indeed, 60 days probably is too long and I would hope that the—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

*(14:50)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

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

I understand the minister has some new staff joining us at the head table, so I'll ask him to introduce those folks now.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): I'd like to introduce Neil Hamilton. He's the president and CAO of Manitoba Agriculture Services Corporation, better known acronym of MASC—Neil Hamilton. Mr. Jim Lewis is vice-president, Finance and Administration. We also have Kevin Craig as vice-president of the lending operations sitting over there, and Craig Thompson, vice-president of Insurance Operations.

Okay, and I do have one other thing I'd like to—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister, continue.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, and I would like to address the—a question that was posed yesterday by the member opposite, and it's regarding the fee for a permit. If—so basically, MAFRI does not charge a fee for issuing a permit; and No. 2, all permitted facilities' names are on the website so the public can connect with them. Okay?

All right. I think that's about it for our sharing of old news or good news. All right, that's it.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): And, again, just for the record that the—I understand the minister's department is still looking into getting permits for moving seed potatoes, so, when they have that, I will appreciate the answer back as soon as possible.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Staff has just informed me they've had some conversations with MIT regarding the issue about the transportation of seed potatoes and we're awaiting their message. We're assuming and hoping that it will be available tomorrow morning or tomorrow sometime and we will relay it accordingly.

Mr. Pedersen: And I have just a couple of other short questions and then we'll get into the MASC portion of the questions. First of all, just—will the minister—after reading Hansard and it's—he goes back to find it on the record for sure—when I asked about \$7 million being missing out of MCEC, the minister can now confirm that for the record we need to clarify that this is \$5.6 million that's outstanding. So, indeed, there is \$5.6 million missing out of MCEC.

Mr. Kostyshyn: For the record, producer levies between September '06 and March 13th of '13—pardon, March 2013, the MCEC collected a total of \$5.9 million from voluntary cattle enhancement levy once refunds are taken into account.

Mr. Pedersen: All right, moving on. The other question that's coming from before: In the Estimates book, when I look in here and I see staff, labour costs, capital costs for GO centers—GO offices, it's unchanged for this year despite the fact that you've closed seven offices. Can the minister explain that?

Mr. Kostyshyn: For the record, the numbers that has been brought forward—consideration should be given that was the Estimates in 2013-2014.

Mr. Pedersen: So have the Estimates changed for 2014-2015?

Mr. Kostyshyn: No, they have not.

*(15:00)

Mr. Pedersen: So I guess that's my question. You've closed seven offices, but you're using the same numbers. You have less offices open, you have—you should have less staff because you have less offices open or are you telling me that—*[interjection]* There's no savings here.

Mr. Kostyshyn: To the member opposite, the savings were captured in the 2013-2014 budget. Just to—that's when the office closures occurred, so that's when the savings took place.

Mr. Pedersen: All right, I'll try one more time. You've closed the offices during that fiscal year. So you're telling me that you've already built in the savings as if they were closed on April 1st, 2013, is the only way they could remain the same because that would be the only logical comparison between fiscal year '13-14 and '14-15.

Mr. Kostyshyn: That is correct. Figured it out.

Mr. Pedersen: So I only have one other math question and then we're going to move on to MASC.

Going back to MCEC, you said between September '06—I see, okay—and March 13th—*[interjection]* March 2013, you have \$5.6 million in income so that would mean—does that include the government contributions?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me be more specific to the member opposite. As I said earlier, between September 2006 to March 2013, the MCEC collected a total of \$5.9 million from the voluntary cattle enhancement levy once the refunds are taken into account. Okay?

Mr. Pedersen: So moving on to the school tax rebates, page 59 of the Estimates book. In 2013-14 you rebated \$34 million and change. Estimates of expenditure and rebates in 2014-15 is \$36 million. So why is this figure higher?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The question posed by the member opposite is—it reflects the impact of the increase of the 2013 school taxes levied and participants' rates and administration costs.

Mr. Pedersen: How many rebates were there in 2013-14?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As of March 28th, 2014, on file—and we know that there's obviously a few more days to the deadline—the total number of eligible applicants keyed in was 27,997—so 28,000 applicants.

Mr. Pedersen: So, just for clarity's sake, almost 28,000 eligible applicants, or 28,000 applications received and therefore either rebated, or, if they weren't eligible—is it applications or eligible applicants?

Mr. Kostyshyn: That is correct. The total number of applicants received was 28,000—rounded out.

Mr. Pedersen: And what would be the total number of applicants eligible? So, in other words, there's 28,000 that have applications received, but there is also—always a number that are not—that do not make application. How many would be eligible to apply in total?

* (15:10)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Historically, when we talk about the application process for Farmland School Tax Rebates, staff informs me that traditionally even a number of 10 per cent applicants, traditionally, did not apply for this Farmland School Tax Rebate, historically. So it's very hard to define in historical numbers because it varies to a point.

But to your question, member opposite, we were looking at a number of applicants, as I indicated earlier, was 28,000; the number of applicants paid to date is 24,247, based on that March 28th date of 2014, and the total amount paid out was \$26,757,610.

Mr. Pedersen: Of those 27,997 applications, how many of those were deemed ineligible?

Mr. Kostyshyn: At this point in time, the staff has informed me that because of a—the deadline just hardly being nine days ago or ten days, they're still in the process of tallying the numbers that the member opposite is asking for.

But, you know, one of the numbers that has been—there's about 300 residents or landowners that are out of province. I can share that with you, but as far as any other type—calculations I think it's, at this point in time, the numbers are still being tabulated because they're still trying to get the application process complete, given the timeline.

Mr. Pedersen: And just to confirm the 34 million—2013-2014 versus 36 for this current estimate, for the current year, that is because of higher school taxes. Is that what you told me?

Mr. Kostyshyn: That is correct to the member opposite and I'll read that again—reflects the impact of business at 2,000 is simply because the school

tax levies have increased, correct, and participation rates—anticipated 'particip' rates and the administration cost have gone up accordingly, as well.

Mr. Pedersen: So last year's budget, a year ago, put a cap on education tax rebates of \$5,000 per family unit, or farming unit, and this is having an impact on a number of farm operations. Is—does the minister have an estimate as to how many of these applications, based on 28,000 applications last year, how many of those will reach and exceed the cap?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As of March 28, 2014, the number of applicants capped at \$5,000 were 1,329 applications.

Mr. Pedersen: So what would be the dollar value of those 1,329 applications?

Mr. Kostyshyn: It was—\$5,052,900 is the amount that was not paid due to the cap of \$5,000.

Mr. Pedersen: So that's an additional 5-and-a-half-million-dollar tax on farmland, then. Correct?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess not to split words, but I think that's just an understanding of the reduction in the cap.

I think I—I think it would be appropriate to make mention of the fact that as the member opposite is quite familiar with it—when we talked about the school tax rebate, which started in 2004—and prior to that, you know, 'objee' there wasn't any school tax rebate. So in 2004, we started at 33 per cent, and I think everybody in the room here is quite familiar with the fact that we're sitting at 80 per cent today. And, you know, the farmland owners, basically—it was a \$35-million annual saving that was paid out at the 80 per cent cap. So, you know, we're—you know, we're very proud that we've been able to provide that service.

And the other thing is that, you know, we continue to work with the industry, and—it's quite interesting when we talk about, in general, the property taxes, when we look about—around the—across western Canada. And the Province provides significant education property tax relief to Manitobans. More than \$336 million annually has been paid out. And it's interesting to note the statistic that, since 2000, Manitoba has been the lowest property tax increase in Canada. Manitoba is at 9.2 per cent increase—is very modest comparison to a

27 per cent increase in Saskatchewan and a whopping 56 per cent increase in Alberta.

So I just wanted to share the—that information with the members opposite when we talk about the commitment that the government has made, and 'objee' I think the understanding should be noted that our investment in education includes \$23 million this year, ensuring all school divisions remain open, including rural divisions, and with declining enrolment, you know, that are facing funding cuts.

* (15:20)

And I think that, you know, I'm sure the member from Lakeside is—or, pardon me—[interjection] The member from Agassiz, I think, you know, when I drive down the highway and I drive through Langruth quite a bit, and I see—and I guess that was where I see these smaller schools, and I see it in a number of other small communities where, you know, the Province has taken the initiative and made a commitment to prevent school closures. And I think the members opposite sitting across from me from Midland and Agassiz—and born and raised in a rural community—realize the importance of schools staying in the community and staying open. And we need to, you know, stay focus—is that it's—okay—that as school closures do occur it's very challenging for the small communities to stay afloat. And I'm hoping that the members opposite are paying attention because that is one of the things as an MLA, regardless of what political party we sit, that is a very key component of the rural development in small communities to stay in existence.

You know, I think we've all gone through elevator closures, and that was quite a demise when we talk about small communities. We talk about, you know, other services that historically may goes back 50 years. But I think the reality is the fact that the way the agriculture industry—and the cropping land is being somewhat purchased by and the number of farms increasing in size definitely is challenging the population in the small schools.

And I think—in all due respect, I think that consideration should be considered if we're firm believers that small communities need to stay in existence and the importance of education to the young children that attend the schools. And I think the challenges would be is that if we were to go back to prior years it would be somewhat difficult for anybody to accept a grade 1 student have to travel 40, 50 miles on a school bus one way. And I think that this is a compromise of trying to sustain the

economic development of small communities, but also show respect to the young children and they have to travel great distances to keep schools open as they are today.

So I think it was necessary for me to make that opinion because as we all know rural development is very key and the school is a very key component of the economy regardless where your community is in the province of Manitoba and providing a pulse in the benefit of our rural areas.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Pedersen: Just wondering how closing ag offices and Hydro offices in rural Manitoba helps rural development—*[interjection]*—conservation offices?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess, back to a question that was posed to me in question period today, and I guess that—I think that the two members opposite who are sitting across from me, I'm sure at one time had the opportunity to be sitting in a tractor—and I think I'm safe to say maybe 20 years ago, 25 years ago—and we talked about the agriculture offices and where we see what they were 20 years ago and what they are today. You know, the office closures that occurred, the people were in employed those offices except for one individual that chose not to relocate and take employment in another location.

The true sign of the fact is that agriculture offices are, you know, involvement. But the reality is that the offices today and what they were years ago is two different comparisons. We're no longer in a tractor that's a two-wheel drive tractor. We're in the four-wheel drive tractors. That's how agriculture's changed. So when we talk about the importance of agriculture offices, producers today are choosing not to walk into the offices and have a face-to-face conversation.

But I do want to share the fact is that our staff at the GO offices or MASC offices are not somewhat *[inaudible]* to stay in their offices. In fact, the encouragement is that we meet with the producers and the people, sit at their kitchen table to discuss issues and if there's any great distances. The fact that there is communication is very key to producers today and I think the members opposite are quite familiar of cellphone communication and the modern technology of communication. Today, producers are—time is of the essence. When you get into the spring seeding, you get into the fall harvest, I don't think they want to park their vehicles and drive to the

local GO offices and the acceptance is that communication time is of the 'assents' to view what they're doing as farm *[inaudible]*

The days of the 300 acres or 500 acres, we know that it's very challenging and unless you're into niche markets, but the reality is 5,000, 6,000, 7,000 acres, and in fact there's—the latest statistics are showing that the average age or the average farmer crop land is in around that 5,000 acres is average. And, in fact, there always seems to be a higher amount and the age of the producers is also accelerating but I think the question is that we need to accept the fact that agriculture is changing and the GO offices are what they are. And there might be the occasional time where a producer may have to go into the ag offices and sign some documents or do some financing.

But, in reality, you know, we do believe in rural developments and when we talk about office closures, definitely we're well aware of the importance in moving forward. And I just want to reinforce my earlier comment here that we are not closing any offices this year, and this was all in last year's budget so thank you for the opportunity to answer to the member's question.

Mr. Pedersen: So, based on the minister talking about farms moving to 5,000 acres average and based on his assertion that school taxes will continue to increase, the cap will come into place sooner and this 5 and a half million dollars from last year will inevitably grow as the years go on with this cap in place. Correct?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I appreciate the question that's brought forward and I apologize if I can't answer the—I think there was three rapid questions, but I'll try and address one of the three that he brought forward. One of them is that, you know, this was a very difficult decision and I justified the question that was posed in the statement was that, you know, we definitely see the benefits of keeping the small schools in existence and we will continue to do that, and there is a cost to deal with that and I'm hoping the members opposite can appreciate, in their own backyard small communities closing or additional closures of schools will somewhat further demise their small communities. So I would respect that they would consider that as being a very serious decision that we took in of moving forward.

* (15:30)

I also want to share this other commentary, is taking this approach means it was making some

tough difficult decisions, and one of the most difficult decisions is that we are going to delay the increase to the Farmland School Tax Rebate beyond 80 per cent until after the budget is balanced.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I listen to some of the rhetoric coming from the minister there about lowering the school tax on bare agricultural land, and he totally ignores—and I know he was involved with council, and I know he was farming at the time that the PC government in the '90s took the education support levy off farmland, which somehow gets lost in this whole conversation, and so I'll just put that on the record.

But on the capping of—and my constituency has a fair amount of higher priced land, and on this capping at \$5,000 on the school tax rebate—and I don't care if it's only 13; I don't care if it's only three farmers. It creates an unfair playing field. You can have a quarter here where the person's getting—is under the eligible cap—and he's getting the rebate and a quarter beside it where the person's over the eligible cap, and he's not getting a rebate because he's over the cap. So it creates a discrepancy between rents; it creates a discrepancy even on costs to those individual farmers. I have land in my municipality—or in the municipality directly to the south of me—where about three to four quarters of farmland—we're not dealing with the big farms here—three to four quarters of farmland will put them over that cap.

I would just ask if—when you were going through this process, did you ever consider if you had to pull money back out of something that you'd put out for a couple of years—if you had to pull money back out, did you ever consider rolling the percentage back on the whole works and keeping a level playing field out there across the agricultural community?

Mr. Kostyshyn: You know, we've had numerous—we had numerous discussions about trying to develop a mechanism that we felt was kind of fairly distributed accordingly, and the \$5,000 cap was probably the most challenging one to find some fairness in the system, to the member opposite. And that doesn't mean that, you know, we're not open to some discussions, and maybe we will have some further discussions down the road of trying to have the fairness in the distribution of the cap.

I do want to emphasize the importance of the, you know, the time element when we talk about March 31st and being involved in municipal politics for 20 years of my life. And I think one of the

challenges we faced as municipal governments as 'osvee' some of the members across from me would—can relate to—a number of the municipality governments were always faced by a certain calendar date of—I may be wrong; it may vary in different school districts or RMs, whether it was January or February—is that the municipal governments were always forced to find dollars to pay school divisions, and there was a calendar date that it had to be. And, traditionally, I would say a majority of the—you know, the landowners had paid their taxes. But for the ones that hadn't, what it really created for the municipal governments was to find dollars within their own until the landowners were able to pay. So the challenge was always there to the municipal government, and not to discredit the producer, but the reality is is the fact that municipal governments were charging interest and so are the lending institutes in order. So there needed to be a certain amount of understanding that the municipal governments were challenged simply because of the time element of payments that they were committed to pay, and hopefully would lessen the burden. So that was one of the considerations.

But I do want to assure the member opposite when we talk about—we really reverse this, and I'm very proud of the fact that this government, you know, for the number of years going back to 2004, introduced the 33 per cent and increased it to 80 per cent, which was a total saving of \$35 million annually to the producers for a number of years. But, you know, we're in the changing saga of rural development and we're trying to figure out what's the 'bowst' mechanism, and this is the \$5,000 cap per year, and we're going to try and move forward with that.

Mr. Briese: Yes, I was a proponent of getting school tax off farmland property, but when you start using figures like \$35 million in savings, that's not entirely true. That's a spin, and you know it's a spin, because the Province didn't put up out of general revenue all that money to cover those rebates. What happens is when you raise or lower the—when you lower a certain segment on the school tax, it goes into another classification. Farmland went down; it went into residential and it went into commercial. The Province didn't pick up the difference; they just shift it onto other people in those school divisions. And that's where the spin and the smoke and mirrors came in.

But—and the fairness of this \$5,000 cap, I have had several constituents come to me and say, I'm

over the cap. But, you know, my wife owns two or three quarters of land—it's in her name. Because I'm over the cap, she isn't eligible, and to me that just takes the female voice in agriculture in this province right out of the equation. And I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just back to a commentary that the member opposite brought up when he referred about property education tax, as he would know, that still does exist. Every property homeowner is still entitled to the \$700 per Property Tax Credit over and above the school tax rebate. So point of clarification much taken in regarding his commentary when talking about that.

* (15:40)

But when we talk about—the fact is that when we do our taxes, regardless whether it's education property tax or personal income taxes, they're done separately. Correct? So to answer your questions, when you talk about trying to segregate whether it's a husband and wife partnership, it's irrelevant, right. There is the fact that it's a separate—*[interjection]* When we talk about income tax, short of being a corporation, yes.

Mr. Briese: And I'm sorry, Mr. Minister, but no, it's not. This has nothing to do with income tax. This has to do with the education property tax—education rebate on bare farmland. And just because your partner has hit the cap doesn't mean, if you've got land in your own name, that you should be denied any rebate. And that's what I'm saying.

I've got a young couple that just live a few miles from me. And she was raised on the farm. He bought into the farm. The farm's under his name. But her dad gave her a half section of land in her name, which is still in her name. He's over the education cap. She cannot get it on her half section of land, which is in her name, because she's married to him. And that is an unfair policy.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I think the fact that a comment was made earlier about the value of farmland, and, you know, it's theoretically—well, it is what it is. I think the members opposite are quite familiar, where land values of agricultural land has probably nearly doubled in the last number of years. So, when we talk about the tax component of that, I understand that the amount of people affected by the tax increase is what it is. And as I said earlier, we are in a situation where we see the importance, if you're talking about the young couple that have a small

school in their area, and the choice is to be made, whether they would like to see that school close and to see their children transported 40, 50 miles down a highway, I think there would be some long discussions, and I think the member opposite is quite familiar with the population and what it is in rural municipalities and where we see some changes happening.

I don't think the member opposite is in a position or would like to state on the record that he believes that schools that have a challenging population would like to see some school closures. I would like to maybe put the question back to the member opposite: Is that a position that he might be interested in putting on the record, of seeing school closures that have a declining population? So it might be challenging for young kindergarten students, grade 1 students, to travel the distance.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to try some very simple mathematics. The minister has twice stated that an 80 per cent rebate gives back \$35 million to landowners. Twice he stated that. And yet, you have said that, to date, and you only have a couple of days left to figure out, you've paid—and I'm going to round up—\$27 million you've paid out. So 35 minus 27 is \$8 million. And yet, you claim that, to date, you have only clawed back 5 and a half million dollars.

Is this NDP math? Or what's going on?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The number of applicants that's still to be processed is roughly about 4,000. So it's very difficult—to the member opposite, you may classify it as PC math, but we're referring to the fact—accept the fact that we need to have—as a deadline was indicated, it was March 24th is when it was indicated—there's a—still been a number of applications, so when we talk about the importance of doing the mathematical match, I think it would have been only important that you would consider the fact that once we get all the applications then we could do the actual math.

Mr. Pedersen: So, when that final calculation is done, will the minister forward me what the actual capped amount is? In other words, it's 5 and a half million dollars to date, but the final figure comes in, will the minister agree to forward me that number when it's done?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes. By all means, once we get the total number of applicants coming in, we'll gladly share that information with the member opposite.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): First off, I would like to welcome the staff back. It's always good to see you. I no longer have the critic for this particular area, but I do have some concerns that I wanted to bring forward and certainly always welcome the opportunity to try and get some answers.

Staying on the theme of the rebate, what is the administration cost for the rebate cheques and issuing of those rebates, a far as the cost to the Province is concerned? I know it used to be, years ago, about \$1 million. I'd like to know what the current cost is.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Obviously, when programs are somewhat re-established and refigured, there is always a cost of, you know, setting up a new program and documentation, so just going back into historical—when we were under the FSTR in the previous assembly, it was a cost of about \$410,000 a year. And with this being the, I guess, the new year of moving forward with the program, it's anticipated the costs, administration costs, will probably be about \$800,000 to bring forward the new programs, information that's necessary to process not only once this year's completed, then moving forward there will be a standard documentation that will be used on a repeat basis. So, going forward, we're anticipating the cost will probably be in that \$640,000 a year.

Mr. Eichler: I'm sure there's a program that could be developed or somebody probably a whole lot smarter than I am when it comes to computer programming, but—whereby we could use the data on refunds for the farmers, whereby we would be able to utilize that information so we could simply walk a cheque down to the Department of Finance. And I've argued about this many times before.

* (15:50)

To me, it doesn't make a lot of sense for the farmer to have to pay it and then the government have to rebate it back to the farmer, where it'd be a simple matter of program set-up so that you could administer that through one office to another office rather than multiple duplications because we know postage is going up as of the 1st of April; it's going to be costly. So 800,000—today-dollars, who knows what that will be next year. Has there been any thought put forward on that process?

Mr. Kostyshyn: First and foremost, I think the stamp increase, I think, yes, it's not really a liking to anybody and I think we should let the appropriate department know that we're not in favour of stamp

costs going up according. So I would support you in your connections to make sure that doesn't happen. If we—[interjection] But the other thing, you know, when we talk about actual costs of administration and stuff to—when you figure out the \$640,000 going forward, when you break it down that's a cost of about 1.8 administration cost to do that. And, you know, when we take the actual figures of administration, to me that's still a relatively low means of administration cost of \$640,000.

Mr. Eichler: Okay, very good, I'll move on from there. I'm not going to debate it. I just made a suggestion, up to the government whether or not they want they want to institute that policy or not.

What methodology did the department use to determine the \$5,000 cap?

Mr. Kostyshyn: You know, it's always a difficult decision, and when we talked about the mechanism that—how we come to this \$5,000 cap—and, you know, as I said earlier, what was a fair way to trying to target our budget goals and still treat it as a fair system within the \$5,000 cap idea. And I think one of the things that should be noted and has been mentioned before is that some of the challenges that the department was facing is retaining the 80 per cent school tax rebate was based on about a 4-and-a-half-million-dollar increase every year within historical—you know, sustaining the same 80 per cent based on school tax rebate, dollars met, it was an additional hit because of increases that occurred through the school divisions or land values, as well. So it was about a 4 and a half million dollar per year to sustain that at 80 per cent.

So you know, it was a tough decision, and that is why we've chosen to do the \$5,000 cap and we figure that was the appropriate area that would limit the amount of people that would be affected and still sustain the dollars into the education system and meeting our targeted within budget.

And taking that money and putting it in other programs that we see are very important and we can refer to, you know, we can take dollars, that we felt that forage insurance was important. We felt that other programs, such as community pastures, was a key component of defined dollars within. And I think member opposite is quite familiar with—as agriculture has changed in the last number of years and we need to move dollars around and set priorities and distribute it fairly to all people that are affected by the change of the demographics and dollar allocations to the agriculture sector.

Mr. Eichler: What exemptions is there, in regards to the rebate, in regards to drought or flood conditions, where the farmer or producer does not have the ability to be able to pay in those situations? What exemption is there and how would a producer go about making application for such?

This year obviously wasn't the case but we know up in Interlake country there was four years, multiple years, where there was no crop, and I can guarantee you there have been no payment of taxes. In fact, I've met with a number of those RMs and they had to work their way through them. But I'd like to put on—the minister to put on the record what those exemptions are and how they would have to be applied for.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Mr. Chair, let us—the scars not go away too fast, the memories of 2011 flood and I think that the member opposite, you know, is in an area that was partly inundated by the flood of 2011 and the producers that were affected by the flood. And I know that there was a number of programs that were brought forward and some of it was delivered through the municipal governments to somewhat be—provide some leniency in the school or in the taxes collected through the municipal government at one point in time.

*(16:00)

And I think depending upon, you know, the specifics of the question the member opposite is posing, you know, there's always the opportunity of nobody can predict when a flood's going to occur or if it's going to occur.

And I think that's one of the great 'attributaries' of crop insurance, that he have an opportunity to take insurance out and protect yourself in that perspective, you know, whether it's cropland and now with forage-land production. You can see the importance of MASC being proactive in distributing some of the priority dollars into programs that are insurance based for the benefit of kind of a bankable.

And, as I was saying today, I was very proud to make the announcement. I mean, livestock price insurance, I think, is a very key component that—the reoccurrence of the BSE, I've lived through that, and let me tell you, that's going to be quite a tough memory. And I think it shows up in the cattle numbers, what we see today. And I think the importance of insurance-based program is truly a priority in every government's mind. At the end of the day, it's a benefit to the producers that are

directly involved in that type of an industry, and I think we as government, in partnership with the federal government, see that being a proactive way to minimize any risk and financial hardships that the producers are facing today and—or may face.

And I think we're doing our due diligence where we try and minimize the financial hardship—unpredictable financial hardships. And the western livestock price insurance is definitely going to be one of the—will be or should be a benefit as a bankable financial—bankable component to the agriculture industry in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: Actually, you know, the minister answered another question that I was going to ask a little bit later on, but the question I'm proposing 'pecifically' is the flood from 2005 to 2009 in the Interlake area whereby crop insurance in the insurance program would have made absolutely no value on a return on the value for the farmers, because it's based on your income. When there's no crops in multiple years, you don't get enough money to cover off a lot of those costs. So the income for the farmers in the Interlake area went from—pick a number; it doesn't really matter. Whichever scenario you want to use—\$100,000 or \$1 million. Those values and incomes come down as there's no revenue from year to year.

Is there an exemption for flood or drought in multiple years where they do not have the ability to pay and still be able to carry over? Because now you put a deadline. If the taxes are not paid and claimed for by March 31st, they're no longer eligible to apply for that refund, where in the past they were. Under the new program, they lose it if they don't apply for it. That's what I'm asking 'pecifically' about.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you, and staff [*inaudible*] but I think first and foremost, I think when you talk about the 2005 and to the 2009 and in the areas that were affected in, and those were the years where ag stability, I sense, and ag invests were, you know, involved in, in the referenced margins becomes a challenge, correct? If I may assume that. And definitely those are the challenges of the industry and the BSE and the flood, you know, not—in no disagreement with the member opposite that it becomes challenging for producers to come up with the dollars to pay the taxes.

And I guess that's where—when we talk about insurance-based programs such as livestock price insurance and we talk about forage insurance

program, I think, is a priority. And—[interjection] So noted.

So I hear the member opposite's concern, and then I—and if he will pardon my—just pause here for a second, I will try and get some updated information for the member opposite.

And quite familiar with the 2005 and 2009 floods that, you know, Mother Nature has somewhat treated that side of the province unfairly. And I think there's a number of components to the way we could answer the question or try and facilitate. And our government has always been, you know, open to suggestions and ideas how we could assist producers that are 'adverlesy' affected because of Mother Nature's elements. And I think the other thing that we talk about is, you know, that the federal government, you know, disaster financial assistance is always a key component when we talk about circumstances that are beyond our control. And the municipal governments have the opportunity to apply to the federal and provincial governments because a state of emergency has been issued in that area, and consideration about the—some form of tax relief for some of the municipalities, which would assume that they may want to transfer or would transfer it onto the landowners. In designated rural areas there's been an unusual flood event that has caused some damages.

And I would like to also indicate to the member opposite, you know, we do have the lending institute in the province, MASC. And those kind of opportunities are always available to producers that are challenged. And the sad reality is, when we're in the agriculture industry, and a lot of us—there are certain things that Mother Nature doesn't treat us very fairly. And we continue to battle with them, and whether it's crop or whether it's beef, whether it's the hog industry, we have our challenges.

And I think—I want to assure the member opposite that we will, and we always will, be conscious of the fact to help out producers that are affected by unusual events that are challenging to them through Mother Nature.

Mr. Eichler: I've finally got it. There is no plans for flood or drought, so we'll move on. For those that are not eligible, I guess they have to go and borrow some money to get their rebate. That's unfortunate, because I think the minister would have had a grand opportunity to take advantage of the question to make sure that there would be. So, obviously, there's not.

I want to move on now to the Shoal lakes flood program. Last year, there were seven outstanding claims. How many is there to date?

* (16:10)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes. Outstanding items included in Shoal Lake's windup or winding down—all buyout payments and payments for lost production and transportation [inaudible] have been completed except for two, much to your commentary, which are expected to be completed by April 2014 without no complications anticipated.

Mr. Eichler: There were 69 individuals that had received payout. What is the number at now for payouts since that time, or could the minister outdate—update us on the number of individuals that have been added to settlement claims?

Mr. Bidhu Jha, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Kostyshyn: Oh, a different voice. Welcome Mr. Acting Chair.

The Acting Chairperson (Bidhu Jha): Thank you.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Mr. Acting Chair, 72 in the Shoal Lake's voluntary buyout applicants have been processed, resulting in a total of \$13,733,671 being paid out to eligible applicants.

Mr. Eichler: Last year, there were 69 that were settled. There were seven outstanding at that point, so that would've made a difference of 76, and there's only two outstanding now, so we lost four. Where did they go?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I'm asking for the member opposite. Our main staff person that was working on that file is not with us today, and I'll gladly provide the answer to the questions brought forward in very short course.

Mr. Eichler: Then I guess we'll have to ask the minister—about the next hour, I'm going to be asking questions in regards to the Shoal Lakes. Would you prefer to defer to another day because these answers are very important to the producers in that area? If we're not able to fulfill that information, then we'll move on to something different.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, you know, I guess assumption was that some of this was MASC flooding programs, but there's also the Shoal lakes one that has other staff members besides MASC are involved in that. So I apologize for the fact that we weren't prepared to deal with some of the questions regarding the Shoal lakes, but we'll definitely make the necessary

arrangements to have that person here tomorrow to deal with the questions brought forward. Or if you wish, you can definitely provide some paper documentation and we'll try and answer the questions if—whatever your choice may be.

Mr. Eichler: Then we'll focus on the flood of 2011 then, around Lake Manitoba, and the cost that was paid out—or the dollar amounts that were paid out in 2012-2013 to those producers under the program that was established by the previous minister. There were several commitments made to those farm producers. We'd like to know the number of claims that were submitted and the dollar amount that was paid out to those producers around Lake Manitoba for the flood of 2011.

* (16:20)

Mr. Kostyshyn: And these totals are somewhat as of March 7th, 2014, but related to the flood of 2011, as the member opposite is referring to, in segregating it to Lake Manitoba flood of 2011. So I will—I would like to have the opportunity to break it down for you.

Hoop and Holler Compensation Program: the amount paid out was eight million two hundred and—or pardon me—\$8,564,458. The Lake Manitoba Financial Assistance Program, part (a) being pasture flooding assistance: total was 2,694—pardon me—\$2,694,345. Part (b) of agriculture, infrastructure, transportation, crop and forage loss, the total dollar amount adds up to \$34,138,282. Part (c) is business, principal, non-principal residents: adds up to fifty-eight thousand, five hundred and—or pardon me—fifty-eight million—pardon me—\$58,531,500. It's kind of like Ralph's bank account. Temporary accommodation program: the total amount is \$5,156,981. Part (d), residents in community flood mitigation: adds up to \$8,269,551. Subtotal for Hoop and Holler and Lake Manitoba is \$117,355,117. It's even hard for me to pronounce those numbers, let alone imagine them. Excess Moisture Economic Stimulus Program adds up to \$2,377,704. Dauphin River Flood Assistance is \$1,972,517. And Lake Dauphin is \$292,696.

So what we have here, based on the total building and recovering action program is \$121,998,034.

Mr. Eichler: And the number of applicants? Number of claims?

An Honourable Member: So under the—

The Acting Chairperson (Bidhu Jha): Honourable minister.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Sorry, Mr. Chair. Under the Hoop and Holler Compensation Program, number of applications received was 631. Under the part (a) of pasture flooding assistance, a total number was 268. Part (b), agriculture, infrastructure and transportation, crop and forage loss was 1,503 applicants. Part (c) was business, principal and non-principal residents, were 2,462. Temporary accommodation program was 243. Part (d), residents and community flood mitigation was 582. Subtotal to Hoop and Holler and Lake Manitoba was 5,689 applicants. Excess Moisture Economic Stimulus Program was 95 applicants. Dauphin River Flood Assistance was 66. And Lake Dauphin was 59.

So a grand total of 5,909.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Minister, for that.

In regards to the applications or the number of claims, how many of those are still outstanding that have not been settled?

Mr. Kostyshyn: So the ones that are still in the process of discussion under part (c) business principal and non-principal residence, there are 72 in discussions, and under temporary accommodations program there are two.

Mr. Eichler: The number of claims that are under appeal at the current time?

Mr. Kostyshyn: This—for point of clarification this is under the BRAP program—and the number of appeals requested originally was 521 and there is a total today—89 still being considered out of the 521.

Mr. Eichler: On the 521 appeals, how many of those have seen a change in the actual amount that was paid as opposed to what they received?

* (16:30)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Basically, as we kind of tabulate the figures that have been brought forward to the question posed by the member opposite, 25 per cent have basically, I guess, were received additional dollars based on the appeal process.

Mr. Eichler: Would we be able to get the dollar amount of the appeal? You said there was a 25 per cent change. I assume that was an increase not a decrease but not always. Could we get that dollar amount?

Mr. Kostyshyn: For the record, yes, that is a right assumption. It's an increase based on the original dollar amount. Out of the 432 estimated, 100 received more dollars through the appeal process.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Eichler: And the dollar amount is?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Unfortunately, staff don't have that with us right now, but I'll gladly have staff forward it to yourself or your department in the near future.

Mr. Briese: My question will revolve somewhat around crop insurance. In the Lake Manitoba inundation zone tame hay and native hay was flooded and absolutely wiped out, like, it looked like a moonscape when it finally came out from under the water. There were programs, whether they addressed the issues or not, but there were programs for rehabilitation and for—some for debris cleanup and things like that. But it takes a period of time—and I asked questions of the House the other day on this—and it takes a period of time to rehabilitate that land, get it reseeded and get a decent crop of hay coming again. Some of the native hay pretty well has to regenerate itself because it's very difficult land to work on.

Now a lot of those producers had crop insurance on their tame hay for sure and some had it on native hay and now they're getting—and I'm sure it's within the parameters of crop insurance—but now they're getting their crop insurance coverage cut back. There's no ongoing program from the flooding programs and they're caught. They're having to go and buy feed either standing and do it themselves or buy feed for their cattle when they would normally provide all that feed on their own properties, and so they're still suffering from the flood and they're not getting any kind of compensation to help them bridge that gap until they have that re-establishment of those forages.

I know they were paid so much an acre, I think they were paid so much an acre—I shouldn't say I know—for re-establishment but there's still that loss that goes on for a couple of years in between when they have to go out and purchase supplies because the crop hasn't been re-established. Can you comment on that? Is there something there that can help these guys because they're in a pretty serious situation?

Mr. Kostyshyn: It's always nice to have a bit of humour once in a while.

To the question brought forward by the member—and I know, being involved in the conservation districts for a number of years and actually having the opportunity to tour that area where we met with some producers, the local MLA

and I, in that area where you see the bulrushes and the growth of the bulrushes, and trying to find some means of harvesting and refurbishing some of the land that was there. And I know I talked to a number of individuals in conservation districts where they were experimenting and also our staff at the various GO offices that were working with landowners to try and develop some means to refurbish that land, and given the ground conditions and the vegetation, it's challenging. But I almost felt that there was some positive movement in that and—but, obviously, it's a number of years of trying.

And, actually, I was quite fortunate to have the opportunity to talk to an elderly gentleman that—I think it was back in the '50s where I think where he was referring to me that he recalls the challenges they faced when they were kind of somewhat faced with a similar flood. And I think his commentary to me at that time was that it's one of those circumstances where Mother Nature doesn't treat us fairly at times, but the fact is that the native grass will come back. And in that space it was almost a turnaround time of about five years—is what he referred to in his conversation to me. So, you know, the challenges are there in events of flood, and I guess the natural surroundings, kind of, you have to deal with it and be creative.

So I want to assure the member that our GO offices are—and staff always working with them, and the conservation districts were somewhat creative in trying to help out some of the producers in those designated areas.

But when we talk about coverage through crop insurance in those challenging areas—2011, obviously, the flood occurred and that would've been the crop insurance was available at that time on native grass areas. And also in 2012, crop insurance proceeded to provide coverage at that time as well for producers to have the option to do the insurance on that.

* (16:40)

And to my records, 2013 was also a year that the producer was given the choice to get crop insurance coverage at that point in time. So I think that, you know, we, from MASC or crop insurance component, we were trying to work with the producers in every way we can and hopefully at the end of the day between conservation districts and the local governments and our GO off staff that we can provide some quick mechanism to retrieve some of

that land that unfortunately was subject to the flooding.

Mr. Briese: They had those coverages and—but the—first of all, you're talking about the cattails and the bulrushes. They're—once the land dries out, they're not that difficult to get rid of. They like wet land, so they're not that difficult to get rid of, but you still need that re-establishment of that grassland. And, by the way, the flood you were referring to before was in '54 and '55, I believe.

But, in this case, a lot of this flooding was caused by increasing the flow of the Portage Diversion by a third—well, 50 per cent more than it handled before. And that's the big difference from any previous flood. It was, to a degree, man-made because the—those flows were increased and programs were promised to bridge these producers in the inundation zone, which is a fairly small area. It's mostly within five miles of the lake, mostly, not all. And there was—there were supposed to be programs to bridge them through until they had that production back. Those promises were made, and I'm just asking how are you bridging that now because one producer has told me his crop-insurance-covered acres is going from just about 1,100 acres to down under 100. Another one has told me that the deadline for signup was March the 31st, so he essentially signed a blank form. He doesn't know what his coverage is going to be because they have to get out and inspect the acres. So these guys are kind of in limbo. What's there to bridge them?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I think, first and foremost, for the record, when the member opposite brings up the—a producer that had signed up, basically indicated a blank sheet through crop insurance and not knowing what he's going to be paying or what he's going to be covered on, I think I want to ensure that he—the MLA that a crop insurance will be doing a reassessment in those designated areas again to see, yes.

But also I think, to the member opposite, the reality is that the producer is not going to be paying on some land that he's not going to be used, so basically there's no premium that will be affiliated in. So that's the choice at that point in time where the premium—have a collection. You don't pay on an area that you're not putting into production or taking into production, right.

And let's not be, let's be a little bit reminisce about the fact that you know we've had our discussions with the federal minister and I think it was pretty evident in the commentary that was said

that as we talk about a partnership with the federal government and we talk about a commentary where the minister made a comment that he doesn't feel that the importance of paying for a flood, a continuation of one 'eflood vent', the government, the federal government was not prepared to continue to pay a compensation program to a flood event that's related to one particular year and then that's—that is where we have our situations.

And also, when we talk about the crop insurance, and I think the member opposite is quite familiar, is that a crop insurance, provincial crop insurance, is a program that's partnered with the federal government and there are certain circumstances and criteria that needs to be understood if we go outside the scope of an understanding between the federal and provincial government in the crop insurance criteria.

So I think that we, as the government, are being proactive. The flood of 2011, definitely, it was the watershed within the province of Manitoba. I think it was manageable. I think the member opposite is quite familiar when we talk about the watershed that starts basically in the Assiniboine valley area in an Assiniboine tributary, it basically goes out to—into my—goes up to Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, in some ways, the start of the tributaries that goes into the Assiniboine River and through in Saskatchewan, the province of Saskatchewan.

It's really a tsunami of water that, you know, we can—we need to deal with and I think, as the members opposite are quite familiar, there was a reason why the Portage Diversion was put in place, with the understanding that in event of events that were beyond, I think, safe to say, but beyond the provincial boundaries of a watershed that we take on a tsunami of water out of our control and we try to deal with that in an appropriate manner.

But I think being the province, the government today, being proactive, is that the reality is in our dollar allocations is we need to have a mechanism in place, such as being proposed in our budget and to have a control structure as a secondary outlet in Lake Manitoba so that we don't have a reoccurrence of this.

And you know, the \$10 million—was it \$10 million or \$100 million that was spent on the lake, the diversion there? Yes, I believe it was \$10 million. I believe it was \$10 million and forgive me if I got the wrong figure, but when the province

became proactive in trying to establish a relief outlet in and out of Lake Manitoba between Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg, and you know that challenges was that we are faced with the choices of possibly not being compensated for that \$10 million.

But, as far as the government today, we're being very proactive, of trying to find a safety valve in event that so we don't have a reoccurrence of a flood event like we had in 2011 and somewhat relieve the tsunami of water beyond our control, and I think we're being very proactive by having that secondary outlet in Lake Manitoba to address, and for the benefit of the Manitoba.

Mr. Briese: The reality of the 2011 flood—and I hate using the word the reality of—was that a group of people around Lake Manitoba were flooded to protect others in the province. They didn't have a problem with that. They were told that they would be—have coverage in that 'unindation' zone until they were back to normal.

Now what I asked and what you didn't even touch on here is what is there to bridge these people? And I—if it doesn't fall under the parameters of crop insurance, it doesn't fall under the parameters of crop insurance, although I think the province sets the parameters for crop insurance in the province. I know you tried to shift it back to the feds there, but I think a province sets that.

But my question was: What are you doing to bridge until these guys have their land back into production?

*(16:50)

Mr. Kostyshyn: For the record, to the member from Agassiz, is that you're correct in my commentary that I've reinforced—is that any changes to be made to crop insurance definitely falls in with the federal government's criteria, so if there's going to be any changes, there definitely has to be an understanding and consultation with the federal government in event of the present program that is in place with crop insurance. So, for the record, I want to inform you on that perspective.

The government of Manitoba provided comprehensive support to its citizens affected by the weather extremes and flooding in 2011. As of March 31, 2014, over \$440 million has been provided to Manitobans affected by the extreme weather and flooding in 2011. Of this, \$341 million has been a direct support to the agriculture industry producers.

And I know, as the member brought forward of the people that are still being affected by the flood in the designated area in Lake Manitoba, MAFRD's forage restoration team continues to co-ordinate an extended program that will begin in the spring of 2012. The team initiated Lake Manitoba Forage Restoration Program, establishing four applied research demonstration sites within the 2011 Lake Manitoba flood zones, and in the spring of 2013, to study and demonstrate restoration practices that will provide a faster recovery of drowned out areas in the province.

So I just want to reinforce—back to my earlier comment—is that we continue—our staff continues to work. We continue to work through conservation districts. We continue to work with the Agriculture Department to find creative ways to help the producers in the affected areas.

Mr. Eichler: Coming back to the payouts to the claims of the \$121,998,034, how much was that recouped? How many dollars was recouped by the federal government?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Obviously, the member opposite seems to be asking the questions that I have to keep referring to that we don't have the information in front of us. And we'll gladly, you know, in a later date we—[interjection] I noticed, that's why I referred to it is that obviously you're picking the questions that are—but I definitely want to reinforce the fact that we'll get back to you with the information from other staff that are somewhat involved in that breakdown of the question being the federal government's contribution dollar amount.

Mr. Eichler: On the same theme, I know the Province decided to upfront \$5,000 in funds right off the bat in regards to outstanding claims. How many of those claims was paid out 2012-2013?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Based on the \$5,000 advance that was provided to people affected by the 2011 flood, the total number was 1,400 properties to—or 1,400 individuals. I'm not sure what the proper terminology would be, but it's 1,400, which was a total of approximately \$7 million. And of those 1,400 we still need to get some final documentation from 72 residents of the request of the \$5,000 that they were paid on. And so that would—out of the 72 residents, if we—doing the math is about—we're anticipating, you know, partial receipt or full receipts would be justified. But it's anticipated about 225,000 would be that still needs to be accounted for by the receipts of the 72 residents or the property owners.

Mr. Eichler: Out of that number how many have been denied as a result of their claim and wanting the money to be refunded back to them—back to the government?

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of Executive Council. Would the staff of the leader and the official opposition please enter the Chamber.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, my first question to the Premier deals with the subject that I raised in question period today, the issue of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

First of all, just to correct one statement from yesterday, the Premier said that there are about 700 more linemen in Manitoba since we've come into office. In fact, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers deals with more than just linemen, and so the members of the union may have gone up but the total number of linemen in Manitoba is, as I am informed, just 650 in total. So we haven't yet reached the first 700, let alone the second 700.

Now, I know that on March the 15th, the Premier promised to double the training capacity for the IBEW workers for linesmen, and that the Premier has been talking about this. The problem as I see it, is that over the last 15 years the replacement of hydro poles has got behind, the training capacity has got behind, and so that we are now in a position where we critically need to replace hydro poles and we critically need to have more hydro workers in order to do this, and so the Premier is essentially playing catch up.

But given that, when will the increased capacity catch up to the increased work requirements and therefore eliminate the need to contract work out to out-of-province contractors?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for the question. I think he was starting his comments and his question today by indicating that it was 650 additional linemen versus 700. And—

An Honourable Member: No, there's 650 total.

Mr. Selinger: The 650 additional new IBEW workers, some of which are linemen, versus 700 is?

Mr. Gerrard: I think that the Premier's statement that there's something like 700 additional linemen is actually referring to 700 additional IBEW workers. They cover many other areas than just linemen so that the—but I don't know what the additional number of linemen is, but the total number of linemen right now in Manitoba is 650.

Mr. Selinger: I don't have a specific answer to him when the additional capacity being developed with linemen will be sufficient to address all the issues with respect to poles, but that's a good question. We can seek to get information for him on that question from Manitoba Hydro and see how that shakes out.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the Premier for that answer.

We've had an extensive Auditor General's report on the situation about not tendering the STARS contract. And, given the extensive criticisms of the Auditor General and then concerns about the fact that it wasn't tendered, my question to the Premier is, you know, if he were in the same situation again, would he tender the contract instead of single sourcing it as he did?

Mr. Selinger: I understand the member is asking me about the tendering procedure with respect to STARS. And, you know, Mr.—I think it's been put on the record before that in 2009 STARS was brought in to serve the urgent needs of Manitobans in the middle of the '09 flood. And then they were re-invited to come to Manitoba in 2011 when we had the flood of the century, as we all know, particularly the Acting Speaker—Deputy Speaker. So they had performed well in 2009. They had performed well in 2011 during the flood. And it was still a period of very significant recovery in that year, even after the worst of the flood waters had declined. But—so there was a real desire to continue to offer that service, particularly to people that might not be able to be accessed by any other means, including ambulance service on the ground. So the real desire there was to ensure continuity of service with a supplier of that service that had done a good job during the '11 and the 2009 flood situations.

Mr. Gerrard: Just to be very specific about the question, what I was asking is—there was some fairly heavy criticism of the government in the Auditor General's report about not tendering. And the Auditor General recommended that it be tendered. I had asked if the Premier was in the same situation

again, would he now tender that contract or not? Is the Premier's answer an indication that he would not tender the contract, or?

Mr. Selinger: I have to say, that is a hypothetical question. And not really—I think you have to make these decisions in real time with the facts available and the circumstances available at the time—key questions—there's another provider ready to go to provide continuity of service, immediately ready to go. My understanding was is that the Department of Health had checked for other full-service helicopter paramedic providers. There were other options in terms of helicopters, but there was no immediately available, another service that could offer the full range of services that was offered by the STARS program. And so in the interests of continuity of service they did select that.

So what would happen in the future? We'd have to take a look at the reality of the marketplace at the time or who the alternative providers were, whether they were available, whether they could offer the services that were needed, how dire your situation was in terms of community need, whether there were, for example, in the context of a major natural disaster like a flood. So it's a hypothetical question.

* (15:00)

But if the member is asking: Is tendering the preferred procedure when it comes to the acquisition of services? In broad terms, of course. The policy we have on tendering has specific grounds for exemption from tendering procedures. And I think we've put some of that information on the record, but if the member wishes, I'll try to get that document for him again on the grounds of whether or not there's a case for exemptions. And so, for example, another province also tendered with—did not tender with STARS in terms of acquiring their services, and that was in Saskatchewan. So I'm going to get—if the member wishes, I can identify the specific criteria under which you can have an exemption.

For example, there are four reasons why government would choose not to tender out a contract: one of them would be urgent requirements when only one supplier is contacted to meet a particular need and an assessment is verified that any other supplier is not feasible or practical; a single-source circumstance, and that is one where—to accommodate the procurement of requirements where only one supplier is capable of providing the goods or services; and a sole-source approach where only one supplier is permitted to provide the goods

or services and an assessment verified that any other supplier is precluded; and an emergency circumstance where an unforeseen situation that poses a threat to life, property, public security or order, and the goods and services must be obtained as soon as possible to mitigate the associated risks.

At the time, Manitoba Health did have conversations with the service in Ontario—Ornge—and Helijet, which I believe was out of British Columbia, but neither was able to immediately provide the service for rural patients. So those are the kinds of circumstances that occurred this last round.

In future situations, we'd have to look at—take a look at the real circumstances on the ground to see what's possible. Presumably, if there were a variety of full-service providers of helicopter paramedic services, there—it would be appropriate to tender and get the best value for the money and the best quality of service.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, let me move to Teranet. The Premier has said and other members of his government have said that there was an evaluation done of the worth of the Property Registry. Can the Premier provide that evaluation?

Mr. Selinger: Look into the specifics of that. That was an issue in the Department of Finance. The Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) was probably more equipped with information to answer that specific question in real time. If the member asked me to identify what assessment was done, I will endeavour to seek what information was available at that time.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, it's my understanding that in post-secondary education, the Premier's making changes and getting rid of, I believe, COPSE, the Council on Post-Secondary Education, and I'm just trying to get a confirmation of that and what the minister is going to put in its place and how it will work.

Mr. Selinger: The Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum) is in Estimates yesterday, and I would invite the member to have that conversation with him on the specifics of that.

But the general idea is to bring COPSE directly into the department so that those officials can work more directly with all the other people in the education system to provide a more continuous approach to making sure high school graduation rates are achieved, post-secondary programs are more

closely linked together and articulated and that we can just have a more seamless system of education that allows for opportunities for success and support at every level of a young person's career or any person's career through the education system.

So the idea is just to bring all the resources closer together for more co-ordination and the ability to more rapidly develop a system that can allow us to meet our skills agenda of 75,000 more skilled workers over the next eight years and work with all of our institutions at the—particularly at the secondary, college and university level—to work together to achieve that.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, in the Free Press today, there is an article about an individual, Deveryn Ross, and the—there has been a court ruling to say that the federal Minister of Justice now needs to review this because the initial review that was done was not appropriate and was—that the—it is also critical of the way that the province handled some aspects of this situation and the concern was that information that was critical was not disclosed and that was the reason why the judge had ruled in this instance that, you know, the federal government has to look at this again.

Now, on a number of occasions in 2000, 2001 and 2002, Mr. Ross had actually written to the former Attorney General, Mr. Mackintosh, asking to meet with him or anybody else at Manitoba Justice, to share the new information—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Just for the advice for the member for River Heights, members are to be referred to by their constituencies and ministers by their titles, please.

Mr. Gerrard: I apologize.

Mr. Ross was refused the opportunity to meet with the minister, and now we know that Mr. Ross was correct in that there was a significant amount of material that wasn't disclosed almost 15 years later. I'm just wondering if the Premier can understand or have any knowledge about why the Attorney General had failed to fully disclose the information needed to Mr. Ross or even to meet with him or even to allow his staff to—in his department to do so.

Mr. Selinger: This is in the hands of the federal Minister of Justice and we can't speculate what measures he's going to take, with respect to this court judgment, but I can say that Manitoba Justice will fully co-operate with any federal requests related to this. So I've—as the member knows, this is an—there

was an article written on this today and sort of explained the background to it and some of the findings in the court judgment. I'm sure our Justice officials are carefully evaluating that judge's decision. But I can let the member know that our officials will fully co-operate with the federal Minister of Justice in any determination he makes on how to follow up and respond to the—Justice's decision.

Mr. Gerrard: I think that the issue here is that—that has been raised is a concern about a wrongful conviction and that the concern that individual in this case, Mr. Deveryn Ross, be treated fairly.

Now, I take the Premier back to 2003 when it became clear that there'd been similar serious non-disclosure in the Driskell prosecution. And, at that time, the government, provincial government, wrote to the federal Minister of Justice and requested that Mr. Driskell's case be returned to the Manitoba courts so that the issue could be settled. We now know that there was, of course, significant non-disclosure in Mr. Ross's case, which is the reason for this court ruling.

And so I ask: Will the Premier follow the example set by his predecessor in the Driskell case and write to the federal Minister of Justice, requesting that Mr. Ross's case be returned to the Manitoba courts so it can be retried quickly and the matter resolved? It's been going on now almost 20 years.

Mr. Selinger: This judgment is very freshly rendered by the judge and our officials are going to fully review it and it would be far too early to make additional comments at this time. But I can say that we would fully co-operate with the federal minister, who has a decision in front of him now about how he would like to proceed, based on what the judge has concluded, in terms of his findings.

* (15:10)

Mr. Gerrard: Now, I've asked the Premier in question period some questions about the employment labour force statistics which were released last Friday. And when I looked at those statistics, one of the things that was striking was that the number, total number of people employed in Manitoba, whether you use the raw number or the seasonally adjusted number, it works out the same. But it shows that the number is significantly lower than that number in March of last year, and depending on whether you use the raw numbers or

the seasonally adjusted numbers, the decrease is between, I think it's six and a half and eight and a half thousand that the employment has gone down from last March. Now March is a fairly good year to give comparisons, or month to give comparisons, for year to year because it's, oh, a fairly good year. In fact, in all the years that the current government has been in office since '99, that number has gone up each year.

Now it goes up in part because of immigration because—and new births because of the—to the extent that the population increases you've got more people in the province. So it is a concern that that number is going down actually for March for the first time since—in many years, and I just raise this because, you know, it is a concern and I would ask the Premier to comment about this situation and what his plans are.

Mr. Selinger: I would say, first and foremost, it's important to compare apples to apples. It's not probably a good idea to compare non-seasonally adjusted figures to seasonally adjusted figures or vice versa. We have to use the same metrics if we're going to do comparisons. So that helps sharpen the conversation and the data.

But one thing is for sure, is that this winter has been harsher than we've seen in over 100 years and that does have impact on certain sectors of the economy. For example, construction might be impacted by that. It could have an impact even on agriculture. On the other hand, we've seen some growing labour jobs in terms of labour force participation or employment in the transportation sector and warehousing, education services, for example.

So, you know, I think we have to put these numbers in perspective and then at the same time ensure that we have a good solid program to keep the steady growth in the economy and good jobs available for Manitobans, and so I'm hoping that it really is spring, and that will bode well for future growth in the economy.

Mr. Gerrard: You know, just to put it in perspective and so that there is clarity here, what I am saying is that when I compare the non-seasonally adjusted in March of this year to the non-seasonally adjusted in March of 2013, that there is a fall of quite a number of thousands in terms of the total employment. When I take the seasonally adjusted March of this year versus March of last year, there is a similar fall in employment this March compared with last year, and

those falls are significant, you know, particularly even more so in comparison with other years, and recognizing that there was, indeed, a significant population increase and new immigrants and so on.

Now what is of interest, sometimes you can have one month where the numbers are, oh, are, you know, just jump around a little bit, but if I now compare the numbers for February of this year, 2014, to the numbers of February in 2013, that there has also been a fall in the total number of people employed in Manitoba. If I do the same for January of 2014 compared to January of 2013, there is, again, a fall in the number of people employed in Manitoba. If I go to December, there is similarly December now 2012 to December 2013, there is a fall in the number of people employed. If I go to November, there is again a fall in the number of people employed from December 2012 to December '13.

This string of five months in a row where there is a fall in the number of people employed in Manitoba compared with the same month the previous year, you know, is one of the longest strings in many years of—and it suggests that there has to be some concerns. There's not just a one-month aberration, that there is, in fact, a trend here that's five months long that we have to take, you know, seriously and significantly.

So I think it's important to note that this is a significant finding, not just a one-month aberration, and I think that the Premier needs to take this quite seriously. Will he?

Mr. Selinger: Of course, we carefully review these statistics when they're brought out; this is one of the more important roles played by our Chief Statistician and his staff. As I indicated earlier, there may be impacts on outdoor types of occupations, such as construction, given the—we've had the worst winter since 1898, so that could be a factor.

Another factor might be a sampling error. Monthly estimates do bounce around when you have a sample size of about 4,700, so there's always some noise there.

Apparently the—according to our Chief Statistician, all the monthly reported changes, including overall employment and unemployment, are not statistically significant at the 90 per cent confidence level. So that tells you that there might be some issues in terms of the sampling, the size of the sample and the sampling error that results from that.

For a 12-month changes, the estimates of error are significantly larger. So even at the 90 per cent level, many of these changes may not be significant. Perhaps education—construction and education was one where—there was significance that was negative in the case of construction. Education was one where there was significance, but that was positive in terms of growth. So, for example, the range just based on the potential sampling errors for construction over 12 months are between a loss of 3,400 and 14,000 jobs. In the case of education and health services, over 12 months the gains could be anywhere from 1,300 to 18,000.

So, basically, our Chief Statistician is saying to—one has to use the above perspective and one's own knowledge to attest the validity of these monthly—of the—of this reported labour force statistics information.

But I think the real point is that it's important to have a positive agenda for growing the economy in Manitoba and skilling up more workers and making sure that we've got a priority on growing our economy, and that's what this budget was all about and that's why we presented the five-year infrastructure program, to continue to make sure the economy does grow.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the ways in which one can look at the extent to which these numbers have some validity is to look at the other numbers. If there are fewer people being employed, working in Manitoba, then you would expect to see the number of people who are unemployed going up, and it has. But you would also look carefully at what's called the participation rate, the number of people who are participating in the economy.

And what was rather striking is that if you compare March of this year with March of last year, that the participation rate has gone down significantly, and the result of that participation rate being significantly lower than last year is that it—there are 14,000 fewer people in the workforce, and usually that's because people are deciding to opt out, often because, you know, it's difficult finding a job.

*(15:20)

And so, you know, what I'm saying here is that, you know, the numbers in the report, the Labour Force Survey, you know, tie together. Looking at them in integrated fashion they suggest that not only is the number of people working going down, but the

participation rate is going down and the number of people unemployed is going up.

So I think that it behoves the Premier to look at this carefully and seriously, and I ask him to do that.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, it is standard for us to review these stats to make sure we fully understand what's going on in terms of the trends, taking into account specific variables such as weather, taking into account the quality of the sampling and the variations that can occur because of sample quality and sampling error.

One thing I can say is the number of Manitoba employees grew more than twice as fast as Canada over the last three months, and we still have the third lowest unemployment rate in the country, so. Very obviously, we are focused on jobs and economic growth in Manitoba; steady economic growth and good jobs is a top priority for us, and we're dedicating very significant resources to that as we go forward, so.

Mr. Gerrard: I would just suggest to the Premier that he look more carefully over what's happened over the last three months, because the numbers I have show, in fact, a decrease in the number of people who are working in Manitoba over that period.

Now, of course, one looks not only at what's happening in terms of the number of people working or employed, but one has to look at—as we got earlier this week, an assessment of the value of building permits by province. And when you look at the number of building permits and the value of building permits from February—this time the data is of 2014—compared to February 2013, you know, Manitoba had a drop in total building permits of 37 per cent, which was rather striking and concerning. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland were the only other provinces to have a drop in building permits, and their drops were not as much. And the remaining provinces—except for pretty small decreases in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the remaining provinces had significant increases in building permits. So, you know, again, you know, it may be early to know precisely what's happening, but this is an indicator of economic activity, and I would suggest that it's important to be looking carefully.

One of the things which is certainly possible, as the Premier has talked about, is the, you know, smoothing out the employment rate from summer to winter. And one of the potential problems of putting,

know you, all one's emphasis on construction is that the large majority of construction happens during the summer months. And it would seem to me pretty important to have a growth strategy which looks at—well, at, you know, activities which can significantly increase employment not just in the summer, but in the winter as well.

And so I would ask the Premier to comment on the situation and, you know, ask what he's doing, you know, in this respect to balance out, you know, the construction activity in the summer with, you know, what's being done in terms of improving employment in the winter too.

Mr. Selinger: To put it in perspective, putting it since the onset of the global recession, Manitoba has done better than most provinces, even including on building permits. In 2013, Manitoba's building permits increased by 5 per cent, second only to one other province in Canada, while Canada's building permits remained flat.

Since 2011, Manitoba's building permits have increased by 41 per cent, the best increase of any province and more than four times the national increase of 9.3 per cent. Since the onset of the global recession, Manitoba's annual economic growth was second best in Canada, with only one other province doing better than that, and I've said earlier our unemployment rate, even at 5.7 per cent, remains the third lowest in Canada.

It is important to have a strong agenda for jobs and the economy right now. I've made that point on several occasions, which is why we released our five-year core infrastructure plan, and with the Conference Board of Canada evaluating that that plan could generate up to 58,900 jobs here in Manitoba. So it's a very significant plan in that for each dollar invested there would be \$1.16 benefit to the economy and that there'd be a boost of \$6.3 billion in terms of economic growth, and a boost to exports of \$5.4 billion, and retail sales increasing about \$1.4 billion. New housing starts going up—the projection from the Conference Board of Canada is new housing starts going up 2,100, and new equipment and machinery assets for firms increasing by \$1.4 billion. So Manitobans have asked us to focus on the economy and that's exactly what we're doing.

Mr. Gerrard: I think that one of the things that is important to note, by taking the baseline as 2011, that there had to be considerable construction to recover from the 2011 flood and so that there—one

has to look at what was ongoing construction of new homes as opposed to, you know, rebuilding homes which were destroyed in the flood, and I think that what we want is, you know, a long-run trend which sees the increase in new construction but, you know, not just recovering from floods, but from, you know, as part of the basal and ongoing economic activity. And I think that when we start to see declines in employment, decreases in participation rates and concerns about what's happening with building permits, that it warrants some attention, and I would re-ask the question that I did in terms of what is the Premier doing in terms of efforts which would boost employment in the winter and not just in the summer.

Mr. Selinger: I just want to be clear: Is the question to boost employment in the winter?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. We clearly—the construction will, you know, boost employment, particularly in the summer, right, and if you're going to have an economic strategy you need something that's going to boost employment in the winter as well as in the summer.

So all I'm asking is: What is the Premier doing in terms of—that will effect an increase in employment in the winter as well as, you know, any increase in employment that may occur in the summer?

Mr. Selinger: Well, there are a number of things. First of all, the infrastructure investments themselves will make it easier to move goods to our major customers' market places, and so those roads will be more usable all year round, including in the winter time. That will help manufacturing. The lower Canadian dollar will be a boost to manufacturing. We've worked with the manufacturing sector very closely over the last several years to increase productivity in manufacturing, both in terms of the equipment side of it and the technical skill of the workers operating the equipment and doing the jobs. Information technology training, quality of work in the workplace, all of those factors—safer workplaces so that people can be—work all year round under safe conditions.

* (15:30)

The legislation we brought in for safe workers is very significant. So all of those things will help boost employment in the winter, as well as in the summertime. But it'll help for year-round employment.

We've got an innovation strategy, and we're retooling our—and restructuring—or strengthening our innovation strategy in Manitoba. We've—so that's very helpful, as well, because innovation, as the member knows, often occurs in warm settings, which can—which make for jobs in the winter as well as in the summer. That has increased—some announcements yet to come, but some improvements in tax credits for investing in research and development. We have a—really, among the best tax credits in Canada with respect to that.

And, of course, trade creates opportunities for further employment on an annual basis, including in the wintertime. So we've—you know, we've had some very significant trade missions and that have built some relationships that we think will generate some additional employment in Manitoba. And when the announcements are there, we'll certainly let the member know what's going on.

Just the ability to hold the Junos just less than 10 days ago—very significant boost to the Manitoba economy, particularly the Winnipeg economy, with all these performers, family, friends, media, people from all across the country, fans and people coming to see the performances. That was a big boost. We look forward to our cultural industries providing year-round employment. We've strengthened our new media support. We've strengthened support for film. We've strengthened support for all of our cultural organizations. Some banner organizations such as Festival du Voyageur are a very strong provider of economic activity in the wintertime.

Without putting too fine a point on it, having professional hockey back in Winnipeg, in Manitoba, boosts employment and activity downtown. But all over Winnipeg, all over Manitoba, people are engaged in being fans and involved in the entertainment sector. Our reforms to our liquor laws and licensing are very significant opportunities for the tourism and entertainment industry to have more venues and more opportunities to promote culture, and cultural industries and cultural activity in Manitoba. So those are all things that generate a more resilient economy all year-round, particularly in the wintertime.

Our skills agenda and our education agenda help build the capacity of Manitobans to be active all year round in the labour market. So those are just some examples. We do have the Grey Cup coming. That will be helpful—

An Honourable Member: The game. We may not get the Grey Cup—the game.

Mr. Selinger: No, we're getting the Grey Cup. The member was just not optimistic enough. But the Grey Cup's coming to Winnipeg. And I know the member will be at the game, even though he opposed the stadium. So we'll look forward to that opportunity going forward. But we do see some tremendous potential there. And that's—that could have up to \$85 million of economic spinoffs in the Manitoba economy. So there's lots of good things going on there.

You know, our—for example, New Flyer is being very successful in securing new contracts for manufacturing buses. We've provided support for them to be more innovative in the energy sources they use in their buses, whether it's electric or diesel or hydrogen or hybrid—all of those things—and natural—compressed natural gas. But New Flyer is 40 per cent of the buses in North America, with some new partnerships with companies like Marcopolo out of Brazil, which we had a modest role in sort of helping move that along. Certainly the companies themselves were the leads on that, but we did our best to promote a healthy relationship there and some investment there. And we have seen some investment there. So all of these things are making a big difference.

We've seen workforce expansions at Boeing, at Canada Goose, at BEHLEN Industries, at Winpak and Buhler. City of Atlanta has agreed to purchase 89 more buses from New Flyer.

The aerospace industry is still very competitive in Manitoba, generates about \$1.6 billion in general revenues and employs about 5,500 skilled workers. And we've worked with the industry, the aerospace sector, to skill up more workers and allow them to be more productive in the workplace.

So there's just a whole number of things we're doing. Infrastructure helps productivity in the overall economy—winter, summer, all year round. And the member will know that we've done a number of measures on the tax side, as well, including reducing in corporate taxes from 17 to 12 per cent, eliminating the capital tax in Manitoba, having zero taxes for small business, the lowest in the country, for sure, and, as I mentioned earlier, strengthening our R & D tax credit scheme.

So all of these measures are measures to increase economic activity in Manitoba, and I have to say our

strong objective of continuing to invest in education and apprenticeships and skills prepares more people to enter the workforce and create their own jobs, start their own businesses. So all of these things are very important dimensions of continuing to keep the economy growing in Manitoba.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Just a couple of questions for the Premier. I let him know I indicated to the Clerk a few minutes ago with our expectations to wrap up your Estimates shortly. I just have a couple—final questioning, and I believe my friend from Emerson does as well.

The announcement yesterday in Steinbach ended up being a 50-50 cost-shared basis between the Province and the city. There's been a few questions related to that from residents just this morning, about wondering if that's a precedent that's going to continue on, that where there are provincial highways that need improvement that the municipalities that are near or have them running through them are going to be expected to pay 50 per cent of the cost of those improvements.

Mr. Selinger: It was a program that was announced last year because, as the member knows, the highway department has criteria for which projects should advance, based on need and quality of the infrastructure. But this program was announced to leverage more opportunities for infrastructure. Communities, it's voluntary. Communities don't have to enter into it if they don't wish to, but if they see the advantage of getting matching dollars for important priorities that they want to have in their community, they can take advantage of that. So it's not—it's an optional program. The core program for infrastructure continues, but where a community wants to be able to move more quickly on improving their infrastructure, they can enter into these kinds of arrangements to do that.

And, as the member knows, the mayor and council in Steinbach, an area he knows very well, were very eager to make some infrastructure improvements in that community for safety purposes. As we know, the community's a growing community, very strong entrepreneurial and business sector, so they were very interested in doing things that they thought would generate more even—even more economic growth in their community.

Mr. Goertzen: Just for the sake of the record, not entirely true. There were comments made by Councillor Susan Penner this morning, who was critical of the fact there was a 50-50 share, believing

that highways are the Province's responsibility and the city should not have to pay towards these upgrades. In fact, the mayor this morning, also on Steinbach Online, indicated that it's not the best way to do the projects because while 50-50 is a significant commitment, so I just wanted to make sure the record isn't left incorrect.

But the program that was announced that the Premier's referring to, is it always a 50-50 share where municipalities decide to enter into it? Is it always 50-50?

Mr. Selinger: The new program that was announced, and I'm going to ask my staff to bring in the press release on that if they can, it is under an envelope of resources that's 50-50 cost shared. It's voluntary. It's not intended to substitute for anything else but it allows communities that want to move faster than they might be able to move if they were prioritized against every other project in Manitoba.

For example, the member would completely understand that a flood-related type of infrastructure project would take priority over something else and so we are still are doing some of those projects from the 2011 flood, but this community saw the real benefit of improving some of their major intersections in town. They saw some safety issues there. They'd received a number of concerns expressed by their citizens. I do commend them for wanting to take the leadership in doing this. Other projects have been done across the province of Manitoba. So it's an optional program that allows communities to move more rapidly on things that they consider to be of great local importance.

* (15:40)

Mr. Goertzen: And there's no dispute about the safety issues along Highway No. 12; I drive that highway virtually every day and it—and I have friends who have been in accidents there and some pretty serious, so no question about that.

I think the question about the cost share because it was quite high for what was considered a provincial jurisdiction.

Is the funding for this program also coming from the increase in the PST from 7 to 8 per cent? Is that where the pool of funding was amassed for this program?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'll seek to verify the specific source of that. But it's part of the overall five and half million dollar program; it may not be in the PST

portion, it may be in the base amount, but I'll have to verify that for the member.

Mr. Goertzen: Because I think the way it was expressed to me this morning from some people in the coffee shops, you saunter into the coffee shops, as the former premier used to say—is people sort of felt maybe they were being double charged because they—they're paying for the PST increase through the goods and services that they buy in Steinbach and throughout Manitoba and they'll also be paying through their municipal taxes for this. So maybe I think they were under the impression, well, the PST increase is supposed to be paying for these improvements, we're already paying the additional PST, but now we'll also probably have to be paying more at some point, municipally, then we might otherwise because there's also that dip on the other side.

Can the Premier understand how people might feel that they're double paying in some ways—they're paying the PST increase and then also having to pay through municipal sources?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I appreciate the question from the member. I hope the member would take the opportunity to tell any of his citizens locally that we make very significant transfers of resources to municipalities for infrastructure out of provincial resources, so it kind of goes both ways if you understand what I'm saying.

We make transfers to municipalities; they can use those resources, for example, to match with us in this program. So you could argue that we're paying for it on both sides depending on what pot of money they access.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): And while we're on that topic, Mr. Premier, when you spoke of flood related and—or the people of Steinbach wanted to move ahead more quickly than it was at 50-50 cost sharing. And I believe it was probably three years ago maybe, four years ago, that you and I were riding down a road because there was a flood and we were riding down a road of 201 Highway. And at that time you seen that there was a need for an upgrade on that particular highway and apparently it may be in the works, I'm not sure that it is because it seems to be a moving target.

But at the same time if that piece of property or that piece of road is being upgraded to a RTAC and the municipality has said, yes, we—but we do need one extra mile on the 200 Highway to cross the

Roseau River in order to access—for access from that side because there is no bridge in St. Jean, there is no access to 75 Highway that isn't restricted but this would be the only access. So would there, then, be a triparty type of cost sharing for that particular piece of—that one piece of road—that one mile—would there be a triparty type of—and I'm thinking of the Building Canada Fund plus your infrastructure.

You wouldn't want to be burdening a small municipality like the RM of Franklin with a 50-50 cost sharing, would you?

Mr. Chairperson: Just a reminder to all members, that they should frame their questions so as to address them through the Chair and not directly across the floor to each other. Thank the honourable members for that.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, first of all I—the member is asking a very specific question and I understand that because this is a road of concern to his—to him and his communities. So I would have to find out where it fits into the capital program within the department of highways and infrastructure and I would hope the member would have taken that opportunity to query the minister and his officials in that department when they were in Estimates. And I would encourage him to do that in the future if he didn't get a chance to do that this time because they will have all the specific five-year plans and whether 201's a part of that.

So it may be part of the base program, it may be something that the municipality wishes to take advantage of, but it wouldn't be imposed on them, the 50-50, that would be their choice. And if the federal government wanted to make it a priority, for example, under the Building Canada Fund, then we would seriously consider matching that with them, and then the municipality could make a decision whether they wanted to be part of that as well.

So, again, it comes down to the specifics and where it's in the overall capital program, what the interest of the federal government and the municipality are and then what role we would want to play along with them to improve that piece of road.

Mr. Graydon: I would remind the minister that, just as late as question period today, he suggested that if there were any—any—projects that we wanted to know anything about, we could ask him, and so that's what I'm doing. I'm taking advantage of the opportunity to ask him about these types of projects.

Now, are there any triparty-type projects that he knows of that are going to be done under the Building Canada Fund?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the federal government has not announced their priorities under the Building Canada Fund. When they do, then we'll know whether there are any triparty projects like this, the one he's indicating.

Mr. Graydon: When will the—or does the minister know when the federal government will be making their announcement?

Mr. Selinger: I wish I could give him a firm date.

Mr. Graydon: Who will be administering that program?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I believe it will depend on the projects. Some projects will be done by municipalities, some projects will be done by Infrastructure—highways and infrastructure, some projects may be shared responsibilities. So we'd have to again—to look at the specifics of each project and whose responsibility it is to be the lead on doing it.

Mr. Graydon: So is the minister then saying that he doesn't know who is administering the Building Canada Fund in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: So I'm going to ask the member to repeat that question, please.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Emerson, to repeat his question.

Mr. Graydon: Is the First Minister saying that he doesn't know who is administering the Building Canada Fund in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: No, I'm not saying that.

Mr. Graydon: Then can he be more specific in who is doing that program in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: As I indicated earlier, each project may be delivered by a different agent. It might be a municipality. It might be provincial government. We have a secretariat that works on the Building Canada Fund with the federal officials and municipal officials. But the specifics of who delivers it, the specific construction of a infrastructure project, I gave him my answer on that already.

Mr. Graydon: So then the information that I've received from the federal government is incorrect, that the Province of Manitoba does not administer the Building Canada Fund in the province

of Manitoba in conjunction with the federal government. Is that fact?

Mr. Selinger: Well, if the member has said to me that the—we have our own secretariat to work on the Building Canada Fund. We do it in collaboration with the federal government and also with municipalities.

Mr. Graydon: The—perhaps, then, maybe the minister can answer another question—*[interjection]* Oh, that's me that's doing that too, isn't it? It's hard on the ears. I apologize to anybody with an earphone.

The farmland education rebate budget for 2013 was \$34 million, and for 2014-2015 it's \$36 million. Knowing that we've put a cap on the education rebate, why would that budget be that much higher?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the facts for the member. Presumably, rebates may reflect land values. But I'd have to check the facts for the member and get back to him on that.

* (15:50)

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Thank you, Mr. Chair and Premier. Just a couple of quick questions.

The Provincial Road 520 connecting the cottage country by Lee River all the way to the Pinawa Hospital has been a gravel road for quite a few years and poorly maintained, and I'm just wondering if—at one time, I know that the 520 was in one of the five-year plans. I'm not sure if it was in the—in one of the most recent plans within the last, say, four years or so. But now the 520 is the fastest connecting route from cottage country—which I'm sure the Premier's very much aware of. I know that some of his ministers are as well—that the population grows at least tenfold where—during the summer months, and so I would be remiss if I didn't bring it to the Premier's attention that to get ambulance service to the nearest ER from that portion of my constituency and the great, wonderful area of the province—I'm just wondering if the 520 is going to be ever looked at again. I know that there was a promise through Manitoba Health a while ago, but now with the 313 bridge, which is known as the skinny bridge by—on the east side of Lac du Bonnet—is down to one lane, quite the congestion in the summertime, especially Fridays and Sundays. So I'm just wondering what state we're in with that and if he can look into that as well, because I do fear for the safety of a lot of those people coming out to cottage country as well and the permanent residents.

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the member raising the question. We can try to get some information for him, but I would encourage him to have a direct conversation with our minister of highways and infrastructure who has the departmental officials responsible for these roads. And I think the minister would be very open to responding to him.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): And, boy, there's so many issues to ask the Premier and so little time, and we know that we—some of my colleagues want the opportunity as well to ask some of his colleagues questions. And I think, though, with all the issues outstanding here, we could probably be here forever, but we do—*[interjection]* We—and, yes, we're all willing to be here and to ask these questions, but I think, in the interest of time, we're ready to move on in this Estimates process.

Mr. Chairperson: Last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 2.1.(a) the First Minister's salary, contained in resolution 2.1.

At this point, we request that the Premier's staff and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this item.

The floor is now open for questions.

Seeing no questions, I will read resolution 2.1.

RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,679,000 for Executive Council, General Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of Executive Council.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Education and Advanced Learning.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare for the resumption of the next department? *[Agreed]*

We are in recess.

The committee recessed at 3:54 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:00 p.m.

EDUCATION AND ADVANCED LEARNING

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Order, please.

This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education and Advanced Learning.

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

Order, please. We are on page 56 of the main Estimates book.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It was interesting to pick up Hansard today and look over the minister's answer to my last question yesterday. But I know that probably one of his 192 communicators on that side of the fence had a chance to pick up the article that I mentioned, and was wondering if he had a chance to look it over, and if some of his staff throughout the departments, maybe it rejogged some of their memories as far as some of the issues that we're having at the Richardson science complex.

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I'm—I did have a chance to look into information that was passed along by the member as he was up late one night surfing the Internet. I think he said it was 1 o'clock in the morning when he was looking for it, and—in any event, I do have some information that I think would be helpful to him and I hope will clarify it. It's unfortunate that he seems to think that there's some kind of huge problem there based on one short small article that he stumbled across at 1 in the morning sometime.

And so let me just say that, of course, our government is committed to ensuring that all students at the University of Winnipeg are afforded significant opportunities to pursue a quality education and training, and we've committed a significant investment in that building, as I told him yesterday, of \$32 million towards the college for the environment and science complex.

We believe that it's an architecturally outstanding building, that it is an environmentally outstanding building. And we certainly believe that it is serving the needs of students and researchers and faculty, and, frankly, has been a tremendous asset not only to the University of Winnipeg campus but to, really, to Portage Avenue as well in enhancing the quality of life here in Winnipeg and in Manitoba.

Now I can tell him that the U of W indicated quite rightly that there was a small minor problem with brown water, and he might recall some brown-water issues in Winnipeg that had occurred. And it's not clear from what I understand that—whether this is a city of Winnipeg brown-water issue or something else, but it was a minor problem. The university immediately took care of it—didn't wait for the City to actually have to try to address, although they believed it was a city of Winnipeg issue. And however, the University of Winnipeg proactively added a filter system to ensure proper water quality for the facility. So whatever small minor water issue that was there, it did attract some minor attention—nevertheless, was addressed proactively by the university. A filter system was installed to ensure proper water quality for the facility.

Food safety regulations are in place at the new science complex and are strictly adhered to and reviewed by provincial government regulators and adhered to by Diversity Food Services, and, as I said, they serve fantastic food there and all good. And what really interesting if is—if the member had stayed on the Internet a little bit while longer and looked to find more information, he would have, in fact, found a number of letters that were written by faculty members who are at the Richardson building. And so I want to be able to read for him just a few of the comments that they've said, and I think it's worth putting on the record because it—he needs to be careful, Mr. Chair, in making sure in asking important questions—in asking important questions—that he needs to be sure that he has the information correctly and has all the information.

So let me quote, first of all, from a letter that was written by Dr. Chris Wiebe and he says: "It is my opinion that the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex is a world-class facility that is easily one of the best buildings of its kind in Canada." I believe that this is an opinion shared by many of the faculty.

He goes on to say that: "I arrived at the University of Winnipeg in 2009 from my previous faculty position at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. One of the big draws for me returning to Canada was not of only having the opportunity to teach and conduct research at my alma mater, University of Winnipeg, but also to be able to build my research lab in the new science complex." He further states that: "My expectations of the new science building were exceeded in almost every way. It is not only an attractive and

environmentally friendly structure—the laboratories are clean, efficient, versatile and" very, very conducive to research.

* (16:10)

I'd also would like to put on the record from Dr. Désirée Vanderwel, who is the chair of the Department of Chemistry at the University of Winnipeg and one of the main occupants of the building, and she says, and I think it's worth remembering: "By any measure, my department," she says, "is thriving in our new home. In the past few years we have made some outstanding new hires—young scientists who are both committed teachers and world-class researchers," who are "attracted to our state-of-the-art facility. The facility has allowed us to attract and retain two individuals who hold Tier 2 Canada Research Chairs.

"My faculty members use the new lab facilities in numerous cutting-edge research projects, funded by external granting agencies. They publish; they present their work at conferences; they supervise numerous students at every level (undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate); and they collaborate with scientists at other institutions. All of these activities were hampered in our previous facility. The Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex literally opened the door to the future for my department.

"The Richardson College and Science Complex is a signature facility that Manitobans can be proud of for decades to come. My department is proud to call it Home."

That's testimony from Dr. Désirée Vanderwel, or a testament from Dr. Désirée Vanderwel, to the fabulous character and quality of the Richardson building, not withstanding a minor water incident that the member has quite legitimately raised.

But, nevertheless, something worth pointing out, that the people who work in the building are quite rightly pointing that it not only is a fabulous place to work and to operate, it actually attracts graduate students, it attracts research and scientists, it attracts folks to come to work at the University of Winnipeg, to come and live here in Winnipeg and in Manitoba; in fact, it's what we might call a brain gain. And so, consequently, while it is a perfectly legitimate thing to ask about, and I respect him for doing so, I think we want to be careful, and he ought to be careful, in not making a mountain out of a mole hill and, more importantly, remembering to respect the institutions

that are here in Manitoba. They're outstanding post-secondary institutions. We want to be careful to respect them.

As he knows, our government is committed to funding our universities and colleges among the highest in Canada. I was at the association of university and of colleges, and, you know, association of university and colleges of Canada dinner last night as part of their several days of meetings. And, when I raised with them the fact that our government had been ahead of the game in funding colleges and universities since we had been elected, I think they were not only very, very impressed but really wished that they had a government who saw the value and the wisdom of investing in our post-secondary institutions.

The Richardson building is just one of many fine and outstanding partnerships that the government has made with our post-secondary institutions in order to make them 21st century institutions. I'm proud of them, and I'm hopeful that as a Manitoban he would be proud of them too.

Mr. Ewasko: I noticed that Mr. Chairperson didn't ask the minister if that was a public document or a private document, but I'm just going to carry on and just get on with my questioning.

There was no disrespect meant to the facility or to the post-secondary institution of the University of Winnipeg. The fact is, is that this government has written a cheque for \$67 million, and even though the minister wants to put rhetoric on the record, and, as far as the article and the professor who was in the article, I actually did do a tour of the building and instead of just standing there and walking throughout the building and admiring the architectural beauty and sitting down and eating the crumpets at the restaurant, which, again, I have heard from many people throughout the city, many students, many professors, the deans, that the restaurant is fantastic. But there's more to an educational facility than architectural beauty and their canteen or their restaurant, Mr. Chairperson.

So all I was basically saying was that I did the tour. I asked the questions. There's deficiencies in the architecture and the building of that science facility; no, they are not fixed yet. It wasn't just a little bit of a brown water. Oh, and by the way, I know that the minister has a Ph.D., but maybe he doesn't understand this: When you're talking science, brown water is an issue when we're doing research. So I would like the minister sometime to maybe pick up

the article and go and actually do a tour where he can actually check out the various sights, check out to see where the public comes in from the back to the restaurant. They can very much pass somebody, again, doing lab research work, in a lab coat, with West Nile virus, for all I know, and for all anybody in the public knows.

So he is saying that, no, it's all good, it's been fixed.

An Honourable Member: Trust me.

Mr. Ewasko: So let's trust him—exactly, as one of my colleagues here pointed out. Trust him and take his word for it.

We know that in the last 2011 election, these NDP MLAs, or NDP candidates, went door to door and asking—and basically guaranteeing people that they were not going to raise taxes.

So all I'm doing today is asking for checks and balances, and I'm not talking about the cheques that are just get signed over to these various places but to actually go and check to see what is happening.

And I know that the member from COPSE is here as well again today so that he could easily clue the minister in to some of the red flags that actually had happened.

So, since I'm done on that point, I'd like to ask the minister, how many millions of dollars, or hundreds of thousands of dollars, went into the new soccer complex at the University of Winnipeg?

Mr. Chairperson: Before recognizing the minister, I just want to say for the member for Lac du Bonnet, I hope he wasn't reflecting on the impartiality of the Chair when he asked me to—or he made reference to whether or not I'd ask the minister to identify. It was the—it was on the advice of the Deputy Clerk yesterday that I asked him to identify whether it was a private letter or a public document. I just want him to know that I try and administer my position here as impartially as I possibly can. So just for the member's notice.

The honourable Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, to reply. I'm sorry. Was the minister ready to reply? Maybe I shouldn't have recognized him so quickly.

I call order, and that shuts your microphone off. You can confer with your staff.

Mr. Allum: We're going to have to take the question of the exact number of dollars that went into the

soccer complex at the U of W under advisement. We'll endeavour to get them that number to him as soon as we can.

* (16:20)

But I do want to take a second just to reply to the—I'm not sure what you would describe his last comments as, but what I do want to caution him about is making sure he has his facts right. And I think this is just not getting it right. He said that the government had written a cheque for \$67 million for that, I believe. The government's contribution, as he knows, is \$32 million, and it's—I just wanted to be sure that he understood, and I'm sure he'll put that on the record that he understands that the government's contribution was thirty-two to a sixty-six, \$67-million building, and it's very important that we make sure that we put factual information on the record, and I certainly know that he expects me to do it, and I just wanted to be sure that we have the facts out there that speak for themselves.

But he seems to be under the impression that the building is somehow substandard, and I'm not quite sure how he came to that conclusion other than he seems to have wandered around the building and done an inspection himself. And I don't know what his academic credentials are, but I'm pretty sure he's not a building inspector. And—but I do know that he's a teacher.

I know that he cares about the education of children in our province, and I know that he wants our young people to get a fine and outstanding post-secondary education as well, and our formula since we have come into office has been to ensure quality at our academic institutions. We want to make sure that they're affordable. And we certainly want to be sure that they're accessible to all Manitobans, and so I just wanted to remind him that it's very important that we show an appropriate respect for our post-secondary institutions. They actually have visibility outside of the boundaries of Manitoba. They speak—they attract students from across Canada as well as internationally. And he needs to be careful not to impinge on the reputation of the university or of any of its facilities, especially new state-of-the-art facilities, because I don't think he wants to diminish Manitoba's standing in the Canadian or international academic community.

However, here I have a—also I have a letter from Dr. Doug Craig from the chemistry department. And he says: "I happen to be very happy with our new sciences building and am thankful to both the donors

and the taxpayers for it. My lab is great. I have more space. The layout of the lab is excellent. I am very happy with my office. I like the idea of all the faculty having offices and the students having desks in the same area. I also think that the atrium is beautiful. It is a great venue for hosting events."

He goes on to say: I was the acting chair of chemistry during our first six months in the new building. There were some minor concerns. This is to be expected of any new building. It was my job, he says, to document them on behalf of the building and request that they be addressed, that small problems that we had were fixed. The building is world class. So I just want to remember—remind the member that these things are important.

And here's also Dr. Charles Wong, Ph.D., professor and Canada Research Chair in ecotoxicology from the University of Winnipeg. And he says: "While all new buildings go through growing pains, I can honestly say that the RCFE"—that's the acronym for the building, for the member's edification—"I can honestly say that RCFE is a major draw for talented young scientists worldwide to the UWinnipeg and to Manitoba, and that colleagues everywhere who have visited have left very impressed."

So what the testimony of those who actually work in the building, who are scientists in the building, who are researchers in the building, who attract both grad students and research dollars to Winnipeg and to Manitoba, seem to be suggesting, by virtue of the information that I've shared with him this afternoon, that this is, in fact, a state-of-the-art, world-class facility, had the odd growing pain along the way as any building would, including the one that he and I have the honour of sitting in today, and, consequently, it's really important that he provide good questions. And it's a legit question. I don't mind him asking it; it's quite, quite important that we get these issues on the table.

But I just want to make sure and remind him that the U of Winnipeg has reputation beyond the borders of Manitoba, across Canada and internationally. We attract students and graduate students and research dollars to the University of Winnipeg. And, consequently, I would caution him from any sense of impugning the reputation of the university or its facilities. My guess is that the University of Winnipeg itself, hearing the—and this is just a guess on my part—hearing the member's questions and the manner in which they're delivered, would not be

pleased to hear him impugning the reputation of the university, when, in fact, it's an outstanding academic institution, something that our government takes enormous pride in.

And I need to remember that in the 1990s, when his leader was at the wheel, there was a quite different story to tell about our university facilities, and that since we came into government, we have done nothing but enhance and partner with all of our post-secondary institutions to make sure that we have an outstanding academic reputation going beyond the borders of Manitoba, across Canada and internationally.

Mr. Ewasko: I would like, Mr. Chair, that if the minister can table those three letters that he spoke of, or whatever, for the last—quite a few minutes. Now, I would just like to also know if it takes into Estimates time, or if it unleashes a 10-minute scramble of rambling again, I'd withdraw that. But I'd like him to table those letters.

Mr. Chairperson: As to the member for Lac du Bonnet's comments, if the minister was quoting from private letters, then, yes, it is required that he table those documents.

Mr. Allum: I would be happy to table them. These are, of course, printouts. He could've found them online if he'd used his research skills, but I'm happy—everything I read was from these documents that I share with the Clerk now.

I also—it disappoints me, I guess, Mr. Chair, because I really do think it's important to have a useful dialogue on these matters. I'm assuming, parent and teacher that he is, that he has a genuine—genuinely cares for the state and quality of our academic institutions. And so I was—I'm sorry that he characterized my answer as rambling, because to me it made a number of really important points about a fine, new, state-of-the-art facility in our community, and wanted to caution him against impugning the reputation of a fine, outstanding university. I wanted to caution him about impugning the reputation of the scientists and researchers who work there, the scientists and researchers who attract grad students, the scientists and researchers who attract grad money to the province, investments in research dollars, here in the province, who—to attract donations from very, very generous members of our community to help to ensure that we meet the costs of these buildings.

* (16:30)

And so what he characterized as a rambling answer was really genuinely intended as an honest, and I thought thoughtful, and I'm sorry he doesn't share that point of view—thoughtful analysis of the issue that he raised.

I asked him to put—reminded him or shared to him what the issue was as we understood it that was raised in the article that he was looking at at one in the morning and while he was online. And I just wanted to be sure that he got the information he needed, that it was put in the appropriate context and that we were sure to make sure that the reputations of the university, its researchers, its faculty, its administration, as it might affect research, as it might affect donations, as it might affect grad students, make sure that he doesn't go too far in his questioning and otherwise compromise the reputation of what is really, and I think he would agree with this, a fine and outstanding post-secondary institution.

Now he had also asked about the soccer complex, and I'm pleased to say I can give him a few details now, and the—*[interjection]* There's a—well, you know, we try to do our best to make sure that when he asks for information, we try to provide it in a—as timely a manner as we can, and I think he would expect it. It's interesting that he doesn't—neither members of his caucus, in me trying to give my answer, don't seem interested in the numbers that the member asked for. And maybe the member might want to caution the member from Steinbach about just sitting there quietly and listening to the information so that you can get the very information that you need, that you've asked for—

An Honourable Member: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Just a matter of a clarification for the minister. I was speaking to my colleague. He'd mentioned that he tries quickly to get information.

I remember in my estimates last year, it took nine months to get answers back from the questions that were taken under advisement. In fact, the minister was no longer the minister and I was no longer the critic by the time the answers finally came.

So we're just trying to ensure that this is a quicker process than it has been in the past. That was the nature of our discussion and, hopefully, those timely answers will continue to come, unlike in previous Estimates processes, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. I'm advised that the member does not have a point of order, that members have 10 minutes to put questions and 10 minutes to answer questions. Those are the parameters that we have to function within.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: So, on that note, I believe the member for Education and Advanced Learning had the floor.

Mr. Allum: I was just endeavouring to try to provide the member with the information that you required. I don't know if the member from Steinbach has been to an NDP convention, but they—we—lots of ports of order there, maybe he's learned how to do that, but I don't recall him actually pointing to a rule in doing that either, but nevertheless.

In—with respect to the soccer complex—*[interjection]* No, I just want to be sure that I'm able to be in a position to give you the information that you require without interruption and—*or*, hopefully, that we can have a constructive dialogue. I committed to him to doing that yesterday. I want to be able to provide the information. I want to be able to have a genuinely good dialogue—and debate from time to time is always healthy—about the—about education here in Manitoba whether it's K to 12 or in post-secondary sector. I certainly want to do it, I'm trying to provide the information.

So, with respect to the soccer complex, I believe it was a \$15-million capital contribution. There was additional \$8.9-million loan that would be repaid by the University of Winnipeg, and the total budget is \$40.3 million in total.

So let me just review that. The total cost of the building—the facility another outstanding asset, I'm sure he's gone and inspected, at least from the outside, or seen it being constructed. And so the total cost for that is \$40.3 million—\$15 million of that is a capital contribution from the Province, and the additional \$8.9 million in loans to be repaid by the University of Winnipeg.

Mr. Ewasko: Where are we on on the repayment of the loan?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I—*[interjection]*—*or* Mr. Chair, thank you. What I can tell him at this stage is that, of course, the university would 'ree' responsible for the amortization of the loan. We will endeavour to provide more clarity on that. As you know, the building is currently just under construction and nearing completion, so, at this stage, my—the—I would say that the university cannot, by law, run a deficit, of course, it's important to note, and that we expect that repayment will be made in due course. But, if I am able to find more precise information to satisfy him on how the debt repayment is going, we can endeavour to do so, if that's his desire.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Chairperson, the Student Financial Aid Information System tendered in 2009. July 4, 2013 Advanced Education and Literacy minister, the member from Southdale, said we were well over \$15.3 million on the project.

What's the total cost of phase 1 and phase 2 of the Student Financial Aid Information System, and is it up and running today?

Mr. Allum: Of course, I want to make sure that the member puts this issue in its proper context, and so were he to apply for a student loan, he would be able to go online today and do so without any difficulty. And so that the system is up and running and serving the students of Manitoba very, very well. And I would say that, you know, it's like all IT systems, or any system, for that matter. It needs updating from time to time. We need to bring things into the 21st century and bring them up to times.

* (16:40)

So, to date, I believe \$15.5 million has been spent on the project. The banking phase of the project is complete. The application assessment, which is another component of it, is still in progress. The existing assessment and online application, though, as I said at the start of my answer, is working well in the interim, and, as with all IT systems, it does require an update, and that's what we're endeavouring to do. We want to be sure, of course, that going forward, that the system is modern and functioning well as he—I know he would want it to be. And—but I also can assure him, assure students, assure parents that the system is currently operating and serving students very, very well.

Now, I'm glad he raised student financial aid, because it is actually a really important point, and there are things that have changed since we've been

in government that are worth just pointing out. Since we were first elected, we've made it a point to keep post-secondary education affordable and accessible, and we've done a variety of things and I just want to point to a few.

We do provide more than \$240 million in grants and scholarships and bursaries. We did that through the two-'13-14 academic year.

As he knows, we've provided \$90 million to students who stay and work in Manitoba through the 60 per cent tuition 'rebrate' program, and that, I know, is an outstanding program. I can remember being at an election debate during the last provincial election, and I was sitting with a—I guess a candidate from the Greens was there and a candidate from the Liberals was there, I'm pretty sure—I stand to be corrected on this—that the Conservative candidate didn't come to that debate. But I can remember talking about the tuition rebate program during that all-candidates debate. And both the Liberal and the Green candidate turned to me and said, yes, whatever you do, don't change that program. It makes education—post-secondary education here in Manitoba affordable and ensures that—gives me incentive—both of them incentive—to stay here and live in Manitoba and get good jobs.

So we've done significant work, in terms of grants, scholarships and bursaries. We've provided, as I said, \$90 million to students to stay and work in Manitoba through the tuition rebate program.

Another thing that we've done in student financial aid, I think, that is really outstanding is we've reduced interest on Manitoba student loans. First, in 2008, we reduced it to prime plus 1.5 per cent, and then again in 2012 we reduced it to the prime rate, saving students nearly \$1.2 million and counting.

We've increased their earnings exemption for student loans, allowing them to earn more money during the school year without affecting their loan eligibility. And I can recall, when I was a student, admittedly quite some time ago, that there were obstacles such as these that made it very difficult to get the kind of support—and, of course, I'm talking about my academic career in Ontario, not here in Manitoba. And so we've made sure that we've allowed them—we've tried to minimize the obstacles to getting student aid in order to 'shudent'—ensure that our students are well positioned to go on and succeed in their academic career.

We've increased the vehicle exemption for student loans, and that's a—also a very important consideration. As he knows, we do live in Winnipeg, with the vast majority—half—more than half the population of Manitoba here having a vehicle, so you can drive into school to attend class is something that's very important—and so increasing the vehicle exception—exemption for student loans was very important.

We've introduced the rural and northern bursary to support students who have to travel or relocate to pursue post-secondary studies. And I think something that we feel really good about, and I know the member would agree with was that we've increased the annual ACCESS program bursary budget by almost \$1 million since we were first elected and committed \$31 million in ACCESS programs bursary assistance also since we were first elected.

So, really, when it comes to student 'assistments'—student assistance program under this government over the time that since we were first elected, we have made incredible progress in improving the affordability for students. As I said, our formula really has been about quality. It's been about affordability, and it's been about accessibility, and that's been a very important—they've been very important elements to ensuring that our students stay here in Manitoba, enrol in our institutions. I know that he knows that our enrolment has gone up significantly since we were first elected. I think he knows, or should know, that we have among the lowest tuition for both colleges and universities here in Canada and here in Manitoba when compared to the rest of Canada.

And, with respect to the student financial aid system, as I said, were he to apply for a loan today, he would be able to do so online without any obstacles. The banking component—banking phase is currently complete. The application assessment component is still in progress. Existing assessment and online application, as I said, is working well in the interim. We're going to update—we're working to update the system to make sure that it meets the needs of students going forward, and we'll continue to do that.

Mr. Ewasko: Fact is the Student Financial Aid Information System was tendered in 2009. Deloitte and Touche received that tender. They were supposed to unveil it or launch it in June of 2011. Now I'm—I don't want to assume anything in regards

to the minister's past history with this student aid financial system, but the system that was working, and is working today, is a good online system. The problem with it, though, right now, factually, is that phase 1 and phase 2 have not been launched very well, and, if it has, 80 per cent of it, if not more, is not working properly.

This minister has his hands on the steering wheel right now, of the Department of Education and Advanced Learning, and there's \$15.5 million that have gone into this project, and it isn't up and running. And I want to know if Deloitte and Touche is still on with organizing and trying to launch this program, or have they been terminated.

* (16:50)

Mr. Allum: Just in answer to the member's direct question, Deloitte and Touche is still the contractor of record with the project, and, as we speak today—and so that I think—that provides the basic answer to the question the member was asking.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank the minister for the answer.

The tendering happened in 2009. Phase 1 was to be completed in 2010. Phase 2 was promised for June 2011 launch; that date was missed. The new date was set for November 2011; that date was missed. And the new date was June of 2012; that date was missed. The next date was set for June 2013; that date was missed. In May 2012, a technical review was ordered and supposedly completed.

Two parts to this question: No. 1—[interjection] That's fine. Number 1, what's the total cost to taxpayers? He's already stated \$15.5 million. I'm wondering when this minister is going to step in and actually do an audit to this whole student financial aid informational system.

And, secondly, are they having conversations about terminating their agreement with Deloitte and Touche?

Mr. Allum: I thank the member for the question and it is important. Making sure that students have appropriate financial assistance is very important, and in the modern age—I have to admit, when I was doing it, once upon a time, we did paper applications, and it took a long time and there was a lot of heartache, and it seemed to take forever to do the paperwork and get it done.

And now today, if he goes online, he would be able to complete the application process without any

difficulty, and he would find that the system, as I think we've both conceded here this afternoon, is working well.

At this stage, as of today, what I can tell him is that Deloitte and Touche is still the contractor of record. The banking phase, as I said earlier, is complete. The application assessment component is still, at this stage, in progress. And, of course, due diligence is being done by the department, in consultation with other departments, to make sure that we have the best system in place for students going forward. And that's essentially where the matter stands at present.

But it's worth saying that, you know, that you can't just talk about student financial aid, one component of it, without talking about the full program in its entirety and how effective it's been.

Since we first came into government, as I said just a few minutes ago, we've provided \$240 million in grants and scholarships and bursaries through the student aid program. And I know he would know that this has helped an extraordinary number of students in making sure that they're able to progress through their post-secondary careers. And really it's the kind of thing that, really, I had to be honest with him, in the '90s—there's a contrast to the '90s—where those kinds of, at that rate, that kind of investments in grants and scholarships and bursaries were not of the same calibre and not of the same kind.

And we've really come a long, long way in making sure that student financial aid, not just in respect to a student loan but in—with respect to grants and scholarships and bursaries are working, and they're providing the very kind of support that I know he wants for all students in order to the—that they can not only complete their studies but succeed in their post-secondary careers, so that they go on and get good jobs and stay right here in Manitoba.

I know I want my kids to live in Manitoba when they're done—when the last two are done their academic career, I hope they do. I'm sure when his kids reach that point, he, too, will want to make sure that there's a really useful, valuable student aid process in place that he can go online and fill it out, which he could do today if he so desired, get the kind of support he needed.

Again, we want to remind him that we have the \$90 million that we've paid out through the tuition rebate program—60 per cent tuition rebate program—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The honourable member for Steinbach, on a point of order.

Mr. Goertzen: I know we're drawing near to the end of this Estimates time. I simply want to say, in terms of how the minister is answering questions, Mr. Chairperson, I know he's taking the time to go over dissertations of previous announcements and previous sorts of things. I want him to know from our perspective, that as the government House leader for this party, this critic has put together a list of questions. And we have, after today, probably about 45 hours left in the Estimates time, which, if we go six hours a day and with some creative ways, we could probably go for another 12 days in Estimates. And I'm prepared to have this minister, and, unfortunately, his staff be here for all of those 12 days until he gets through his questions. So my hope is that, as you consider this over the next day, if you could succinctly answer some questions. You start off by sometimes answering the questions and then drift into a bunch of extraneous things that have nothing to do with the question.

All I'm doing is putting you on notice. If you are willing to sit here, and I'm sure you are, for 12 days and have your staff sit here for 12 days, wonderful. But I'm going to make sure that this critic has the opportunity to ask every question that he's put on the record, and, if that means going into concurrence, which has unlimited time, which you may or may not know, then you can sit there for another 12 days in concurrence and answer questions if you want to proceed to answer questions with always adding on a bunch of verbiage at the end that has nothing to do with the question that he asked.

I know that's not a point of order, but I needed to have that on the record so that the minister might be able to govern himself in the future, because if he's looking forward to 24 days of Estimates questions

and have his staff go through that, I can absolutely accommodate with him. In fact, I can probably come up with a strategy to get him even more than that. I'm sure his caucus would love that, as we could sit here long into the night. And he could explain that to his caucus, because I have many different ideas how that could happen.

Mr. Chairperson: I want to thank the member for Steinbach for his—oh, the—*[interjection]* I'm sorry. The—the honourable minister of Family Services.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): The minister of education and advanced education has so much information that he wants to share, and he wants to make sure that he's getting everything on the record, so that you, as the critic, will have the full understanding of what we're dealing with. And so I think that we should relish the fact that he is prepared to share as much information—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I just want to advise the Minister of Family Services that points of order should not be used for debate.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I was saying is that I think that it is important that the minister of education and advanced education puts all of the information on the record and is able to fully answer all of the questions and not feel threatened.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, order. It is now 5 o'clock. The point of order will continue on to our next session.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: And on this note, as it's 5 o'clock, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow

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