

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

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
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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, May 14, 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.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills? Seeing no bills, we'll move on to petitions. Seeing no petitions, we'll move on to committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to table, in accordance with the provisions of section 28(1) of The Auditor General Act, the report of the auditor on the follow-up of previously issued recommendations, dated May 2014.

Are there any further tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have a number of guests I would like to introduce to members.

First, in the Speaker's Gallery we have with us today the 2014 Legislative Assembly visitor tour guides, including Rachele Bosc, Elise Champagne, Erica Siddall, Claire Templin and, of course, our director of the tour program, Ms. Vanessa Gregg.

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome all of you to our program.

And I would also like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us this afternoon Springfield Youth Parliament founders and organizers Norv and Arlie Christopherson; Brad Dowler, trustee Gladys Hayward Williams of the Sunrise School Division; Reeve Jim McCarthy of the RM of Springfield; Cathy Tymko, Sunrise School Division; Brent and

Bev Reid; and, of course, Gayle Dowler. And these folks are the guests of the honourable member for Springfield. On behalf—or St. Paul.

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Member for Riel Reinstatement to Caucus

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) was suspended by the NDP leader from his caucus some time ago now for making statements which subsequently proved to be true.

And so because they were proven to be true, and out of respect for membership in this Chamber, which should mean something to the people here, I just want to ask the Premier, with all due respect, understanding that he is in charge of his own caucus and makes these decisions, when and if he plans to reinstate the member for Riel to his caucus.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we've 'canvid' this matter on many occasions in the House, and the Leader of the Opposition, I think, has his hands completely full with his own caucus.

And we'd be happy to continue to have a dialogue about good public policy issues such as we've seen today where we have 1,907 more nurses in Manitoba, and this is a very important accomplishment. We have over 3,000 more nurses working in Manitoba at the bedside providing care to Manitobans, a commitment we made in the last election to increase it. Nurses are retiring. Many new nurses are being trained and we're very pleased that we're hiring them and employing them in all regions and all parts of Manitoba.

And I'd be happy to discuss any other important public policy matters with the member opposite if he wishes to do that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it is a matter of important policy. I think when a person runs for public office, is elected by their constituents under an NDP banner, is an-expelled from the caucus and told that they no longer have the right, by the leader of the party, to sit in that caucus, and a question is asked of the leader

as to when they might have the chance to return to their own caucus, I think that's entirely fair to ask and I do ask it again.

I ask it because the member—the rationale that was given for expelling the member from the NDP caucus was that she had said things which were subsequently proven to be true, that she had said things that implied that and implicated the leader's office in co-operating the organization of a partisan political rally, something which he now subsequently released proved to be the case.

So, again, she was clearly dismissed from her own caucus not on good grounds but on false premises, and so the question is quite valid. Why the member would be removed from her caucus based on the fact she told the truth is not clear.

So I ask the Premier again: Does he plan on having the member from Riel permitted to be back in his caucus?

Mr. Selinger: There's been a very significant shift. It was members opposite that were demanding that the member from Riel be taken out of caucus, Mr. Speaker, and out of Cabinet. That was their original 'recommendation.' So maybe they should get their story straight.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of immigration in Manitoba is fundamentally important to the future of this province, and we on this side of the House believe that the Provincial Nominee Program has been a tremendous success. Over 70 per cent of the newcomers to Manitoba come here for economic reasons. Within three months they're usually employed in the area for which they are trained. Within six years they're homeowners. Over 80 per cent we've retained in the province of Manitoba.

When the federal government made unilateral changes to that program, we believed every member of this House would support that program. Sadly, some people stood up for the newcomers to Manitoba; other people stood up with Ottawa. The members opposite supported the position of Ottawa; we support the newcomers in Manitoba and will continue to do that.

Mr. Pallister: These newcomers to Manitoba deserve honest answers to honest questions and are not getting them.

* (13:40)

The suspension decision by the NDP leader, foisted on his own caucus, I understand, was clearly excessive, smacks of retribution, and the member has already apologized for her comments in this House.

Now, the fact is the Premier has made the decision to dismiss her, though not for earlier wrongdoings, some of which he was clearly complicit in, but he did not dismiss her for the cover-up. He did not dismiss her for the deception. He did not dismiss her for the blaming of civil servants, which was totally unjustified and which he also engaged in. He did not dismiss her from caucus for any of those reasons.

He dismissed her from his own caucus because she said that his office knew of her involvement and was also complicit in the involvement of organizing a partisan political rally. That's what she said, and that subsequently was proven to be true.

So given that the Premier won't answer the question, I hear the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) anxious to answer it and she probably would be interested in telling us, then. Perhaps she would rise, then, and say: Will she, as the next leader of the NDP, allow the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) to re-enter the caucus of the NDP?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm proud of the talent we have in this caucus here in Manitoba. On their worst day on this side of the House they provide more leadership than we see from the member from Fort Whyte on the other side of the House in terms of integrity and were—in terms of willing to take responsibility for their own behaviour. We're still waiting for apologies from the member opposite on letters he writes to the editor, widely demanded by all the editorial writers of Manitoba, over four months ago. Did he make an apology? He doesn't have the leadership to even do that.

Members on this side of the House, they learn from their mistakes. They make amends. They move on to serve the people of Manitoba every single day, and they do that on the immigration file. They do that with respect to nursing. They do that with respect to creating good jobs for the people of Manitoba with investments in infrastructure. We'll keep doing that every single day while the member opposite continues to spin his wheels.

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

Mr. Pallister: Well, truly, given the incredible number of mistakes of that administration, they would have learned something by now, one would think, but, clearly, they haven't learned how to answer straightforward questions.

As far as accountability is concerned, we have yet to hear an apology from the Premier in respect of his clearly broken promise to the people of Manitoba and his hoisting of the PST, and this we remain anxiously awaiting. So as far as the Premier's lip service on being accountable and being apologetic and sincere, none of that fits.

On this issue, of course, Mr. Speaker, the situation is clear. The member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) has done wrong. She's admitted it. She's apologized. The MLA for St. Boniface did wrong. He has not admitted it and he has not apologized.

So what we need here is to be fair to all members of this Chamber. The member for Riel is being punished for telling the truth. She's being punished by the Premier for telling the truth about him and his office. She's being punished by her former colleagues on the front bench who claim that they're loyal to her but aren't anymore.

I ask the Premier again: Will he consider allowing the member for Riel to come back into the caucus, and if so, when?

Mr. Selinger: The member can ask the question as many times as he wishes, but reality is this—the reality is this: This side of the House stood up for newcomers in Manitoba to ensure that they would get good services, to sure that they would get supports. We thought members opposite would be supportive of that. They clearly bailed on that program. They completely decided to side with the unilateral decisions made elsewhere in this country.

We think newcomers in this province deserve to be served well in this province with integrated services. We think they should have access to good schools, while the members opposite want to cut those programs. We think they should have access to health care. When members opposite cut those programs and their federal counterparts eliminated health-care benefits from newcomers to Manitoba, we decided to extend benefits to newcomers in Manitoba. Members opposite voted against it.

When newcomers want to know who's on their side, we're on their side; members on opposite are not.

Mr. Pallister: New immigrants to Canada come here looking for open and honest government and escape from corrupt governments, and they don't get that here—they don't get that here.

And the fact of the matter is that the people who depended on this program are being better served by it now than they were when the Province was taking credit for every aspect of it. And that according to people like Reis Pagtakhan, who know far better than the mousy minister opposite does how that program can serve the new people who come to our country.

Again, this government is very good at placing blame. They are very good at blaming others. They blame civil servants. They blame the Ombudsman.

The Premier's blamed everyone, but he hasn't taken any responsibility himself. There's no point in him standing up when I don't ask him a question, and I'm not asking him again because he refuses to answer.

I'll ask the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton)—the member for Thompson—a likely candidate in the next leadership contest of the NDP: Will he, if successful, will he give the member for Riel a chance to come back and serve in the NDP caucus as was her intent when she stood for office in the first place?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. You would almost think that there was a full moon.

An Honourable Member: There is.

Mr. Speaker: Oh. Well, perhaps that explains why members in such good spirits today and the volume is continuing to rise.

So I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please keep the level down a little bit. We have a lot of guests who are with us here this afternoon, and I'm sure folks are watching on their televisions, and we want them to understand both the questions and the answers that are placed here in the Chamber during question period.

So I'm asking for co-operation of members to keep the volume down a bit.

Mr. Selinger: We've seen more examples today of the disrespectful attitude of the member opposite to members of this Chamber, all members of this Chamber, with the language he uses, and every time he's offered an opportunity to make amends for that and apologize, he skates away from it. He skates away from it faster than any professional hockey

player when it comes to avoiding contact and responsibility.

The reality is this, and he's confirmed it again today: We believe that immigration programs are very important in Manitoba. We believe that they deserve to be integrated with other services we offer people so that they can properly settle in this province and put down deep roots and become lifetime members of our community, and when that crucial decision became important to debate in this Legislature, the members opposite decided to bail out on that. They did not stand up for that program.

Now, the member opposite who wants—who acknowledges that members of this side of the House have made apologies, it's now four months and counting since January 13th when the Winnipeg Free Press editorial recommended that he apologize for the behaviour that he had perpetrated on the people of Manitoba. We're still waiting for that apology. If he wants leadership, he should set his own leadership example and get up and apologize today.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, no answer, no indication of an answer and no intention to right a wrong that has unnecessarily been done to a member of this Chamber.

One would've hoped that the members opposite would care enough about their former colleague to at least join in considering the possibility that she might have the chance to rejoin her former colleagues, but that is not the case, and that is sad.

Now, this is the party that introduced the Provincial Nominee Program, and we are the party that understands that people come here from all over the world to this beautiful place so they can be protected from corrupt governments that punish people, that use retribution and fear as a way to get their way.

The member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) did not tell a lie about the involvement of the Premier and his office. She told the truth, and she is punished for it, and she's being punished for it now, and it's wrong, and all of us need to understand that.

If it happened to the member from Brandon East, he would want others to rise in his defence. If it happened to the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), she would expect others to rise in her defence.

So I'll rise in defence of the member for Riel now and say that it's—she should be treated fairly.

She's done nothing wrong. She deserves to be considered for re-entry into the NDP caucus.

And I'm simply asking the Premier if he would be the man he claims to be—

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

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I didn't actually detect a question there. I just detected—what I detected was once again a dramatic change in position.

One day it's purge the member from caucus and Cabinet, the next day it's reinstate them. The next day—one day it's victimize them, the next day it's defend them. It's all over the map. And it's the same—but it's not the same when it comes to defending the immigration program. They—actually, it is the same. They said they support the program, and then they abandon it when it counts. They abandon the program when it counts. Same with the Wheat Board; they decided that they were opposed to that. Same with the immigration programs, same with other major shifts we've seen in programs for Manitoba.

* (13:50)

They stand up for the position of Ottawa. We stand up for the people of Manitoba, antibullying, immigration, human rights, health care and education and good jobs for all Manitobans. They consistently do not support those initiatives and vote against them.

Matias de Antonio Case Update

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, on April 17th I introduced this House to the Herriera family who had recently lost their baby, little Matias de Antonio, while he was in CFS care. They still do not have a cause of death to explain their loss.

How long will it take this government to give this family some explanation?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): The tragedy of the death of a child has struck all of us across Manitoba.

What we've been able to do with the family is we've shared information, the information that we have. We have followed our protocol. We have regular contact with the family. There are weekly updates that are being provided by the provincial investigator. We are having open communication.

They have all the information that we have at our fingertips.

Mr. Wishart: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker, the weekly updates are no further information.

Mr. Speaker, the Herriera family is frustrated with the lack of action. They asked to meet with the foster family; that has not happened. They asked for documentation from CFS itself; they have none. They called the ministers last week for any further updates and no one returned their call.

I know the minister committed to a prompt explanation. When is this forthcoming?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There has been regular contact with the family to share the information as we're proceeding with the investigation. This has been happening on a weekly basis. We have continued to commit to that. I have had the privilege of meeting with the family. I have sat with them. I have shared their pain. We have made a commitment that we will do our best to identify what happened to this wonderful little baby and what can we learn from this mistake.

So we need to continue to work together. We need to continue to share the information. I have full confidence in the investigation that, as they obtain information, they will share it with the family.

Mr. Wishart: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really hope this government is using its resources to help the family find some resolution, not to delay and not to frustrate.

I remind the minister again that it is over a month since the death of little Matias and we all agree that the family deserves some answers. Why haven't they received any?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I met with the family, we had the provincial investigator Lorna Hanson come in and share the information, identified what is the process, what information do we have. We are not holding back information. All of the information that we have, the family has.

And I know that there is still a lot of questions unanswered. We are continuing to investigate and to discover what happened to this baby. We want to. We want to make sure that we're working with the family. I committed to that when I met with them. We are having weekly calls with them and I will be meeting again with the family on May 27th.

IRCOM Project Timeline and Costs

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, in December of 2012 the Minister of Housing announced a \$14.7-million project to construct 60 affordable housing units at the IRCOM building on Isabel. They were to be completed by December 2013.

I'd like to ask the minister today: What is the status of this project? When can the 60 immigrant and refugee families that expected to move in in December move into this facility?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Well, Mr. Speaker, a housing question. I have to thank the member for the question.

I'd like to thank the member for the question and, clearly, it's an opportunity to talk about the 1,500 units that we committed to and have delivered in social housing and 1,500 affordable housing. We've also committed to 500 additional social housing and 500 more affordable housing units.

And though there have been some issues with some of the construction—they wouldn't know about issues of construction for housing because they never built any affordable housing, Mr. Speaker—but I can assure the member opposite that IRCOM II will open and there will be residents tenanting that building very, very soon.

Mrs. Mitchelson: It would be nice to get a housing answer in this House.

Mr. Speaker, the project should have been completed five months ago.

Has the delay in construction of the project resulted in any increased costs?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of projects that we have delivered on time, on budget. Occasionally, problems do arise with specific housing projects, but, again, they don't know anything about that because they never built any.

We have built several affordable housing units. In fact, I had the privilege of opening up affordable housing in the Gimli constituency just last week, not only in Gimli but in Riverton. I know members opposite had a sudden interest in affordable housing in Gimli. I saw and read that in the local paper. Suddenly, they're champions of affordable housing.

But unlike members opposite, we're building affordable housing. They never did.

Payment to Contractors

Mrs. Mitchelson: That's small comfort to the immigrants and the refugees that they talk about standing up for that haven't had an opportunity to move into the housing they were promised.

Mr. Speaker, has the contractor been-*[interjection]* A very simple question for the Minister of Housing: Has the contractor been paid for costs that have been incurred to date, or is there payment outstanding?

Mr. Bjornson: I'm aware there are issues of—that are under dispute, but, clearly, the member opposite does not want us to sign a blank cheque. Is that what the member is asking?

University of Manitoba Proposed Fee Increase

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It would just be nice for some answers for a change. We'll give them another chance.

This NDP government is full of broken promises, from a 14 per cent PST increase to the 15-and-a-half-million-dollar cover-up for a student aid program that is still not working, Mr. Speaker, to a funding cut. This minister cannot be trusted.

According to the Winnipeg Free Press, the University of Manitoba is proposing a 327 per cent increase in graduate continuing fees for the next two years.

How can this minister justify a 327 per cent increase?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, our government has, since the moment that we were elected, been committed to a quality, accessible and affordable post-secondary education system. That's why we have among the lowest tuition rates for universities and colleges in Canada, and that's why we are leaders in Canada in funding universities and colleges as well.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke with the president of the University of Manitoba today. I advised him that the proposal was not acceptable to the government. I further advised him to go back and consult further with students.

We remain committed to a quality, accessible and affordable post-secondary education system.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, it seems that the minister wants some credit for solving the problem, the problem that he actually created in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, in a Winnipeg Free Press article, an aide to the minister stated that this fee proposal is under consideration and it would not be appropriate for the minister to comment until COPSE has completed its review of the current application, end quote.

The same minister who's unable to comment because of COPSE is trying to pass a bill that will bring it into his own department. The minister wants to pass Bill 63, which would give him full authority over COPSE.

Why is he waiting for their decision now, or is he ducking the question?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, I'd advise the member to listen to the first answer rather than going with the script from yesterday's news.

The fact of the matter is that I contacted the president of the University of Manitoba today. We work in partnership together. We talk openly with one another. I advised him that the proposal put on the table by the University of Manitoba for continuing fees was not acceptable, and I invited him to go back, talk with students, find common cause and keep education in Manitoba affordable for all our students.

* (14:00)

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education went door knocking during the election time and promised no PST increases, then increased it by 14 per cent. He promised 15 and a half million dollars towards a student aid program that to date is still not up and running. He promised a 5 per cent operating grant hike to post-secondary institutions, then reduced it to 2 and a half per cent.

And now the University of Manitoba is proposing a 327 per cent student fee increase. The university would not have to propose this had the minister not broken his promises.

Why is this minister pitting students against those very universities instead of stepping up and taking responsibilities? Today he decides to comment?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a bit rich coming from a member who, when his leader was at the Cabinet table, tuition rates rose by 132 per cent in this province. When the Leader of the Opposition was at the Cabinet table, enrolment declined by 8 per cent. And when the Leader of the Opposition was at the Cabinet table, they cut, they cut, they froze, they cut, they froze funding to universities and colleges, and as a result, when we came into government the system was in a horrible mess.

Since then we've got it up and running; we've repaired it. Students are happy, parents are happy. We're building Manitoba, providing an education for our students so they go on and get a good job and live right here in Manitoba.

The biggest threat to education in this province is—

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

Farmland School Tax Rebate Cap Impact on Farm Families

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, recently the Minister of Agriculture indicated that the school tax cap is 80 per cent of farmland; that is a false and misleading statement. In my constituency and the minister's constituency, many family farms are now capped at as little as 10 per cent on their education tax rebate.

Will the minister correct the record and admit today that many farm families are capped at far below 80 per cent, some as low as 10 per cent on the education tax rebate?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): I've answered this question a few times.

I think what the members opposite failed to realize, when they were in party they were at zero per cent. This government was at 80 per cent. What is the difficulty where the members opposite don't understand it and never stood up for the rural parties of people that supported the education system?

We're still at 80 per cent, majority of the people. They were at zero and continue to be at zero. That's the true reality how they stood up for the rural farm families.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, the promise made by this NDP government and this Minister of Agriculture

was 100 per cent rebate on school taxes for farmland, just another broken NDP promise.

A neighbour of mine is at the cap; therefore his wife, who owns two quarters of land, is ineligible to receive the rebate.

Why has this minister targeted and penalized this young farm woman? Why is she forced to pay higher school taxes than others simply because of the whim of this NDP government?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I'm sure, to the neighbour he referred to, what would he prefer to be getting back, 80 per cent or zero per cent back on the school tax rebate?

Mr. Speaker, this government started out in 2004 at 33 per cent school tax rebate. We are—in 2013 and '14 we are at 80 per cent, majority of the producers are getting 80 per cent back.

We continue to work with the rural. We've invested money into community pastures. We invested money to help out the rural farm families such as the demise of the community pastures in the beef industry are suffering today. We stood up. We brought forward \$1 million towards help sustain community pastures and keep the family farm going through the beef industry. The BSE crisis was a 'depriment' to the beef industry. We set our priorities. We continue to work with the farm families and we will—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time has elapsed.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, that same minister stated that they are an 80 per cent government. I think when he's making a statement like that, 80 per cent, he—is being overly generous to the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, that young farm woman is making land payments. She's paying all the costs associated with being part of a farm operation, yet she is being penalized by this minister and his spenDP allies.

Why must she pay more school tax on her land than some landowners adjacent to her? Why does the Minister of Agriculture think it is fair for this NDP government to claw back the education tax rebate on her farmland?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let's reverse the commentary that the member opposite's trying to bring forward. It started in 2004, 33 per cent; we've increased to 80 per cent. Let's tabulate that saving. It works out to

\$35-million saving for the producers on an annual basis.

We continue to support the school system in small communities, and we will continue to support the small schools. What the member opposite is asking for, should we consider closing small schools? Thank goodness to our Education Minister supports the small schools and the survival of small schools and the family farms that we need to have. I'm asking the members opposite, is that what they want to see done in the rural communities, school closures?

We're here for family farms. We're here for rural development. We will continue to be. As this government side, we'll always be.

Children in Care Reduction Strategies

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): For many years this NDP government's mismanagement of child welfare in Manitoba has gone from bad to worse. They continue to have families torn apart instead of providing support for families and children to reduce apprehensions. Our report last year reinforced this, as did the Hughes report.

Today I table a FIPPA showing that the number of children in care is 10,435 children. That's as of December 31st. That's more people than live in the entire city of Selkirk.

Why does this NDP government continue to ignore expert advice that we need to address the root causes of child apprehensions? Can the Premier explain how he plans to turn these numbers around?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I—the member's question is a very important question, Mr. Speaker, and one child in care is too many children in care. We want child to be at home with their families. We want them to be in their communities. We want them to have that experience that all children deserve, which is to be raised in a loving home. And where that's not possible, occasionally and far too frequently, they're brought into care.

Many of those children in care now are over the age of 18. The Children's Advocate recommended that they continue in care after 18, whereas before they used to be just left on their own to their own devices. So we have retained more people in the system in order to provide them proper transition to adult life and independent living.

But even with that, Mr. Speaker, there are too many children in care, which is why we have made a very significant investment in prevention, which is why we've put another 280 workers on the front lines to work with families in their communities.

And the long-term solution is to have strong communities where there's jobs and employment and support for families and to ensure that we have good schools where children can get an education. And those are the things we're investing in, and the members opposite always want to slash those services, and the member from River Heights always votes against the investments we make in those very things which strengthen family life.

AMR Planning & Consulting Contract

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, to implement some of the Commissioner Hughes recommendations, the government issued an untendered contract to AMR Planning & Consulting. The fact that the contract was untendered is not surprising with this NDP government, but Manitobans want to know what to expect from the contract.

To prevent apprehensions of children, this province must move to a child and family services system that provides far more support for children and families, but we don't know if the NDP government instructed AMR to achieve this goal.

I ask the Premier: Did he instruct AMR that the goal is to support families and reduce the number of children apprehended into care, and will the government table these detailed instructions today?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we had detailed recommendations from the Hughes inquiry, numerous recommendations, all of which are being considered and reviewed for implementation; many of them are under way as we speak. And Hughes—the Hughes in commission of inquiry said there was very significant progress being made in Manitoba, but they said there's more progress that can be made.

We have accepted those recommendations. The implementation team will be working closely with the child-welfare authorities. They'll be working closely with the professionals in the system. We'll be working closely with those organizations as well as the communities where children and families live.

* (14:10)

So the approach is to ensure that the child-welfare system puts the welfare of the children as the No. 1 priority and provides supports to

families in the aid of prioritizing child welfare. And we are working across Manitoba to build stronger communities with a steady growth in the economy and good jobs and a commitment to education and health care, all of which are at risk by the members opposite with their plans and the member opposite who refuses to support investments in families in Manitoba.

Child and Family Services Funding Cuts

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the problem is the government's mismanagement of funds.

Mr. Speaker, around Christmastime, as a special present from this NDP government, there was a drastic cutback in funding for all four CFS authorities for the remainder of the fiscal year, a funding reduction of 16 per cent. As a result, the authorities that set their budgets according to this NDP government's funding promises nine months before were forced to cut back support for families and for children, as this Free Press article I table indicated.

Manitobans know that the NDP mismanaged the budget, but why are they using cutbacks to punish the very service they claim they want to improve?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Child-welfare budget has gone up this year; it has gone up in all previous years as well. All positions are funded for front-line service in the province of Manitoba, very different from what we used to call Filmon Fridays, when people were forced not work—to be laid off one day a week, essentially, and no service provided to families at all for three days every week, Mr. Speaker, and that was a very significant problem.

So proper funding is there. It has been grown, with respect to that envelope of support for families, every single year.

In addition to supporting child welfare, we made big improvements in funding for early childhood development, Mr. Speaker, this year in the budget. That is a prevention program. Early childhood development works with young families from the day of inception to ensure they get off to a good start. We increased funding for daycare. Early childhood learning, daycare makes a big difference for young people getting a good start in school. We've decreased the number of students in the K-to-3 area, which allows children to get off to a good start in their education program.

And we're looking after children after they reach the age of majority and have aged out of the child-welfare system. We still provide them with the opportunity to be supported by child-welfare workers of Manitoba.

We care about children. We care—

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

Nursing Profession Employment Increase

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): This week is National Nursing Week, and nurses are with us for those joyous moments when babies are born or those tragic moments when we lose some of our loved ones. This is why I am so proud to stand with a government that values and respects the essential work of nurses.

Today the Minister of Health announced some exciting news about nurses in Manitoba.

Could the Minister of Health please elaborate on how our government is supporting nurses throughout this province?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Well, I was glad to be joined with the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) at the University of Manitoba earlier today, surrounded by nursing students who all know they will have jobs when they graduate.

Mr. Speaker, I was there to let Manitobans know there are now 3,702 more nurses practising in Manitoba than there were in '99. We have a record number of nurses practising, the highest number of nurses practising in Manitoba in all time.

And I know the Conservatives would like us to forget about the fact that they fired 1,000 nurses when they were in government, but I'll you, I will not forget what they did when they were in government, and I spoke to 500 nurses this morning who also remember exactly what they did to nurses when they were in government.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Nursing Vacancy Numbers

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Well, it's interesting, the NDP never like to give the whole story. They paint their fluffy picture and mention good things, but they duck and weave and cover up information they don't want the public to know.

Mr. Speaker, for the last year and a half the WRHA has refused to provide the nursing vacancy numbers in Winnipeg. In Estimates the Minister of Health refused to tell us what the nursing vacancy numbers are in Manitoba.

So I'm going to ask her again: Will she give the whole story right now? How bad is the nursing shortage in Manitoba today?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have a record number of nurses working in Manitoba right now.

Mr. Speaker, this member has gone on the radio, she's gone on CJOB to say that they didn't fire 1,000 nurses. So I'm going to table this today because I'd like her to explain why there were more than 15,000 nurses working in 1992, and there are almost 18,000 working now, but right here in 1999 there was only 14,000 nurses working. These aren't our numbers; these numbers come from our nursing colleges, and I would like the member to explain where those 1,000 nurses went.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The—order, please. Order, please.

Time for oral questions has expired, even before the member for Charleswood stood.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: So it's time for members' statements.

Scopus Award Winner Moe Levy

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to recognize Mr. Moses Levy who was honoured last night at the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights as this year's recipient of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's highest accolade, a Scopus Award. And I want to welcome Moe and his family here to the Legislature today.

Mr. Levy was born in Bombay and after living in Israel and moving around Europe, he came to Winnipeg in 1968. Here he pursued his bachelor of commerce and masters of business degrees at the University of Manitoba. He went on to become a managing partner in Manitoba's Industry, Trade and Tourism Department and was the creator of the first business incubator program in Canada called Enterprise Manitoba.

Mr. Levy's vast career has seen him in numerous roles as an entrepreneur, civil servant, university

lecturer and philanthropic executive. His role as president and CEO of the Canadian Heritage Company as well as his involvement with the Asper School of Business, the Asper Foundation and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights have all been cited in the decision to award him with the 2014 Scopus Award.

President of the Winnipeg chamber of Canadian Friends of the Hebrew University, Margaret Shuckett said—has said, and I quote, "Manitoba has benefited enormously from Moe's dedicated and strategic philanthropic focus, as demonstrated by his successful career in both the Jewish and general communities." End quote.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of the House join me in congratulating Mr. Levy as the recipient of this most prestigious award and thank him for his great contributions to Manitoba.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with all members of the House and those that were there last night in recognition—with the 1,500 others, to recognize Mr. Levy and his achievements.

I was particularly touched by Mr. Levy's recounting of his own history and his birth in Bombay and his childhood and particularly the story that I think we'll all remember, that of Muhammad, the fellow that worked for Moe and Moe provided food for. And he worked for Moe in order to provide sustenance to him and his family, and how he carried that generosity and that thought in his life to where he is today, where he stood yesterday at the pinnacle of his career honouring human rights and his hero, Israel Asper, and his parents, having raised over \$100 million in private donations to build what will be Winnipeg's Eiffel Tower, Winnipeg's pinnacle of success. And from the story of Muhammad and sharing and caring for each other and making the world a better place, you have demonstrated for us all what a life worth living and what contribution one person can make to the life of all of us.

Thank you and congratulations.

* (14:20)

Springfield Youth Parliament

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, it is with great honour that I rise today in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly to recognize this province's

leaders of tomorrow. I speak, of course, of the Springfield Youth Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the Springfield Youth Parliament has a tradition of excellence stemming from its over 60-year history within my community. Through six decades of educating youth in the workings of parliamentary democracy and governance, Springfield Youth Parliament has dealt with issues that were progressive yet within the public consciousness. In fact, in 1955 the Springfield Boys Parliament was established, later changing its name to the Springfield Youth Parliament to include women as well.

Not being afraid to change and grow with the times, Springfield Youth Parliament remains as relevant today as it was on the day of its founding in 1955. The group has operated under the mandate of helping educate youth on the parliamentary system, public speaking, democracy and issues of the day. The energy and enthusiasm shown by these bright young individuals is incredible as they debate and vote on important matters in today's society, including the use of religious symbols in public places and discussions about our constitutional monarchy system.

The mandate of this program has again grown and developed to include all of the Sunrise School Division. This resulted in a record attendance of 150 participants for this year's historic 60th annual session from the communities of Springfield, Beausejour and Lac du Bonnet areas. This session was held for the first time during school hours, thanks to the outstanding support of the Sunrise teachers and administration.

Going forward, the Springfield Youth Parliament will be organized and implemented by the Sunrise School Division. As of yet, it has not yet been decided if another name change will be in order to accommodate its larger membership. We will just have to wait and see what our future leaders decide next year.

On behalf of my constituents and all members of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, I would like to commend these fine young leaders for their interest in democracy and service to this great program.

I would also like to thank the founder of the program Norv Christopherson and his wife Arlie and the Springfield Youth Parliament organizers Brad Dowler and Gladys Hayward Williams, as well as founders, the late Don Reid and the late Reverend

Lind Barbour, for their role in assisting the Springfield Youth Parliament.

In closing, I would like to wish the greatest success to Sunrise School Division and all future sessions of the Springfield Youth Parliament.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

National Nursing Week

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, this week is National Nursing Week. Nurses are with us for some of the most joyous and tragic moments of our lives. From the birth of a child to the loss of a loved one, nurses give our families and friends the care, comfort and reassurances they need.

Today, at the Helen Glass Centre for Nursing, the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) and I joined Liliane Allegro and many other nursing students to celebrate the fantastic work nurses do for Manitobans. The minister also announced that we now have a record number of nurses working in Manitoba. I can't think of a better way to recognize National Nursing Week than celebrating the bright future of nursing in Manitoba.

In the mid-1990s, year after year, we saw nurses laid off and leaving our province. Today there are more than 3,700 nurses practising in Manitoba than there were in 1999. This means that for every nurse in the last PC government fired in the 1990s, we've hired more than three back.

With our record of almost 18,000 nurses working across the province, Manitoba is on track to reach our goal of hiring 2,000 more nurses by 2015. This record number means that in the coming years we'll be able to fill positions left from nurses entering their well-deserved retirement. It also means Manitobans will continue to have access to the essential services and quality care that they need. Hiring nurses and increasing training seats available to Manitobans is part of our commitment to build and expand the profession.

Mr. Speaker, through all those long days and nights of shift work, nurses continually give us the quality care we all need and deserve. I would like to extend my gratitude to all nurses here in Manitoba, to LPNs, RPNs, RNs and nurse practitioners for the work you do in hospitals, personal care homes, at research and educational institutions and, of course, in our communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Project Comet

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, first, I join others to congratulate Moe Levy.

Second, I want to applaud Project Comet, a community initiative to prevent property crime in River Heights. It has been noticed that after the winter months when the weather is warmer, crimes tend to increase. This morning, I attended the session at the River Heights Community Centre on Project Comet. This meeting gathered members of the River Heights community, members of the Winnipeg Police Service and cadets to take a proactive approach to property crime and to raise awareness among community members.

Constable Jason Michalyshen, Sergeant Mike Brooker, and Abbie Bajon, the general manager at the Corydon Community Centre, along with many cadets, were present at the meeting today.

In this community approach, everyone does their part, looking out for each other to help prevent the crimes before they occur. Mr. Speaker, the emphasis on community members' involvement and responsibility to help maintain low property crime rates in River Heights is strongly encouraged and promoted through this initiative, with tips like: close and lock all doors, windows and garages when not at home; don't keep valuables in cars; install alarm systems; and notify your neighbours if you're going away.

Last year, around this time, I met with River Heights residents and Police Chief Devon Clunis, to address the issue of reducing crime in the area. Chief Clunis was very inspirational and reminded us that we can be difference makers. His approach to move the Winnipeg Police Service toward including a primary mandate of preventing crime and keeping the community safe is a strong and realistic approach, if we as community members do our part and become difference makers when it comes to preventing and reporting crimes.

I think this is great work on behalf of the Winnipeg Police Service, cadets and community members to take a proactive response to neighbourhood crime, and I thank all of them for their efforts.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, I tabled the list for concurrence for this afternoon. I understand there's a scheduling conflict with one of the ministers who appeared on the list. So I'm asking leave of the House to replace the minister of Aboriginal affairs on that list with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General (Mr. Swan).

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to vary the list of ministers required for concurrence, to substitute the Minister of Justice for the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson)?
[Agreed]

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Grievances.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): If you can commence the process of Main and Capital Supply with concurrence.

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve into the Committee of Supply.

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Capital Supply

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

Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

We have before us, for our consideration, the resolution respecting Capital Supply. The resolution reads as follows:

RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,192,247,000 for Capital Supply for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015.

In accordance with rule 76(3), as the 100 hours allotted for the consideration of Supply have expired, there will be no debate on this resolution.

Resolution agreed to.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

* (14:30)

IN SESSION
Committee Report

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted the Capital Supply resolution.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve into the Committee of Supply.

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
Concurrence Motion

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), that this House concur in the report of the Committee of Supply respecting concurrence in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: On May the 13th, 2014, the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) tabled the following list of ministers of the Crown who may be called for questioning in debate on the concurrence motion: Health, Education and Advanced Learning, Justice.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): For the Minister of Health, during the Committee of Supply I asked her regarding the potential helipad for the STARS or another air ambulance service at Bethesda hospital. She indicated in response to the question that she would have her staff be in contact with the group, the Lions Club in southeastern Manitoba, who had an interest in doing some private fundraising for that project.

Has she ensured that that meeting has taken place or been scheduled?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): I have been given the information that the meeting has been

scheduled, but I can check and confirm that with the member.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the member for Steinbach, I'm asking all members of the House to try and keep the volume down, to use our loges if you want to talk so that we can have a good conversation here.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that response. I did contact the individual whose name I gave to the minister's staff, and—this morning, and he indicated he had not yet heard from Manitoba Health. So I know sometimes there's confusion of these things. I'm not trying to be accusatory, but if the minister could do a double check on that, and the next time we have this opportunity in concurrence, I'll probably follow up again, but if she could do me the service of ensuring that that contact happens and that meeting happens, I'd appreciate that.

Just a question regarding the process. When an individual makes a complaint regarding something that's happened to them in a hospital or, I guess, a PCH, I understand that they can complain or bring forward information to the Protection for Persons in Care Office and then an investigation can take place. Does the minister—is she advised of the resolution of those investigations, or how does that process work?

Ms. Selby: I appreciate the member bringing to my attention the group that we had been discussing with the helipad, and I will ensure that—I will confirm that they get a meeting, and I apologize. I thought they had been contacted by this time, and I will make sure that that happens right away.

Certainly, the—any case of potential abuse or mistreat is—treating somebody inappropriately or even not following their care that has been set out by the health-care professionals is taken very seriously. It's why we brought in the Protection for Persons in Care Office. They receive—any question of abuse or somebody that may have been mistreated, they look into all of those. They look into a number of them and the serious ones are taken very seriously and a more thorough investigation is undertaken at that point.

I can tell the member that I do receive notice of the—when they reach the case of being taken seriously and have seen reason to go into a further investigation. I am given notice of the incident and how it was dealt with, and I'm quite sure that those are posted a certain amount of times per year on a

website, but I should confirm that—when that last would have been done. Thank you.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that response. The family—or it might not always be family, I suppose, but the person who is making the complaint to the office, are they kept up to date on a fairly regular basis in terms of how that investigation is going, or are they just—do they just find out at the end of that process, and how long do those processes usually take? I know there's probably some variation, but is there kind of a mean in terms of how long they take, and are the people who made the complaint, are they kept up to date as that investigation unfolds?

Ms. Selby: Certainly agree with the member that the families have a right to expect that their loved one be treated with respect and professionalism, of course.

Certainly know that we've learned a lot since the protection of person in care office was first established, including working on strengthening some of the recommendations that the Ombudsman did bring forward on strengthening the important work that these folks do.

They have always investigated every complaint that they receive, and we're happy to see that more people are coming forward. We don't think it reflects an increase in abuse but an increase in awareness that there is a place for people to turn to, and, particularly, we see the vast majority of the new complaints coming forward are made by staff, which suggests that staff, of course, are attuned to these and are looking for—to make sure that people are receiving the care that we would all expect them to receive.

* (14:40)

I can tell you that every year they receive and review thousands of complaints. They do undertake a preliminary investigation on those complaints and, where it is warranted, they move into a more formal investigation.

When there is an instance of an abuse that is determined to have been found, they take a number of steps. They issue directives or recommendations to the health facility to improve the policy or process that particular incident. They address the identification, reporting, prevention and, of course, management of patients to make sure that these events don't occur again. They can also make referrals of individuals who may have been found to have abused or neglected someone to the Adult

Abuse Registry for appropriate action there. And they can conduct follow-up audits of selected facilities, and have done this a number of times.

They have directed facilities to adjust the care of residents, they have been able to provide staff with more training related to the use of chemical restraints, for instance, and definitely have talked about adjusting staff levels when there are noticeable difficult periods of day—of the day in some particular homes. And we know of one instance, at least, where the protection and persons in care office recommended that an independent leadership review take place at a personal-care home. Certainly, they do a number of things to address it.

We don't currently track those response times, but it's probably not a bad idea to be doing it. But we do publicly report every year a summary of investigations, but I'd have to get back to the member with a little more detail of what the family can expect.

Mr. Goertzen: And I will provide the minister with more details off the record on a particular case. There is—there's a case of—from a constituent of mine whose mother was in a—in one of the hospitals in Winnipeg, and there was an allegation of inappropriate questions that were posed to one of the—to her mother. And there was a complaint that was brought forward to the protection of persons in care office, and I believe there was an investigation where there were concerns about, you know, contact that still remained between the individual working in the medical profession and the patient, and they have not heard any response back.

So I'm happy to provide the details, obviously, that I don't necessarily want to put on the record, but to provide those details to the minister, and I would just ask that she would follow up on that.

Ms. Selby: Yes, I would appreciate it if the member could bring me those details and I would like to commit right now to follow up on that. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I'd like to direct this question to the Minister of Education. I'd ask for him to—in the Estimates booklet for this year, I'd like him to turn to page 35, and if he can speak to those lines in regards to the funding. Thank you.

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): It would be helpful, Mr. Chair, if the member could just be a bit more specific on the questions that he wants answered.

Mr. Ewasko: In the Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2014-2015 Departmental Expenditure Estimates, on page 35, I would like him to give an overview of some of those lines that are in that document on that page.

Mr. Allum: Yes, again, Mr. Chair, I'm not—I'd very much like it—it would be helpful if the member could just articulate which of those lines he would like me to comment on, and I'd be happy to do it.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm not going to go through the whole preamble. On page 35, the total subappropriation, three point—almost \$6 million—if you can expand and talk to—about those different figures that are covered within that, whether it's all capital or just employee benefits costs, et cetera, or what is he seeing there?

Mr. Allum: Could the member remind me of the page number that he was referring to?

Mr. Ewasko: Absolutely, Mr. Chair, and the nice thing is we stalled long enough for the Minister of Education to actually get his Estimates booklet into the Chamber. I know that—*[interjection]*—if we had some of the—some of our teachers or students that would not be coming in with—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order. The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet has the floor.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, as I was saying, I know that, as teachers or parents for that matter, when we're showing up for a particular class, or in this instance we're actually in the Chamber talking about Estimates expenditures, it would be nice if we would actually bring the Estimates booklet with us.

So on page 35, back to the minister, Manitoba School for the Deaf, I know, as last year, Mr. Chair, the Finance Minister talked about staying after school for not bringing their books. Well, you would think that it's one of those things that would be sort of an unwritten rule when we're in Estimates process, but, you know, I don't know how they run their departments over there.

So back to the original question—*[interjection]* I'm sure the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) will have her chance again in concurrence.

Mr. Chair, Manitoba School for the Deaf, we have on page 35, Mr. Minister, we've got almost 300—or \$3.6 million going towards the Manitoba School for the Deaf, and I see that there's been no

change from last year to this year. If he can just sort of give a little bit of an update on the Manitoba School for the Deaf.

Mr. Allum: I'll take the member's advice very seriously in the future and, of course, always want to be co-operative when we're in the House and to make sure that I'm answering your questions to the very best of my ability. I'm pleased that he would take the high road in that, and I certainly will make sure that I remember that in the future going forward.

Of course, the Manitoba School for the Deaf is one of the very important schools that we run in addition to many other types of educational institutions across the province. I've had the pleasure of speaking quite closely with staff and also parents who have children attending that school. And what I am always impressed with, Mr. Chair, is the extent to which there's a common cause among administrators, teachers and students at the school of the deaf in order to ensure that there's an inclusive environment in the school and to ensure that the students feel a sense of belonging and feel that they can also be included among Manitoba's children as having an opportunity to get a quality education and they can go on and also participate in the economy of our great province.

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

I see that for the Manitoba School for the Deaf we've got, as far as full-time equivalence staff we're looking at almost 45 people. I'm just wondering how many students are presently at the Manitoba School for the Deaf.

* (14:50)

Mr. Allum: I'll have to get back to the member on the specific number of students currently attending the Manitoba School for the Deaf. I can tell him that the number of families wanting to have their children enrolled in a specialized school is declining. That's the trend line, anyways, to date. Parents, I think it's fair to say, have different options in the 21st century than they might have had in the past.

So as to the specific number, I'll have to get back to the member on that, if he's willing. But I can tell him what the trend line happens to be suggesting at this point.

Mr. Ewasko: Thanks, honourable minister, for that answer and the suggestion or the point that you're going to get back to me with those numbers. If at the same time if you could also get the numbers of

students that have participated or have been enrolled in the Manitoba School for the Deaf over, say, the last four or five years, just so that we can see whether that trend line is increase—is actually increasing or decreasing.

So my new question to the minister is: Is there any plans for the Manitoba School for the Deaf in the upcoming—within the upcoming couple years?

Mr. Allum: Sorry, Mr. Chair, the member's voice tailed off at just the last part of the question. If he could just repeat the last part of the question.

Mr. Ewasko: So the question was, and I'm going to elaborate a little bit, but due to the fact that the minister has said that there's—the number of parents that have been wanting a specialized school have been declining, and these are his words, is there any, then, plan in the upcoming future for the Manitoba School for the Deaf?

Mr. Allum: Thank the member for doing that. It's not for lack of trying to listen closely. I just missed it at the end.

I think at this stage it's fair to say that the Province is—and Department of Education and Advanced Learning is committed to the school and to ensuring that parents get the kind of education for their children that they are looking for. It is true that we'll need to explore other options going forward and we'll see where that takes us, but there's no contemplated radical overhaul of the existing system at this point. But it's fair to say that different options will need to be explored in the days ahead.

I can also tell the member that the approximate population of the Manitoba School for the Deaf is approximately 60 students.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

In regards to, also, the Manitoba School for the Deaf, is there any future plans for any of the senior high students attending there to possibly amalgamate or join with another school within the area for any type of, you know—yesterday we were talking about inclusion, and we're—and I'm not quite sure if at the secondary level, at the senior level, that there's enough students to necessarily form sports teams or that of—at the Manitoba School for the Deaf. And I was just wondering if there's any plans in the upcoming future for sort of amalgamating or having students go from the Manitoba School for the Deaf to a nearby school to participate on some of their high school teams.

Mr. Allum: Well, I want to say to the member that I think, as I said just a few minutes ago, the objective, of course, is to make sure that students attending MSD have the same opportunities as every other child in Manitoba. That sometimes requires the kind of alternatives that he has just articulated and, of course, other services that students may want and/or need.

I can't comment specifically, I have to say, on the specific nature of his question. We'll certainly get back to him on that as well, and that's, I guess, in fairness, a reflection of the school itself evolving in its current context and what other kind of options that we'll need to look at going forward.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Minister. I know that in question period we raised a question on the financial situation of Red River College, and I'm just wondering if the minister has an update as far as how the college's figures are starting to look now that we're already into, you know, probably about a month after that initial plan was put in place.

Mr. Allum: Yes, the member's going to think that I'm not listening, and I am. I still—there's a—I just—there's a blur in the Chamber that I can't quite capture. No, it's not that; I'm just not capturing the full of it.

I was a—I'm a minister's kid, so I tend to talk loudly as a rule, and so I—and this is completely, respectfully, just trying to raise the volume just a tad. Thank you.

Mr. Ewasko: We're going to run out of concurrence time. Oh, no; it's an unlimited, so it's okay. I have no problem repeating the question, so I'll raise my tone a little bit as well.

So I'm just wondering, I know that we brought—I brought this up in question period, and just wondering if the minister has an update as far as Red River College had proposed a plan to get their books back into balance by the end of the year, and I know that we're roughly a month into that plan, and wondering if they're on track to do so.

Mr. Allum: It could be, Mr. Speaker—or Mr. Chair, that my iPod has been too loud over the years; that could also be an explanation for my failure to fully understand the member's questions. But I thank him for the question.

In fact, the college has been working today to make sure that they meet their budget targets.

Those are the kinds of things that we'd made perfectly clear when I was speaking about it earlier, to make sure that this is the letter of the law and we expect Red River to meet its budget obligations. I anticipate that they will do so and that's really the status of the circumstance right now.

* (15:00)

Mr. Ewasko: To the minister again, in regards to the Manitoba Student Aid software, I know that we've gone back and forth a little bit on this in regards to question period and even back in through the Estimates process, I'm just wondering where we're at with the program, because I know that the minister continues to put on record that if it was me who is looking for student aid access or student loans at this time, I would be able to go online and actually be, you know, successful using the program. But, in fact, that would not be case because I would only be an actual part-time student and I don't see that program working well for part-time students right now.

So I would just like to know again, where is the new program? Where are we at, or are we, in fact, is it on a suspension right now?

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

We have gone back and forth on this, and it is a good question and it's a worthy matter of debate and discussion in the Legislature.

Of course, when I referred to him going online, I'm assuming that he would be eligible for a student loan in the first place. So that's the-kind of the underlying assumption. But my point is—as been to say, that were a student looking for student assistant and they went online, they would be well served by the existing system and that they would be able to go through the process. And, I hope, if they met the criteria, receive the support that they required and then go on and get a good quality education and, hopefully, a good job as well.

As I've indicated to the member in the past, phase 1, the banking component of that particular project, was completed some time ago. Phase 2 has encountered some complications, as all IT programs do and upgrades do. We're currently working with—in discussions with the current vendor in order to try to rectify outstanding issues.

I'm confident in the existing system right now, and that's—but I will say that we began planning some time ago to make sure that when the system no longer is able to serve students another system will

be up and running, and I'm quite confident, Mr. Chair, that will be the case when the time comes.

Mr. Ewasko: I know that the member from Steinbach, who was the Education critic before me, had asked numerous questions in regards to tracking in our public school system. And I was just wondering if the minister could share some possible figures now that they sort of know some of these questions were going to be coming.

So, you know, we're almost—well, we are, we're 11 months—or sorry—nine months into this present school year, and I was just wondering if he can update the House with how many lockdowns in this past 2013-2014 had occurred in our various schools within the province.

Mr. Allum: Yes, I thank the member for the question, and he is a worthy successor to his predecessor as the Education critic.

As he knows, on October 10th, 2013, our antibullying legislation that protects all students was proclaimed into law. We believed, on this side of the House, that this will our schools more inclusive and provide new protections against cyberbullying and the new legislation also gave students and teachers and parents more tools to address bullying.

But in addition to that, Mr. Chair, we also introduced new measures to keep our schools safe with a new regulation that requires schools to conduct at least two lockdown drills each year. The schools are required to report all lockdowns as soon as reasonably possible to the department where they will be tracked and review their codes of conduct and emergency response plans each year.

So, Mr. Chair, in response to the member's question, we have, in fact, not only passed antibullying legislation that is designed to protect students and give them a safe and caring environment in which to go to school, we've also just last October also initiated new regulations around lockdown drills, reporting on lockdowns as soon as reasonably possible and, of course, an annual review of their codes of conduct and emergency response plans.

Mr. Ewasko: So, no, I am very much aware that schools are to prepare—to have a couple of lockdown mock drills, including fire drills, as well, and I know that the minister had said that once, if there is a lockdown that they should be reporting it immediately. And so my question is: How many

lockdowns have been reported in the province of Manitoba in the public school system as of today?

Mr. Allum: Well, aside from the number of lockdown drills, I guess I'd leave him to do the math on that.

I will say two things about the number. To my knowledge I have not received any indication of a reported lockdown, but I also want to say that I really owe it to the member to give him more precise information and will endeavour to that.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, so just if I'm hearing this correctly—the minister is saying to his knowledge, he has no recollection or knowledge at his fingertips that are saying that there's been any lockdowns but yet he shared, in the previous answer, that schools are supposed to be reporting lockdowns, you know, immediately, as soon as they happen.

Mr. Allum: Yes, I just want to say the member characterized that correctly to the best of my memory while we're sitting here at this particular time on this particular day. That's why I endeavoured to get him the precise information that he's requested. And if I can do that in—during the course of day, I will certainly do that and if not, as soon as possible.

Mr. Ewasko: I know that during the Estimates process, there was some information that the minister had promised to get me, as well, and I'm still waiting to date for some for some of that information. So I would hope that in the upcoming days or even within today, as he's sharing, would be much appreciated.

So then I'm—guess I'm going to assume then that asking the question how many bomb threats or threats that had come towards schools in the public school system—I'm assuming then that the minister has no idea how many numbers—the number of those that have occurred this present school year either.

Mr. Allum: What I've committed to do is to provide the member with the precise information that he's looking for, and I appreciate his point about the need to get that information in an expeditious manner, and we'll endeavour to do that to the very best of our ability.

But let me say, from the reports that we have to date, from September to March inclusive, two lockdowns have been reported. So there's the precise information that he requires.

* (15:10)

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister and minister's department, for providing that rather quickly.

So then what we'll do is we'll—I'll ask for the minister to provide also the number of—and they might as well put down—include the two lockdowns and, hopefully, that does not include, of course, the drills, but also include the school time loss for fires, threats—whether that's bomb or any type of threats, or any type of school closures, you know, and might as well include the amount of snow days, as well, per school division—would be great as well. Is that seem fair to the minister?

Mr. Allum: So noted, Mr. Chair. I wrote it down and I was pleased to be able to provide him with the information that he requested as quick as reasonably possible.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Minister. What year again was the—was grade 11 and—was the grade 11 and 12 phys. ed. program made compulsory?

Mr. Allum: I have to say that it was certainly before my time here in the Legislature that we made that compulsory. Of course, the benefits of doing so, I think the member would agree, is a—would agree that it was a wise and smart decision to make sure that kids were getting the kind of healthy activity and physical fitness they required during the course of the school day. I think it was six or seven years ago, but I have to say that's well before my time and his in the Legislature, but it's—I know that it's a program that, at the time that it was implemented and certainly going forward, has produced a recognition among educators and students and parents that simply the sedentary existence of a high school life needs more than that, and that it's absolutely essential for kids to be participating and getting active and being physically fit in order to ensure that they're not only fit in body, Mr. Chair, but, of course, in mind as well.

Mr. Ewasko: So then because the minister doesn't exactly know what year the courses were made compulsory for high school graduation, I would like to ask him what his opinion is on the curriculum for the grade 12 phys. ed. program and just comment on the flexibility that schools have for that program.

Mr. Allum: Well, as I said a few minutes ago, Mr. Chair, I think the government of the day, predecessors of mine in the Department of Education and as ministers of Education, felt very strongly that it was important to make sure that our kids were physically fit and that these—that real physical fitness

and physical phys. ed. was incorporated right into the curriculum up to very-older age, up to grade 12. And so we feel, I think, quite strongly that the program is serving the very kind of benefits that we'd looked for when we first initiated that particular undertaking. I think it's safe to say that parents were very much supportive of building phys. ed. into the senior years curriculum, and, consequently, we feel quite confident that the program itself is succeeding exactly as we intended it. Of course, we're always looking to make improvements in the Department of Education, and if the member has suggestions for doing so, we look—certainly look forward to him doing that.

I have to say that for our government and for our party, we want to make sure that our kids are fit, as I said, in body and mind, and I guess it's worth happening that—it's worth noting that we were the only jurisdiction in Canada to make it mandatory. And so, as usual, Mr. Chair, at least on this side of the House, Manitoba, and I'm sure the member would agree, would be proud to be leaders among Canadians in ensuring that our kids are physically fit in body and in mind.

Mr. Ewasko: Definitely, members on this side of the House feel that the need for physical activity at the high school level is definitely necessary and the benefits are going to far outweigh the negatives, and—but I did not quite hear, as far as some of the flexibility that the schools have in completing or in bringing forward the phys. ed. programs, I didn't quite hear what his opinions were of that.

But, you know what, we can also move on to some of the health factors. I know that we've talked in this House about various things along—around bullying and inclusion, social-emotional topics, cyberbullying, and I'd like his opinion whether he feels that these components, built into the specific grades that they're delivered in, you know, are where they should be.

Mr. Allum: Just on the former point, on the flexibility of it, I think that there are flexible components to the phys. ed. program that makes it helpful for students and parents to be able to get a credit outside of the school if that is what they desire as part of their physical—own personal fitness program and physical education program. So, just in terms of my opinion of it, I think there's good flexibility there and it's good for both parents and kids.

I think, with respect to his other question, that, in fact, there are a number of successful initiatives in schools both driven by the department as well as at the division level and then again within each individual school itself that addresses a broad cross-section of health issues from physical health to mental health to special needs. And what I have come to experience in my short time in this chair, in this very privileged position that I hold, is that there is a great deal of collaboration and camaraderie across the system in order to ensure the well-being of our children across the health—I believe he said health spectrum, and that deals with from the antibullying and in terms of inclusion and belonging all the way through to physical fitness and phys. ed.

Mr. Ewasko: Back in the early time of his government, I know that one of the election promises back then were the grade 3 guarantee. I'd like the minister to comment on the grade 3 guarantee and also where are we at with that and how are the numbers looking.

* (15:20)

Mr. Allum: The member has a penchant for asking questions of a long time ago as—long before my time in this privileged position that I'm now lucky enough to hold.

I would say this about what we've done in our—when it comes to early years, whether it's the new Early Childhood Educational Unit in our department that works in collaboration with a variety of other government departments to ensure that early childhood learning happens, following along to the small class size initiative that really is intended from kindergarten to grade 3 to provide small class sizes and make sure that there's that more one-on-one time between the teacher and a parent, he wants me to refer to either governments of—in—during our mandate. And I think it's fair to say that, as he well knows, our government has made a commitment to early childhood learning across the spectrum not only for kids in preschool, at the kindergarten age and right up to the early years up into grades 1, 2 and 3.

Mr. Ewasko: I know that some—quite a few of my questions have been not so much in the past. They've been as recent as just things that have happened either yesterday or things that have been also planned for the future in education. And I know that the minister has brought up the '90s quite often in his responses in question period, and I just thought he

would like me to take a question a little bit further back into the early days of his government.

So basically my question in regards to the grade 3 guarantee, that was the guarantee that they made quite the big deal of in the back-then Doer government of making sure that all students would be up to grade level in numeracy and literacy skills. And I would like to know what percentage to date has grade 3 students reading and—or through their numeracy and literacy skills—are at the grade-3 level for those students who are actually in that grade. What's the percentage?

Mr. Allum: Yes, well, the member—as fair to say that he's asking a number of very specific questions, sometimes dated back several—not only several years, but several mandates of the government will endeavour to get him the specific precise number that he's looking for.

Mr. Ewasko: Great. I'd like to know the timeline for getting that information to me.

Mr. Allum: We will endeavour to do so as expeditiously as possible.

Mr. Ewasko: That's not a specific answer.

Mr. Allum: I'm sorry, but I wasn't sure if that was a rhetorical question or not, or just an observation. We will endeavour to do so as quickly as possible.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay. So then I thank you, Mr. Minister, for endeavouring to get me that information as quickly as possible.

But with that I'd like to know from the year 1999 to present, two thousand and—you know what, we'll even go until June 2013—the percentage of grade 3 students reading and writing numeracy and literacy skills that are at or above, or whatever, information that he has, according to that promise that his government had made, how that tracking's been going, how have they been doing? I just—I would just like to know, have their endeavours in their programs that they've put forward in the last 15 years, has it been working?

Mr. Allum: The member, I will certainly endeavour to get him the precise information that he would like.

Mr. Chair, I think he knows that we have, as a government, invested considerable resources into our education system both at the K-to-12 level and at the post-secondary level. What we've experienced in that time is the overall improvement in the quality of

the education during our time in office. We have made it a priority since my time in this chair, and really this is sort of what we're trying to talk about here in Estimates today, about making quality education a priority and ensuring that literacy and numeracy and those foundational skills that go along with literacy and numeracy is a priority in our schools.

And I think it's safe to say, Mr. Chair, that we demonstrated that by—among other things in our schools' funding announcement, did identify an envelope for quality initiatives specifically for literacy and numeracy. And what we do on this side of the House, Mr. Chair, is to work in partnership with school divisions. We enter into a dialogue so that we invite submissions. We'll want to go back and forth on the innovative ideas they have for improving literacy and numeracy results. And I know from having talked both to divisions and to teachers that they welcome the kind of initiatives that we undertook in the last school funding announcement and in this budget in order to ensure that we continue to build for the kind of outcomes that all parents—I'm a parent, as is the member—we want to see for our children.

In addition to that, Mr. Chair, we have made it very important to look at the math curriculum and to fine tune and enhance it so that kids are getting the very kind of foundational skills that I think the member's driving toward when he talks of literacy and numeracy. That includes a pilot project at the U of W in order to get the teaching education students—teacher education students up to speed on not only the math curriculum, but how to teach math. I'm a history professor in my former life where I've had taught history in universities, and there's a way to teach history and there's a way to teach math. I know that. And I'm sure the member, as a former guidance counsellor, would know that there are ways to do the kinds of things and the kind of skills he needed in his job. So we've tried to take those kind of measures to improve not only the curriculum itself, but how it gets taught, which is an important part of any pedagogical exercise.

And then in addition to that, Mr. Chair, we're also looking at the language arts curriculum as well. We're mindful that parents want their children to get those most basic skills, and we agree on this side of the House, and we've taken the approach to be agile and nimble and to adapt when circumstances require us to do.

We'll get him, certainly, the precise information that he requires, but I would say overall that the government is always adapting to the circumstances that we're faced with in the current year, and as the he would know from reviewing the school funding announcement that we made at the end of January, we've made quality—especially with respect to literacy and numeracy—a priority.

* (15:30)

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Minister, for the statement or the answer.

A quick question in regards to buildings: I know that the minister has gone around and has done quite a few news releases and announcements on facilities or new gymnasiums. I'd like to know how many of those gymnasiums are actually going to be shovel ready for this upcoming summer, how many are going—you know, what's the timeline on some of them? And if he doesn't have that at his fingertips, if he could provide that to me as well. How many specific new builds in regards to the mandatory phys. ed. programs for grade 12 for graduation, so how many new builds to accommodate that, in regards to gymnasiums, and also, in regards to the K-to-3 initiative for class sizes, how many brand new builds or additions or portables have been allocated to various places, and timelines to go with those as well?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Chair, we'll endeavour to get the member the kind of precise numbers that he wants as well.

But I do want to take this opportunity to concur with his view that we should be undertaking a comprehensive build out of our schools, whether it's in terms of new schools or new gymnasiums, the retrofit to science labs that we're undertaking across the province. I know he'll recall that we were up in St-Georges to open up a new gym and community facility common area in the school, and I thought that that was a really great event, and I know that he enjoyed it, too, and we both know that the community, the students and the teachers greatly appreciated it as well.

I had the wonderful opportunity to be with the member from Morden and Winkler in Winkler for the opening up of a beautiful, state-of-the-art school there and that particular ceremony was quite touching because of the circumstances under which the school was opening at the time, or at least when

the ceremony for the opening of the school was taking place.

We have made it a point of government policy to build new gyms. I was at Saint-Avila in Pembina Trails with the member for Fort Richmond (Ms. Irvin-Ross) not so long ago. We were at Laura Secord in Wolseley; we were at—in Fort Rouge at Kelvin High School to open a—announce the opening of a new gym then. When those will—*[interjection]*—yes, of course, at—in Selkirk, as well, and in addition, there that also constituted a new swimming pool, as well.

We were—we did have a shovel at the Selkirk—at Bonaventure there. We did have shovels. The ground was a little cold at the time, I have to say, and I'm not quite as strong as I once was, but we did get the—we did get it—made the announcement and I know the community was thrilled, as evidenced by appearing on the front pages of the wonderful newspapers in Selkirk.

We'll get him the precise information on the build-out going forward.

I did want to just take a couple of minutes simply to reinforce our commitment to restoring, renovating, renewing the capital infrastructure of our school system. We certainly believe in it and it's something that we'll continue to do, going forward.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Minister. So I will be, again, waiting for that information. I look forward to it.

In regards to portables, I know that the new—relatively new school in Gillis, which is in Tyndall, Manitoba, had requested two portables because of their population explosion within the last couple years, and I understand that they were denied the two portables and I believe that they have put in an appeal for this coming—upcoming year because of the amount of adjustments or accommodations. To try to accommodate the students for this coming school year would be rather tough without having, you know, the minimum one portable. I'm just wondering if the minister can shed some light on how that appeal process is going or if there is any hope to get that portable classroom in Tyndall for this coming school year.

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Chair, the utilization of portables is something that is in an odd circumstance in our, I would say, in our educational system. What we know for sure is the portables themselves, as they're currently constructed—unlike when I was a

student in high school, I hate to say it, in the 1970s—have improved greatly and they actually are really very nice learning—places for learning. I can also say that what I've learned from parents is not an objection to portables per se, since they are good environments for learning, but it has a lot to do with connectivity to the school, safety of children and that kind of thing.

The precise status of the appeal that the member's referring to, I think, will play itself out in short order. But I would say that what we have in our school system at present is a really interesting and valuable mix of educational infrastructure that permits us to adapt to circumstances where enrolment, in the case that he's referring to, is growing, and we also rely on the innovation of school boards and schools to address those issues to the very best of their ability. And I—for my part, what I want to be sure is that when those circumstances do arise where a portable may be needed or in some cases where it's believed not to be needed, that there's a fulsome discussion on the subject, that there's good collaboration and conversation between parents, schools, school divisions. In my world that's where you achieve the greatest measure of understanding and the greatest measure of success in ensuring that all parties are reasonably satisfied with outcomes.

Mr. Ewasko: To the minister, I'm—I'll await, hopefully, the positive outcome to that—or the positive decision by that appeal process.

So, because we have both the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) and the Minister for Education in the room in this, so I'll throw this question out to either one of you. I know that part of the—one of the—your government's promises in the past is, as well, been up in—to provide nurses in targeted schools. And I was wondering if, you know, in light of today's announcement and yesterday's announcement by the minister, the Health Minister, I'd like to ask her what the status of nurses—the number of nurses that are in-practising, actually, in the public school system to date across the province.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Can we have a, you know—sorry to be a bother, but do we have some sort of timeline on that one?

Ms. Selby: As soon as possible.

* (15:40)

Mr. Ewasko: Well, since we're—since now we've turned it over to the Minister for Health, I just got a quick question on the status of—I know where the minister grew up as well, and I know that she's in—she grew up in the same region that I grew up in, and I'm wondering what the status is of the personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet, because I remember the Premier (Mr. Selinger) coming out for a picture and, you know, the grand digging of the shovel in the location where the personal-care home's going to be. And I'd just like to know where we're at in regards to the personal-care home, because I believe, if I think back to the project charter, this time of the year, 2014, we should have been reviewing the contracts and actually have been awarding the contracts for the building of the personal-care home.

Ms. Selby: Yes, I'm sure the community is very excited about the new 80-bed personal-care home that will replace the one that is currently a 30-bed personal-care-home facility. I can tell the member that schematic design is now under way and expected to be completed soon. The community is involved in planning of the project and there are active efforts to advance this project into construction as soon as possible. I agree with the member, I'm as eager as he is to get shovels in the ground there.

Certainly we know that we do need more personal-care homes. It is why we've got a commitment of more than 300 new beds in development right now, and projects—current projects that are in for construction are set to begin—I'm looking for a timeline here exactly—looks like construction will begin in 2015, but I would like to see what could be done to speed that up because, as the member said, I am from the area, so I hear about projects that are happening in the Lac du Bonnet-Pinawa region as well. And once it does begin, construction's expected to take about two years to complete.

Mr. Ewasko: Thanks, Minister, for that answer. So since we're on tenders and construction and that, I know that the project up at Powerview-Pine Falls, the hospital was announced quite some time ago, and I'm just wondering if the tenders have gone out, and if the tenders have gone out, when will construction begin there?

Ms. Selby: I'm sorry, I would apologize to the member. I thought I had that information in front of me, and I don't, but I will get back to him as soon as possible.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm going to turn it over to the—our Health critic right now.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I would like to go back to question period today and just ask the minister—she tabled a chart here this afternoon when asked about the nursing shortage, and she indicated—and I'd like, again, to just get her to explain what she was tabling and what her explanation was to that.

Ms. Selby: I can tell the member that the table—the chart that I tabled earlier today is—the sources for those numbers were from the annual reports of the college of registers nurses of Manitoba, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses in Manitoba. It is the comparison that we've been using which shows, of course, that we've got a steady increase every year since '99 and the number of active participating nurses is, of course, provided by the independent colleges who track this information.

Mrs. Driedger: So confirming that then, the minister is indicating by that chart that she distributed then, that there are 17,795 active practising nurses in Manitoba in 2013. Is that correct?

Ms. Selby: Yes, this is the numbers that are gathered to us from the independent colleges. They're the ones who track this information. Their statistics show that there is an all-time high of 17,795 active and practising nurses in Manitoba, which is 3,702 more than there were in 1999.

Mrs. Driedger: And would all of those nurses be graduating out of nursing programs in Manitoba or do those numbers also include any nurse that moves here from anywhere else and is registered with those colleges? Is that part of the number as well?

Ms. Selby: I can tell the member that those are the total active, practising nurses as reported by the colleges who licence and count them. Those nurses could be working anywhere: hospitals, schools, private practice, fee-for-service doctor's office. They could be working in one of our provincial jails, a number of places. But those, again, are the statistics that are provided by the independent colleges who track the information of their members.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister also indicate—it was on CJOB at 9 o'clock this morning that there are 800 nurses now registered in Manitoba that have come from elsewhere and 400 from the Philippines. Would that be an accurate—I guess, would that be accurate information that was presented this morning on CJOB?

Ms. Selby: The member is probably aware that in 1999 we brought in the nursing recruitment for relocation cost grants to attract nurses to come back to Manitoba, or to move to Manitoba after we saw a number of them leave. That grant allows eligible nurses up to \$8,000 to help offset the costs associated with relocating.

And, Mr. Chair, I can tell the member that as of December 31st, 2013, the grant has provided relocation assistance to 1,997 nurses who've moved to Manitoba from out of province; this includes 745 nurses who relocated to rural and northern Manitoba. More than 70 per cent of those nurses have relocated from other parts of Canada. Just more than 20 per cent have relocated from outside of North America, less than 5 per cent from the United States. Of the nurses who relocated from outside of Canada: 393 were from the Philippines; and within Canada we had 346 relocate from Ontario; 281 came from Alberta; 254 from British Columbia; and 94 from Saskatchewan who went through the grant process.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Driedger: Out of those 17,795 there are only 11,600 of those working within the public health-care system. Where do the 6,200 other nurses that are represented in that number, where do they work?

Ms. Selby: As I mentioned before, there are nurses working in many places: hospitals, schools, private practice, fee-for-service doctors' offices, jails—there's a number of places.

We chart—in our report, we track both the numbers of active and practising nurses that the college—the independent colleges who track the information have provided. And, as it shows, no matter how you look at those numbers, we're at an all-time high of active practising nurses.

We also track the number of positions and vacancies in the health-care system that are funded by the Province, which includes the RHAs, Selkirk, MDC, but it doesn't include the nurses who are working elsewhere such as federal nurses, agency nurses, other ones listed above.

It's important that we track that, of course, so that we can plan for the workforce that we need provincially under our provincially funded health-care system in our hospitals, our home-care system, personal-care homes, et cetera.

Mrs. Driedger: And when we look at nurses working within the public health-care system, what is the vacancy numbers positions? What are the vacancy positions? How many are there within the total positions that are publicly funded?

Ms. Selby: We have a 13 per cent vacancy rate across the province, which is, well, part of the reason why we've increased the numbers of nurses that we're training. I could get you the exact number of how many more nurses are trained every year in Manitoba, but I don't have that right in front of me at the moment. But any way you look at it there are more nurses practising now than there were in 1999.

We've also had a commitment in 2011 to hire 2,000 more nurses by 2015. We knew that that was to replace 1,000 nurses who are expected to retire, but also 1,000 new nursing spots to put folks on the front line to make sure that they can increase the time that they can spend by the bedside.

So certainly we know that our recruitment and retaining initiatives are working, but we know that we also want to keep growing our working nurse force, and we're committed to doing that.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what the trend line has been on the vacancy rate? Thirteen per cent sounds very high. Has it been going up over the last few years?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, of course, I think that the trend line that most Manitobans are probably looking at is the one that I tabled earlier today with the more nurses practising. That trend line clearly shows that there were 15,665 nurses in 1992 that were licensed and practising in the province. That number dipped to 14,092 nurses and, of course, it's now back up to an all-time high of 17,795 nurses practising, as provided by the colleges who do—the independent colleges who track those.

Certainly, Mr. Chair, we have created more than 3,200 more nursing positions across the system since 2000. There are more than 3—or sorry—3,702 more nurses practising in our province now than there were when we came into government. We're building more health facilities. We're creating more positions. We know that we need to do this to meet the needs of Manitobans, and we're going to keep working to aggressively recruit, retain and train new nurses to keep building the workforce. I made that

commitment in front of 500 nurses this morning, and I can tell you that the trend line that they're interested in is the one that started in a certain spot, dipped in the '90s and has been on a steady gain since we came into office, and that's the number of nurses practising in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: And that's very well and good and we do need to do that, but can the minister indicate what the vacancy rate of nurses has been over the last three years? If she said it's 13 per cent now, what was it last year and the year before that? I'm just curious.

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I'd have to get back to the member with that, but I can tell her that since 2000, a total number of 3,214 nursing positions, that includes RNs, RPNs, LPNs and nurse practitioners, have been created across the province. The number of filled nurses' positions has increased by 2,479 over the same period, which is an increase of 27 per cent.

Mrs. Driedger: So, out of the 17,000 nurses in Manitoba, we've got 6,200 of them working in the private health-care system and we—it looks like we have, according to the minister's own numbers, 11,611 working in positions that are filled but there are total positions of 13,388. So we have a nursing shortage right now in Manitoba, which the minister is trying to duck and weave around, of almost 1,800 nurses. That is the highest nursing shortage since they have come into office.

So, if we're sitting with a 13 per cent vacancy rate, that is very high. The NDP don't want to talk about it, but the nursing shortage in 1999 was about 751. Right now, it has more than doubled under the NDP to almost 1,800 nurses short in the public health-care system. If she's talking about having all these nurses that she's graduating or bringing in, why is there such—and it's a fair question to ask—why is there such a significant nursing shortage in our health-care system?

* (16:00)

Ms. Selby: Again the member wants to ignore the fact that we have a record number of nurses actually working in the province, something that she likes to dismiss and I can see why she probably would.

Mr. Speaker—or Mr. Chair rather, I think the member should also notice that we didn't put a freeze on capital health building as was done under the previous government. When her leader sat around the Cabinet table they put a freeze on health capital. We're not doing that. We're building more. We have

a lot in development right now and that means that we keep adding more positions for nurses, although we keep filling them as well, and we've been training more and we will keep doing that as well because we know the value of having nurses in there, of course.

Certainly, we have more positions because we are expanding and not cutting. I can tell the member that they had a great plan for nursing shortages; they brought in Connie Curran. It cured the nursing problem they had; they just fired 1,000 of them. There were less nurse positions and they didn't have to worry about filling them with that plan.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, I know the minister tends to like to go down this road because she struggles with answers about what is going on in health care. So she goes to the usual rhetoric, which doesn't do her any good because it's just making her lose credibility, not only with me but with people in the health-care system like doctors and nurses that listen to her or hear what's going on in the department. So she would be wise to try to at least make an attempt to answer some of these questions because she has lost a lot of credibility within the health-care system and there aren't a lot of people that believe she knows what she's talking about. So here's her chance to show some of it.

It is showing that between—or since 2011, the government has only filled 341 public positions. All the rest of the positions have been created in the private industry, in federal government; it's not in the public health-care system. So she needs to dig deeper in how she understands the interpretation of these numbers. Yes, it's wonderful that we've got more nurses in Manitoba, but she also needs to acknowledge that 6,200 of them are working in—as private health-care nurses and, in the last couple of years, she's only hired 341.

But to go back to what I'm trying to get her to respond to is the one question about the nursing shortage right now. Mr. Chair, it's the worst it's been in 15 years. It is 13 per cent, but it's almost 1,800 people. That means there are nurses—or positions that may not be filled.

And, I mean, she can sit and smirk about all of this, but I've worked in the trenches where we haven't been able to find a nurse when somebody phones in sick or we haven't been able to find a nurse when there was a vacancy. I can remember spending hours trying to, as a nursing supervisor, beg nurses to stay.

Since this government came, they have created mandatory overtime. That never existed prior to this government getting into power, so they're forcing nurses to work overtime. If we have a shortage of 1,800 positions in Manitoba, that is significant.

So I want to ask the minister, why are there so many positions? If there are nurses that are graduating, is there enough nurses being trained and graduated then? The numbers—the nursing shortage has climbed, you know, and if you—if the minister wants to look at one of her own graphs and charts, it's climbed and it's especially climbed—there was a little bit of progress from 2000 to 2005, but since 2005 the nursing shortage, the vacancies, have actually grown quite substantially, and right now it's almost 1,800. That is almost 800 more than 2006.

So, you know, if she's saying that she's graduating these nurses or they're coming here from other places, what is happening to create this shortage, because it's a critical shortage. We've got, you know, a number of nurses at the retirement age, probably about 1,000, and if we've got a nursing shortage already of 1,800, what is she doing to try to address that nursing vacancy? Instead of trying to, you know, throw this off with rhetoric—I mean, this is a very serious issue and it's affecting a lot of elderly people, too, in personal-care homes—why do we have the highest nursing shortage, the worst nursing shortage in 15 years, and what is she doing about it?

Ms. Selby: What we're doing about it is hiring nurses, Mr. Chair. That's what we're doing. We're hiring nurses and we are training more nurses.

I can tell you that when you build more health capital projects that we've been doing since we've been in government, more personal-care homes, more hospitals, more clinics, more QuickCare clinics, more ACCESS centres, all of these things that we've built have also meant that we've had more nursing positions. So, as we've increased the number of positions, we've increased the number of nurses. We are at a record high—all-time record high in Manitoba for the number of nurses who are practising, and we're going to keep hiring more nurses. The member seems to be questioning the numbers from the independent colleges of registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses, as well as the other colleges. Perhaps she should take that up with them if she doesn't like their numbers, but I trust that their numbers are correct.

The member should also recognize that we've hired more than 560 more doctors in this province

since we've been here. Many of them, of course, do employ nurses in their clinics, so I'm happy to see this many nurses working in the province. I'm happy to be a part of a government that invests in health capital, that doesn't freeze health capital as was done when her party was in government, and we're going to keep building and we're going to keep hiring. We're going to keep recruiting and we're going to keep training more nurses.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister doesn't get it. She's created positions but they can't find the nurses to fill the positions, so there's just something terribly wrong with her logic. They're vacant positions. So she can boast about creating positions, but who is filling those positions? Where are the nurses that are being asked to fill them?

Maybe she could explain, then, at this time, how much money is being spent on mandatory overtime because RHAs, under this government, are forcing nurses to work overtime. How much money has this government spent, in the last year alone, on forced overtime?

Ms. Selby: I guess I would remind the member that there are 17,795 nurses filling positions, and we will keep working to fill all the positions and likely create more, too, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Chair.

I will have to get back to the member on details—on overtime details that she asked for but I would also just inform the member, if she doesn't realize it, that we just ratified a new agreement with nurses. I meet regularly with the nurses union. I'm always open to a discussion with the nurses union of what we can do to provide better support to nurses, and as I committed to 500 nurses this morning, to make sure that we do what we can to help with their workload because I know the nurses want to be able to provide a very strong level of care and we want to do what we can to provide them with the supports that they need to do that.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate, within the new MNU contract, there was a commitment to address the issue of mandatory overtime—can the minister explain what that agreement was?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I don't have those details in front of me, but I would be happy to discuss this with the member at another time.

* (16:10)

Mrs. Driedger: But the minister just went through the process of contract negotiations. She's been the

minister. There were some fairly significant issues within that contract. This was a big one. How can she not know what the decision was about mandatory overtime? Because it was written up in the papers, people know about it, it was a ratified contract. Surely to goodness this Minister of Health knows what she signed off on in terms of that—what she plans to do in addressing mandatory overtime.

Ms. Selby: Our plan is to hire more nurses, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, then, I guess the minister's going to have to attract 6,200 of them out of the private system to come here, because over a three-year period all she's done is fill just over 300 positions in the public health-care system, so she's got a big job ahead of her. I am very surprised she can't address the issue of mandatory overtime. It was a major contract issue with the union.

Can the minister also indicate—in that contract there was some decisions made about agency nurses. Can the minister tell us what her understanding is of what was agreed to about agency nurses?

Ms. Selby: Again, I can say to the member, no matter how she wants to look at it, there are 3,702 more nurses working in Manitoba now than there were when they were in government. And in the time when they were in government, there were approximately 1,500 less nurses from the time they took government until they were no longer government.

I can tell the member that there is a working group that we've set up to reduce the use of agency nurses. We are, of course, going to continue to work with the Manitoba Nurses' Union on this. I've been very clear in my discussions with the RHAs that we'd like to see the reduction of the number of agency nurses so that we have those positions filled and don't have the need for agency nurses. But, of course, we know that there are times that arise when patient safety is, of course, the top concern, and agency nurses are needed. And we understand that, but there is a commitment to reducing those numbers. I would be happy to set up a time with the member if she would like to go over the specific details of the new nurses' contract. I'd be happy to do that with her at any time. I don't have those details in front of me, but I'm happy to arrange a briefing if that's what she would like.

Mrs. Driedger: So, if the commitment is to reduce the number of agency nurses used in the public

health-care system, can she indicate what she knows right now about how many agency nurses there are in Manitoba and how often they are needed in the public health-care system?

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

Mrs. Driedger: During Estimates, the minister also made a commitment to get back on a number of other issues that she still has not responded to. I wonder if she could give me some indication as when I might expect, in a reasonable amount of time, responses to the commitment she's already made.

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I will look into the status of those commitments.

Mrs. Driedger: I thank the minister for agreeing to have a look into that.

During Estimates, I had asked about the Manitoba Nursing Labour Market Supply document that was on the website. The one on the website at the time of Estimates was, I believe, 2011. Within days of me asking about that—and I asked the minister why there were—wasn't a more current document up—out there, and that it was, you know, three years out of date. Right after asking that question, that document disappeared off the government's website and, as of a few days ago, there was nothing on the website. So, for three years, the government has not been transparent about Manitoba's nursing labour market supply.

Can the minister indicate why, for three years, there has been no information on the website about—or with this document?

Ms. Selby: I can tell the member that that information is there now, and that is the information that shows that we have a record number of nurses practising in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us when it went up?

Ms. Selby: I'm not sure of the exact date. It was recent and I can get back to her with that.

Mrs. Driedger: Previous to this particular market supply document, in the older ones, 2011 and earlier, it included part-time and full-time numbers, so it was very clear what percentage of nurses were part time and what percentages were full time. Can she indicate why she removed it from this document?

Ms. Selby: Yes, the member is correct. I can tell her that the chart that we see about the total filled

nursing positions includes full time and part time included in the data. It's also included data from the regional health authorities, the Selkirk Mental Health Centre and the Manitoba Developmental Centre—doesn't include casual positions, federally funded, et cetera, or private sector.

And I can tell the member that these are important numbers to us because they allow us to monitor and plan the workforce in the—in our provincially funded health-care system, and that is what these numbers are used for. That the member's correct; that is the full and part time included in this data.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Driedger: Well, the minister is really showing her lack of knowledge about the health-care system by saying the part-time and full-time numbers aren't important to her and, therefore, they're not needed on this document.

She may not remember, but in 1999 there was a commitment—a promise, actually, by the NDP to move to more full-time jobs versus part-time jobs. There were a lot of nurses that couldn't get full-time jobs. That is probably one of the biggest issues out there for nurses in health care is part-time and full-time, and for the minister to say that those numbers aren't the numbers that are important to them shows her absolute lack of knowledge about what she is talking about. That is a critical issue in health care and there was a significant commitment by this government to move towards more full-time nurses. In fact, Manitoba had one of the highest numbers of part-time nurses in Canada.

Can the minister tell us what percentage now of our workforce are full-time and what percentage are part-time?

Ms. Selby: I'd have to get back to the member with that breakdown.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us if there is any movement in trying to increase the number of full-time positions in the province?

Ms. Selby: Yes, absolutely we want to see more full-time nurses. We want to see more nurses in general. In 2011, we committed to hiring 2,000 more nurses by 2015. That was 1,000 to replace the anticipated retirements and 1,000 new nursing positions, and we're well on our way to doing that. We have seen that—out of 2013 data from the nurses' colleges shows that 1,907 of the 2,000 nurses are practising,

including replacement of about 1,230 nurses who retired, and a gain of 677 more nurses.

Mrs. Driedger: The other thing that's missing that the minister has taken off this Nursing Labour Market Supply document is the shortages of health-care aides. Can she tell us why she took that number out of this document? They are an integral part of the nursing workforce. That number was getting worse over time. Is that a—you know, is there an attempt to bury that information and not be transparent about how bad the shortage is with—amongst health-care aides?

Ms. Selby: I was looking to see if I had the numbers of how many more health-care aides there are working in the province compared to when we came into government in 1999. We certainly have been hiring more health-care aides, and I don't have that exact number in front of me, but I'm certainly happy to talk about—whether we talk about how many more nurses we've hired, how many more doctors are practising in Manitoba and how many more health-care aides, I'd be happy to talk about that. And I apologize, but I don't have those numbers in front of me.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, thank you, I'm sure the minister would be happy to talk about things where she has dropped the ball and avoid talking about that. So she wants to talk about good-news stories, but she also is responsible for all the rest of it as well and needs to be, you know, more transparent than what she is being. And I, you know, I can tell she doesn't have a good grasp on some of this, but it's still really quite important.

In the Brian Sinclair inquest, there were comments made by the MNU about the nursing shortage, and, in fact, it was the president of MNU that indicated at that time that there were 700 nursing vacancies in Winnipeg and likely another 500 outside the city.

She also went on to say that chronic staff shortages have meant that nurses are beginning—are working in the ER now with far less experience in the past. In the past, new grads were never hired into ERs or ICUs because they just didn't have the experience. But now because of the chronic nursing shortage as indicated by the MNU, which the minister does not want to acknowledge here, a growing nurse shortage—and she does a disservice to nurses by not acknowledging it—MNU are saying there's a chronic staff shortage, chronic nursing shortage and it's getting worse under the NDP.

There is a real effect to this, and one of the effects—and it goes back to Brian Sinclair situation too—is how many of those nurses at that time were new grads or inexperienced nurses or casual nurses who had very little ER experience. I think, if the minister were to look at the shifts that were filled at that time and look at who was filling them, she would realize that there is a very significant impact based on skill levels or lack of skills by nurses.

And so, when you've got a shortage in an ER, patients get missed like Brian Sinclair got missed. When you have a nursing shortage and you can't look after patients in a PCH, that's when little old ladies get punched in the face because there is a shortage. She doesn't seem to understand that when we're talking about these shortages they have a dramatic effect on care that is delivered or not delivered; it could mean the difference between safe patient care and unsafe patient care.

And, Mr. Chair, the nursing shortage right now is at an all-time high under their watch. There's 11,000 nurses working in the public system, but there's 13,000 positions. That means we're almost short 2,000 nurses. That's significant, and it's gotten worse under this government and it's a serious issue.

And then the minister can't provide a whole lot of other information about a lot of the questions here, and that is very concerning because this all does come down to patients and what happens to patients where they're in our personal-care homes and in our hospitals.

Can the minister—does she have any indication of how many heavy workload forms have been filled in over the last number of years? Is that number trending upwards?

Ms. Selby: A number of things to respond to there. First of all, to get back to—the member was asking for more specific questions on health-care aides, and I can commit to the member that we'll make sure that information is public, be happy to provide that information to the public, of course.

* (16:30)

Also, in response to her questions concerning Mr. Sinclair, certainly we know that he went to the Health Sciences Centre for routine care. He didn't receive it. His death was tragic, and, most unfortunately, it was preventable. But I will say that immediate action was taken into place, taken into the days following Mr. Sinclair's death to figure out what went wrong and to make those changes so that that

would not happen again. That was including changing how patients were greeted, triaged and monitored. I can tell the member that a critical incident investigation was started the same day as Mr. Sinclair's death. And the WRHA has now acted on all five of those recommendations. A protocol was put into place three days after Mr. Sinclair's death, requiring primary-care clinics to call the ER when sending a patient over for care. A safeguarded triage process was implemented within a week of Mr. Sinclair's death to ensure that anyone entering the ER seeking care is identified, registered, triaged, monitored and ultimately gets the care that they need, including a-use of more greeters and green wristbands, and that more staff were added to the ER eight days after Mr. Sinclair's death to double-check that everyone in the waiting room who is seeking care has been triaged and is in line to see a nurse or a nurse practitioner.

Certainly, we know that families—nothing matters more to them than getting the care that they need for them or for their loved ones, especially in an emergency. It's why, since 2009, we've invested over \$5 million to add 60 front-line staff to Manitoba's busiest ERs. And, might I say, again, that we do have a record number of nurses working in Manitoba. But we're not done, Mr. Chair. We are looking to hire more nurses. We're looking to build more health capital, which will create more positions, and always recruiting more doctors and nurses to our system as well.

I'd have to get back to the member with the details that she wanted on the number of forms that have been submitted, and I will get back to her on that.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what the nursing shortage is in the Winnipeg ERs?

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I'm interrupting this debate to inform the committee that we had a procedural error earlier this afternoon, and the wrong motion was provided to the Government House Leader (Mr. Swan) to move when we began the concurrence debate. I am therefore now seeking the unanimous consent of the—the unanimous consent of the committee to allow the Government House Leader to move the correct motion. Once that is complete, we will resume debate.

Is there leave to move the correct motion now?
[Agreed]

The honourable Government House Leader, to move the motion.

Mr. Swan: I move that the Committee of Supply concur in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, which have been adopted at this session, whether by a section of the Committee of Supply or by the full committee.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order. Debate will now resume.

Ms. Selby: I'll have to get back to the member with those specific numbers.

Mr. Goertzen: Question for the Attorney General. We spoke in Supply about the case of Deveryn Ross, which, at that point, had come back from the federal court. Justice Mosley had issued a judgment that he believed that evidence should've been disclosed to Mr. Ross during his trial and that he believed—this is Justice Mosley speaking—that had Mr. Ross been provided with that evidence that he would've conducted his case differently.

Now, at that point when we were speaking in Supply, the case was still open for appeal from the federal Justice Minister. Can the Attorney General indicate whether or not that time frame has lapsed on the appeal?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm not certain whether the appeal period is still open or not.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I'll classify, perhaps, my question as somewhat rhetorical, then. It has closed, and the federal Attorney General did not appeal the decision. So Justice Mosley's decision on the Deveryn Ross case stands, and the factual findings and legal considerations within that decision now stand because the decision was not appealed.

Does this now lead the Attorney General in a direction that is different than what he had before? Is he willing now to ask that this case be returned to Manitoba now that the legal findings by Justice Mosley have not been appealed? And it stands that there's a belief that Mr. Ross would've conducted his case differently had evidence been provided to him at the time of his trial.

Mr. Swan: As I understand it, the—I believe the relief that was sought before the federal court was really a redirection of the matter to the federal

Minister of Justice. And I'll take the member at his word that the appeal period has now expired and that order will be final. That would be the next step in the proceeding—would be for Mr. Ross to return to the federal Minister of Justice.

Mr. Goertzen: And I recognize that certainly is an option, or that for Mr. Ross in terms of awaiting to see what the federal Attorney General would do now that there's been a decision not to appeal his case. But, as the minister confirmed in Supply, there's also an option for him, and that is to do what he did in the Driskell case—obviously, a different kind of case and different circumstances, but still to be able to write to the Attorney General in Ottawa and ask that the case be returned to Manitoba, and there are different remedies that could follow from that, perhaps a new trial.

Again, I'm not speaking to the innocence or non-innocence of Mr. Ross. I'm speaking to the findings by Justice Mosley that his case was not conducted fairly and the outcome might still very well be the same if there's a retrial. I don't know that. I don't think the Attorney General knows that, but there is a finding that the case was not a fair trial because evidence was not disclosed and he may have conducted his case differently. Given that, is the minister open to considering asking for the case to be returned to Manitoba?

Mr. Swan: I haven't made any determination of what, if anything, we'll do. We will certainly consider this carefully, going forward.

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the minister undertaking that consideration. I think that is the right thing to do. So he has not taken off the table the option of asking after his review is—an analysis is done, asking for this case to be returned to Manitoba. Is that correct?

Mr. Swan: We haven't made any determination. So, sure, the member is correct; we haven't ruled out any particular action.

* (16:40)

Mr. Goertzen: And I appreciate the minister doing that. I think, and I have said to him, and I said in Committee of Supply that my own feeling on this case has evolved as time has gone on. And I believe that the ruling of Justice Mosley was a game changer around this case, and I also believe that the fact that there wasn't an appeal adds to my feeling that there needs to be action taken by the Attorney General in Manitoba. Again, that's not speaking to whether the outcome of the case or a new case would be any

different than the original case, but it does speak to the fact that everybody is 'entitled' to a fair trial. And it doesn't appear by Justice Mosley's decision and the lack of an appeal that that was the case here. So I do appreciate the minister acknowledging that he's undertaking further review of it, based on the new situation. I think that is the responsible thing for an Attorney General to do, and I'll wait the outcome of his review.

I have a couple of questions regarding the—and I know that this falls a little bit beyond the Justice portfolio. It is more specific to issues related to Manitoba Public Insurance and not the issues we've been debating over the last days in the House. I raise these as a more-less political matter but more of one that I think is still important.

I've been getting some correspondence and perhaps the minister has as well; I'm not sure if he's been copied on it. Those who have collector vehicles—and I don't have a conflict in this; I don't have a collector's vehicle. I don't think anyone would consider my Mazda to be a collector's vehicle either now or any time in the future, but I understand that the government introduced the Collector Vehicle Program where you could get vintage plates for these collector vehicles, and then the cost of the plates would be 45—at a 45 per cent reduction from the normal plates that they were receiving.

Now, the concern that's been raised by those who have these collector vehicles is that the cost really isn't a reduction, because they're not eligible to then put their cars on lay-up, as it's called, during the winter. And so they end up paying for the collector vehicle plate through the entire 12 months, even though most of them are only driving their vehicle for four to five months, I suppose, and so that they don't feel that there's an actual cost savings. In fact, some are saying that it's actually more expensive to use the collector plates, because they're not able to lay the vehicle up over the winter and have it at a reduced insurance rate.

Can the minister comment on that concern that I've been hearing from individual collectors?

Mr. Swan: Well, this is outside the scope of the Justice Estimates, but I'm prepared on—despite that, I'm prepared to try and provide some information on that. I'm advised I don't have my MPI materials with me, but I am familiar with the issue.

We're quite excited about the collector plate. I've already seen a couple of them driving around.

This past weekend, people got their cars out and, hopefully, the last of the snow has fallen.

The member's right. The result of these new plates is a 45 per cent reduction for the months that the vehicle is registered, in recognition of the fact that people who have collector vehicles take care of them. They drive them—I think most people would agree—in a manner that's very safe, very cautious, in many times only to take them out to a show and shine or for a drive. I know that there were some individuals concerned, generally not ones who would have their vehicles out for the entire driving season which we'd consider to be from April or May until September or October. I am aware of one individual who, I believe, would only—who'd only want to have his vehicle on the road for June and July, saying that, even though there's a 45 per cent reduction, there was a greater cost.

It is still possible for individuals, if they don't want to keep the collector plate all year and they don't want the higher level of insurance, they can actually do as they've been doing now. They can go down and get the collector plate, put it on their vehicle for one month or two months or four months—whatever the case may be—and they can then still take that plate back and then have lay-up insurance for the rest of the year. The advantage for them is that, for the period of time that they are licensing the vehicle, they will still enjoy that 45 per cent rate reduction.

For the majority of people who have collector vehicles, it will be really greater convenience for no greater cost, which has made people happy. But for those individuals who only want to have their vehicles out on the road for a much shorter period of time, they are entitled to the lower rate while the vehicles are on the road and then lay-up insurance for the rest of the year.

Mr. Goertzen: So, just for some clarity for me, because I don't deal with these plates on a personal level, an individual can have a collector's plate on their antique vehicle, and when they decide to lay it up in the winter, or at whatever time during the year the individual wants to lay it up, do they have to return the collector's plate or is just a matter of going into MPI, see and saying—or their local dealer—and saying that they want to switch to lay-up insurance, where their physical plate, sort of, remains on their collector's vehicle?

Mr. Swan: My understanding is that the majority of people with collector vehicles now will simply want

to keep the collector plate. They will now get a 45 per cent reduction. When they're finished driving at the end of the year, they will simply put their vehicle up. They won't have to return the plates. When they're ready to go again in the spring, they will be able to take out their vehicle, with the plate on it, and use it.

For those who don't want to have the—those who don't want that, who want to have a lower rate of insurance, they would then have to return their collector plate at the end of the driving season and return in the spring to reapply and get new collector plates.

Mr. Goertzen: So I guess I can understand from the collector's perspective, why this is an inconvenience, to have to—and maybe it's even an inconvenience from the aspect of MPI or the individual dealers. I mean, is there not a way administratively to allow somebody to just keep the collector's plate on, but go into the dealer and change their registration type to lay-up service. What is the concern there? Is it a policing issue or why can't that be done in an administrative fashion without the, you know, removing of the plates and bringing them back in to MPIC?

Mr. Swan: Well, the collector plates now provide a greater choice. What would happen until the collector plates came out, is that everybody with a collector vehicle had that inconvenience. At the end of the driving season they would have to then go and return their plates. They would then have to get lay-up insurance and have their vehicle insured in that way, go back and reinsure their vehicles for road use in the spring.

The majority of collector vehicle owners will now simply keep the insurance throughout the year. They will automatically have their lay-up insurance. They'll actually have full insurance and many people will be satisfied. There will be some who will effectively choose to continue doing what's happening now; they will insure their vehicle for the road for a limited period of time, at the end of that time period, they will then switch their coverage and get lay-up insurance.

Really what the collector-plate program is moving to, is very much like the motorcycle insurance, where if—where people have their motorcycle insurance, it's seasonal insurance but allows motorcycle owners to get their bikes out, if we have a better spring than what we've had this year. It was not unusual in other years to see people

out riding their bikes in April. As well, if we have a very positive fall, people can ride their bikes into October, and perhaps even, November.

The member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) and the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) will probably have lots of stories about that.

It just provides another choice. For every owner of a collector vehicle, we believe it's going to result in lower premiums. For the majority of collector vehicles, it's going to result in greater convenience. The worst case scenario, I suppose, will be the same level of convenience or inconvenience at a lower cost, which is a positive.

I do know the member for Steinbach has the person with the collector tank in his area, because I know we discussed that with the fortified vehicles act. So I don't know whether that's going to be coming up as the next question.

Mr. Goertzen: Now, in defence of the individual who owns the tank, he's not raised this issue with me. I think he's just happy to just fire away the way he is right now.

* (16:50)

But the—is there not a way that things could be changed within MPI? Because I can understand, sort of, the frustration that the collectors have—the people who have collector vehicles have. I mean, they're sort of saying, isn't it just simpler to allow us to register under the Collector Vehicle Program and then, instead of bringing the plates back, just have us go into our—with our registration, I suppose—into the office and change the nature of the insurance to lay-up and maybe they get issued a different sticker or something they're supposed to put on to the plate then. I'm sure there's some simple way to figure that out because I think the impression that they're being left with now is that this is somehow a money grabber, a revenue thing for the government, and, you know, I don't think that—I hope that's not what the government was intending.

So is there not a way to be able to allow for that administrative change when somebody can just—so somebody could just go into their local Autopac dealer and make that registration change to lay-up as opposed to going through that whole switching and shuffling of plates?

Mr. Swan: The advice I have right now from MPI is no, but I don't mind taking another look at it. As I understand it, the only individuals who feel that this

hasn't created a big advantage are people who have their vehicles, who—one of their vehicles registered for road use for a very short period of time in the summer. The majority of collector car folks want to get their vehicles out as soon as they can in the spring. They want to keep driving through the summer into the fall. This results in better coverage at the same or less cost. For individuals who have their vehicles out for a much shorter time, they are in no worse position than before this program came in, and, if anything, for the period of time their vehicles are insured, they now get a 45 per cent discount.

I appreciate that those who insure their vehicles for a short period of time may be disappointed that there is a decrease in their premiums but no increase in convenience. I will take another look to see if there's anything we can do about that. But, in general, it's provided another choice, and I—again I've already seen some people proudly with their collector plates on, and I think it's only going to encourage Manitobans to keep restoring and driving their beautiful vehicles.

Mr. Goertzen: So, in short, I'll leave this line of questioning for now. I just want to ensure, then, the minister is going to go back to Manitoba Public Insurance and see if there's a way to maybe administratively deal with this so there isn't that requirement to—and I know we're dealing with, you know, a relatively small number of people compared to the number of vehicles that MPI insures, but I do think that this would probably be helpful for everybody and that there should be a way to do this that isn't difficult by just simply allowing them to change the nature of their registration when they're done driving their vehicles for the season.

So his indication is he's going to go back to Manitoba Public Insurance and ask them to see if there's a way for that to happen. Is that correct?

Mr. Swan: Yes.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that response.

I understand from the Deputy Clerk that I have to advise that we will keep this list of ministers open for the next calling of concurrence, which will be at the call of the government, I think. Does that fulfill the requirement?

I've been through this now 11 times, and every time it's like the first time I'm going through it. So the Clerk will forgive me as I have to ask those questions, but I appreciate the advice that we continue to get.

I'd asked the minister in Supply about the issue of using electronic monitoring more broadly. At that time he'd indicated to me that only one individual who was not a high-risk car thief had been assigned the ankle bracelet for a domestic case. But I think he said to me at that time that there was—oh, I don't remember the exact number, but it was five or six, I think, that—potential applications that were coming forth to use on for their domestic cases. Is that correct or does he have an update on that?

Mr. Swan: No, I don't have an update from the number that I gave in Estimates.

Mr. Goertzen: But it is true that the government is still committed to using the ankle-bracelet program for cases of domestic assault. Is that correct?

Mr. Swan: Yes, with certain parameters. We don't believe that ankle bracelets are a substitute for incarceration for somebody who poses a danger.

When somebody is with, or often without, the consent of the Crown is released back into community, we believe that there can be situations where electronic monitoring can provide one more tool to try to encourage management to the person in the community. It is something that we've pledged to consider, and we will continue to allow our Crowns to seek that as a possible term when people are released back into the community.

Mr. Goertzen: And so how do those parameters sort of play out in real? Is it to the—up to the discretion of the Crowns to make the application for use of electronic monitoring or—and, if so, what are the parameters that are placed on them?

Mr. Swan: It would generally be requested by the Crown attorney, but, ultimately, it's the judge who would decide if it's an appropriate condition. Although I don't know of any specific case, I suppose the defence counsel could actually start the conversation. There may be some individuals who would actually believe that electronic monitoring might be of assistance to their clients and might provide for better management to people in the community. But, generally, it is the Crown attorney deciding, once they know somebody maybe coming back into the community, deciding if this would be a tool that could be useful to assist with management.

Mr. Goertzen: In the Auditor General's report on—the most recent one, in the section that dealt

with corrections, she was critical of the current measurement of recidivism, and it's something the minister and I have talked about in the past when I was previously Justice critic in whatever incarnation that was, that I was concerned about the change of measurement.

The measurement for recidivism used to be in Manitoba if somebody was released from a correctional centre and they committed—were charged with another crime within two years, they would be considered somebody who was a recidivist. I hope I didn't make up a word there, but somebody who has recommitted a crime, and they would fall on the recidivism list. Then it was changed to the two-year window was whether or not you were convicted within that two years as opposed to charged, and so the numbers, or the percentages, dropped fairly significantly.

And the criticism I had at the time, and I think it was echoed somewhat by the Auditor General in her report, was some of that is the drop is not reflective of those who are not committing crimes. It's reflective of the longer court system that we have, and that it takes a longer time to get from charge to conviction and so there's, in some ways, an incentive. I'm not suggesting this is happening where there could be an incentive to have, you know, longer court cases. But she suggested that the measurement be changed and that there be a going back to a standard that it was either the previous standard or a standard that doesn't have the issue of this time lag and not being used as a measurement for those who've been actually been convicted. Is the department looking to go back to the previous standard of recidivism?

Mr. Swan: I think we agree that the measurement of recidivism is not clear-cut, and there are—there is no standard measure or standard practice across the country of how to do that. The change in the way of reporting actually moves Manitoba much closer to the way that the federal correctional service considers recidivism, and I mean, I'll just remind the member of the reasons why we found the existing measure really wasn't an accurate reflection of how we were doing.

The way it was done previously is that you would take the total number of individuals in whichever class it was—adult offenders, youth offenders, whatever the case may be—and you would divide the total number of offences within the two

years into the number of offenders. So, if I can give an example, of 10 youths being released in the Manitoba Youth Centre in a given month, you could have a situation where nine of them did not reoffend. The tenth one commits a number of crimes and, in that time period, is also breached several times for failing to comply with their conditions.

The member and I can actually agree on some of the frustrations with the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Maybe instead of being returned to the correctional centre, that individual is returned back into the community; they breach again. Let's say that person has a total of 10 offences including breaches. The recidivism rate, the way it was calculated before, would not be 10 per cent representing one of the 10

individuals; it would actually be 100 per cent even though nine of the 10 offenders did not reoffend.

That was artificially inflating the numbers. We thought moving towards much closer to the federal system was a better—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., 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 morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 14, 2014

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