

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

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(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	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	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	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	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	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, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 3, 2015

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 33—The Family Law Reform Act
(Putting Children First)**

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 33, The Family Law Reform Act (Putting Children First); Loi sur la réforme du droit de la famille (mesures pour le mieux-être des enfants), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, this bill enhances the best interests of the child in a rewrite of our family law. It strengthens enforcement tools to collect child support, including online postings of persons in default and hunting and fishing licence suspensions, for example. It modernizes the law regarding parentage to recognize the changing kinds of families in this province. It deals with assisted reproduction, all with a view to helping to avoid court and disputes. It deals with custody, access, including the relocation of parents, and it lays a foundation for a swifter, a cheaper family court process for greater access to justice for Manitobans.

Thank you.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

Rights of Manitoba Children

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government should uphold the rights of children set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by Canada over 20 years ago, to better protect and promote children and their rights and to ensure the voices of children are heard.

Instead, many children in Manitoba, especially those in the child-welfare system, reveal that they sometimes feel they have no say in what happens to them.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba's children and youth are falling behind on several indicators of well-being and in areas that would prepare them for better outcomes in life.

This year, the provincial government's education system was ranked last of all Canadian provinces in science, math and reading.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba also has the second highest percentage of children using food banks of all Canadian provinces and the highest child poverty rate.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to ensure that the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and that the opinions of children are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to correct the tragic systemic flaws that have failed Manitoba children in the recent past.

Mr. Speaker, this petition's signed by B. Cawston, A. Marqueses, A. McCorrister and many other Manitobans.

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

Provincial Trunk Highway 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank—Pedestrian Safety

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH 206 at the intersection with Cedar Avenue.

(2) There have been many dangerous incidents where drivers use the right shoulder to pass vehicles that have stopped at the traffic light waiting to turn left at this intersection.

(3) Law enforcement officials have identified this intersection as a hot spot of concern for the safety of schoolchildren, drivers and emergency responders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by J. Zale, B. Humphreys, J. Mazur and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Province-Wide Long-Term Care—Review Need and Increase Spaces

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And this is the background to this petition:

(1) There are currently 125 licensed personal-care homes, PCHs, across Manitoba, consisting of less than 10,000 beds.

(2) All trends point to an increasingly aging population who will require additional personal-care-home facilities.

(3) By some estimates, Manitoba will require an increase of more than 5,100 personal-care-home beds by 2036.

(4) The number of Manitobans with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia-related illness who will require personal-care-home services are steadily increasing and are threatening to double within the current generation.

(5) The last personal-care-home review in many years, including the Swan River Valley area currently under the administration of the Prairie Mountain regional health authority, was conducted in 2008.

(6) Average occupancy rates for personal-care homes across the province are exceeding 97 per cent, with some regions, such as the Swan River Valley, witnessing 100 per cent occupancy rates.

(7) These high occupancy rates are creating conditions where many individuals requiring long-term care are being placed far away from their families and their home communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to consider immediately enacting a province-wide review of the long-term-care needs of residents of Manitoba.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to recognize the stresses placed upon the health-care system by the current and continuous aging population and consider increasing the availability of long-term-care spaces, PCHs, in communities across the province.

And this petition is signed by L. Todd, L. Orbiter and F. Tabanera and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Bipole III Land Expropriation—Collective Bargaining Request

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

On November 19th, 2014, the Premier authorized an order-in-council enabling Manitoba Hydro to take valuable and productive farmland for its controversial Bipole III transmission line project without due process of law.

* (13:40)

On November 24th, 2014, the minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act signed a confirming order for the province of Manitoba declaring that no notice to landowners is required for the seizure of property.

The waiver of notice represents an attack on rural families and their property rights in a modern democratic society. There was not even an opportunity provided for debate in the Manitoba Legislature. In many cases, the private property seized has been part of a family farm for generations.

Manitoba Hydro has claimed that it has only ever expropriated one landowner in its entire history of operation. The provincial government has now gone ahead and instituted expropriation procedures against more than 200 landowners impacted by Bipole III.

Since November 2013, the Manitoba Bipole III Landowner Committee, MBLC, in association with the Canadian Association of Energy and Pipeline Landowner Associations, CAEPLA, has been trying to engage Manitoba Hydro to negotiate a fair business agreement.

For over 14 months, the provincial government and Manitoba Hydro have acted in bad faith in their dealings with Manitoba landowners or their duly authorized agents. Those actions have denied farmers their right to bargain collectively to protect their property and their businesses from Bipole III.

MBLC and CAEPLA has not formed an association to stop the Bipole III project and they are not antidevelopment. The two associations have simply come together, as a group of people, as Manitobans, to stand up for property rights and to exercise their freedom to associate and negotiate a fair business agreement that protects the future well-being of their businesses.

In recognition of the fact the incursion on arable land without due impact on livelihood is occurring in Manitoba, the Manitoba Seed Growers Association is leading an effort develop right-to-farm legislation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to direct Manitoba Hydro to immediately engage with MBLC and CAEPLA in order to negotiate a fair business agreement that addresses the many legitimate

concerns of farm families affected by the Bipole III transmission line.

This petition is signed by K. Taft, B. Carpenter, D. Kelly and many other fine Manitobans.

Renewal and Improvements to PTH 5 and PTH 16 at Neepawa Intersection

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And this is the background to this petition:

Two major provincial trunk highways, Provincial Trunk Highway PTH 5 and Provincial Trunk Highway PTH 16, intersect in Neepawa along a distance of 1.5 kilometres, resulting in high volumes of traffic.

The town of Neepawa is experiencing consistent growth as demonstrated by a reported 6.5 per cent increase in population between the 2006 census and the 2011 census, according to Statistics Canada.

Due to population and industry growth in the Neepawa area, the area where PTH 5 meets PTH 16 is experiencing increasing volumes of traffic flows.

The portion of highway where PTH 5 and PTH 16 join is frequently used by emergency medical services to transport patients to the Neepawa District Memorial Hospital and health centre.

Manufacturers, agricultural producers, area residents and many Manitobans rely on the area where PTH 5 and PTH 16 are a joint highway, yet this part of the highway is in need of significant repair.

There are serious safety concerns due to poor conditions of the 1.5-kilometre portion of joint highway in Neepawa.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation recognize that the 1.5 kilometres of shared area on PTH 5 and PTH 16 running through the town of Neepawa is in unsafe condition and therefore dangerous to the public, and as such, be urged to prioritize its renewal and consider making necessary improvements to reflect its current use.

This petition is signed by L. Kubarski, R. Kulbacki, R. Nienhuis and many, many other fine Manitobans.

**Proposed Lac du Bonnet Marina—
Request for Research into Benefits and Costs**

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Lac du Bonnet is a recreational area with great natural beauty.

(2) The Winnipeg River is one of the greatest distinguishing cultural and recreational resources in that area.

(3) Manitoba marinas increase recreational access and increase the desirability of properties in their host communities.

(4) The people of Lac du Bonnet overwhelmingly support a public harbourfront marina in Lac du Bonnet.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider collaborating with other levels of government to research the economic benefits and construction costs of a marina in Lac du Bonnet.

This petition is signed by M. Comeau, R. Reaume, D. Karklin and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review of the Manitoba Employee Pensions and Other Costs for 2015-2016.

And I'm also pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review of the Manitoba Enabling Appropriations and Other Appropriations for 2015-2016.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

I have a report to table for the Assembly. In accordance with section 42 of The Ombudsman Act and subsection 26(1) of The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, subsection 58(1) of The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and subsection 37(1) of the personal health act, I'm pleased to table the annual reports of the Manitoba Ombudsman for the year ended December 31st, 2014.

Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

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

I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Sheila Reid and Kathy and Aaron Ross. The Rosses are visiting from British Columbia. Welcome to Manitoba.

And also, in the public gallery today we have with us from—today Harvey and Bev Lyons and Lawrie Kyle, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection (Mr. Lemieux).

And also in the gallery we have with us today the 2015 senior women's world curling champions, Lois Fowler, Cathy Gauthier, Maureen Bonar, Allyson Stewart, and their coach, Brian Fowler. Welcome to our Legislature. And these folks are the guests of the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer).

And on behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here.

And, of course, also seated in the public gallery we have with us today from Ralph Maybank School 18 grade 6 students under the direction of Christel Steingart, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum).

And also seated in the public gallery this afternoon we have with us from Minnedosa Collegiate, we have 45 grade 9 students under the direction of Tanis Barrett, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome all of you here this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTIONS

**Crown Corporations
Financial Forecasts**

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Now, what does the NDP government do when it can't run on its record, Mr. Speaker? Well, all it has left is a forecast, of course. And what's it going to do with a sunny forecast? Well, it's going to then launch a multimedia advertising campaign to promote the nice forecast that it has

because it can't promote its record. And so radio and TV and print ads all show off the government's nice forecast.

Now, who pays for that? Does the NDP pay for it? No, taxpayers pay for it, taxpayers. And we say, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, that that's another example of NDP waste which is threatening Manitobans' essential front-line services.

So I want to ask the Premier today—straight-forward question, hope he can answer it—how much are taxpayers paying for NDP pre-election advertising?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, there is no ND pre-election advertising going on in the province at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, what is going on is the putting forward to Manitobans the plan to grow the economy with infrastructure investments. The 5-and-a-half-billion-dollar program will generate 60,000 person-years of employment, 60,000 jobs over the next five years, and it'll make good jobs available to Manitobans now, improve our infrastructure for the future, which will allow us to grow our economy in the future.

* (13:50)

And when it comes to economic forecasts, the reality is strongest economy over the last 10 years, in the top three anywhere in Canada, Mr. Speaker, in the top three over the last three years. And the good news is the forecast is it will be in the top three going forward as well.

Mr. Pallister: Well, under this Premier, who has doubled our debt and broken every consistent promise that he's made, we have seen no performance that he'd like to run on, that is for sure. But we have a forecast. The Premier calls this forecast a plan. A forecast is not a plan, Mr. Speaker, not even close.

He can run, but he cannot hide. And the fact of the matter is he is trying to hide because he has a tendency to want to use forecasts to promote himself, but he wants to hide. For the first time in Manitoba history—for the first time—he is not letting Manitobans see the forecasts for their Crown corporations. That's very interesting, Mr. Speaker. What is he hiding? First time in memory, this year's budget hides the forecasts for Manitoba Hydro.

So if the Premier is so big on forecasts, why not let the owners of Manitoba Hydro know what the forecast is for their Manitoba Hydro? Why hide?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we don't have to talk about forecasts, we talk about results.

Since the great recession, 31,000 good-paying jobs created in Manitoba, full-time jobs—full-time jobs—one of the best job creation records in the country. We don't hide from that fact. We are very pleased with the job creation record that all the industries in Manitoba have worked on, that all the organizations have worked on.

The only person hiding is the Leader of the Opposition. He doesn't want to talk about his plan to shut down Hydro. He doesn't want to talk about his plan to shut down the infrastructure programs. He doesn't want to talk about his plan for the economy because it means \$550 million of cuts to front-line services.

Less people working, less people being looked after, less people being educated, that's his plan. Why doesn't he get up and let us know what it is?

Mr. Pallister: Half his own caucus don't believe him, Mr. Speaker, there's no reason Manitobans would believe him either. No, no.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro belongs to all Manitobans. It does not belong to the NDP. It is not the property of the NDP. Yet the Premier is hiding the forecasts for Manitoba Hydro from the owners of Manitoba Hydro, and why? If they were good, he'd take out advertisements and tell everybody about it, wouldn't he? But they aren't good. Of course they're not good. So he's covering them up. The only reason to hide them from Manitobans is they're bad forecasts.

Now, what makes this Premier think he has the right to hide the forecasts for Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries and every other Manitoba-owned Crown corporation from the owners of those Crown corporations, Manitoba Hydro?

Will he today commit to some transparency for a change and release the forecasts for Manitoba Hydro so Manitobans can have a look at them?

Mr. Selinger: First of all, the member opposite just puts factually incorrect information on the record. Not—nothing new for the member opposite; he's a master of fiction, Mr. Speaker, and master of the double standard.

The forecasts for, and the reality of, what will be generated in terms of revenues for Liquor & Lotteries, it's in the core budget, Mr. Speaker. It's presented every year. I'm shocked and dismayed that the Leader of the Opposition, with all his years of experience, does not know the Liquor & Lotteries revenues is reported in the core budget. Shame on him.

Another example of how he wants to avoid his real agenda. His real agenda: shut down the building of hydro, shut down the infrastructure program in Manitoba, make cuts to public schools, make cuts to family services, reduce \$550 million of expenditure. Total that up in job losses, the Manitoba economy would go south into negative growth.

We're growing at among the best in Canada over the last 10 years, and, yes, for the future, that's our plan. What's your plan?

Budget 2015 Summary Forecast

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): This First Minister knows full well that there has been a dramatic change in the style and the method of reporting in this budget. Mr. Speaker, it is pledges over performance over there; it is forecasts over facts.

Right now, we know that the Finance Minister is not providing a forecast of when the total budget will be in balance. Until now, his predecessors have done so. They have produced and they have published this forecast, but in Budget 2015 he has not.

Did the Finance Minister and his staff prepare this total budget forecast?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the—this—[*interjection*] I'll begin again.

Budget 2015 still reports on summary. That has not changed. It is the view of this government that wild fluctuations in the summary budget shouldn't dictate how we're able to provide services to Manitobans like health care or education.

When Manitobans think about budgets, they think about the core budget: health care, education, infrastructure. We're going to report—this budget reports on summary, and it will in future years.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, once again the Finance Minister is missing the question. He says he reports on summary, but he does not forecast any longer on summary.

We know that the government worked on a forecast of the total budget. The government responded to an information request. They stated that the forecast was worked on and prepared for the NDP Cabinet. But this Finance Minister has refused to release it. Manitobans deserve to know the future of Manitoba's finances.

What does this Minister of Finance have to hide by refusing to release the forecast of the total government budget?

Mr. Dewar: As I said, Mr. Speaker, again, Budget 2015 and future budgets will have the summary information provided. Again, we state that we feel that fluctuations in—and revenues from our Crowns should not impact on our ability to provide services, core services to Manitobans that Manitobans count on.

I note, Mr. Speaker, also, I want to remind the member that today the Royal Bank of Canada made a prediction, made a forecast that Manitoba will be yet again one of the leaders in Canada when it comes to economic growth. In fact, they're predicting that Manitoba will be the best in the nation when it comes to economic growth, up from—most of the indicators are showing that Manitoba will be an economic leader, the Conference Board of Canada, the Bank of Montreal and now the Royal Bank.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister just demonstrated that he can read a forecast, but he will not present one.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The government is now providing in the budget the most incomplete and the least transparent road map to Manitobans that they ever have.

The minister understands that international lenders are looking for a plan to return to balance. There is no such plan on the total government budget being provided. If lending rates go up, Manitobans pay more in debt servicing and get less in front-line services.

My question to the minister is simple: Is he hiding the total budget forecast from international lenders for fear of a credit downgrade?

Mr. Dewar: Well, the simple answer is no.

But I do refer the member to page 4 of the budget where he would see, Mr. Speaker, all the information he asks for in a summary basis. As I said, we continue to report under summary. We feel

that wild fluctuations in weather should not impact our ability to provide services to Manitobans.

Now, the member talks about forecasts, but I want to talk about facts, Mr. Speaker. Manitoba's performance ranking: full-time employment, No. 1; total employment, No. 1; private employment, No. 1; retail sales in Manitoba, No. 1.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Target Costs

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, full disclosure: the MLA for Gimli and I do not shop together, but I do like his taste in shirts.

In 2008 the NDP legally bound themselves to cut emissions to below 1990 levels by 2012, but like so many other laws, they chose to break it. In 2010 the Auditor General tabled a report with a chapter on managing climate change, stating the government has the capabilities to track and report on government-wide climate spending.

Why does the minister ignore his own legislation, ignore the Auditor General and refuse to 'include' these costs in his public reporting?

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I thank the member across the way for the question.

* (14:00)

The fact is that over a decade our economy grew at a considerable rate and we kept emissions flat, which is an accomplishment in itself, something that members opposite I don't think would give much consideration to whatsoever would they happen to be in government. I don't think they believe in climate change, to be honest with you. Their way of looking at things, more 19th century than 20th century. We are in the 21st century, Mr. Speaker.

We believe we take every action possible to address climate change, and I think our record speaks for itself. Thank you.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the original Auditor General report stated that reporting on greenhouse gas emission reduction, quote, should disclose not just reductions but also the cost of achieving those reductions, end quote.

In the last—in the NDP's last emissions report, they admitted they were several megatons away from reaching those reduction targets, targets that this minister personally set.

How much has the NDP's failure in reducing greenhouse gas emission targets have cost Manitobans?

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Again, the double standard that his leader displays on a daily basis in this Chamber applies to him as well. It's quite obvious, given the growth in the economy, when you look at their strategy, which would be to make massive cuts in expenditures which would stifle our economy.

You know, you want to talk about—hydro development is a prime example of that, Mr. Speaker, where, you know, this is the government that builds hydro, not just this government but every NDP government going back in the history of our province. Members opposite stifle all of that: no growth, no vision, no plan whatsoever.

So I think the people of Manitoba best know who serves their interests the best.

Mr. Martin: The NDP promised and set out in legislation specific emission reduction targets. This never happened, and the NDP admitted that the targets were never achievable and it was more about hot air than clean air.

Yesterday, the Auditor General update was very clear reporting on the costs in achieving greenhouse gas emission reductions, quote, would have added needed context, end quote.

Why is this minister denying Manitobans that needed context? Is it because of his shameful failure on this file?

Mr. Nevakshonoff: I thank the member opposite for the question. It gives me opportunity to speak more about our climate change initiatives.

Let's talk about renewable energy, for example, Mr. Speaker, and I was a member of the biodiesel task force a number of years ago. These are the types of things—renewable fuels—this is where our economy is going to grow. This is where we are going to address the issues such as climate change.

Members opposite, their double standard, their plan to cut growth in the economy, to cut expenditures to the bone, that's not going to get us where we need to be.

Again, Manitobans know where they're best served, and that's with the members of this party. Thank you.

Shoal Lake Flooding Effect of Road Closure

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): The residents around the Shoal lakes in the Interlake continue to face road closures due to continuous high water levels. Provincial roads 415 and 416 are still closed, which seriously impedes commerce, school buses, emergency vehicles and much more.

Why does this NDP government continue to ignore the serious impacts caused by the closure of these roads?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, as I outlined in Estimates yesterday, there's been chronic overland flooding in the Shoal lakes area. Our government has responded with a buyout program, something requested by residents of the area. And the reason we've done that is very straightforward. There is no simple hydraulic fix that doesn't create flooding downstream, and we're not prepared to put other Manitobans in a situation of being flooded out.

We have acted to restore road access, and I've been on site. I've worked with our department, worked with the Minister of Conservation in terms of that. So we are very serious about maintaining road access, Mr. Speaker. But, again, we have a very significant focus there of buying out flood-prone—chronically flood-prone land, which is what people in the area have asked for.

Mr. Pedersen: I refer to Hansard from July 4, 2001; that would be 14 years ago, in case the math is not good on the other side. It was the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) discussing the Shoal lake flooding in committee that year in—14 years ago, and I'll quote from what the member from Thompson said, in quote: "The water level is at an unprecedented level." End of quote.

Mr. Speaker, 2001, 14 years ago, it's not like this is a new problem, and yet the NDP just continue to talk and talk about it and not act on it.

Why does this NDP government continue to ignore the problem and the effect that these closed roads have on local residents?

Mr. Ashton: You know, Mr. Speaker, I find it rather ironic, and particularly following the question to the Minister of Conservation, that they haven't connected the dots. And for a party that denied climate change provincially, I think federally, I think with the Harper government, 4 per cent of Canadians think

they're serious about climate change. That's, I think, less than the number of people—that Elvis is still alive.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's called climate change. We've seen significant situations and impacts in Shoal lake. My suggestion to the members opposite is they finally recognize, perhaps 14 years later, that what we said 14 years ago is actually true, and maybe they should get on board, because continuously in this House they make it clear they still don't understand climate change and its impacts, particularly when it comes to flooding.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, I will table for the minister 1,200 names—1,200 names—on petitions from concerned citizens of the area. These—today we have the members of the Shoal Lake Flooded Land Owners Association with us in the gallery, and again today they're going to hear 14 years the same minister talking and talking and talking and not doing anything.

The member for the Interlake continues to ignore them, refuses to even return their phone calls to the committee.

Mr. Speaker, so when will the minister—member for Thompson, the minister responsible for the PRs 415, 416, will he agree to meet with this committee today to finally resolve the issue, stop talking about it, make some results?

Mr. Ashton: Well, first of all, in terms of meeting today, I'm actually in Estimates today, Mr. Speaker, where I look forward to further questions on this and other issues.

Second of all, I would point out again that if the member opposite has a simple solution, he should perhaps indicate what that is, but all the hydraulic experts have indicated that you cannot deal with the situation in Shoal lake without making it a lot worse for other Manitobans as well. That's why we put in place an unprecedented program of buying out, many cases, significant agricultural land. That's why we've worked to restore the infrastructure where the water levels do allow for that.

So we have been committed to people in the area, and I'd suggest to the member opposite, again, that he recognize one of the reasons we're so focused on flood mitigation is the fact there are many areas in the province, Mr. Speaker, where we can make a difference; where we can't, as we've done with Shoal lake, so we listen to people and put in place the buyout program.

So we've made a real difference the last 14—

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

Children in Care Rural Hotel Accommodations

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, it seems we are returning to the issue of children in the care of CFS a lot.

On April the 1st of this year, the minister vowed to Manitobans that by June the 1st, no child in care would be in a hotel. Then, on May 28th, the minister made another announcement where she admitted, reluctantly, children in rural and remote areas would still be housed in hotels.

These promises have been repeated many times in this House in response to our repeated questions.

Is the minister able to live up to her promises? When will children in the care—in care in rural and remote areas be out of hotels, or is this just another broken promise?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I thank the member for the question. This gives me an opportunity to put some facts on the table.

And I'd like to reflect back on Monday when the member from River Heights spoke about a position that West Region Child and Family Services was advertising for. I'd like to assure all members in this House that this position was to support the many important individuals that are working in the front lines that manage the large geographical area of the west region and provide them with travel arrangements. I'll table this for the House. The position has now been reclassified as administrative clerk as well.

So what is important here is to understand that this position had nothing to do with placing children.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, I guess that's reminiscent of the reclassified social workers.

*(14:10)

Agencies that use ANCR, or ANCR, for placement inside of Winnipeg also exist in rural and remote areas.

What is stopping them from removing children in the care of these agencies from Winnipeg no-hotel zones to rural areas where they are allowed to use hotels?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I have said time and time again, the people that are working within Child and Family Services have come together to address this important need of ensuring that we do not have children in hotels across this province. We have gone, we have done the work. We've hired more staff. We've increased the number of beds, 90 more beds, and we're nearing 100 more staff that are being well trained and supervised. We are making a difference. We're addressing the issues. We're ensuring that we are protecting Manitoba children.

I would like all Manitobans to be very afraid, if those people got in across the floor, what they would do to child welfare by slashing the budget by \$4.5 million.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you we wouldn't differentiate between rural, remote areas and the city of Winnipeg like this minister.

Mr. Speaker, this government has offered no specific plan to deal with children in hotels in rural areas other than the minister's veiled threat that there would be consequences if agencies continued to do this. A plan of action would make agencies and Manitobans feel a whole lot better.

What is the plan for CFS in rural areas to deal with the safety of children under the care of CFS?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The plan that we tabled last Thursday was very comprehensive. It talked about building more resources across the province, hiring more staff to address the issue of children in hotels.

We heard from the agencies and the authorities that we need to build even more resources in the rural and the North, and it's going to take us a little bit more time and we've given them that time. But as we're working towards that deadline of December 1st, we're going to continue to provide them with the resources they need. We've expanded the hotel reduction team. We've ensured that if any child being placed in a hotel in the rural and North has to get approval from the CEO of the authority.

But we're not stopping there. We're investing in prevention. We're supporting foster parents. We are not cutting their budget.

Children in Care Rural Hotel Accommodations

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, following yet another tragedy under this government's watch in Family Services, the minister promised that no children would be placed in hotels.

She repeated that promise and said, we will not tolerate any agency placing a child in a hotel.

Of course, now we learn that that doesn't apply to foster children outside of the city of Winnipeg. Those in rural Manitoba and in the North, they are being treated in second class by this government.

When the minister made the promise, she said that no children under the care of CFS would be going into hotels. That means that she either misled Manitobans or she didn't know how her own department worked outside of the city of Winnipeg.

Which is it, mister—Madam Minister?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): This is the government that said a Manitoba—a child born in the North is a Manitoban.

We continue to implement the strategies across the province. What we've been able to do is we've reduced the hotel usage. We've eliminated hotel usage since May 11th. We're going to continue to work in the rural and the North. While we're working there to reduce the hotel usage, we're also implementing prevention strategies.

The front-line staff are working diligently to create those resources. We're supporting them. We are not slashing their budgets like the members opposite.

Mr. Goertzen: What this minister said on behalf of all the NDP members is that no children under CFS care would be going into hotels after June 1st. Then we found out that that didn't actually include children under their care in rural or northern Manitoban.

That came as a surprise to the Child's Advocate. That came as a surprise to the Grand Chief David Harper. Both of them understood that it was supposed to be province-wide.

So I want to ask this minister: When she made that promise, that meant that she either misled Manitobans or she didn't understand how her department worked. Which is it?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I can tell the member opposite, we've tripled the budget. We've hired more staff. We've created more resources. We are supporting foster parents like they've never been supported before; we are employing—we are providing them with mentorship and also orientation strategy.

We are making investments, not like the members opposite that slashed foster parent rates,

reduced the budget by 4.5 and didn't provide services to 16-year-olds.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister didn't just make a promise to Manitobans; she made a promise to kids, to children who are under care. She made the promise on behalf of the NDP government that as of June 1st no children—no children—in Manitoba would be in hotels that are under the CFS watch, and that promise has been broken.

This is important because this goes to one of two issues. Either the minister misled Manitobans, and that goes to the issue of trust, or she didn't know what was happening in her department, and that goes to the issue of competence.

We want to know: Is she not trustable or is she not competent? Which is it?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, we have come together with the authorities and the agencies across the province. We have been reducing the usage of hotels. There have been no children in hotels in Winnipeg since May 11th.

In the rural and the North, as we unfolded the strategy, the agencies and authorities came to us and they expressed their concern about being able to make the deadline. What we did is we listened to them. We extended it, as they requested. And with doing that, what we've been able to do is expand the hotel reduction team to the rural and the North. We're going to build more resources there. We're going to provide more services.

We're going to also—we're not going to stop there. We're going to prevent children from coming into care. We're going to keep supporting the child-welfare system, not like the members opposite.

Early Learning and Child Care Program Auditor General's Recommendations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Auditor General released a report reviewing recommendations from 19 previous reports.

The two most notably ignored reports by today's NDP government were, first, on climate change and, second, on Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care program. Now, we all know that this government has not been very concerned about climate change; that's not news. But only six of 25 recommendations for Early Learning and Child Care have been fully implemented.

Why is today's NDP giving child care such a low priority that after more than two years, 19 recommendations still have not been fully implemented?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, it's greatly ironic that the member from River Heights is speaking about child care. We brought forward a program that puts 900 additional child-care spaces into this budget. And what has he done? He's voted against it. He's voted with the opposition, who don't believe in providing child care. They cancelled the program at the federal level.

Mr. Speaker, when the Leader of the Opposition was a Member of Parliament and they became the government, one of their first acts was to cancel the national child-care program. And now the leader of the—the former leader of the Liberal Party, the member for River Heights, is supporting their policies by voting against our budget.

We're expanding child-care spaces, Mr. Speaker. We call them early childhood learning. There are opportunities there for families to get the support they need so they can enter the workforce and have the good jobs that we're creating in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I voted against that budget because that was not nearly enough. Nine hundred spaces is nowhere near enough when you've got more than 11,000 people waiting on the list.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's original report on Early Learning and Child Care was released January 2013. Yesterday, two and a half years later, the Auditor General's review revealed that in two and a half years, only six of the original 25 recommendations have been implemented. Twenty-four per cent implemented after two years, even with NDP math, Mr. Premier, that is a failing grade.

Why has today's NDP failed early learning and child care in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member would put the full statement of the Auditor General on the record. Significant progress has been made towards implementing several other recommendations along with the six that the member himself acknowledges were completed.

What the member himself does not acknowledge is why he voted against 900 additional spaces in the budget, as well as additional investment. Every new school in Manitoba now being built has got a daycare

centre or a child-care centre being built in it, policy that never existed before. There's tremendous investment going on in early childhood learning in Manitoba, and that's because we have a high number of families working in Manitoba. When families are working, they need secure, safe, well-run daycare. That's what we have in Manitoba. Our daycare providers are among the best in the nation.

* (14:20)

And by the way, Mr. Speaker, our daycare providers are only one of two provinces where a pension is part of their working arrangement. We have provided a 'pension'—a pension. Every member opposite has voted against that in every single budget.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, 900 spaces is not nearly good enough when you've got 11,000 children waiting.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General notes in the review that in the case of one of the most important recommendations, to ensure that the government was publicly measuring and reporting wait times for child care, today's NDP has said they will not implement that recommendation.

I ask the Premier: Why is today's NDP government disregarding one of the key recommendations of the Auditor General and not publicly providing the wait times for child care in Manitoba? Is it because they'd be embarrassed by the results?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we've got a—we have a five-year plan to expand the number of daycare spaces by 5,000 in Manitoba, and that's after tripling the budget and dramatically increasing the number of spaces in this province.

The member opposite has voted against those resources in every single budget. Now—now—he pretends to be interested in child care, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't really wash when you voted against it every single time. He's no different than the members of the opposition: when they're at the federal level, they cancel the programs; when they're at the provincial level, they vote against it.

We're the only party in this province that has consistently supported child care. Every single year we've been in office there has been more child-care spaces. There's been an over 30 per cent increase in wages. We brought in one of the first pension programs in the country, and we're spending millions

of dollars improving child-care facilities all across this province.

A major program, new daycares in new schools, improved daycares all across the province, better facilities for children, more support for families. That's what we're about, Manitoba families working and children being well looked after.

Low-Cost Bike Helmet Initiative Ten-Year Anniversary

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Yesterday I presented the House with a private member's resolution on the year of sport.

We all know that a healthy child is an active child, and today the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors made sure that the active children are also protected children. This all on the 10th anniversary of our low-cost helmet program in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors please inform the House on this incredible announcement?

Hon. Deanne Crothers (Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors): I thank the member for the question.

So in the past 10 years our Low-Cost Bike Helmet Initiative has provided over 104,000 bike helmets to families across this province, and nearly 10,000 of those have been given out for free.

So to mark this anniversary, the member of—the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) and I joined others this morning to attempt to break the Guinness world record for the largest gathering of people wearing helmets. We had over 1,300 kids who were extremely excited and school staff who were in attendance; that's over 20 schools all wearing helmets. And I'm proud to report that with their help, we unofficially—the unofficial tally right now indicates that we did set a new world record.

So kids had a great time, but, more importantly, the event helped reinforce the important message for kids and for media in attendance and viewers at home how important it is to wear a helmet.

Kirkella Visitor Centre Hours of Operation

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, on Monday I asked the minister why his government closed the only visitor information centre between the Saskatchewan border and Brandon. The minister

said, and I quote: The visitor centre is open. End quote.

Can this minister confirm that the Kirkella visitor information centre is currently open?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): Mr. Speaker, the Kirkella visitor centre right now, as a matter of fact, as we speak, is seeking young students who will occupy that centre and advocate on behalf of Manitoba starting at the end of the school year.

The centre is not closed. It opens every summer. It will open again this summer.

Mr. Pivniuk: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that this minister puts misinformation on the record to defend his government's dismal promotion of tourism in Manitoba.

I'm tabling this—pictures of the Kirkella visitor information centre taken yesterday which, contrary to the minister's claim, clearly states, and I quote: This location is closed. End quote.

Will this minister apologize today for putting misinformation on public record?

Mr. Caldwell: Well, Mr. Speaker, members opposite may not know this or they may be just being disingenuous; certainly the staff is being disingenuous, there's no doubt about that.

Mr. Speaker, visitor centres are open to correspond with the school vacations. The Kirkella centre, like other centres, will be open for this summer season. It is not closed—it is not closed—it is not closed.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member—*[interjection]*

Order, please. Order, please. The honourable member—honourable Official Opposition House Leader?

Point of Order

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, it was just yesterday that this very same member stood up and apologized for making a derogatory comment about staff that work here in the Legislature. I would've hoped that in the 24 hours he wouldn't have forgotten that experience and the apology that he had to provide.

Now he's done it again, Mr. Speaker. He seems to be a repeat offender. He's said it again about staff and made a derogatory comment about staff, which is completely untoward and unacceptable in this Legislature, and, frankly, it's unbecoming of any member of this Legislature.

I would ask him to again—for two days in a row—apologize for that comment.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Municipal Government, on the same point of order.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I withdrew remarks on the character of a staff.

This is a disingenuous argument today. If the member would—wants me to retract it, I will, to put it on the record again.

But we have an issue, Mr. Speaker, where a visitor centre is open for the summer season; it's not closed. I don't know about this sign here, but the sign itself does not reflect, in fact, reality.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Caldwell: It's not in provincial—yes, it's a summer visitor centre, Mr. Speaker. The visitor centre is open.

We're proud of our tourist—tourism industry in the province of Manitoba. It's a multimillion-dollar issue.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), I want to make sure that I'm very clear on this. Is the Minister of Municipal Government indeed indicating to the House that he is withdrawing his comments with respect to the staff?

Mr. Caldwell: I'll withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable Minister of Municipal Government.

I hope that this satisfied the matter with respect to the point of order raised.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now, we're going to continue with the honourable member for Arthur-Virden's question.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Speaker, the minister said that the Kirkella visitor information centre is good for Virden, Kirkella, Brandon and Manitoba.

How exactly a closed visitor information centre is good for anyone?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, once again, the visitor centre is going—is open for this season. The members opposite, I understand they—as I recall, former Premier Doer called the naysaying nabobs of negativism.

Only in this Chamber would we have a member for a constituency, who's got jobs in his constituency being provided for by this government in our budget, vote against the budget and then in this House criticize the fact that a centre is open in his own constituency.

So, Mr. Speaker, if the member for Arthur-Virden won't stand up for employment in his constituency, we on this side of the House will.

Lake Manitoba Flooding Water Level Concerns

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, four years after the 2011 Lake Manitoba flood, the lake remains well above recommended operating levels.

When is this NDP government going to actually do something, anything, to alleviate the fears of Lake Manitoba flood victims?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, we've already acted. We constructed for the first time an outlet—an emergency outlet from Lake St. Martin. That's something that was not done when it was first constructed in the 1960s.

I point out that operationally it requires that we be above flood levels, Mr. Speaker. That's not our decision; that's a decision that is part of the regulatory process through the federal government. I want to indicate, by the way, I'm not being critical of the federal government, but they have made it very clear we have to be above flood levels to operate it. And when we were above flood levels, we operated that.

So, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line here is we have acted, and our next goal is to build the permanent outlets, and, in fact, we're well on the way in terms of that.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, Fairford simply does have the capacity to lower Lake Manitoba, and this NDP government should know that. It is the only outlet to the lake.

Why is the NDP government still trying to mislead the people of Manitoba about the dangers they are placing on the Lake Manitoba flood victims?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, our record in terms of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin is the following: First of all, we built the emergency outlet; we did it in a matter of months. Second of all, we've done significant work in and around Lake Manitoba in terms of shoreline protection in terms of flooding, and, in fact, we've had tremendous co-operation from the municipalities in that area. The third thing, we've not only put in place the design work but the budget, the \$500-million commitment for the two outlets.

* (14:30)

So, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, it's the NDP government that's responding. The unfortunate part is that members opposite, every time we brought forward any of these initiatives, they've voted against it.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, the minister goes on and on about the emergency outlet. The emergency outlet does not lower Lake Manitoba one millimetre. The emergency outlet has not even been running full any time since 2011.

The only outlet for Lake Manitoba is the Fairford outlet and the only thing that changes the flows out of it are the levels of the lake.

I ask again: When are they going to deal with the problems that the people around Lake Manitoba are dealing with? When are they going to do something to give the victims of the Lake Manitoba flood peace of mind?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, the member is inaccurate, because the operation of the emergency outlet, by bringing down Lake St. Martin, allows us to operate the Fairford structure, particularly not to have to throttle back its use because of frazil ice. So what we're able to do is get the full capacity from the Fairford as well as getting water out of Lake St. Martin.

And I will make no apology. This government will make no apology for making sure for the first time we're going to have flood mitigation and full relocation for the people around Lake St. Martin, chronic victims of flooding for decades. But in the process of building those two outlets, Mr. Speaker, we're also going to be there for Lake Manitoba.

Again, the real question should be, why do members opposite not get onboard with the program and support those initiatives of this government?

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It's now time for members' statements.

Canadian Senior Women's Curling Champions

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, believe: That was the word that Coach Brian Fowler gave to the Canadian Senior Women's Curling Champions when they arrived in Sochi, Russia, to play in the worlds.

Believe that you not only belong here but that you are the team to beat. Believe in the broom. Believe in your skip. Believe in the call, even if the ice has six feet of curl or that a takeout needed two feet of ice. Believe in the team and mostly believe in yourselves.

In any curling competition, the lead dictates how the game will be played and Allyson Stewart did it all that week. She calmly and quietly played her game, setting up the end so that her rink could have success.

Second Cathy Gauthier had been on the world stage and made sure that they remembered that they were Team Canada, but always keeping it fun with her wit and humour.

Third Maureen Bonar brought the energy, soaking up the experience, saying, Lois, we're playing Sweden. Can you believe we're playing Sweden? As Lois said, it seemed easy for Maureen to be in awe; while she was curling 100 per cent, I was just trying to make the next shot.

Finally, Lois, who brought the steely determination, drive and desire to win. They were on the world stage and she was determined that they would play their best. They did. They outscored their opponents 71-19 over seven games.

They played in Olympic venues against rinks that had been there before. But they were the only rink that had a coach that stayed out testing the rocks and the ice every night. They were all rookies at the international level except for Cathy-Cathy, who stopped them before they went on the ice for the first time to say, we are Team Canada, we don't just walk on the ice, we strut out there.

When it was all over, they stood atop the podium listening to the Canadian national anthem as the 2015 Senior Women's World Champions.

There have been many stories shared. As Cathy said, Brian found this shirt in a store in Sochi with a phrase about believe printed on it. It was in Russian. For all we knew it could have said, I love bologna. But we believed.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the members of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, congratulations to the 2015 Senior Women's World Curling Champions.

Harvey Lyons—CCA Volunteer of the Year

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): In Dawson Trail we are lucky to have many people dedicating themselves to making our community a better place.

Harvey Lyons is one of those caring individuals. He recently received the Canadian Curling Association Volunteer of the Year Award for all his hard work at the Lorette Curling Club.

Harvey's a long-time contributor to the club. When poor ice conditions at the Lorette Curling Club started driving membership down, Harvey knew it was time to get to work. Harvey would volunteer anywhere between 30 to 40 hours a week. There was no job too big or too small. He spent countless hours brainstorming with ice keepers at other curling rinks and with experts in Winnipeg to identify the best way to keep the club's ice.

Harvey also recruited and organized volunteers to help him in different roles. He even organized the year-end party for the volunteers.

His commitment doesn't stop there. Harvey took a workshop to learn more techniques on how to better scrape and pebble the ice. He also filled in for the ice keeper when he was ill and took over the volunteer on a voluntary basis.

It's clear that Harvey was willing to do whatever it took to rebuild the Lorette Curling Club, and all his hard work paid off. The men's league has returned now that the club is in better shape and a big increase in membership has saved the club.

Winning the Canadian Curling Association Volunteer of the Year Award came as a complete surprise to Harvey, although not at all to his family, his wife Bev, and friends. But for Harvey it's the

support of his friends and his curling colleagues that he treasures most.

Congratulations to Harvey Lyons for receiving the Volunteer of the Year Award. Your hard work and dedication has helped save the Lorette Curling Club.

Thank you, Harvey.

Winnipeg Wednesdays

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, as part of the United Way of Winnipeg's 50th anniversary celebration, they are planning activities each Wednesday in June. This first Winnipeg Wednesday event is Conscious Kindness.

United Way of Winnipeg is encouraging Manitobans to make a kindness pledge today and to share their kindness story on social media with the hashtag kind Winnipeg. One popular pledge today has been to pay it forward by paying for someone else's purchase.

It is Tim Hortons Camp Day today as well, so why not go buy someone a coffee? Last year almost \$12 million was raised for the Tim Horton Children's Foundation on Camp Day, which helped over 17,000 kids go to camp last year.

Next Wednesday the United Way is encouraging Winnipeggers to get together and have red table dinners. At these dinners they are encouraged to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Winnipeg today and to generate ideas on how to make the city better. They have a starter kit with conversation questions and a feedback form that you can download from the United Way of Winnipeg website.

The last Wednesday of this month, United Way is planning a free community concert at The Forks. Several local musicians are scheduled to perform and everyone is encouraged to come down and celebrate Winnipeg. As well, they are also going to try and set a world record that night for the most people drumming together at the same time.

I encourage everyone to take the kindness pledge today and to keep the momentum going with the other United Way of Winnipeg events scheduled this month. And today, Mr. Speaker, is a great day to say thank you to the United Way, to all their volunteers for the great work that they do and to wish them a happy 50th anniversary.

Wrestlers of Flin Flon

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): If you're paying attention to amateur athletics in our province then you will have noticed that Flin Flon is emerging as a wrestling hot spot.

This April, two students from Hapnot Collegiate Institute in Flin Flon flew out to the Maritimes to compete in the Cadet/Juvenile Canadian Nationals in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Hunter Lee and Christina McKay each managed to wrestle their way to silver medals in their respective categories. While this is an impressive feat, these two are no strangers to success.

Christina has won a gold medal in wrestling in both the provincial and national levels in past years. She just—she is just about to graduate from Hapnot Collegiate and certainly has a bright future ahead of her.

Hunter Lee, who will be entering grade 11 at Hapnot Collegiate next year has also earned national and provincial medals before. Most recently, he qualified to wrestle for Team Manitoba at the Western Canada Games, which are being held in Fort McMurray this summer. He also had been selected for Team Canada's Pan Am Games wrestling team as an alternate in the cadet category.

It seems as though wrestling runs in the family for Hunter. His younger brother is quite the prodigy as well. Carson Lee, in grade 8, has also qualified to wrestle for Team Manitoba at the upcoming Western Canada Games. While Hunter isn't officially old enough to be his younger brother's coach, he does help out with encouragement and instructions from the sidelines.

I am so proud of these young people who do such a great job representing Manitoba and Flin Flon on the national stage.

Congratulations to all of you, and keep up the great work.

Thank you.

*(14:40)

Management of Group Homes

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report delivered yesterday said, and I quote: The child-welfare system apprehends too many Aboriginal

children while at the same time failing to protect them.

The report is blunt. The child-welfare system fails to protect Aboriginal children, and we've seen this with children like Tina Fontaine.

Mr. Speaker, during the last three weeks I've exposed how CSF—CFS run by today's NDP fails to protect children in group homes. I provided evidence that the number of children reported missing from group homes is skyrocketing. In January 2008, there were 53 children reported missing from group homes. Since January 2013, an average of over 200 children a month have been reported missing from group homes. This is a disturbing, more than fourfold increase.

On May 19th in response to my questions in Estimates, the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) said, and I quote: There are a number of youth that are consistent runners and can be reported hundreds of times running. And further, the minister talked about children coming in the front door and leaving the back door because they don't want to be there. It's very concerning to have children running from the very place that's supposed to help them.

The minister also confirmed the children are running away at all hours of the day and that the system hasn't been developed to raise children. The policies of today's NDP government are irresponsible toward the children who need love, learning and limits, but are not given limits toward the staff of group homes, who often are given little ability to impose limits for these children, and toward the community, because when children run away from group homes they sometimes engage in destructive behaviours, including vandalism.

As the minister herself said, her approach to managing group homes is not designed to raise children. The truth and reconciliation report said it is time for major changes so that more families are raising their own children.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Now time for grievances. Seeing no grievances.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, could you please canvass the House to see if there's leave for the

House to sit until 6 p.m. today, an extra hour in each section of the Estimates, if we can sit today to allow for extended sitting of the Committee of Supply?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to permit the three sections of the Committee of Supply to sit this evening until 6 p.m.? Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: Seems I hear a no.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, could you resolve the House into Committee of Supply in three areas?

Mr. Speaker: Just so that the record is clear, too, that the leave has been denied for the extension of the Estimates process.

We'll now resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Will the various committee Chairs please take their places.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

*(14:50)

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

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

And, while the floor is technically open for questions, I understand the minister has some additional information that was requested from yesterday to provide. So we'll start with the honourable minister.

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I just wanted to follow up on some of the information requested by the member and regarding the Birth Centre, the services there. I'd just like to begin by, again, following up on that question regarding the services at the Birth Centre. I can assure her that the funding to the south Winnipeg Birth Centre has not been reduced and that the Birth Centre continues to offer prenatal classes as usual. Their next six-week session is in August, and they will be having two more sessions in 2015 called taking care of yourself in pregnancy. I am also happy to let the members know that since 2011 there have been

almost 12,000 midwifery appointments at the Birth Centre, and I just wanted to commend the wonderful staff that are providing care and support to the women at the Birth Centre. I know that they do phenomenal work there supporting women throughout their pregnancies and postpartum.

And considering this is the day of kindness today, to make sure that if those of us that, you know, those that often work with midwives, oftentimes, you're in the throes of things and you don't always get the chance to say thank you to them. So, on behalf of all the women in the province that have had a midwife, loved the support and compassion that they received in prenatal and postnatal care and at attendance in birth but we maybe never got quite the chance to give them the thanks that they so rightfully deserve, I'm going to say today, on behalf of all of us, thank you so much for what you've provided to us as individuals, to our families, and, most of all, to our newborns.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister for that additional information.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Thank the minister for the information she put forward. It's certainly contrary to the information provided to me by midwives. So I will take that information back to them and seek out any further comment from them and also, you know, the minister is right in terms of being grateful for the work that midwives do. The midwives in Manitoba are extremely frustrated with this government and they're also very demoralized and burnt out because of the poor handling of their education program and the lack of supports for them and the lack of real recognition by the government in a sincere way. So they are a group that definitely we need to acknowledge in a very sincere way.

The minister was also going to return today with numbers on the nursing ER shortages in Winnipeg ERs. I would ask if she has that information with her as well.

An Honourable Member: Yes, I, actually—to follow up—with that—

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, hold on—Honourable Minister.

Ms. Blady: Okay. Sorry. I just wanted to let the minister know—or the member know that we have been looking into the situation, and my staff are working to pull that information together. As she

mentioned yesterday, the workload that—and the high level of delivery in terms of the quality of work that is done by the department—she acknowledged that. And what they are doing right now is, again, the fact that this means reaching out to the RHA, having the RHA pull that information together. What I can tell the member right now is that we do have more nurses working in Manitoba than ever before, and that is a great accomplishment and that we will be able to get that information back to her over the course of Estimates. We just want to make sure that it is as thorough and to the calibre that, again, the member expects.

Mrs. Driedger: And I look forward to getting that information from the minister. And I think what I'm probably going to do right now is just pick up on some of that line of questioning from yesterday on nursing ER shortages. And, you know, and we were talking yesterday and looking at the Sinclair—the Brian Sinclair inquest report. And we had been looking at a number of the recommendations from the Emergency Care Task Force from 2004.

One of the other documents she had committed to bring was a written description of how the fast-track process works in the health—in the Winnipeg ERs. As I would point out from that 2004 report, it indicated that the WRHA program should institute a minor treatment system fast track at each emergency department to reduce wait times for less urgent patients. So I would look forward to the minister following up on the commitment from yesterday where she did indicate that she would be providing a written description of how that fast-track system actually works today, whether it is, indeed, present in all of the Winnipeg ERs and if it is set up according to the recommendations of that task force report.

* (15:00)

One of the other aspects to that 2004 report was a review of acute-care-bed base, and one of the recommendations was that the WRHA should undertake a review of the current acute-care-bed base relative to other regions in Canada. So the minister indicated yesterday, I believe, that all but one of these recommendations had been achieved, and I would ask her if she could table a copy of the review that was recommended here in this task force report and any other reviews that have taken place since on the acute-care-bed base in the WRHA.

Ms. Blady: Well, again, I do believe that the member asked for this—the information regarding the

emergency department fast track to be provided in writing, and I can assure her that our staff are working to prepare this information, again, to ensure that it is thorough and complete.

And, as to the report, I believe she just asked if I—sure—for a copy of that report, and that that can be, again, obtained for her at a later date. We can get that to her through the course of Estimates.

I just want to assure folks that we have brought in a number of new measures to help take the pressure off our ERs. We've brought complete transparency on ER wait times for patients and families who can now access real-time waits for WRHA ERs online, as well as explore a number of new alternatives to ERs.

We've opened the Mental Health Crisis Response Centre, which, again, sees over 500 patients a month. QuickCare clinics, again, are fully staffed and have seen over—well over 100,000 patients, taking pressure off our ERs. And launching the Emergency Paramedics in the Community program, which identifies a number of very frequent ER users and treats them at home, often allowing them to avoid a trip to the ER together is another thing that has received both great support and very strong results.

And again, adding the 665 new docs since coming into office, ensuring that more Manitobans have a family doctor and don't need to rely on an emergency room. And again, investing in options that will give patients and their families more choice, and that includes committing to building 22 more clinics by this year, and has—many have already opened, with more on the way, including more QuickCare clinics, community clinics, mobile clinics and ACCESS centres, so this is in addition to the 38 primary-care sites built since 1999. So that I know that work there is being done.

And I can, you know, also assure the member that in terms of the application of some of the protocols that she's discussed, that they have actually worked very well to reduce wait times—specifically, in one case, as I referenced yesterday, at the Grace Hospital where Arlene Wilgosh and, you know, noted that work and talked about the leadership of a wonderful woman that I have pleasure of knowing, Kellie O'Rourke, the COO of the region's west Winnipeg integrated health and social services. And the measures that they've introduced to reduce wait times for patients include the nurse-initiated protocols, which allow triage nurses to flag a patient

for quick assessment, which may include ordering lab tests or X-rays while they're still in the waiting room. And it also ensures that clinical information for decision making is available when the patient sees the physician.

Another one that has worked very well has been the creation of a rapid assessment zone, and under this initiative, the patient must see a doctor within a certain time, and if not, the patient is brought into the zone by a nurse who then works with the emergency doc on duty to assess the patient and set in motion any procedures needed for treatment, such as a diagnostic test. And Ms. O'Rourke has explained how a doctor, while they may not be available to immediately examine the patient in question, but they can at least determine if the patient needs, for example, a CT scan and other things that get their care under way.

So these nurse-initiated protocols and rapid assessment zones are just two of the examples of changes that have been implemented at the Grace, and again, part of more than 15 major changes that have been introduced to enhance patient flow throughout the hospital.

Mrs. Driedger: And the minister certainly took a long way around and didn't answer fully the question that I had asked. I do thank her for her commitment to provide the review of the acute-care-bed base that was completed after the 2004 recommendations.

But I also had asked whether or not there had been other, similar reviews undertaken after that period of time. I wonder if she could tell me whether there were more acute-care-bed base assessments done, and if she could table those reviews as well.

*(15:10)

Ms. Blady: Again, the task force really developed—did some wonderful work, and I want to thank those that did it in the past.

I know it was long before my time, either as an MLA or in the current portfolio, and I really have to say that I recommend that the principle—you know, really appreciate what the task force recommends in terms of principles, and that they, you know, have endorsed and adopted by facilities and programs within the WRHA. They really speak to the quality of compassion, care, that the WRHA embraces and chooses—you know, wants to deliver to all that seek it out—seek out services in the WRHA.

Every patient is entitled to and will receive timely access to care in any emergency department within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Every patient who accesses health care through a Winnipeg Regional Health Authority emergency department is entitled to and shall be treated as an individual with personal dignity, concern and respect. And, in addition, it is recognized that every emergency department visit is for the patient an unplanned, unwanted and stressful disruption in their lives, and that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, at all levels, and every facility and program is committed to the implementation of the Emergency Care Task Force recommendations as well as to continuing to find new-and-improved, innovative ways to improve the quality of care received by patients in all emergency departments.

And in regards to the report that she references, the review of the acute-care-bed base, again, that report, we can get a copy of that to the member, and we will also be in touch with the RHA and do follow-up with them should there be any kind of additional or supplementary work that they have done in the meantime on that same subject and that same area.

So, again, we will strive to get that information to her during the course of Estimates.

Mrs. Driedger: In the same task force review, it indicated that to be implemented immediately was a computerized triage system, e-triage, and I do note that they did put some priority on. So that was 2004.

Can the minister tell us what date that that actually did take place?

Ms. Blady: Yes, I would just like to assure the member that we will be contacting the WRHA to get the exact date. It's not something that we had to hand. As you know, that the report, again, was from 2014. So the exact date is not at the tip of our fingers and so—sorry—2004 report. So as a result we will again clarify with the exact date for the member, again, during the course of Estimates.

Mrs. Driedger: In the Emergency Care Task Force report, on page 43 it did indicate that the triage system was implemented in the WRHA in April 2004 to provide more consistent triaging in emergency departments throughout the region, and the recommendation itself was for an additional e-triage computer terminal to help extra triage. And yet somewhere in the Brian Sinclair inquest report,

I thought it said that there was paper triage being done.

Can the minister clarify for us whether or not there was some referral to paper triage still happening during the time Brian Sinclair was in the ER?

* (15:20)

Ms. Blady: Yes, in looking at—I believe it was recommendation 13 from the Sinclair report, again, a paper triage list at any emergency department be eliminated, that each presenting persons' information be entered electronically into a hospital registration system upon the first point of contact by ED staff.

Again, I gave a copy of this to the member yesterday, so she knows that the approach is organizational. The actions under way are either—indicates here that paper triage lists are being or have been eliminated at all in-scope emergency departments, and RHAs, PHSOs, are actively undertaking policy and procedure development to enable a presenting person's information to be entered electronically into an existing hospital registration system upon first point of contact by ED staff, and that the timeline is put into the short- and medium-term, meaning that the elimination of paper triage lists needs to be completed within four months at all in-scope emergency departments and that electronic registration procedures at point of first contact will be implemented within 24 months.

As I mentioned yesterday, I really do appreciate the scope of the work and the recommendations that were put forward by the judge on this. It's, again, still a tragedy that is something that really, well, it's—frankly, it's quite upsetting for any Manitoban, because any individual that has had a life as impacted by colonization and racism in the way that Mr. Sinclair did, it's just—it's, again, a product of so many different things, and, again, my heart goes out to his family and to those that feel the loss of his presence in their lives.

And that, again, the intensity of the work that was done and the implications that it has had for our entire health-care system, but also for those who were there at the time and that those who, again, were directly impacted or involved in the situation. It is one where when one thinks about the—frankly, there's the tragic situation, it is heart-wrenching, and we are looking forward to, again, the follow-up and the completion of all recommendations.

And I again thank the judge and all of those involved for the work that they did so that we can ensure that all of these recommendations are brought to conclusion and making sure that health care is what each of us want for our own family, for each Manitoban.

Mrs. Driedger: I would say to the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) that a lot of the problems around the Brian Sinclair death had a lot to do with a nursing shortage at the time, and it—although she's trying to put a certain spin on it, there was a lack of leadership.

We will have a chance to go into the lack of leadership by a Gary Doer of the day and the current Health minister of the day and the cover-up that was actually going on at the time. So, while she may want to go down a rabbit hole in some of these answers, certainly a focus on leadership by the government is something that needs to happen if we're going to improve the ER challenges.

So, you know what, I mean, if we're going to get anywhere in Manitoba with dealing with the ER crisis, I would hope that she can really focus on the questions and not just read briefing notes into her questions, but actually really think about this, and, you know, let's try to move ahead and look at how we can fix some of these challenges because they are only going to get worse.

The Emergency Care Task Force also recommended discharge facilitators and recommended that the WRHA examine the need for similar positions at Seven Oaks hospital. We certainly saw with Heather Brennan that she basically was kicked out of the hospital. It looked like they needed space. She was put into a taxicab, and the whole issue of taxicab medicine, you know, became the issue of the day.

Based on the recommendation of 2004 where it did ask that Seven Oaks look at having a discharge facilitator, can the minister indicate—and she has said that all of these recommendations had been put in place. Could she indicate why we would see something like taxicab medicine happen—and it wasn't just Seven Oaks; it was other hospitals as well—why that would happen if we supposedly had discharge facilitators working in various hospitals?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

In regards to ER discharge protocols that the member identified, again, we know that Manitobans expect and deserve that they and their loved ones

will receive the highest quality care at our health facilities. And, you know, we do want answers on what could have been done differently in the case of Ms. Brenan to help make sure that patients are being discharged appropriately and safely. And, again, to make sure that they're being discharged appropriately and safely, the onus is on medical professionals to make sure that they are ready to be discharged. And I do ask that if anyone who feels that they are not well enough to go home, they do have the right to let medical staff know. And, again, if something goes wrong we do want to learn from it.

Also, one needs to place this in context in the sense that there were over 193,000 discharges within Winnipeg emergency departments in 2013. So when you look at the volume there, that is quite a number of folks that have come through our emergency departments.

And, again, reflecting on the fact that this is, in fact, the day of kindness, the—and conscious kindness, I guess how I look at it is I am very thankful for the work that those in the WRHA and on the front lines do and to know that they have strengthened their discharge guidelines and enhanced the process for safe ER discharges, including an implementation of the regional discharge checklist. And that new checklist is about making sure that discharge care plans are clearly documented and communicated effectively with patients. And it is a checklist that will also help reinforce what front-line medical staff already do when they evaluate a patient's fitness to go home—that's ensuring that they can manage safely at home, that they understand their care plan and they know what to do if their condition changes after they leave the emergency department.

And it is really about investment in professionals and as well as in infrastructure, health-care infrastructure. So, again, whether it's rebuilding and expanding the ERs at HSC, at Children's Hospital, Concordia, St. Boniface, Victoria, Seven Oaks, as well as the current undertaking of redevelopment and expansion of the Grace ER, that's very important.

And as to the nursing complement, as indicated, I can say that there are more nurses practising in Manitoba than ever before. There are more nurse training seats than ever before and more nursing positions than ever before with more nurses at work in those positions, again, than ever before. And, in this past year alone, we've added nearly 100 nursing positions across the province, and we still know that

there's more to do in recruiting and retaining more nurses, especially in rural Manitoba. And for our emergency departments, it's the exact reason why we expanded the nursing training seats to record levels to bring more and more nurses into the workforce.

* (15:30)

And, as I said, I was part of training some of those nurses, and I know the wonderful work that they do now. In fact, recently I had the opportunity to—I ran into one of my students. It was hard to believe he was in my class 10 years ago. It's hard to believe it's been that long since I've been out of the classroom. But, you know, Jason does amazing work now at Selkirk Mental Health Centre, and I'm really, really proud of how he's grown and blossomed and another student of mine, Jason—sorry, Jay—there's—Jason is in Selkirk and Jay does wonderful work out in the community and—for a wonderful non-profit front-line group, and it's just amazing to see the work that's been done. And they were part of those expanded training seats.

So, again, we've been working to expand those numbers. They're growing every year. And, again, it is in sharp contrast to approaches that have been taken in the past in terms of addressing nurse vacancy numbers that—I know when the member was the, you know, the legislative assistant to the minister of Health in her time, that, you know, they were cutting available positions, handing out pink slips and trying to force nurses into jobs they didn't want. And so, we're building, we're training, and we're hiring. And do we need more nurses? Absolutely. Do I want to bring in more nurses? Absolutely. It's why I'm so proud of things like the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund. That includes, you know, things like, well, just—I should first put on the record that it was established when we came into office to assist the regional health authorities with the recruitment and retention of registered nurses.

An Honourable Member: We started that in 1999.

Ms. Blady: Oh, sorry, '99, okay.

An Honourable Member: Yes. Give credit where credit's due.

Ms. Blady: Oh, I have no problem giving credit where credit is due. I'm sorry I'm so used to things that started in '99 having been our initiative that it's an old habit, and my apologies for that, and I do want to thank the member. I do reflect back on her comments from yesterday in her opening statement

where she mentioned—I just want to make sure I get this right here, how our first minister of Health said 90 per cent of what they did was correct and that it was high in public praise and that one can never get a 100 per cent approval rating. So I would like to think that all of us here around that table can aspire to that same standard and that we'll not hold anyone at this table to a standard that we ourselves are not willing to live up to. So I put out—that out there, the day of kindness, saying that I think we do need to give credit, so I will give credit for that, having started that fund, but that we have grown that fund. And, again, it has to do with everything from RNs to registered nurses in extended practice, nurse practitioners and psychiatric nurses, licensed practical nurses. Again, it's a wonderful program and it does amazing things whether it's the reimbursement for relocation costs. Again, we've kept making those investments, and I think that it's very important.

So I do appreciate that the members opposite started that program, and I'm happy to see that we've maintained it and we've also added things like the Nurse Practitioner Education Grant utilization since—in 2013. So, again, building on those programs.

Mrs. Driedger: It's too bad, Mr. Chair, that it wasn't the day of respect for Manitobans because the minister has just spent about 15 minutes reading from her briefing note, adding some partisan rhetoric to it and totally did not even address the question that was posed to her. So it appears she doesn't know the answer to that one.

So let's try another one, and I hope that the minister will turn this around a little bit. And it is about, you know, a process. It's not here to burn time because she doesn't know the answers. This is a process whereby, you know, Manitobans want to see answers given to questions. They're legitimate questions, and I think Manitobans deserve a little bit more respect from the minister instead of her sitting here day after day—and if this is what's going to go on for the next week, that she's just going to read briefing notes, maybe she'd just want to table her briefing note binder and we can all read it. I don't need to sit here—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order. Order. Order.

The honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) has the floor.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So, without getting an answer on that question, I'll go and ask another one and see if there would be an answer to this one.

With the increasing number of left-not-seen patients from ERs, and those numbers are escalating, despite promises that the NDP have made for I don't know how many years now that they were going to address that, that they were going to ensure that those numbers would go down, in fact, they're sky-high right now. And previous ministers have indicated that these patients were phoned at home by Health Links and ensured that that was happening all the time, when, in fact, it did not happen all the time. We do know of one patient that did go home, did not get a call and did die.

So can the minister just tell us what conversations she's had to find out if, indeed, all patients that—and there's tens of thousands of them that have left the ERs without being seen—what conversations has she had to ensure that all of those patients are getting a follow-up phone call? And I would have to indicate that—and I realize not all of them might be able to because some of them may not have a telephone or a fixed address, so I realize that we're probably not going to see 100 per cent here getting follow-up calls, but is the minister confident enough that where calls—follow-up calls can be made, that that is, in fact, happening?

* (15:40)

Ms. Blady: Yes, I just wanted to ask a point—a question for clarification regarding part of the member's statement and question.

There is indication from the member that there was a person who had left the ER, I'm assuming is—left without being seen and then passed away. Just curious as to the—if there's any information the member can provide to us that we can look into that situation, if it's one that's not already something that's been discussed or on the record. But, again, any information in that regard would be quite helpful.

I like to know about every opportunity where there is—where something—it's not gone the way we had—the way we want it to go and that there can be, again, changes made, things done differently to ensure that that doesn't—that kind of tragedy does not befall someone else.

So just to ask her for that information, if that is new information that she has to provide to myself or to the department.

Mrs. Driedger: It was a question that had been asked to the previous Health minister in question period. It had been discussed at that time, so it is not new information. It certainly should be in the records of the department somewhere. So it is not anything new; it's just an example I'm showing as to what happens sometimes when follow-up calls are not being made for patients that are too frustrated to wait so leave without being seen.

Ms. Blady: I want to thank the member for that, that point of clarification that if it is something that has, again, already been addressed with the previous minister, it's good to know that it is not a new case. But, again, just wanted to ensure because, again, we do want to ensure that there is follow-up with Health Links to anyone that does find themselves in this situation where they leave before they are seen.

I can assure the member as well that we are just—the department is connecting with Health Links right now in trying to get that information and that we will get the information regarding the rate of follow-up with them and, again, factoring in, as the member noted, the fact that not everyone may have a fixed address or a phone, and so, therefore, that does compromise the ability to have a hundred per cent outreach.

So, again, with her patience, we will endeavour to get that information for her in a timely fashion.

Mrs. Driedger: Not a problem with that.

I would like to ask that, considering in 2004 there was a recommendation—or an implementation, actually, of a computerized triage system, according to what the report had indicated, but there was also a recommendation that a tracking system should be purchased and installed in all Winnipeg ER departments. I know at one point I did go to Sunnybrook hospital in Toronto prior to a lot of the IT changes happening in our ERs. I saw what they were doing there. They were the major SARS centre in Toronto so, certainly, were at a very high sophisticated level of electronic information for patients.

Now, considering both of those were mentioned in 2004, it makes me wonder—and I would just ask the minister whether or not she had even wondered the same or had the conversation—if we had those in place, how is it possible that Brian Sinclair could've fallen through the cracks in 2008, four years after these recommendations were made. And these recommendations all came about because Dorothy Madden had died waiting for care in an ER. She

waited six hours. She had a heart attack, she died. So the task force was put into place and then these recommendations came forward so that, you know, deaths like that could be prevented and better care can be given. And yet, with two particular recommendations in here for, you know, e-triage and tracking systems, has the minister ever, you know, had the discussion or asked her department for any explanation as to how can a patient die if these systems are in place? How could a—

Mr. Chairperson: Hold on, hold on. Just—sorry, just to make sure that they haven't switched the mics, I recognize the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) again.

Mrs. Driedger: Sorry, and just to clarify it a little bit, it's not just that how could a patient die, it's how could a patient sit in an ER for 34 hours and basically not be seen and die invisible within an ER, if supposedly we had these processes in place?

Ms. Blady: Again, I think back to when we first received the report from Judge Preston, and as I said at the time, that the death of Mr. Sinclair was in fact a preventable tragedy, and I did recognize that the system had failed him and apologized to his family, friends and loved ones.

And the 63 wide-ranging recommendations that Judge Preston provided in his report will, again, help to improve emergency care across the province. And, as I said earlier, I accepted all of his recommendations, and, as a result, established an implementation team led by my deputy minister, Karen Herd, and when they came back to me with the report and the province-wide plan for implementing the recommendations on March 19th, it does set out a timeline to implement these recommendations.

* (15:50)

And, again, when the member is referencing a report from 2004 and the recommendations there, again, I would hope that, you know, things had been moved upon in the proper manner. And it is a new set of eyes that took a look at this situation with Mr. Sinclair and brought in recommendations, because, as we all know, health care is evolving and—at all times, that, again, as she herself said, that we—you know, one never hits a hundred per cent in health care, that we do our best and that I know that those in the front lines do their best as well.

And so I appreciate the recommendations that are here, and especially the fact that some of these

recommendations that are put forward in Judge Preston's report really take us to another level in terms of recognizing the importance of—whether it's community support workers or emergency departments—the role of all in the emergency room in the—in ensuring that we are taking care of individuals who present at an emergency room, knowing that it is the leadership of the health-care professionals that guide the way and that, again, everyone that is associated and does work within an emergency department is part of a larger interdisciplinary integrated health-care model for emergency medicine.

So, again, I look forward to the work that being undertaken and that will continue to be done in this area. And, again, I think one thing that reflected on this, when looking at the volumes that are seen by our emergency departments, I do want to thank all of those that do work on the front lines in emergency departments because of the great volumes of folks that do come through seeking emergency care.

We show up at emergency rooms as individuals, as Manitobans, generally in times of crisis, and so the ability of the professionals to deal with us both compassionately and competently is something that we all look for. And that while tragic situations such as that of Mr. Sinclair we would hope would never happen, and that we can learn from and ensure that we do things differently and better, that I know thousands of folks do go through our emergency departments and do see the kind of care—do receive the kind of care that they want, deserve and that we all deserve.

And so, while I do not want to diminish impact and the tragedy associated with what befalls any one individual in a case where something has gone wrong, and what you do want to fix this, I do want to assure Manitobans and the member opposite that thousands and thousands of people do move through our emergency departments within the regional—Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and throughout the province and get phenomenal care in a timely fashion from compassionate and competent individuals. And I would hate for the investigation of and the addressing of situations related to one particular case to undermine them and to make them feel like their work is not appreciated or respected, that I do appreciate the work that they do.

And I want them to know that, again, while we always strive to do better and that we want to investigate any one situation that may not go the way it should've or the way we wanted it to, that we do

know that thousands of situations, thousands of Manitobans are well looked after by very competent and compassionate, hard-working front-line health-care providers. And that we continue to partner with them and to learn from these situations.

So, again, the Sinclair inquest report and its implementation timelines do provide us with one more opportunity to go forward and make improvements that will have a positive impact for thousands of Manitobans.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister seems to be missing the boat on this one in that if things and all the recommendations had been, you know, fully implemented and managed since 2004, we might not be in the position of having to go through a patient dying, waiting 34 hours for care without being seen. And she doesn't seem to understand, and I have no comfort level in her answers today because, you know, she's not really focusing on the issues at hand and instead is sort of dancing and waltzing around some of the questions.

But, you know, in 2004, the government at the time didn't want to acknowledge that there was an ER crisis, and I know we asked questions time and time again, and then finally somebody died and then finally the task force was called.

So, you know, the minister really needs to focus on here. And these questions have some relevance to what's happening today because the recommendations that did come out of 2004 were actually fairly significant. And, you know, she said yesterday, I believe, that all but one were implemented, and if that was the case, then perhaps we do need some more follow-up in terms of the level of implementation and whether they're working well.

One of the areas that's not working well perhaps is, you know, the area of the tracking system and e-triage because, again, four years after this was recommended, then we have Brian Sinclair that shouldn't have been invisible for 34 hours if indeed those two recommendations had been properly followed.

To go to another question, though—and we brought this up recently, too—is scheduled visits. Scheduled visits to ERs for non-ER cases really plug up the ERs. And at the time this report was written, one of the recommendations that's said to be implemented as soon as possible was to eliminate scheduled visits in emergency departments. So the government has now had 11 years—12 years since

that recommendation, and things are getting worse, not better. What is the minister going to do about it, and what's the excuse for this recommendation to have failed completely?

Ms. Blady: Again, when, in 2004, the Province received the 44 recommendations from the Emergency Care Task Force that focused on Winnipeg emergency departments, and then committed to putting in the necessary funding resources and expertise to take action on all of them, there was a follow-up document that provided a short summary of the report's recommendations and how they've been implemented. And, as mentioned, that the recommendation that the member identifies—I'm just trying to get the exact number here—the recommendation 16, the computerized triage system. Again, it was put into place to ensure that triaging was done consistently on all sites based on national standards. New computers were purchased to ensure that emergency department staff and reassessment nurses can all access the system where a large number of patients were to be triaged.

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Again, as mentioned earlier, that we all know that health care is something that is evolving and that while those things were in place, as we know the tragedy of Mr. Sinclair did in fact happen, and that has provided us with an opportunity to, again, to learn further. And again, it is a tragedy. And so we are focused on, again, knowing that those recommendations had been implemented from the emergency room task force that this new implementation is, again, of a more recent vintage and is what I, Minister, am focused on. And so I am working with these recommendations to ensure that we take things to the next level and that we follow up on those recommendations.

And, again, technology is always evolving, and if we can have better technology than what was implemented after 2004, absolutely. I think we can all understand how much technology has evolved in that past decade. I believe then—I know personally I didn't even own a cellphone at that time much less the kinds of technology we have now. And we—it has evolved and if this implementation report and its recommendations indicate that we need to, again, add newer, better, more complete technology, I know that it is there and that we have wonderful folks working on a number of things, including right now.

I mean, we have the Emergency Department Information System which is, again, the most—more

current version from what occurred after the 2004 recommendation and it was implemented in all Winnipeg health region hospitals to provide a global view of the emergency department. And EDIS tracks patient stay throughout their emergency department visit, whether it's from the triage desk to discharge, and there are colour-coded monitors which allow nurses and other health-care staff to easily view the number of patients, how long patients are waiting, lab results and reassessment status. And EDIS also includes easy tracking of patient histories in the emergency department to assist with patient treatment.

And I can say that on a recent visit, actually, to the Health Sciences emergency department, it was very evident how useful that technology is and how it is helpful.

But, again, I know that there are always with technologies new and evolving practices, and if this—these recommendations mean we do something even more thorough, more modern, then I'm willing to follow those recommendations. But I do know that, again, the EDIS system as it is currently used in the Health Sciences Centre is a valuable tool.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister, once again, didn't respond to the specific question on scheduled visits, and I just wonder what her intent is and what her plan is to eliminate them as recommended, or does she feel that that's not something that she is able to do?

Ms. Blady: Yes, again, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

And I think that's something—that there's something that she and I both share, and that is the belief that emergency rooms are for emergencies and that is how we expect them to be used.

That of all of the visits that we had, as I said, the 193 emergency visits and discharges that occur, scheduled ER visits make up less than 5 per cent of the total visits and that there are still some procedures that patients may schedule in an ER, such as abnormal lab values, removing staples or sutures, or to have a wound checked.

And, again, the WRHA has implemented a number of measures to bring those numbers of scheduled ER visits down whether it's the administration of IV antibiotics and wound care, which is now centralized at the Lyon's place and ACCESS Transcona; wound care being delivered in the community including home visits; cast checks are

done at the Pan Am Minor Injury Clinic for kids referred from community hospital and emergency departments; as well as anticoagulation clinics set up at several sites for the follow-up of patients with deep-vein thrombosis; and we also have a 23-hour surgery unit established at the HSC for orthopedic and other surgeries where previous patients had been going to the HSC ER.

So, if there are opportunities to improve that system even more, it is something that I have asked staff to look into and asked—and have begun discussions with the WRHA to ensure that people are getting the right care at the right time at the right place, and that our emergency rooms are for emergencies only and that when we have those folks that are presenting, especially at the CTAS 1 and 2, that they are getting the care they need at a proper time. And, if there are those presenting at, you know, CTAS 4 and 5, that they can be redirected or taken into a minor treatment area, again, making sure that the triaging is done in a manner that ensures that patients are getting the care that they need and that, again, our emergency rooms are there for those in emergencies.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister seems to be a little bit out of touch, really. I mean, she talks about this but doesn't seem to really get the grasp of what it means.

I know of an elderly lady, believe she was, you know, in the vicinity of 90 years old, she had to go to the ER for antibiotic IV therapy. She sat there for nine hours one day and did not get the IV therapy. She was so exhausted, she went home about midnight, ended up having to come back the next day and again is sitting waiting for her IV therapy.

That is absolutely not acceptable health care, not just because of the person's age, but she was not an ER patient. There has to be more done in the system where—for instance, a dressing change. That is something else, as well, or to take out sutures. Those are not ER cases. And they are plugging up the ERs. It's no wonder that tens of thousands of people leave the ER, perhaps some that are really sick, because the ERs are too plugged up.

And, certainly, you know, the minister said, well, all this is happening, is happening, then why are the numbers of scheduled appointments getting higher, getting worse instead of getting better? What more is she prepared to do to ensure that this recommendation, which basically says eliminate them—not reduce them, but eliminate them—what is she telling her department or asking her department

to do in order to address that recommendation from 2004?

Ms. Blady: Again, I am myself quite disturbed by the circumstance that the member opposite has brought forward, and if that is a case that she has not previously brought forward to my departmental staff, please feel forward to bring—please feel free to bring forward that information so that we can better investigate it.

Because, again, in mentioning the example of the administration of IV antibiotics and wound care, we know that there are, again, the locations at Lions Place and ACCESS Transcona. So I want to ensure that doctors are referring patients to the right place to go so that they are getting the care in a timely manner at the most appropriate place.

And that's where I'm really happy, that through the recent contract with Doctors Manitoba, one of the things that is a key part of that is working with the doctors in a co-operative and collaborative way to make sure that best practices are followed at every and all opportunity and that it is about what is the most appropriate care and making sure that if they are referring someone to another provider or to another location that it is being done in the most appropriate fashion. And so for the administration of IV antibiotics, for example, I would want to ensure that they are being done at the right place where someone is getting it in a timely fashion.

*(16:10)

And, in terms of emergency departments, again, I appreciate the member's 23 years of nursing experience, and, you know, I appreciate what she brings to the table in that regard. And she has every right to be skeptical about any new minister. I think everyone should approach any new job with a sense of knowing that you're on a learning curve and knowing that people will automatically underestimate your abilities or competencies, and I have no problem with that.

And I guess one of the questions that I would actually have for the member on that is knowing that emergency departments, as, you know, being dynamic environments where there is a high volume of undifferentiated patients with varying levels of urgency that need to be assessed and treated in a timely manner and that that is done primarily by nurses, and knowing that these nurses not only provide initial but continuing care for all patients presenting, and in light of conversations around

staffing models, I was just curious about her opinion on, and I believe I mentioned this yesterday, the Jones Dependency Tool. And the idea of examining the—you know, that as a tool which determines patient dependency and how that is reflected in nursing staff and knowing that patient dependency is one of those things that is defined as the specific care needs of each patient and then the nursing time that they might require, how that reflects the actual workload.

And it's one that, again, in taking a look at this particular line of research that I thought was quite interesting, it's an article by Vardell, MacGregor, Gallagher and Fry in the Australian Emergency Nursing Journal of 2013, volume 16. Again, I just found it an interesting thing because it did—they did review the 12 classification systems of patient dependency, including the Jones Dependency Tool, the ED patient classification matrix and the Conner's Tool. And, in terms of their viability, and looked at the—again, specifically for pragmatic reasons in their methodology, looked at patient dependency assessment tools in identifying the level of nursing care required, facilitating appropriate resource allocation and improving the standard of patient care.

And I was just curious, with her experience, if her—again, this is a tool that's also been studied in the UK, again, and it was compared against the Manchester Triage System—what her thoughts were on this particular triage model as opposed to what, again, the CTAS system, and, again, thoughts, again, she seems to have a strong interest in advocacy in emergency room departments. And, if there is anything that she can teach me regarding that, I would gladly, again, having taken an interest in this particular article, would hope that she could share some insight on this particular tool. For example, its, you know, use of the five domains of communication as an assessment area in initial assessment, the assessment of ABC, the airway, breathing and circulation, the assessment of mobility, also the assessment of things like personal care including eating, drinking, elimination and as well as environmental safety and health and social needs. I was just curious if that was something that, again, in terms of her own experience, she might be able to share something with me as someone that is trying to learn more about the kinds of things that happen in a vibrant and active emergency department.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, the minister might have had an opportunity to learn more about tools had this business processes review been conducted as was

recommended in the 2004 report. And it was a recommendation that was made that as soon as possible, the WRHA should undertake a detailed review of current processes in emergency departments. This review should be conducted by a team of experts including, but not limited to: industrial engineers, business process consultants and health-care professionals.

Can the minister indicate whether or not—and yesterday, she did say, actually, if I heard her correctly, that all but one of these recommendations had been implemented. It is certainly questionable as to the degree of implementation. But I wonder if she could confirm that this review had been done, and if so, whether it could be tabled.

Ms. Blady: Again, going to recommendation 28 that the member had brought forward, the idea of the recommendation for the business-process review which was completed and, again, it says due to the number of changes made as a result of this review, a formal business-process review was undertaken to ensure new processes and procedures worked together as effectively and efficiently as possible to improve patient care, and that it was in a very broad and dynamic way including a wide variety of professionals. And, from that time on, other developments have occurred to ensure that there are ongoing discussions about exactly those kinds of things in ensuring that interdisciplinary health-care innovation are ongoing.

And in 2008 the George and Fay Yee Centre for Healthcare Innovation was launched, and it's really a wonderful, you know, partnership that is evident through, you know—it's the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the University of Manitoba as well as expanding partnerships and collaborations with Research Manitoba, the government of Manitoba and the Canadian Institute of Health Research.

So the vision of this, you know—of the—of CHI and their partners is to be a catalyst for health-care providers, decision makers and health-care researchers to generate and facilitate the use of knowledge to improve the health of Manitoba—health of Manitobans within a sustainable framework.

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And I really am pleased with the work that they do in terms of their commitment, who they work with, the fact that they work with patients, health-care leadership, clinicians, researchers and policy makers to engage patients in full—as full

partners in care to provide health-care professionals and policy makers with the best of evidence-based—best available evidence to make informed decisions and provide the development and innovative cutting-edge research, as well as strengthening clinical care, process improvements and better delivery of health-care services. And it's to make this kind of crucial knowledge and research findings accessible to folks.

So that's been the—sort of the next and most recent level in the direction that the member has asked, and, again, I'm really thankful for the kind of leadership that we do have in this province in terms of health-care innovation and, again, know that there are a variety of folks that are part of the delivery of emergency medical services that are not necessarily medical professionals or health-care providers themselves.

Again, I was quite happy in meeting with the folks that associated with the design of the new emergency department for the Grace Hospital, where we were able to find out that the design team there worked very closely with the front-line providers to ensure that the space that was being provided to them was based on their needs and the needs of patients and that it was being basically designed around those needs.

So, yes, again, the idea of constant collaboration and innovation is something that we strive for in this area, and to ensure that—again, that this kind of work continues to be done. And so I know that in terms of CHI and the activities that they have, they bring together everything from Lean experts to process engineers, knowledge-translation experts.

And, again, this is all really about a strategy for patient-oriented research, and I really appreciate the work that they do and how they help bring together those in health care in Manitoba so that they can all perform to the high levels that they aspire to.

Mrs. Driedger: In Judge Preston's report that he put out, in regards to the design of the Health Science's Centre Emergency, there were some glaring comments made that I think deserve some attention.

Apparently, veteran emergency department nurses were consistent in their testimony at this inquest when they described their reactions to and experiences with the new version of the waiting room at the Health Sciences Centre Emergency Department.

These same nurses told the court that they had raised their concerns with WRHA administration in a variety of ways prior to the opening of the emergency department. They expressed concerns about the physical layout of the space, the location of the triage desk and the configuration of the waiting room. And so this is prior to what happened with Brian Sinclair.

They also said that they voiced their concerns to management. They were listened to but nothing was acted on, which the nurses sounded frustrated. They were demoralized, but they were also very, very worried because of the risk to patient safety.

So the nurses who worked on the front lines would certainly have a good idea of what an ER should look like. These veteran nurses were ignored in 2007. They are raising the specific concerns that actually were involved in the death of Brian Sinclair, because their concerns were ignored at the time.

I had also heard that the original design of the ER was somewhat different and that the Health Sciences Centre was told to cut back on some of the design and change the design because the government wanted to save some money. Can the minister indicate if that is in fact true?

Ms. Blady: I thank the member for the question—that, again, I appreciate her concerns regarding the situation that had happened with the emergency room department that had occurred.

And, again, in terms of recommendation No. 14, that the RHAs review the floor plan of all EDs to ensure that no patients in the ED waiting room requiring medical care face away from the triage desk, and that is an organizational one where the actions under way include the RHAs. PHSOs are actively again reviewing the floor plans and scope of all EDs and, where possible within existing infrastructure, revising the floor plans accordingly and where existing infrastructure prevents this from occurring, that the RHAs and PHSOs submit proposals for capital revisions, identifying resource implications. And that again, it's a medium-term recommendation, meaning that the revisions to the floor plans or capital plans need to be submitted within 24 months.

That, again, in accepting the judge's report—in accepting this and all of its recommendations—that I appreciate the information that was brought forward regarding the ED and, as you mentioned, veteran nurses and their concerns around it. And that is

where I have to say that I'm very pleased with the work of Chief Nursing Officer Lori Lamont in terms of her work with the Manitoba Nurses' Union and working with nurses, veteran nurses, nurses on the front line regarding the changes that occurred to the ED subsequent to that and, again, have found that the emergency department at the Health Sciences Centre, as it exists now, is very much a different place and that, again, the opportunities for contact with individuals—again, having been there recently, watching the process by which—that people are brought into that emergency department, how they are interacted with, the flow that is there, I can say that I'm very pleased with the changes that have occurred.

And, again, if there are any further changes that can happen that will improve that and take that even to a newer, higher level, I welcome that and, again, respect and accept all of the recommendations that were brought forward and, again, appreciate the fact that changes occurred instantaneously at the HSC and within other emergency rooms, but that these recommendations from the judge—from Judge Preston indicate where that work can go even further.

So, again, I respectfully accept and—those recommendations and will work with the department, with the WRHA and HSC and any other emergency room to make sure that they can, you know, provide the best care possible and any and all changes that need to be made in that direction. And if it—if emergency department layout is part of it, then that is, again, something that needs to be addressed.

And again, where I'm happy to see in the contrast of what had happened in the past, the description that's been provided regarding the design of the emergency department at HSC at that time as indicated in the report is very much different to what I have seen happen with the emergency room at the Grace Hospital and the engagement there.

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So I think that is a positive step in terms of how we—the various professionals work together, whether it is within the department, the WRHA, the design teams—how again there is an engagement there that may not have been seen in the past, that we do know that that engagement is happening now and that it is resulting in, again, not just design changes from an architectural level, but design changes that manifest themselves in a higher quality of care and things that allow nurses and all other health-care professionals to work to the levels that they wish to work at in

terms of being able to provide the high quality of care that I know that they want to ensure that every patient gets. And, if floor plans and other architectural elements can make their jobs easier and make sure that it's possible for them to give the highest possible level of care, then that is something that I know that we are working on and that I will ensure is consistently delivered to any and all designs for emergency departments.

Mrs. Driedger: It was certainly a concern to me when I heard that the government at that time might have made demands that the ER layout change because the government didn't want to spend a certain amount of money that would have met the designs of the day. And, by scaling it back, it certainly has sounded now like that has created the situation that led to the death of Brian Sinclair. So it may not be something that this minister or her staff may specifically know at this time, but it would certainly concern me if there had been activities like that by the government that, you know, led to an improperly designed ER because the government didn't want to be supportive of, you know, spending a certain amount of money to ensure that safe layout. So, you know, I leave it at that.

The other thing that nurses have been saying for years and years, and I know we've brought it up over a very, very long period of time, it's the chronic short-staffed ERs in Winnipeg and the difficulties in ensuring that our ERs are properly staffed with nurses. I know I have brought this up with every Health minister. Every Health minister has indicated that they're working on it, that, you know, they have a plan, that we're going to fix the problem and, in fact, the problem is not getting fixed. And in the Brian Sinclair inquest, it—the nurses themselves spoke to a chronic issue of understaffing in the ERs. And at the time that Brian Sinclair died, I was very concerned about the nursing staffing situation in the ERs only because I'd been aware of it for a long time before that. And, in fact, I did write a letter to the inquest council telling them that they needed to have a look at the nursing staffing situation.

Strangely enough, the government at the time, including Gary Doer the premier, made some bizarre comments that staffing was fine, nursing staffing was fine, nursing staffing was fabulous, there were no problems with it, which, you know, gave me grave concern that the premier of the day would go on CJOB and indicate that staffing was not problematic when, in fact, the staffing at the time of Brian Sinclair's passing showed that on the Friday there

were 16 hours where the ER was understaffed. On the Saturday there were eight hours where it was understaffed, and Sunday there were eight hours understaffed. Not only was it understaffed, but also the skill sets of all of the nurses that were working raised concerns for me because they had some very inexperienced people working in the ER at that time, including new grads, including nurses that were there on an orientation. So it's not just, you know, whether or not you have a warm body in a spot. The nursing shortage on those dates at times reached a high of 20 per cent. To me, that was very significant.

And now I—you know, as I read through the inquest report and see what the nurses and read what the nurses are saying, one thing that became quite apparent to me is, you know, it almost sounds like a cover-up by the government of the day about how bad the nursing shortage really was, and sadly it's not specifically dealt with in this inquest.

But certainly there were nurses working overtime, there were new grads working in the ER that day, and, in fact, all of that contributed to what was happening. It makes me realize why there was no nurse or health-care aide available to help a vomiting patient in the ER, because these nurses were so darn busy because they were understaffed.

So I think we had a very unsafe environment that particular weekend that Brian Sinclair was in there, and when we look at the nursing numbers to it, we can certainly see that there were some issues. There were 18 vacancies at the time; that's a 12 per cent vacancy rate. Twelve nurses were being forced to work overtime, which is another issue altogether, too. It's mandated overtime. That never used to happen prior to this NDP government, and now nurses are forced to work overtime. Eight nurses over that—those three days were casual, they were not regular staff. Eighteen were new, inexperienced grads. Eleven were relief nurses.

Mr. Chairman—or, Mr. Chair, this was a recipe for disaster. The nursing shortage and the—you know, the lack of experience in—of the ER nurses in Winnipeg's busiest ER very much, I believe, contributed to what happened. And, you know, even if you had a procedure in there about how to handle vomiting patients in a waiting room, you wouldn't have had the nurses to even go and help a vomiting patient because the nurses were on absolute overload. This was a recipe for disaster, and indeed a disaster happened.

Now, this nursing shortage has been chronic in Winnipeg ERs. In fact, I believe, well, there were 18 vacancies at the time that Brian Sinclair died. The minister doesn't have the current vacancies, but I know that in December, a few short months ago, the Health Sciences Centre was short 16 ER nurses. How an ER can function and give safe care when you've got exhausted nurses that are being forced to work overtime, and that's what the nurses are saying too.

The nurses that testified at this inquest, you know, talked about exhaustion, and that was one of the—and fatigue, and Justice Sinclair—or, sorry, Preston, certainly indicated that this was an issue. One of the nurses recalled that both shifts were horrendous. They were very busy with very sick patients. Another nurse confirmed—or the same nurse confirmed that short staffing was a daily issue. She spoke to management and the Nurses' Union about her inability to provide enough staff or enough experienced staff. She went on to say that on one of those days the nurse assigned to reassessment was unassigned from 3:30 to 10 because they were short-staffed. She called this emergency department a war zone. One of the physicians confirmed that there was a chronic shortage of nurses in the ER and it happened on a frequent basis.

All of my information supported that as well, so I felt compelled to write to the inquest council and share my concerns, especially as a former nursing supervisor, too, about what this means. Because it's not just numbers, I know what that means when you have that level or lack of level of nursing in an ER.

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So, if there were 18 nurses missing, a vacancy rate of 18 at the time Brian Sinclair died, and right now at Health Sciences Centre we're short 16, at Concordia we're short 10. And these go back to December. I look forward to the minister bringing forward more current numbers.

But right now in Winnipeg ERs, as of December 2014 we're short 57 nurses, and this issue I've brought forward numerous times. You can't carry out safe nursing care with shortages like that, with exhausted nurses where—with forced overtime, with inexperienced new grads working in ERs, and it scares me because those numbers all point to another disaster that could be possible.

So I've brought this up, I don't know how many times. We have a new Minister of Health now, and I guess I would want to ask her what she thinks she

could be able to do to address the chronic nursing shortage, the understaffing in Winnipeg ERs, because it's remaining high. It is troubling. It scares me that there are patients not getting safe quality care. I get upset when I hear spin coming from many different levels. I get upset when the premier of the province at—the time said there was no issue. He basically misled the House on this issue.

And I guess I would ask this new Minister of Health if she might be the one that is going to take this issue and find some way to improve the chronic understaffing in our ERs so that we can ensure better, safer patient care. What can she do? What is—what are the conversations she's having with her department? How can we address this so that this can get fixed?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

And I can actually assure the member that I've actually been working on this issue long before I was elected, and I think my work would have started with my first teaching position at Red River in the joint baccalaureate and diploma nursing programs that they had there where I watched my class sizes of nurses grow every year. So my commitment to this began with the training of nurses over a decade ago and watching how every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon I got to see more nursing students as well as some of the ones that I taught through online courses in Campus Manitoba for those that lived in far-reaching places across the province.

So I've been an active part of addressing this concern, and that the one thing that I can say is that in terms of the nursing complement in this province, that things definitely have changed. And I'll begin by addressing the member's concern regarding the recommendations with regard to staffing levels, including hiring more nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and, again, these are things that our government is already actively pursuing. We've steadily added more staff to the ERs across Manitoba, including in Winnipeg where in 2009 we invested over \$5 million to add 60 front-line staff to Manitoba's busiest ERs and that this 2009 investment does include \$3.8 million for 45 new front-line positions in Winnipeg ERs, some of which have included my students. These include funding for overnight reassessment nurses at HSC which is the busiest ER in the province, as well as more overnight nurses for Concordia, Grace, you know,

St. Boniface, Seven Oaks and Victoria emergency departments.

So, again, the staffing levels, one of the most important things to have, staffing. You actually have to have nurses trained and you have to have nurses available, and so every year we have more active practising nurses than ever before, more nurses training seats than ever before.

And, again, the—last year's data from the nurses college show—nurses colleges show that there are 2,419 nurses registered to practise in Manitoba since 2011, including a replacement of an estimated 731 nurses who retired, meaning a net gain of 688 more nurses. And there are 3,700 more nurses practising since we came into government. So when we talk about vacancies, you have to know that we are growing the complement of nurses that are out there and that, you know, in 2011 when we realized that there was a looming crisis of nurse retirements, that we needed to act, and so we announced even more nurse training seats.

So I wonder what, you know, my successor in that teaching position, how large her classrooms are, how many more classes she teaches now. Because we, you know, promised to recruit 2,000 more nurses, 1,000 of which would replace the nurses anticipated to retire. And what's interesting is that—we actually saw more nurses that retired—but what's interesting is that we were still able to increase the number of active practising nurses across the province, again, still bringing the number of nurses practising to a record high.

So, again, I think of—I think one of the best bits of news that I've had in recent times here is I think back not that many weeks ago when we were celebrating, you know, our nurses here at National Nursing Week and the recognition of the work that's been done and, again, the increased number of nurses and the partnership with the Manitoba Nurses' Union in terms of the renewal of their collective agreement, which, again, works with them and was supported by 90 per cent of their members. And I really want to thank Sandi Mowat, the president of MNU, for the work that she does and for her kind words where she says, and I quote: This government's focus on recruiting and training more nurses has been critical in making our nursing workforce stronger. But what I am most proud of is the work that we have done to make the places where our nurses work healthier. In the 1990s only one in five Manitoba nurses would

recommend their profession; today four in five nurses would recommend being a nurse in Manitoba.

And when we talk about the growing number of nurses that there are, and the fact that we have more nurses practising than ever, again, being an academic, I'm one that's prone to putting all information in context, and I know that this is something that when I was providing contextual information yesterday, that may not have sat well with the member, but, again, when you talk about the progress that you've made, you always have to reference where you started. And where we started in 1999 was at a deficit.

I quote the health care in Manitoba report from the Manitoba Nurses' Union, April 1998, where they state that 1,000 nurses have been laid off—over 1,000 nurses had been laid off by government. I can quote the Winnipeg Free Press from March 12th, 1999, where they reported that her government had eliminated 1,100 nursing jobs over the previous six years.

And so we do start—we did start at a deficit. And so, when we talk about a shortage of nurses in any place, we know that this government has done so much and will continue to do much. And, again, I believe now, in my current role, it is basically a carrying on of something that I committed to, back as an educator, to ensure that there were more nurses practising in Manitoba than ever before.

But we do have to remember that if we're going to talk about nursing shortages, I really hope that when the member opposite was the legislative assistant to the minister of Health in their government, that she was advocating for nurses in the same way and that I do really wonder how, in terms of discussing nursing shortages now, how she must have felt as a fellow nurse watching 1,100 of her colleagues being put out of a job and what kind of crisis that must have created for those that remained in the emergency rooms. And having known folks that lost their jobs as nursing at that time, not all of them were able to come back to the nursing profession. Some fled the province and sought nursing work elsewhere, including folks that I know.

And so my commitment to hiring nurses and ensuring that they are there is, again, it's a long-standing commitment and as I've said, you know, in terms of adding nursing positions last year across the province, we still know there's more to do in recruiting and retaining more nurses.

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I've found it very interesting coming to know the folks from the Filipino Nurses Association and their work with internationally educated nurses and the desire that so many of those folks have in working not just here in Manitoba, but specifically in rural Manitoba.

So, you know, I can assure the member that, you know, I reject the cold-hearted artificial way in which the former government addressed nurse vacancy numbers by cutting positions, handing out pink slips and doing that. That we instead have, again, a situation where the president of the nurses' union talks about how, again, it's gone from one in five nurses that would recommend their profession to four in five recommending being a nurse today.

And I also want to say that I would like to send out my support to those MNU nurses who are on strike in Nelson House. When we work with nurses we come to agreements on new contracts that nurses overwhelmingly support, contracts that are good for nurses, that are good for patients and good for our health-care system as a whole.

And, you know, again, we see what happens when, in this case a Conservative federal government are forced to work with nurses, the negotiations are forced into arbitration and nurses are forced to strike. So we don't even need to look at the record of the previous Conservative government in terms of nurses. We're seeing it happen here and now in Manitoba. In Nelson House, we're seeing that a Conservative government, again, can't work with nurses and that these nurses from MNU have been forced to strike for weeks now in Nelson House because of a federal Conservative government that has refused to fund nursing positions. I can assure Manitobans that the Province of Manitoba has stepped up to provide our fair share to the nurses in Nelson House, but the Conservative government, you know, can't seem to be bothered.

So if the member opposite is concerned—as concerned about nurses as she says, I'm curious if she will call on her federal Conservative counterparts to stand with us and support the nurses in Nelson House.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, a partisan behaviour, when we're talking about a shortage of 57 nurses in Winnipeg ERs, is really uncalled for. I mean, we could get into the whole debate on 1,000 nurses, but, basically, if the minister had had access to the

briefing notes, the accurate briefing notes of the day, she would see that that is not true. She would see that the way the unions have set up how you change shifts, how you change rotations, how you change jobs requires that a nurse be given a pink slip and may be hired 30 seconds later into another job. That's where 1,000 people ended up changing, with the WRHA changing, with the Misericordia hospital changing, with movement to more community care, there was no transfer ability in all of that. So what you end up with is pink slips.

If you look at Morden and Winkler, when both of those hospitals closed in order for nurses to be hired then into Boundary Trails, all of the nurses and all of the nurses in Winkler and Morden were all given pink slips. There was what, 250 of them, and then they were rehired into Boundary Trails. That's how it works. That's how the unions have set up some changes, because there isn't an easy way to transfer nurses from one rotation into another or one job to another.

So pink slips—and the government still does it. It's happening today. Changes with the, you know, it's going on all the time. You look at the psych nurses that are going to lose their jobs at the Grace Hospital from one area to another. They're all getting pink slips and then they can get rehired into another area. But in some cases there's going to be a bumping that is going to occur because that's how the system works.

So, you know, as far as the fired 1,000 nurses, that is absolutely false. The minister does not understand the processes of the day. And she's ignoring the concerns, actually—which troubles me—that are being brought up by emergency department nurses, especially veteran nurses, who are basically talking and worried about chronic understaffing in the city ERs.

We've got an ER crisis on our hands. We've gone from hallway medicine to a full-out ER crisis with, you know, thousands of people leaving without being seen, with thousands of people being scheduled for appointments, with off-load times that are getting worse and tying up ambulances and paramedics, with people falling through the cracks, with taxicab medicine. We've got some very serious issues, and it would be better for all of the patients in Winnipeg if the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) could just get her head around some of that and, you know, look at what's happening 16 years after the last government was in power. So, you know, to

have callous partisan spin right now, I don't think, serves patients well. This is about patient safety, and it does concern me in a huge way.

The other thing that troubles me too is this forced overtime. And nurses I know aren't very happy about it, but they seem to put up with it from this NDP government, and that never occurred before. But right now we have mandatory overtime. The nurses that spoke at this inquest talked about that too, and one of the recommendations by Judge Preston, recommendation 27, was that the RHAs, you know, look at rotation of roles and hours of work for ED nurses in an effort to reduce fatigue. My—and I find it interesting that the timeline on this is 24 months. You've got exhausted nurses right now. They are saying that they were exhausted in 2008 when Brian Sinclair fell through the cracks and died. He was vomiting and the nurses were too busy, and the nurses said that. There was a person in the waiting room that tried to get nurses several times that made it on to one of the newscasts, and he said every time he went to look for help for Brian's vomiting, he—they—he was told that—the nurses told him they were too busy to help this vomiting patient. So we know what they were working under at that time, and it was not a—what I would call a safe working environment for nurses, and they were fatigued and there were lots of them in forced overtime, and the inquest says that we have to do something more to reduce fatigue.

My concern with what the minister is agreeing to is a timeline of 24 months to address nursing fatigue. Tired nurses make mistakes, and I know that. Tired doctors make mistakes. When you've got forced overtime, mandatory overtime, you're tired. When I was a nursing supervisor, I know I had to beg nurses to double shift. And after some of them had worked 12 hours, I begged nurses to double shift. And I was afraid that there were times that I knew they were too tired, and yet I had no choice as a nursing supervisor. Anybody that works 24 hours straight is exhausted. You're going to miss something. You're not going to give the best care because you are exhausted.

Can the minister indicate, you know, related to nurse fatigue, forced mandatory overtime, what is being done to address that so that—you know, she says we have all these nurses and yet, she didn't go on to say in her report that we have the worst nursing shortage in Manitoba's history, that in 1999, the nursing shortage was 750 and now the nursing shortage is something like 1,850. It's the worst it's been since this government formed government.

We've got the worst nursing shortage in history, but the minister doesn't talk about that. It's obvious that there's a nursing shortage out there. She's saying there's lots of nurses, but, you know, we've also got the shortage on top of it, and we've got exhausted, demoralized nurses on the front lines being forced to work overtime. If we have so many nurses, why do we have such a problem with forced mandatory overtime that's creating exhausted nurses?

* (17:00)

Ms. Blady: I just wanted to indicate for the member that the numbers that I put forward were not partisan but, in fact, statistics from Manitoba's independent nursing colleges, which shows that the number of nurses in the province continues to grow and that it did reach an all-time high of the 17,806, which is a net gain of 3,714 since 1999. So the numbers of nurses practising are those as indicated by the nursing colleges and so they are the ones that track. So when indicating the example regarding how pink slips work, I'm very much familiar with how those work and how, in some cases, yes, a person—

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry for the interruption, but the hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Jim Maloway): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed on a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Yes, I do have some answers from yesterday, which I—yes, I've got some answers from questions today. I know the member has maybe some other questions, so what I was going to suggest is maybe in 15 minutes I can do it. I'd like to, basically, as a matter of fact, is give the information that was offered yesterday that is available right at the start, because there may be follow-up questions from the critic.

But I think I see some keenness from the member, so, if that's all right with members opposite, I'll maybe delay that for about 15 minutes and then

we—then I can read the stuff on the record that I did promise to give yesterday.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I do have a few questions.

As the minister is very much aware, we have some folks here from the Shoal lakes. In particular, we'd like to talk about 415. We have three roads that we want to get updates on and what the plans are on how we're going to develop those so that those folks can get back to a normal way of life.

So let's start with 415. We know that's been under water for quite some time. Could we get an update on that particular road and what the government's plans are?

* (15:00)

Mr. Ashton: I'll just give a brief background of the overall situation, and then I can certainly provide a background on four of the roads in the area that we have been dealing with.

And, of course, as the member knows, and I know he's raised issues, there's been flooding over the years—2011, of course, amplified the local flooding problem and raised lake levels, causing them to overflow their shores. And, essentially, I think the term Shoal lakes really could be changed to Shoal lake, because it became one large body of water.

Water levels remain high. I can get the detailed information, if the member wishes, as well, getting that currently. And, again, one of the difficulties there is there's not a simple hydraulic fix, and we've had discussions about that before—and I say simple, and certainly one that wouldn't impact elsewhere as well.

And what I can do, I can run through the four highways that were impacted perhaps just to—*[interjection]*—and then we can perhaps have follow-up, because I'm sure the member will have questions about the others as well.

On 229, we did rebuild 229—the north side of the Shoal lakes. This was the highest priority for the RM of St. Laurent, the local residents, and certainly we did respond.

The—on 415, that's—that does run east-west. It's fully flooded and closed as the member knows, and we have not identified it as a priority at this time. There are not only low traffic volumes, but it's quite problematic to rebuild it. It would have to involve,

you know, a significant redesign to meet sufficient standards, and it may not be actually even feasible to do so. Again, that's why we focused on 229 initially.

Mr. Chair, 416 is immediately adjacent to the shoreline on the east side, of course, which the member knows, and makes it very vulnerable to constant flooding when the winds rise. And, again, that is similar category to 415.

On 518—we have been rebuilding 518, and it has reopened to one-way traffic along the damaged one-kilometre section. It is a long road, so we do believe that, obviously, the single lane for that short period of time does provide a reasonable access, and it's certainly something identified, again, by the people in the community. There's been problems with recent wind setup which is not unusual this time of year and in the fall—with high water levels, and that's, again, put the roadway at the risk of closing. So this is, again, very much to do with the difficulty coming up with anything on hydraulics side.

And we have, as the member knows, focused in on what has been requested by communities in the area, which is the buyout. In fact, quite a few local landowners have taken advantage of that buyout. Again, it's a buyout that is essentially of agricultural land which is somewhat precedent setting. It's not something that's normally done. Usually buyouts are for structures. But it was recognition that, without a clear hydraulic fix, then this was the second best option.

So that's the story of the four roads in the area. We have reopened 229; the problematic part of 518 has been dealt with at one lane; and both 415 and 416, as I said, there are some challenges there.

Mr. Eichler: Would the minister tell the committee what the plans are for 415? We understand that it is under water, of course, we know that, but what is the government's plans now and in the future about dealing with this issue? The minister did talk about redesign. That was actually prior to the flood of 2011, as we all know, and it was being talked about then, but I would like to have him put on the record what the plans are currently and for the five–next five-year plan on 415 before we go into the others.

Mr. Ashton: Again, the—you know, we did meet with the municipality, and we did prioritize 229 and 518 which were the two main priorities. I do have the traffic counts as well. For example, 518 ranges north of Highway 6 up to 200 vehicle per day. South of

415, it's about 40, and these were counts in, you know, the last few years. So there are—you know, there are sections of 518 that certainly have a somewhat higher traffic count.

On 415, the vehicles per day is approximately 80 east of Highway 6. It drops down about 50 east of 518. West of PTH 7 is somewhat higher at 140. And it ranges on 416 from about 100 to 180.

So again, 415—the real concern there is, quite frankly, the feasibility of rebuilding it, particularly given the chronic flooding. It's certainly something we are looking at in terms of whether it is possible to rebuild to current standards, given the situation. And, similarly, with 416, there are—it's meeting challenges there because of the fact that it's right on the shoreline, so our priority there based on, certainly, meeting with the municipality and in terms of what is feasible has been 229 and 518, rather than 415 and 416.

Mr. Eichler: Well, the—I thank the minister for that. The counts really don't take a lot into a play because of the flood and the condition that they're in. What we're asking for is what the current plans are for those three roads—415, 416 and 518—now and into future. So the counts really don't mean a lot to us because we know very much that without some upgrades on them, it's not going to do us a lot of good, and that's what the folks really want to know here today.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, well, the traffic counts were the traffic counts prior to the flood, so this is—and this is the standard process across the province. And, you know, again, when we looked at the situation, we focused in on the priorities that were identified by the municipality, by residents in the area, and that was certainly 229 and 518.

The difficulty in the other roads, quite frankly, is the feasibility of reconstructing given the flood levels. And I want to stress, on 415, we have been looking at whether it is feasible to build to acceptable standards, but—well, it's acceptable standards of, you know, current highway standards. And certainly the technical information from the department—again, it's not a political decision—but the technical information from the department is that there are some real challenges, so we've moved on 229 and the portion of 518, but there are some ongoing difficulties with 415 and 416 because of feasibility in both cases.

Mr. Eichler: Then could we get the timelines and the plan on what you're planning on doing with each

of those three roads, in particular 518 and 416 which are both dry currently but they are in need of repair and some upgrades. We'd like to know what those immediate plans are, and, of course, long term.

Mr. Ashton: As I'm sure this member is aware, we have been rebuilding 518 and we have reopened to one-way traffic along the—that one-kilometre section, and certainly there has been some concern recently with the wind set-up, high water levels. So it could be at risk of closing again, but, having said that, we have been rebuilding the road because it does reflect the priorities that were identified. I mentioned 229 earlier—rebuilt.

And when—415 and 416, it's very much a question whether it's even feasible given current water levels, given the geotechnical situation and also the degree to which to build to any acceptable standard really becomes a question of feasibility. So work has been done by the department in terms of looking at that but there are significant problems about 415 and 416. Lesser so with 229 and 518, and even 518, by the way, if there—if it does require a closure in a short period of time, short-term period of time, I think we've identified through the technical work that it is possible to—it's fairly feasible to maintain it, and that rebuilding, you know, reflects that. So we would endeavour, if there was a short-term closure, to reopen it using very much the same sort of approach we have thus far to get it open from the last flood.

Mr. Eichler: There's a number of producers that are here today that didn't take the buyout that have cattle pasture there. They need access to be able to get to that land, and I know those that took the buyout are okay, of course; they don't have cattle to get there. But a lot of these folks do, so it's a major issue for them.

On the timelines on 518, the minister talked about those upgrades are going to be taking part here in the next short time. Will those be completed by midsummer? Is there a timeline that's been given, or where is that project at?

*(15:10)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I want to stress we are in the process of rebuilding it. I can—yes, and we've actually already started the widening to get it back to two lanes, and I'm assuming work will continue over the next couple of months. But, yes, actually we're pretty close to completion on that section, so I want

to say we've been rebuilding. There's been significant progress over the last couple of months.

Mr. Eichler: And I know the minister did talk briefly about 416—we to understand it is currently dry? We do understand that rains and so on and, of course, winds will have a significant role to play in that as well. But, since it's dry, is there an opportunity to take advantage of this dry period where we can put some gravel down to keep that road open, perhaps rather than have it closed so these farmers can have access to their farmland and get their cattle back out to pasture?

Mr. Ashton: Yes. We certainly look at—I want to stress the, you know, the problem with the wind set-up, of course, is it can happen any given time. It's not always the ability of the forecast to fully determine that but we could certainly look at that. It is in a bit of a different situation from 415; 416, again, is wind set-up; 415 is, you know, there's some real challenges there. So we could certainly look at that.

Again, if we were able to do anything, it may be something that would be done sort of periodically, perhaps through, you know, some sort of a permit process or something that would recognize that we, you know, when you've got a provincial highway you've got to make sure that if there's any risk of wind set-up you can't have, you know, the public at risk. Certainly, local producers might have a better sense of it as well, which might help, but we'll certainly look at that on 416.

Mr. Eichler: Coming back to 415, is the water monitored on a regular basis, or a weekly basis, monthly basis? How is that arrived at and what's the follow-through process for the possibility of looking at that down the road? Is there significant trade between the various communities? I know it's an area I represent and it has a hard part of not only the school situation, but the sharing of emergency services as well, and it's paramount that we do something. You know, just to say that it's a big task, I mean it's always been a big task and that's our role, so I'd like to know what the monitoring stage is and what criteria we're going to use to try and see if we can get that road back open again.

Mr. Ashton: It is monitored regularly on a monthly basis, and certainly there has been chronic flooding, definitely exacerbated in 2011 and, you know, continuing into subsequent years. And, again, the issue that's somewhat different for us from 416, it really is the feasibility of reconstructing. We are

looking at it. It hasn't been ruled out but, again, it is, out of all the four highways, it is the most problematic just from a straight feasibility standpoint. So it's not something we've rejected, but it's—it is a big challenge.

So the department is doing work currently on that. I want to stress, I mean, the—when I say the other two are priorities, both 518 and 229, we've either reconstructed or are almost complete in terms of reconstructing, so that has been the focus, and that involves a fair amount of the design work as well. So, as we make progress on those two highways, it is, you know, possible to put even additional resources to look at the feasibility on 415. So it hasn't been ruled out but, again, I wouldn't underestimate the challenges.

Mr. Eichler: I'll try and do a bit of wrap here, then, still on 415.

The minister had talked about the redesign. Has there been property bought, or what is the plan for 415 when you talk about redesign? Does that mean you're going to build the road up, or you're going to change the direction, the path of which it currently is, as opposed to what was talked about, I know, back in the early 2000s, is when it was originally talked about. And I know the minister who was responsible, you know, at that time, and we have Hansard discussions on that and what the plans are, so where are they at now today?

Mr. Ashton: Yes. I—if you're looking at rebuilding this or any other highway in a similar circumstance, you'd look at a combination of rebuilding the existing road alignment. You would—if you had significant problematic areas you would have to relocate. That does, of course, result in issues related to land acquisition, et cetera.

So, again, that's a sort of function of doing the full technical work, and we have—we've done some preliminary work on that and, certainly, there are some real issues in terms of feasibility, but we will again be looking at that more broadly, and that would look at a potential combination of relocation and rebuilding. I mean, the relocation is pretty obvious, because if you have problem spots, you've got chronic flooding, if you rebuild you're going to end up with ongoing problems, and that's, you know, clearly the message coming from that area. So there's no simple fixes on that highway and any reconstruction, again, that's why I've stressed the feasibility would be quite complex.

Mr. Eichler: Is there a timeline on that initiative to try and move forward in the next two years, three years? What is the timeline that the minister's looking at?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I—you know, to be very frank, we've prioritized 229, 518. Won't repeat all the comments made earlier, but that was a clear message both in terms of feasibility and also feedback from the municipality and from the—from local residents. And in terms of 415, we have done some work on it; we'll continue to do work on it. Until you are able to determine it's feasible, you can't look at programming work. You know, with the highway capital program, basically, it doesn't get into the program until it is feasible, costed out and you know you can both build it and have some sense of what the cost is. So there's no specific time frame, but, again, we haven't ruled it out when I say there are some issues in terms of feasibility.

Again, it'd be difficult to comment long term and to, you know, without the completion of all that kind of work. And I'll be very upfront, to get 229 and 518 open and with the situation across the province with 80-plus bridges and many areas, you know, flooded out, what we've done, whether it's here or in the southwest or other chronically flooded areas, is focus in on the priorities that have been given to us by the communities, and that certainly means you start with, say, here 229, 518, and then you look at highways like 5–415 after. You know, there's only so many technical resources you have available, so you'd have to prioritize. So as we make progress on 229, 518, we can look at 415, and we will look at, as I said earlier, on 416 if we can make it available for access on a limited basis, subject to the issue with wind setup.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and nice to see you in the Chair. I think that's one of the first times I've asked questions or been at committee where you've been chairing one of these committees. So nice to see you in the Chair.

And to the minister, I—after his break away from Cabinet duties, I don't know if I'm allowed to say it's good to have you back because I don't know if that's what one says. But under whatever—*[interjection]* But under whatever conditions, good to see the minister back in the chair. I think you—probably the only person who knows more about his department than the individual sitting to his left and perhaps even more so is the minister. He's been minister for the department for a long time.

And I know the minister's been paying with rapt attention that every day we start our session with a petition from the Oakbank area. It's an issue that was raised by citizens on patrol and the local constable. And one of the problems is is that as people line up wanting to turn left to go to the schools in Oakbank, individuals feel that it's a four-lane road, which it's not, and pass on the right-hand side. There are a lot of kids bunched up waiting to cross and sometimes they sort of are looking at dodging while they're waiting for cars to turn, and I guess it's just become an incident waiting to happen. And I sent the minister's predecessor, the interim minister, a letter and some documentation, and I know I handed off some copies to the minister.

I don't think we're looking at a heavy amount of investment in this intersection. I was wondering if the minister could give us a little bit of an update what's happening with that intersection in Oakbank.

* (15:20)

Mr. Ashton: First of all, I appreciate the words from the member, although I am reminded that I did say of one of my previous critics that they were doing a good job, and I kind of thought that that was almost like a career-ending move on his part, to get comments like that from the minister, but I mean it. And I sure do appreciate that the member has been very proactive in, and constructive on, highway issues in his area, and I take that pretty seriously. And I don't mean that as criticism of anyone else, but, you know, to my mind, I appreciate the degree to which the member has been both responsive to local concerns, but also very also focused on solutions and what is feasible. And I think that's often something that we miss in this more partisan environment, when we get into some of the give and take, you know, in question period, or even in Estimates committee—maybe not this Estimates committee, maybe in other Estimates committee, with the leaders.

But I do take it seriously, and what I was going to do, if I could, if—I was going to start reading some of the information on the previous stuff, and if—I'll get a full update while I'm doing this, because I want to make sure that I got the information on the record if there's any follow-up, so I—and I'll address the Oak Bank issue right after.

Number one is Wawanesa. The question was asked yesterday, in terms of the bridge; its close was restricted to 10 tons before the closure requires replacement. There are other routes available. It does

create an inconvenience, we certainly recognize that. We're dealing with numerous flooded bridges, 80 in 2011, 80 in 2014. Those are 80 plus 80. Rebuilding these is being done on a priority basis. There's lots to do, and, you know, we've got to look at the availability of consultants, contractors, et cetera. So it's on our list. It is an issue we're looking at. But that's the latest.

The Ken–Kemnay Bridge—pardon me—we did some surfacing a few years ago, but we need to ensure we didn't reduce the vertical clearance. That was an issue the member raised, of course. We're looking at a longer range plan to deal with the issue of trucks hitting the bridge, particularly the westerly extension of the eastern access, which I did mention yesterday. We continue to monitor and provide as much signage as we possibly can.

Mr. Chair, 110 speed limit, just will confirm, again—probably the best way to phrase it, it's the default to the Saskatchewan border, same way that in an urban area, the default's 50.

Carberry area: it is longer than normal, and that's due to the proximity of the rail line and PTH 5. And we will monitor it. And we could consider shortening, if warranted, you know, changing the situation does require the Highway Traffic Board approval, but I certainly appreciate some of the issues that are being dealt with.

And hot off the presses here—yes, and in terms of Oak Bank, I will follow-up, and I know it's certainly—we've had some initial contact on this with some of the details. I appreciate that. We do have to perhaps look at specifically who the traffic authority is there. And we'll pass it onto our regional staff to review, and what I'd suggest is if the member's open to it, to set up a meeting with regional staff, and perhaps if he could relay the concerns directly, and we will determine the exact situation in terms of the relevant traffic authority and what we can potentially do about it.

Mr. Schuler: I had the opportunity to speak to the minister on this issue already, and probably the last thing the community would want is for the minister and I to show up at that intersection and start trying to figure out what should be done. Not that the minister and I don't have great talent in a lot of respects, but, you know, even the recommendations we make are just suggestions. And the minister's absolutely right in recommending that this go to the department and that regional officials go and have a look at it, because they would know what works best.

They are trained in these things. And they are the professionals. And, basically, that's what we're asking.

I feel, in this place, we often say what—that something should be done, and then just leave it at that and don't offer any solution. So with the minister's indulgence, I believe what we had indicated—and we're now all so electronic I actually can read this right off of my Samsung—and we had talked about doing a little bit more paving on the shoulder, that the line had to be—been paved, but I think cross lines or something. And I don't have the right terminology, and, again, this is something that should be dealt with with the RM and with the law enforcement officials.

And the other one is uninstalled and lighted crosswalk structure, and the reason is that somebody was given a ticket for improperly passing on the right-hand side, and it went to court and the court threw the ticket out because the intersection wasn't marked appropriately as a crosswalk or a school zone or something. And, again, way better if the department would look into it and speak to the officials, the town constable and the CO. Again, not that the minister and I can't figure a lot out, but probably in this case it'd be better if it went to the professionals.

And I do want to say, I always have appreciated the minister's professionalism. His and mine is far more of a professional relationship than, say, for instance, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak). I would term that more as a—more of a love—not love relationship—you know, we have our moments, he and I, and I was going to say love-hate, but that's a little strong—but that's maybe a little strong.

But, anyway, I appreciate the minister and—from the first days when I came here and I spoke to him about that there was a problem with one of my highways, that people were driving through Glass and there was no warning. And the department actually didn't get it, but the minister did. And the sign was put up, you know, saying Glass—the town of Glass, that it was coming up in a kilometre, and the minister caught that one right away. And I always appreciated the fact that he was on top of his portfolio.

And, if the department would look at this, we are going to be presenting petitions, and I would point out to the minister the reason why I'm going to keep presenting petitions is because people keep signing them. It's become the thing to do in Oakbank, and it—

you know, it's great to see people see participating in something they feel very strongly about. I suspect we've already presented 200, 250 signatures. And, I mean, it shows that people are engaged and this is an issue that's important and we want to take it serious. So I know that the minister and the department are looking at it, but I will be continuing with petitions because they are coming in and people would like their voice heard in the Legislature, and I think that's also really good. I think it's good to have people buy-in to what we do here at the Legislature, so I thank the minister and his department for the professionalism.

There is another project, just as a sidebar, that's being done in my community and it has met with some great degree of excitement, shall we say, and I would suggest to the minister and his department you handled that—and your predecessor, the interim minister, handled that issue with great professionalism. And it could have easily has gone off—easily have gone off the rails and it didn't and I'd like to compliment, and your assistant who is sitting here as well, I would like to compliment him because it needed very professional approach to dealing with it, and I thank him for that as well.

So, on that, I'm good.

Mr. Ashton: Ray and I thank the member, and I—of course, I'm not an engineer by background, I'm an economist, and I think you don't want economists designing roads. So I appreciate the work of the department with all the engineering expertise we have, and they deserve a lot of credit for that.

And as for the relationship with the member and the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak), I feel like I'm at a support group here, actually. It's—and if there is a—[interjection] Yes, you know, I'm just wondering here if we could arrange something.

But I do recall, on occasion, even the member and I have had our moments on some issues. Actually, usually not to do with highways, so, you know, if we can have this kind of working relationship, I think there's hope for all of us.

* (15:30)

So I—in all seriousness, I do thank the member, and also the comments about my office, as well, too, because I do take seriously when issues are raised, and certainly our staff in the office, minister's office, take them very seriously well—as well. And with both Darryl and Chris here from my office, I really want to, you know, say that it's an important element. I

mean, as someone that's over the years raised a lot of issues as an MLA, I always take issues seriously and our goal is at the minimum get information to members, but if we can solve it co-operatively, I'll do it.

And I particularly want—and I may get the member in a bit of difficulty here—but I mentioned earlier but I particularly appreciate his input on the major project which I assume he's talking about, which is 59 and the Perimeter. A lot of conflicting uses, a lot of different perspectives, but one thing was clear: It had to be done. It's going to be under construction this summer and the degree to which we moved from a lot of the initial concerns about design to this point, I think, is quite remarkable. A lot of work has been done in that area. But I think—I want to commend the member for raising real issues and concerns but at the same time have a broader sense of how important this is. This is the busiest intersection in the highway system. And it's something that is going to be setting a standard for the next 10, 20, 30, 40 years and will have a significant impact both on the city of Winnipeg and the communities the member represents, so, you know, there—there are a lot of things that are legacies; this is going to be one of them. And I appreciate the degree to which he's been a very constructive part of that.

And I think it's one aspect of the Legislature often gets understated is the degree to which there's often a fair amount of, you know, joint problem solving. And even when there's differences, they're not always that, you know, partisan. There's partisan differences, absolutely. I, you know, on occasion I've been known to get into some partisan debate. But when it comes to the highway system, I think in a lot of cases there's a lot more common ground than we often think gets that kind of recognition.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Does the minister—did you have some information that you wanted to impart at this time or you want to wait for—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, in terms of the staffing, we're tracking that information down. I'm hoping to have it probably by tomorrow, assuming we're in Estimates tomorrow; if not, whenever we're back in Estimates. But we'll certainly target if we are in Estimates tomorrow to bring it out. We want to make sure it's completely accurate. And, of course, a lot of our senior staff, obviously, are dealing with ongoing issues plus Estimates. Hoping to have it by tomorrow

and, of course, if we sit in Estimates, we'll deal with it whenever.

Mr. Helwer: Now, looking back through some of the responses yesterday, as I was able to look at the numbers in a little more detail, I did notice and I heard at the time, and I was—had to question whether the number was right. The minister said the 2000 flood task force, I assume, report, we received it. Is that the correct year, the year 2000, or is there a different year?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Chair, 2011.

Mr. Helwer: That makes a little more sense then. I didn't think we were looking quite that far back in terms of flood reports. But I guess in terms of some of the other of your answers, the minister did mention the Kemnay bridge this morning and we spoke about it yesterday obviously. Lots of different suggestions and I'm sure the minister has heard many of them as well. One of them was used on the Wawanesa bridge, the older bridge over the river where the barriers were put in place so it was difficult for anything longer than a single, perhaps, even a tandem truck to go across. And I don't imagine that's something that we want to put in place on Highway 1A, but it has been brought up to me by residents in the area to make it difficult for semis to actually navigate through that type of an environment. Of course, the local farmers don't want to see that. Their grain trailers, the semis can fit through the bridge, but they know that the vans can't, so I'm interested if the minister has any comments on that.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I think the member's identified why we would not want to put obstructions in place, because it would have impact on other users. And, again, it is 1A and it gets back to some of the previous information, which is, it's a broader system fix. It's unfortunate that you continue to get these incidents. They shouldn't happen. I mean, truck drivers, 99.99 per cent, are navigating safely through that, but, clearly, when you have these kind of situations, you do what you can in the short term to educate the drivers. We certainly work with the industry as well on that, but it's a broader system fix. And the problem with anything in the short term, especially on a highway of this kind, it could have even further ramifications for traffic safety, which I'd be very reluctant to see.

So, it's—you know, the ideas are appreciated. I'm not saying the member is putting it forward; I know local residents are, but generally in this type of

situation you need a systems fix and that's where the westerly access issue really is. The only short or long—well, I say short. The only solution was a long-term solution.

Mr. Helwer: Has the department looked at dealing with the companies that provide navigation systems at all?

I know in some of the GPS systems, they—as you update them they come up with alarms in terms of barriers. And I do notice, actually, in Winnipeg particular, photo radar is one of the things that often shows up as an alarm. But not that every truck driver updates their GPS to current standards at all times. But it is something, I think, if you work with the TomToms, the Garmins of the world, to put in those types of notifications in their system. They can put them in the updates, so when it's downloaded the GPS can flash an alarm to the driver. They don't seem to pay any attention to the flashing signs or the words on the sign, but—and maybe they won't pay attention to the GPS either, but there's another alternative there.

Mr. Ashton: Do appreciate that. I wasn't aware on the photo radar side. I'm not sure that's, you know, really the best use of GPS. I'm always wary of GPS as well, too, because there are many situations, and the member's mentioned one of them, which is just outdated information.

But they've improved somewhat in navigation. But I've also had situations where the GPS will direct you down a route that might appear to be the most direct route, but you know you're on a highway, Highway 75, and the next thing you know, you're on a secondary road. I mean, there have been numerous examples around the country and around the world of people running into significant difficulty because they've been directed by GPS down a closed road. So I could run through, you know, the numerous elements where I would always advise motorists to beware of relying too much on GPS, but I think it's a reasonable point. We want to make sure we do follow up on it if, you know, those that do follow—do use GPS, there might be a useful way to do that.

So I appreciate that we do, of course, have, you know, significant mapping of this with our trucking routes, et cetera. And when trucking routes are in place we make sure that they're safe when—with the proper configuration is used in terms of vehicles. But, clearly, some people aren't getting it, and I think the member's probably identified that if flashing lights and a clear indication that it's a low

bridge and what the height of the bridge is and with people—and people driving trucks that they should know are higher in terms of clearance, the difficulty with that is what do you do other than enforcement? You know, there's always insurance-related issues as well because in some cases we have structure that's been significantly damaged by, you know, collisions from trucks that were clearly, you know, not at the right clearance level.

So I appreciate the member raising it and we'll certainly follow up on it.

Mr. Helwer: Going back through some of the responses, again, yesterday the minister did talk about Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin outlets and the emergency outlet up and running for a second time, as he said. And I'm—it may be something we need to wait for DFA for another day, but is there a percentage that the minister's aware of what the current outlet capacity is at this point, or do we have some ideas of what's been flowing through there?

*(15:40)

Mr. Ashton: What I—well, yes, what I was going to suggest on that, we can get that information. I mean, it's publicly available, but I'll try and—I can get the current flow right now, which is 3,000 cfs. Of course, there are a number of factors involved. One is actually the level of the lake. That's—same with the Fairford structure. I do want to stress again, as I said in the House, that the key issue with the emergency outlet is it does enable us to operate the Fairford outlet at its full physical capacity at times where we otherwise have to throttle back because of frazil ice difficulties which creates significant downstream flooding. But I can certainly get some further information as well if the member would like, including some of the information about the flows that have taken place the last period of time that we've operated.

Again, we are restricted with a temporary outlet to what the federal government permits, which is essentially, you know, its initial operation is really when the lake is above flood stage—not, you know, the range, but flood stage. It has been a significant asset. The big advantage of the permanent outlet would be the degree to which we could operate it in an anticipation of flood events. That would be part of the licensing.

So I want to stress that that's why the permanent outlet does offer significant advantage over the temporary outlet. But I can get—I'll get the flows

for the member which is from perhaps our last operational date last year, and the 3,000 cfs—pardon me, Mr. Chairperson, the 3,000 cfs was from three weeks ago, so it's fairly current.

Mr. Helwer: Well, I'm trying to co-ordinate some of the Estimates and the forecasts and the numbers that the minister mentioned yesterday in terms of current spending, anticipated spending, with what we have in terms of what's been published. And, of course, the last current annual report is from 2013-14, and when I look at some of the numbers in that report, on page 123 it talks about—and 122 we talk about maintenance expenditure by activity—or preservation expenditures by activity. So I look at the report on page 122 where road service—road surface has 21 million—just over a \$21-million expenditure, I believe, and that's for this particular 2013-14 report.

Can the minister—I know that the year has ended, but the numbers may not be all in just yet. From his discussion yesterday, it would seem that we're going to anticipate a higher amount perhaps in road servicing spent in the '14-15 year than in the '13-14 year. Would that be correct?

Mr. Ashton: These are the—what the member's referring to, these are the figures of the maintenance side. The reference side, which are fairly consistent year over year, the big increase is on the capital side. We targeted a specific amount. We've exceeded that target. I haven't got the final figures in yet but I think probably within a couple of weeks we will be in a position to present that. So—but that's on the capital side so maintenance year over year fairly consistent, capital will be up dramatically. It will probably be the biggest single year-over-year increase in the capital budget I'd say in the department's recent history, if not in history.

And just in one year we're looking at an increase of probably over 40 per cent year over year, quite remarkable. And I commend the department. They've done a tremendous job, consulting engineers, the—and the Heavy Construction Association stepped up to the plate now and said we'll get the numbers in but to get a 40 per cent plus—might even be higher than 40 per cent—increase year over year is a huge achievement for everyone. And again subject to, you know, weather and other issues, we're targeting an equally, if not more, ambitious budget this year.

Mr. Helwer: So, when the minister speaks of capital, I take it it's—would be the chart on page 121 of this 2013-14 report where we're looking at enhancement expenditures. And the infrastructure

road surface would that be paving, I guess, or building as well? What would be included in that area?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it—you know, the capital assets are—you know, there is a definition we work with something that's consistent with a comptroller to ensure that it meets, you know, proper accounting standards. And there is a distinction between assets—I think the minimum time period is—yes, it just gives the member some idea, like, you know, roads amortized over a 20-year period. Roads can—or bridges can be 40 to 75—the road surface versus, you know, the roadbed; there's different amortizations.

You know, equipment, again, there's different formulas there, and the key thing that the comptroller looks for is the degree to which it's a long-term asset; same with buildings as well. So—and, you know, you'll see we'll do what most people might classify as patching; it is surfacing, microsurfacing, there's various different elements of it. They're a part of a maintenance system. So maintenance isn't just, you know, clearing the road or putting down, you know, dust control, things that people often associate. It does include, you know, some activities that are somewhat similar to what, you know, you see on the capital side. The big difference is the scope of it and the longevity of the asset.

So simple answer is you go through the report, you know, in terms of the capital side. Each different type of expenditure has a different threshold for amortization, but, overall, we're up dramatically on the capital side, fairly consistent year over year on the maintenance side.

Mr. Helwer: So, when I look at some of those amounts, does the department have a guideline or an idea of what it costs them per kilometre of road to pave a road for the surface or to construct a road from the ground up or to resurface a road?

Mr. Ashton: If it's on a road, probably around 300,000, new construction, \$1 million per kilometre, and we do have significant experience, obviously. One of the things that's quite remarkable, and we give all credit to the department and to the industry, is the degree to which, notwithstanding some of the significant pressures in terms of construction and, you know, materials costs, which you obviously can't control, I mean, oil prices, you know, go up and down. I mean, there are various other factors that, you know, could go into that. What is, I think, noticeable, is the degree to which we've been very much on target with a lot of our cost estimation.

In fact, if anything, we've been getting even better prices. And that's actually quite an achievement.

You know, often, whether it's private or public sector, if you have a significant increase in the amount of work, you will see higher per-unit price at least in the short-term because you have difficulty—the industry stepping up, you know, or ratcheting up, and in the initial period, you don't necessarily get other companies entering, you know, or existing companies expanding. But the reason, I think, for the success, and I want to give credit where credit is due, and it's not just because I'm going to be at an event—I don't know if the member is as well, but with the Heavy Construction Association later on today—is we started 10-plus years ago with moving the tender process into the fall in terms of notice of tenders. We have now moved to accelerate that. We've been getting tenders out not only earlier for that construction season, but getting a clear indication with the plan that we do have what's going to be there.

And what it allows the industry to do is if they know we're moving ahead on paving or gravel or structures, they're able to plan ahead and assemble the resources they need. So they've been doing it thus far. We anticipate further growth in that area. But, you know, that's one of the reasons we've been able to keep our unit costs very competitive. I don't think there's been a major project at all that's been significantly over budget. In many cases, we're getting tenders coming in under our estimates, so it doesn't just happen; it really is a result of a lot of work, and we have a working group right now with the industry that is continuing to come up with other ways to provide greater efficiencies and greater effectiveness.

Mr. Helwer: So, when the minister speaks of \$1 million per kilometre, I guess, to actually physically construct a road from the ground up—that's kind of what I heard him say—is that the actual physical construction of the road or is there design and engineering costs in that as well?

*(15:50)

Mr. Ashton: You know, all-in cost. What I should mention is all costs, both direct and indirect, are part of the capitalization, you know, in terms of that definition. So staff costs related to building a highway are—they're not operating; they're accounted in terms of the actual capital cost. So it is a—you know, it's an important part of it, and, yes, certainly, it's an interesting one. It just gives some sense of

how competitive the prices have been. We've received an indication that the cost of paving is the second lowest in the country—just testament to the planning and it's a testament to the industry as well.

And, obviously—and this is one of the advantages of our significant investment in infrastructure—when you have a significant investment, if you plan it properly—and we have—and if you work co-operatively with the industry—and, of course, that is—you know, it's a tender process by and large, but it's—you know, we're working co-operatively. To my mind, this shows we're getting economies of scale.

And give you some sense, I mean, assembly costs, you know, for a project are pretty significant. So if you—you know, if you have two 20-kilometre sections of paving—if they're done as one-offs—a few years ago we were getting two- and three-million-dollar contracts were fairly standard. But if you start getting \$20-million contracts and if you can get 40 kilometres of paving instead of 20, two times 20, what you have is the assembly cost that's built into the bit structure applies to a larger construction project. So it's a smaller percentage which means you get these kind of cost advantages.

So there's a double advantage in the investment we're into now. The scale is really giving us—you know, it's giving us good highways, but it's giving us very good unit costs.

Mr. Helwer: Oil prices have an impact on paving costs, both in the operation of the equipment and in the content of the asphalt, obviously. Now, we've had a lot of discussion over the past few months of the impact on the changes in the oil prices to the Manitoba economy, both good and bad, but this is one area where I anticipate that it may be good for the Manitoba economy, both in operations of the actual vehicles used in the construction and in the asphalt itself.

However, many of these contracts, I'm sure, were probably issued prior to the oil price drop. Is there any stipulation in there in terms of changing supplies of oil, for instance, or the price of oil in terms of a contract, or is it once the contract is issued it's the responsibility of the company that win—won the tender to either bear the brunt of oil-price increases or the benefit of decreases?

Mr. Ashton: It's actually a good question because we actually do purchase the oil to reduce the risk element. Price has dropped 15 per cent over the last year. Generally speaking in terms of both the oil

prices and the issue of currency, it actually cuts both ways.

You know, for example, we—okay, government air—if we're buying parts we're no different than, say, Calm Air. I've had a discussion with the president of Calm Air recently. You know, our air fleet is using fuel that's cheaper; but, if you're buying parts, you're often buying from the US with US prices, so the cost goes up.

So we've actually been, I would say, very—we've done very well the last period of time. There's been some significant scenarios where we've been able to, you know, reinvest in equipment both on our Highways side, but also in the air fleet side and the water bombers—major renewal at a time actually where we had some real advantages with the Canadian dollar, because when you're buying equipment you want a high Canadian dollar.

But, certainly, the drop in oil prices helps us, and what it means is we can do more. We can extend projects. We can add projects and, actually, over the last period of time we've had a number of additions to our capital project list because we're getting cheaper prices on oil and we're getting more competitive prices on tenders, which is good news all the way around.

Mr. Helwer: So, then, to clarify: the minister mentioned that the Province buys the oil. So does the Province buy the oil to supply to the companies for the asphalt? Is that what he meant by that statement or did I misunderstand that?

Mr. Ashton: We meant we buy the oil then they turn it into asphalt.

Mr. Helwer: So is there additional carrying costs in terms of pricing to the companies or how does that flow-through work?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we basically buy it, deliver it, and then what they're bidding on is the actual work itself, which does reduce the fluctuation in risk elements from their side, and as the member knows, when you minimize the risk elements on a contract side or you identify them in areas where, you know, you expect contractors to manage them, you're going to get better prices. Either you're going to get scenarios where, like in this case, if a company's bidding, they know it's not about materials, so they know they don't have to deal with that; they're really dealing with equipment and labour costs, which are far more definable.

It's also important for us long term, because I can tell you one of the key issues with the Heavy Construction Association has always been not just giving them advance notice on the work, but anybody in the contracting business will tell you, you know, it takes one bad contract to put a contractor out of business, and some have done that, that situation.

So where we can have situations where we manage certain elements of the risk and they focus on the risk that they're there for, which is on the construction side, it actually allows them to put less of a premium when they're doing bids on those risk elements because we basically remove them. And, you know, there's still risk elements in terms of the construction time frame. There are penalties attached to that. There's general liabilities, as well, and, you know, we have had situations where we've had difficulties with contractors, had difficulties with engineering firms as well. But we find this system really is effective. It's shown in the numbers, and, again, all credit to the department and everyone involved, and I feel like, you know, this is like an awards show here. I'm getting notes from my deputy minister, and last year we had the second highest asphalt tonnage produced ever, second highest in the history. We're on track to break the record. Now, weather and contractor performance being the factor, but people have the sense that there's a lot of construction going on. I think that points to its second highest asphalt tonnage ever.

Mr. Helwer: Are there—we've spoken in past years about the number of asphalt plants in Manitoba. Have there been any additions to capacity in Manitoba and where would those additions be?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we had three new. One had a fire. We have had a new company enter the market. Again, when you get this much work, it does attract a lot of interest, and I think that's one of the other dynamics here, you know, in the kind of tendering results we're getting, which is, there are additional—there's additional paving capacity and additional firms.

Mr. Helwer: Does the province own any asphalt plants?

Mr. Ashton: We have two small for our own purposes, but primarily the capacity, again, is all in the private sector for the capital program. And, actually, just to be more specific, it's actually the minor patching we do have the capacity for, and it's important that we have that capacity because that's

an ongoing need. Obviously, again, when you're dealing with the contracting on the capital side, you've got to be very cognizant of the fact that, you know, it's a capital program. Companies can bid; you know, projects were delayed for a year for whatever reason. You know, that's a fact of doing business on the private side on the capital program. But with two small plants for ongoing needs, and that would be essentially the maintenance side of the budget.

Mr. Helwer: So two small plants for maintenance. Were there any larger plants that the province owned at any time in the past several years, or has it always been the small-scale plant?

Mr. Ashton: It's unchanged.

Mr. Helwer: In terms of talking about supply to contractors, the minister talked about supplying the oil. Is there anything similar on the aggregate side for concrete road construction, or is that the responsibility of the contractors?

* (16:00)

Mr. Ashton: That's part of the broader situation. Of course, it's locally, you know, available. And, you know, there is a significant supply of aggregate around the province. To be quite frank, some areas we've probably pushed the limit. We've had to do quite a bit of work on aggregate and it's often frustrating for major projects, 280's a good example where there was a lot of aggregate crushing took place. But you have to have the aggregate before you can do the work because it's a gravel road. So it's a—different on that side and there's less fluctuation, obviously, on the aggregate side. The—you know, there is a trend in terms of cost, but it's less variable, you know, it's not impacted by global sources.

Cement is a bit different. There's not a lot of cement that's really used. Cement is a—you know—it's more impacted by global—actually, North American markets—tends to be somewhat high in North America, actually. And while, you know, there are some arguments about cement road construction versus other kinds of road construction, cement's not a major part of our system—*[interjection]*—maybe one or two per year, I'm advised.

Mr. Helwer: So I guess what I think I heard is that the aggregate is the responsibility or owned by the companies that provide the contracting to the Province. The Province does not own the aggregate. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: On the capital side, yes, and, of course, on the operating side, the maintenance side we have our own sources.

Mr. Helwer: So the Province does tie up leases for aggregate around the province for maintenance of highways, but not necessarily for capital. Is that—and these are long term. I understand the Province has some of these leases that may not be mined for several years until we get to that area of development?

Mr. Ashton: That's correct.

Mr. Helwer: I guess one of the areas of aggregate that's been brought up to me, to my attention, is the impact of having limestone in an aggregate. And I understand several of the Province's tenders, perhaps all of them, require that limestone not be a part of the aggregate because of the amount of water that it can soak up and then the freeze-and-thaw cycle, is that something the minister would care to educate me on?

Mr. Ashton: It's done on a case-by-case basis. It's basically, you know, the basic principle is to get as much of the aggregate locally for a number of factors, not the least of which is cost. There are different qualities of limestone. There is a fair amount of limestone in Manitoba, obviously, you know, so it's not something that is taken out of the mix. But it's very much done on a project-by-project basis.

In fact, aggregate can vary quite bit. If there's one constant issue that I deal with in my area but it comes through the department, again, is the quality of the aggregate. If you get, you know, Arrowhead rock, which I've seen, you know, and you start getting a lot of flats, you will get a lot of complaints. It's a constant challenge for the department to get, you know, especially where you have major projects, to get significant supplies of aggregate that meet our standards and are, you know, a reasonable quality for the travelling public.

But yes, we haven't ruled out limestone, nor would I anticipate we would.

Mr. Helwer: So, when I'm looking at the Infrastructure books themselves, most of them, as I look from year to year, are continuous where the number from the previous year shows up—or the current year from the—current number from the current year shows up as the number in the previous year for the next year.

However, when I move from 2014 to 2015, that does not seem to be the case, and when I'm looking in particular on page 11 of those two Estimate books. So can the minister tell us why there are those differences in the capital investment numbers and the appropriations for Infrastructure and Transportation, I think, are different as well from year to year, as are the—yes.

Mr. Ashton: Just to confirm, you're referencing schedule 3?

Mr. Helwer: Yes, when I look at schedule 3 for the 2014-15 year, if we look at total part B, capital and investment, expenditures for 2014-15 is some \$682,920,000, and when I look at those numbers across in the schedule 3 of the 2015-16, it is six hundred and two thousand, nine hundred and twenty thousand. So—some 80,000—or, sorry, \$80-million difference there.

Mr. Ashton: Just to confirm, where is the other figure from? We've got—this is the—yes, this refers—I believe I've got—stand to be corrected here; I'm not sure of the specific figure. I'll make sure—it's the transfer of the AST? *[interjection]* ASD, yes, over to Finance. That's the accommodation side, so that's the difference in the capital. So everything else is the same in terms of what's in the department, but that's the one difference.

Mr. Helwer: So, yes, I kind of anticipated that was probably where that went. We did have some discussions, as I mentioned, with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) about Accommodation Services, I believe, is what he mentioned it was, and there is \$80 million, of course, that's coming in from Infrastructure and Transportation, so it's the capital side. And I did ask him several questions about what was contained in that capital side. I anticipate the minister here may know more detail that perhaps the minister knew there about—given the history with the department.

Can you expand a little bit on what types of assets have moved from MIT to Finance?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, Accommodation Services deals with the buildings that we own or lease. There were—are various buildings, too, that go beyond sort of core government. We do own college buildings. That is changing with Red River. Red River is taking over, as part of the budget announcement, its own buildings. So we're in transition, actually, to Red River itself, and we also have responsibilities in terms of jails. I mean, the two big things coming out

of the Accommodation Services side outside of core government buildings are college campuses and jails, which does make for some rather interesting differences in approach on the construction side.

So that's the broader portfolio. There's actually quite a bit in the portfolio if you look at, you know, the footprint government has. And the move here, I think, is really aimed at recognizing there's a lot of efficiencies in the system. I've certainly been very proud to be minister responsible for Accommodation Services. They've done a really good job across the province. But, again, change is good as rust. By coming in under Finance, there may be some broader issues that can be dealt with on the Finance side.

I note that the—we've been—we're implementing this—the member's aware of this from previous budget announcements about shrinking the profile of government in terms of, you know, the per square foot, square metre per employee. I think that recognizes two dimensions, really, as one broader efficiency.

The second one is that in this day and age, you know, the standard fixed physical office is less—you know, it's less dominant now as the working environment. I think a lot of newer workers are looking for the open-office concept, and there's a lot of indication that's more efficient as well. We have a section of the department where that was the case anyway and continues to be the case. So there are opportunities there.

There are opportunities, you know, through teleconferencing, working at home. There's a lot of ways in which the profile, you know, can be reduced. So that's very much been what we've been implementing and will be moved over. But the bottom line is that's—you know, that—in a general description, that is the case, and I could always provide detailed information. I've done this before. If the member would like, on what the portfolio is. I think we've done that, not every year, but most years. And I'm sure I could track that down. I'll try to do it before the wrap-up of Estimates, and if not, we'll get a list in writing.

* (16:10)

Mr. Helwer: That would certainly be helpful from the minister. We did ask the question of the Minister of Finance but was, perhaps, not as forthcoming or not quite sure what was in the portfolio of assets yet—just yet. And it's new to him so I understand. That's fine. That would be useful.

Now the minister mentioned community colleges, and I, of course—one that I'm well familiar with is Assiniboine Community College. And so would all of those campuses then be transferred from MIT to Finance? Are there any that are owned in a separate forum for Assiniboine Community College, or leased or something of that nature?

Mr. Ashton: There are, like in terms of the publicly-owned, you know, campuses, you've got a variety of different scenarios. Red River is going to be taking over its own asset base which reflects in a way with what we've had with universities. Universities, of course, there's autonomy in universities, but they have their own capital. It's separate.

In addition to the main campuses, you know, ACC and with UCN, there are numerous satellite campuses. I believe there's 20 separate satellite campuses with UCN alone and some various different configurations there in terms of ownership et cetera, leasing, because it's important to note that we don't own all the buildings. Across government we don't own all the buildings. We do a significant amount of private leasing.

So Red River's a bit of, I think, a unique case given the scale. So, again, we're—that's being transferred directly over to Red River. It's in transition now. And everything else is going over to the Finance Minister. I'm sure very shortly, now that budget debate is over and the budget has passed, we will be more than familiar, maybe, by the time of next experts. He'll be an expert on the department. Not that I claim to be an expert, but I'm sure I'll be fully up to speed.

And, you know, I think it's important to know that with that transfer goes a lot of expertise. We have a very good track record and I think we've proven it in terms of—on that side of the department, some major projects done; UCN campus in Thompson, good example, on time, on budget. The very significant work we've done with ACC that has taken, you know, 13-14 years ago where the old BMHC location has now been transformed into—well, a lot of people would assume it was actually constructed as, you know, a campus 100 years ago, and it was. And I think that's very much the vision of people in Brandon. And I've been very proud of the department, the work that's been done and, of course, we're doing it, yet again the next generation of, you know, developments out there. So I think I've said this before, much accomplished, more to do, certainly the accomplishments of ACC.

Mr. Helwer: So the minister mentioned there's the variety of owned and leased properties. So, then, were the leases part of MIT and will now be moving as well as the owned properties to Accommodation Services and Finance?

Mr. Ashton: Correct.

Mr. Helwer: And so that's ACC and UCN. And Red River itself, then, is moving to a more of a governance model like a university. Will we see an asset transfer out to Red River in the coming year or has some of that happened already?

Mr. Ashton: It's in the process of happening. It's actually part of the whole budget process. So it will happen—well, it's in transition now, it will happen this fiscal year.

Mr. Helwer: And the minister, of course, mentioned staff and that. I understand is part of the operating transfer is—would include the staff functions. Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, that's correct. ASD, I mentioned as well VEMA, procurement. There are various functions going over.

Mr. Helwer: So is there any issues with unions, pensions, geography in those transitions? I mean, I under—would—from what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) seemed to say, these are MIT staff that were working in MIT offices and now have been transferred to Finance Department. They will continue likely to still operate out of the MIT office even though some of their neighbours may not be Finance, they may be MIT staff, and that certain geographic consolidation isn't happening this year or may not happen.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, that is correct. The issues are pretty straightforward with the internal transfer within governments. It's somewhat more complex with the transfer to Red River. And we have been—I say we. We as a government have been working with the union that is impacted. You know, it's—there's a lot of parallel ships, you know, in terms of Civil Service Superannuation, you know, the pension side, that aren't all that complex. But that is actually a shift in terms of employment, and every effort is being made to minimize or eliminate impacts from the transition.

So that is a different case, different from going to Finance. Going to Finance is just an internal within government. Red River is, of course, as a college it's somewhat different, arm's-length from

government. And there are some issues that go with that.

Mr. Helwer: So with the Red River transfer, would that entail a change of union or is it seniority that's the issue? What would be the particular concern there?

Mr. Ashton: It's the same union, but you have, you know, a different employer. There'll be some differences too. Red River has, you know, different contracts, different benefit providers similar to government. Civil Service Superannuation Board, you know, that's not an issue. You know, the pension system is the case. But there are some issues and, again, there's—every focus has been on making sure there's no layoffs, and it's a—that it's a seamless transition for the employees involved. The goal here is to make it actually seamless to the point of not making any substantive difference at all for the effective employees, but really to change the—shift the paradigm, in a way, of having a different approach. It's something Red River's talked about for a while and it's not something we entered into lightly. But I think it's been certainly fairly well accepted as something that will give them some greater control over their premises and maybe there'll be some opportunities for some different approaches.

And I want to stress again, we've had significant upgraded facilities—I mentioned about the UCN campuses. You know, the Red River downtown campus has been huge, the Royal Bank building. You know, Red River has moved from its former location downtown in a major way and, of course, there's been the major new developments on it, you know, with the trade side as well. So I'm very proud of the work that's been done. And, actually, the downtown campus is something that has, I think, been a significant part of the revitalization of the Exchange District which is part of the Manitoba success story with the downtown development.

So, yes, it provides a building for post-secondary purposes, but it's been a major driver as well for the economy and especially for downtown development.

Mr. Helwer: So, then, in terms of geography, are there any transfers from rural to urban environments as part of this move from MIT to Finance?

Mr. Ashton: No, it's really just transfer from one department responsible to another department responsible. The people will be essentially doing basically the same tasks working out of the same

areas, so there's no immediate substantive change to the employment.

Mr. Helwer: Okay, and then moving back to ACC, there was an announcement here a few months ago about some new planning that would take place there and some provincial funding. My recollection is that it came out of Education as opposed to MIT. Is that the minister's understanding as well, or was MIT a part of that funding for the planning? I think it was around a million-dollar planning number.

* (16:20)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, again, I know Finance has gone through it, but it really has not been—something transferred over to the Finance side. So, you know, we've certainly been involved with some of the preliminary work over the last number of years as part of the overall developments, you know, on campus, but it is now functionally been transferred over.

Mr. Helwer: Last year, we had some announcements that were a surprise to a few people in Brandon about the various bridges there. Obviously, we've been looking at the rail overpass on 18th Street and traffic flows. As it—the minister well knows, that's a three-lane bridge that is adjoined by four lanes on the north side and four lanes on the south side, and the anticipation of most people was that that might be the next major provincial-federal project to be targeted in Brandon.

And then the 1st Street Bridge came up as needing some structural correction and rebuilding, and there was an announcement of an engineering study that was to be done on it. Has that engineering been—study been completed for the 1st Street Bridge?

Mr. Ashton: Perhaps I can give the member a bit of an update here in terms of this—might be helpful.

We're in the early stages of a functional preliminary design for the major rehab or replacement—Daly Overpass on the 18th Street bridge. So we have started negotiations with the federal government to secure their participation, and there's certainly an interest from the local MP which I think is helpful. And with MIT and the City of Brandon sharing the one-third cost, it's estimated to be a pretty significant investment of 60 million.

You know, and as the member knows, it's very heavily used—about 12,000 vehicles per day which is very high in terms of our system. You know, there—the issues go back to—constructed in '72, needs a

major rehab to extend its life. You know, there's been a fair amount of history. I can get into it if the member's more, you know, interested in some of the detail.

But we're still in the early stages of functional preliminary design. That is critical. We have to work with CP Rail, as the member knows, since they're critical stakeholders. So extensive negotiations required to identify impact on their operations, specifically during construction. We need an MOU to formalize ensuring that we protect their interests.

We're—I can assure the member that there'll be significant public consultation. You know, because if you consider stakeholders in addition to the rail company, you've got the city itself, you've got Chamber of Commerce, regional health authority, emergency services, trucking association, cab, RCMP, local businesses. There's a lot of interest in that area.

And the key issue again, as we look ahead, is getting a partnership commitment, negotiating with CP Rail. And we've identified that really over the next number of years. We've had, you know, contact and that would sort of, you know, be something that would be aimed at over the next period of time.

Finalizing the conceptual design really last year and this year, moving to preliminary design really this year and next year and then what you get into is full consultations; environmental assessment; got to get the right-of-way acquisition in place, which will be able to really get under way once we get the conceptual design moved to the functional design, because that's where you get the sense of the land imprint.

And then construction: I can certainly indicate that there is interest from, well, certainly, Brandon, but from the federal government as well. And there are various different programs, different options that we could look at, but I'm optimistic that we will be able to reach an agreement with them. So, if there is progress on that, there will be an announcement. I think there's definitely real interest.

And I can relay 1st Street, if the member would like a quick update. We've completed the preliminary design for the 1st Street Bridge in Brandon, and it, of course, crosses the Assiniboine River and CP rail yards. Based on our cycle cost analysis, replacement is the most cost-effective option. We're looking at construction starting officially this year or early next

year, estimated cost of \$40 million, again, a fairly significant investment.

I think the member knows how important it is in Brandon, 14,000 vehicles a day, which is a very high traffic count, built in '72, similar to the previous bridge, and we've had extensive investment in inspection throughout the province, and this has been thoroughly inspected. There has been some deterioration, as to be expected with an asset of this age, on the concrete deck foundation, steel bearings and steel bridge guardrail systems. And there's been a scour within the river channel, which is an issue, and we've completed the preliminary design, so, again, it's well under way, replacement as I indicated. CP is a key player again, so we would move to a MOU and very significant consultations that we would engage with both the general public and many of the same stakeholders I referenced earlier.

So, again, our construction replacement time frame, we're looking at moving into that over the next period of time this year, next year perhaps. So it's slightly ahead of the other project in that sense. But, again, a \$40-million investment and our intention is to proceed with it. They're both priorities but between the two, the reason, No. 1, the 1st Street Bridge is the No. 1 priority is it's in a more urgent need of rehab. So it's based on the actual inspection and assessment. Daly does require rehab, but the expansion is, you know, is aimed—the purpose of expanding to four lanes as well in recognizing traffic count, and trouble is you can't do both at the same time and maintain traffic.

So both complex projects, but basically the member's going to see a \$100-million investment in two prior targeted projects in Brandon already under way, so we're already investing money, but, over the next period of time, investment, construction.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you for that update. So did I hear correctly that the 18th Street Bridge is a third, a third, a third municipal-provincial-federal, and the 1st Street Bridge, what would the—the shares be on that?

Mr. Ashton: Our anticipation, you know, would be again that we've had some contact. I'm not actually the minister for that side of it, that's the member, quite appropriately in this case, for Brandon East. But, certainly, the information we've received is there's interest from the federal government on that, and anywhere in the system where we can get federal funding, we'll take it. But this one fits both their expressed priority and our expressed priority, so that

was the proposal, you know, one third, one third, one third, and we anticipate they will come through with that. If the feds have more money out there, we'll take that too.

Mr. Helwer: So what would be the funding proposal for the 1st Street Bridge? Is it similar, a third, a third, a third, or is it a fifty-fifty government-or provincial-federal?

Mr. Ashton: That's 100 per cent ours, and the reason is really it's a function of what we know is available from the federal programs currently. We have a number of other projects that would be very good candidates as well. So we are very anxious to make sure that we access it, but for every dollar that's out there on the federal side we've got more than a dollar's worth of project. So it's really—it's just a question of where you allocate it.

We do respect, too, that the federal government has its own set of priorities as well too. Let's say, though, instead of priorities, they do defer to us in terms of the broader management of the system, obviously. But, as I indicated, we received positive response on that, and I think the local MP has been quite clear about that, and I'm optimistic about the cost sharing.

* (16:30)

Mr. Helwer: So, to clarify, the minister said 100 per cent, so that bridge is 100 per cent provincial, or are you anticipating federal funding?

Mr. Ashton: A hundred per cent ours. The other—let's put it this way. We're optimistic that we will receive the cost share.

Mr. Helwer: And then moving back, but I don't mean to flop back and forth here, but I'm trying to follow the minister's responses.

On 18th Street with—why is it—the question I always get from Brandon is this is a provincial bridge; why is the municipality expected to put up a third of it, but I'm sure the minister has a reason for that.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, well, as the member knows, we're working on a series of aspects that do include on the municipal side, so this is something that benefits the city in terms of its assets. I don't know if he wants me to go to, you know, significant detail on it. And I could offer briefly, but I suspect he more than knows the scenario that's out there. But, again, it's part of the broader needs of the city in terms of its own assets.

So, again, it's something that—it's a priority for us provincially and we're going to move ahead with it, and the, you know, cost share, I think, has been broadly agreed to. In any case, it is 100 per cent asset and you know, you've got to remember that there—it—the other option is to fix up the 8th Street Bridge. So it defers cost for the municipality. And we do, wherever possible in the system we're co-operating with municipalities. It's not the only case; it's part of a larger scale. But there are many areas of the province where we come to similar arrangements.

So this is cost-effective for the city, so I think the simple answer to constituents is by working co-operately on this bridge. It will be cheaper for the citizens if Brandon—because the other option would be far more expensive for the city. [*interjection*]

Yes, and I just want to emphasize, the member will recall the Urban Highway Fund we brought in as initiative and—you know, so there are—that's given us our piece of cost share at 50-50. And we're getting a fair amount of interest from a wide variety of, you know, scenarios and municipalities because there are often very similar situations we run into where, you know, communities will look at what's good for the community and, of course, for their own bottom line. In the case of Brandon, I think it's a win-win. It helps Brandon avoid greater costs, helps us move ahead with this asset, helps us leverage the federal funding. So, you know, this \$100-million investment will involve, you know, some investment by the city, but it will help them to defer other needs that would be far more expensive for the people in Brandon. So it's a—I describe it as a win-win.

Mr. Helwer: So can the minister inform us on what other types of projects in Manitoba of that size or a little bit larger, a little bit smaller, much larger perhaps, would be in that third-third-third cost-sharing arrangement?

Mr. Ashton: I can track down some of the projects. There are some significant projects we've been in discussion with where, you know—there's investment on the provincial highway system by the municipality of Steinbach, comes to mind, and we've just had some recent allocations there. But I can get a full list. It might be of use to get a full list of where we get the urban highway projects because that's where you get the 50-50 funding and some of them may access federal money which reduces it even further.

But we've had some significant take-up as well from the rural municipalities. I've mentioned, you know, in debate Steinbach, but there's a number of

rural scenarios where you've got RMs that have taken up with the program because of a couple reasons. One is, you know, perhaps something that, you know, is an urban part of the municipality. It's not necessarily part of the highway capital program because it doesn't serve the overall requirements, but where there's a specific interest in improving, you know, improving, say, a main street, and there are other situations to where municipalities—you know, they come up with some creative solutions where they're really in situations where they've got significant pressures on their municipal roads, and the logic is to upgrade the provincial highway.

So it's a variety of situations but I can undertake, hopefully by next Estimates, to get a list of the approved projects that we have out there from the Urban Highway Fund.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you for that, to the minister. That would be very useful.

So, Mr. Chair, the—moving back again to the 1st Street bridge, the minister mentioned the impact of the flood on the river there and some scouring that's happened along there. Obviously, we had flood waters that were overtop of the road itself at the bottom of the bridge. So, in the new design, is there going to be any anticipation of changing the design to build up the roadbed so it's a dike or perhaps allow it to flow over or underneath? These are things that may never happen again, but we don't know that, of course, and we didn't anticipate that that flood—those floods were going to happen, especially so close together.

So, in the new design, is there any changes that will be made to ensure that we won't be impacted by a future flood and have to close the road again?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, bridge is—would be constructed to current standards, which—or a higher level. And in terms of the water control issues, we're in discussion with Brandon to tie into their diking system. So it is a factor in the design process, yes.

Mr. Helwer: And then moving a little bit further east, we have, of course, the eastern bypass and the bridge there that was protected by the Tiger dikes and Tiger Dams, that type of thing. The social media has been hit and miss, I guess, with the remnants of the dams there, of course. And the responses, I understand, are that the roadbed's going to be raised so the plastic that's remaining there will be covered up as opposed to picked up.

But could the minister clarify that the roadbed from the bridge, I guess, south, is going to be raised so it'll act as a dam and not have to put the temporary dams up there should something of that nature happen again?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's under consideration right now. So we're definitely looking at it.

Mr. Helwer: So, then, the social Twitter—or the social media areas that are talking about this may be incorrect? Do we anticipate that we might clean up some of the plastic and other detritus that's sitting there still from the flood along the bypass?

Mr. Ashton: I know I'll get in trouble because I'm pretty active on social media. First thing is to don't believe everything you read on social media. But I'll certainly pull up the terms of specific concerns. Again, the broader solution is under active consideration right now. You know, raising up the road, that's the long-term solution. But if there are any localized issues the member wants to tweet out that—in 140 characters or less, the minister is looking at it here.

Mr. Helwer: Just to clarify, it's not on Twitter that this one is on, but it's on some of the blogs that surround Brandon that people comment about or perhaps even the Sound Off in the Brandon Sun where it's always interesting. You can send an anonymous statement in and have the printer—the paper print it with even names in there sometimes. But that's—those have been some of the questions we get through those areas and sometimes people do call and actually they leave their name, but—so that's where it's coming from.

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate that, and I would note that I would say Brandon is probably the most wired—wireless city in terms of social media anywhere in the province. I mean, it cuts both ways. But I think if you look at Brandon in terms of—so, on Twitter—I'm on Twitter, so I notice that Brandon's got a significant presence on social media which is—it's a good sign of the times, to my mind, the number of organizations in Brandon, people in Brandon are involved.

They—of course, they—the shortcoming of social media can also be the other side as well, too, is, you know, there are facts, there are rumours, and then there's what you read on social media. So you have to often take it with a grain of salt, but, having said that, we do respond to real concerns, whether they're expressed on social media, through traditional media

or the old-fashioned way of phoning up an MLA, and we do take them seriously.

* (16:40)

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I'd like to just maybe have an update on the upgrading on 75 Highway at the border. I understand that's been on the books for some time. If I remember correctly, it was probably three, four years ago that that was announced. The American side has done a tremendous amount of work, and we still have done nothing on our side. I understood that there was federal money available for that, and is that federal money still available, and when will the work start?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we are working co-operatively with North Dakota on this. There have been a number of open houses that have been held. The funding is—continues to be available. It is available, and there's, you know, some opportunity to upgrade and improve the situation, and I do want to acknowledge, too, some of the input from Emerson as well.

Part of the issue is the Canadian border crossing side; they have to finalize their plans as well. I don't think people realize—the member, obviously, would realize, but—the degree to which the border crossing is one of the busiest in Canada and it's—this is western Canada. So they're currently finalizing their plans, which is the critical element for us in terms of any enhancements either to the highway side or the service side because I know the former town of Emerson and, certainly, the current municipality—there's been a lot of discussion over the years about enhancing border services—I mean, I'm saying border services in terms of retail, you know, truck stops, et cetera.

If you look at the number of cars and trucks that go through, I think the community has identified some real opportunities, you know, for that kind of development. So, as this is finalized by CBSA, we were basically going to proceed, and, of course, as the member knows, we've had a significant investment on Highway 75 since we came into government: \$157 million and more to come this year. And the member's, you know, I'm sure seen a lot of construction that is under way, and the eventual vision is going to be full upgrading in terms of the highway itself.

Of course, as the member for Morris (Mr. Martin) will know, the project in terms of Morris itself and the—which is related to floods, and

with the border crossings as the CBSA finalizes its plans, we will access the funding that's available, and I think the goal there is over the next few years to significantly improve the border crossing itself, both in terms of immediate access but also in terms of any of the issues I referenced. And I think there's a—personally, there's a lost opportunity there. Whenever I go across the border—just through maybe about a year or so—or a month or so ago—huge opportunity that's being lost, and we're—we recognize that. And when I say lost—retail service being, you know, the classic example. So, you know, as CBSA finalizes its plans, we'll be moving ahead too.

Mr. Graydon: So, in relation to the work on our side of the border, has been one open house. How does that compare to the work that's been done on the south side of the border?

Mr. Ashton: I can only speak for the Manitoba side, but I am advised that North Dakota has been in correspondence with us complementing our co-operation as well, so we are working co-operatively with them. It's not a question of either-or. We obviously can't control CBSA, but we're working co-operatively with them as well. So I think there's been significant progress and we're going to continue to move ahead on it working co-operatively. But it is a priority to upgrade it; we do have funding available, and we anticipate using that funding fully.

Mr. Graydon: When can we expect it in the next open house to see what the progress has been from the first?

An Honourable Member: I'll undertake to get back. I don't know if there's anything scheduled. If there is, I'll put it on the record in Hansard. If not, I'll undertake to either in writing or one-on-one to get that information.

Mr. Graydon: Thank the minister for that.

And, staying on the border, there is a road, and I'm not sure that it's a provincial road, but it's called Border Road. Does that fall under your jurisdiction, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ashton: I'm advised it's not ours.

Mr. Graydon: I thank the minister for that.

I also want to acknowledge the work that the minister has done on 201 Highway from 75 to 200 south, or to the community of Dominion City, with a commitment to upgrade that, but in the meantime of—before it is upgraded, he did make a big

effort to increase the traffic there and weight loads there, so now it is—doesn't have a weight restriction on it; it's an RTAC restriction.

However, we did inquire when the minister was busy, preoccupied, looking for different work or a different field of work than he currently has, we inquired with the then-minister of Infrastructure, and he indicated that a tender would have been out by now.

I'm wondering where that is in the queue and when that tender will be let for the work to be done on 201 Highway, keeping in mind that there is a partnership with the municipality on one mile, on 200 north, with the municipality of Franklin, and keeping that in mind that they have a budget as well that they have to work with, and those type of considerations.

Could the minister give me an update on when that tender will be let for that particular highway?

Mr. Ashton: I want to thank the member for his ongoing attention to this issue. And it is something we're working co-operatively with the RM. Anticipation is we will get it out this summer and a time frame of, obviously, over the next couple years.

And I do want to credit the former minister—the former-former minister, because that's me, might be self-serving—but I think he, given his ongoing portfolio on the Agriculture side, was able to give a [*inaudible*] amount of attention to, again, another important department, MIT. And I think the degree to which we're rolling out capital, you know, programs across the province, including this particular project, is just testament to the fact that we are committed to infrastructure and transportation.

And none of us are indispensable, you know, and I'm always honoured to have any role in government. I'm honoured to be back in MIT, but I think, as the member will see, there's a lot of continuity, and it's because we have an excellent department, and we've had people who've been able to step up and play the role, you know, significant role of minister.

And, yes, you know, this is one of the projects that's going to proceed. So thanks to the member again for advocating on behalf of his community. I think—and again, I've said this about the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), but I do appreciate—I feel like sometimes when I say this to an opposition member—I've been in opposition—it's a career-ending move, you know, describing an opposition member as

having been very constructive and co-operative on this issue, but I mean it in all sincerity. Because there are other issues we can disagree on, and we will, but on this, I think where we're at now is a direct result of a co-operative approach from everyone, the member, the municipality and the department. And I'm certainly pleased that our office, the minister's office, have been able to be part of it—both myself and the former minister.

* (16:50)

Mr. Graydon: Well, I thank the minister for that. I've always had the premise that not everybody knows everything, and certainly we can work together on something going forward. That's important. And I think that was demonstrated when the federal government stepped up to the plate for the bridge at—across the Red River at Letellier, at the Roseau reserve. That facilitated the rest of this to open up a community for economic development that it's never had the opportunity to have for many, many, many years. The road has either been restricted or the bridge has been restricted for over 20 years. And that's very difficult for a community to grow.

And we know that agriculture does contribute a huge amount of money to the economy of the province. And so—and it's also, I might add, that when 75 Highway is under water, 201 is not under water and 59 Highway is not under water, the bridge over the Red River facilitates that traffic. So it can be used as an alternate flood route as well. It can serve two purposes.

So I really look forward to that being upgraded, and when it's upgraded, there was a part of that road that did flood. Is that going to be addressed in the upgrade?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the transport study, you know, is looking at transportation in that area, is going to look at exactly what the member's talking about in terms of the flood alternate-route aspect, and I certainly appreciate that the member's highlighted this before.

And given some of the challenges during major floods, it's something that we take—we do take very seriously. There are highways that are absolutely integral even in fairly significant flooding like we've seen in 2009. There's some significant importance to roads that perhaps in a normal time period are, you know, local and regional access that become absolutely strategic on a regional and provincial basis.

So that is most definitely going to be one of the key factors we will look at with the study and we'll take into consideration in terms of capital investments.

Mr. Graydon: Moving farther downriver to the village of St. Jean where the bridge has been removed, contrary to what I was informed for six weeks prior to the removal, has there been any work done at replacing or any studies done at replacing that bridge?

I know that I've given the minister a couple of opportunities and a couple of options in that particular area to facilitate a bridge there at much less cost than what was reported at the time or after the bridge was demolished, when there was an open-house meeting. There has been other opportunities presented to the minister. Has there been any work done on that?

Mr. Ashton: In a general sense. And the transportation study is—it's under way. I think an open house was just held in the community. We're obviously looking, as was the case in the previous answer, at the regional transportation needs. There's been no decision on replacement until the study is completed.

I know the department takes seriously the options that the member has put forward. Any and all options will be looked at, including specific options the member's identified. You know, I know there's some significant engineering challenges will be involved with any of the options given the river, given the experience even with the previous bridge. But I do take very seriously the fact that the member has significant knowledge of that area, and I don't mean just as an MLA, you know, in a political sense, but the immediate situation. And I know he's been in contact with people in the community that have come forward with these options. We will, as part of this overall study, look at any and all options, including the specific options the member's identified, not just in terms of cost issues but feasibility.

You know, we have a situation, obviously, where there is no bridge right now, so the decision to [*inaudible*] is not just a question of rebuilding; you can't rebuild the previous bridge. You'd have to, you know, you'd have to build a new bridge no matter what. So that's where the options members put forward are, I think, well-intentioned and very useful. And I'll assure the member—and I've done it privately, but I'll do it on the public record—that, as

minister, I'll make sure and the department will make sure that they're seriously considered.

Mr. Graydon: There was a study done and I'm not—I don't have a copy of it—I've asked for it in the past. But there was a study done on the river that indicated that there would be two crossings removed on the Red River between the border and the lake. Could you identify the next crossing that's going to be removed?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I wouldn't describe it as crossings being removed. I know there was a overall focus on the number of river crossings here, say, compared to North Dakota and sort of what the optimal situation is. Again the Transportation side will look at that.

What we're looking at here is obviously a bridge that failed. There is no low-cost option. Certainly, even a one-lane bridge is probably upwards of 40 million. According—you know, the information from the department, right now, two lanes around 60 million. So, you know, obviously, we're looking at feasibility of a newly constructed bridge in that area, but there certainly wouldn't be any intention to take out of service any existing bridges.

Although, you know, certainly the events—last few years have shown the degree to which bridges that can function quite significant for, you know, for an extended period of time, you hit a major flood and, as is the case, you know, 2011, 80 bridges impacted; 2014, 80 bridges impacted.

And we have bridge damage going back to 2009. It's going to be an ongoing challenge for us across the province which is very much on, you know, fixing where we can fix it, rebuilding where we can rebuild it—looked very seriously at what we can prioritize and what we can actually do in terms of feasibility. I wouldn't underestimate the complexity—and I know the member wouldn't either—of some of the challenges we have here, given the hydraulic flow, especially the high flows you get during a flood.

Mr. Graydon: There was a hydrology study that has been commissioned on the river. Has that been—and that was in conjunction with raising 75 Highway above the flood waters. Has that study been completed?

Mr. Ashton: Ah, there's been various technical work—you know, studies done on 75. I'm not quite sure what the member's referencing, but there's been significant work done on the hydrology on the Red River over the last number of years. We haven't got

the final report, I think, on what he's referring to, which is just the more recent hydrology report.

An Honourable Member: Yes, it was supposed to have been released; it hasn't been.

Mr. Ashton: It's still being finalized, yes. We're anticipating it will be finalized fairly shortly, but if that's what he's referring to, it's being completed. It's not fully completed—hasn't been released yet.

Mr. Graydon: Then if it hasn't been finalized and yet we're raising 75 Highway so that it will be out of the flood water, it's difficult, then, to suggest where the water is going to go.

Right now the water goes across three, four, five miles of 75 Highway at a foot deep or two feet deep, heading northwest at the rate that the water flows in that direction. Now, if we're going to stop that by raising the highway out of the water, then is—where is that water going to go?

And I don't believe that the water is going to go down between 246 Highway and 75 because in '97 it went over 246. It went back to 200. It didn't cross 200; it went through the bridges and so on. But, if it goes over 200, it's faced with the same situation then and even may head to the Rat River system.

But at the same time, as the flood recedes, it has to come back through controlled structures which inputs the land under water for much, much longer time, which will cost a lot of money in crop failures or crop production—non-production. So—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Order. This section of Committee of Supply will now continue consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council.

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

As previously agreed, questions will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): My questions are around the issue of this vote-tampering allegation during the leadership race of the NDP, and I just wanted to say that I know that sometimes in these contests things can—

accusations can fly, and I understand that some of those accusations certainly did flow during the leadership race for the NDP.

The situation in Swan River called for a revote of all the members in the constituency as a result of some allegations of, I guess we'll say vote tampering. Were these allegations ever verified as far as the Premier knows, or were they just allegations, I guess, is what I'm getting at?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Yes, the provincial party dealt with that matter and they dealt with it to their satisfaction.

Mr. Pallister: Maybe the Premier could elaborate on how they dealt with it.

Mr. Selinger: The—they dealt with it by reviewing the situation and having a revote.

Mr. Pallister: So why did they have the revote? What happened that caused them to have to have the revote?

Mr. Selinger: They wanted greater certainty about the procedures to ensure that everybody was able to vote in a way that they felt was appropriate.

Mr. Pallister: So who deals with this? Is there a subcommittee of the party or somebody that has to deal with complaints when—I am assuming this complaint would have originated from a rival camp or some such thing as that. Was that the case here?

Mr. Selinger: Not—I don't know about that. There is a committee that deals with these matters and they ruled that there should be a revote.

Mr. Pallister: So there must have been some evidence presented to the committee by somebody—I'm assuming somebody in Swan River riding. Does the Premier have any information about what the evidence was that was presented that caused this revote to happen?

Mr. Selinger: Again, it was dealt with at the party level. They felt for greater certainty that there should be a revote and they conducted that, and then the delegates were accordingly put in place based on the revote.

Mr. Pallister: Well, yes, the only information I have on this is, of course, what I think any other Manitoban might have, which was just reports in newspapers and so on, and this is why I'm asking it. Sometimes these accusations fly around and there's no truth to them at all and they're rumour, and it seems like there must have been something behind

this. The—I know the committee—well, I just—the ruling the committee made, they said over the last couple of weeks a number of incidents were reported regarding potential voter interference—a number of incidents regarding potential voter interference. That's why I was asking, because potential doesn't mean it really happened, and I guess I'm asking, is—was there ever any evidence that the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) aware of that any tampering actually occurred, or was it just a concern about the optics of a situation that triggered this?

Mr. Selinger: As I said, the specifics were dealt with by a committee, and for greater certainty they required a revote, and the revote was done in such a way that they arrived at a level of confidence that the delegates had been properly selected.

* (15:00)

Mr. Pallister: Well, there must've been a level of insufficient confidence as a consequence of something. I know the allegations were that members were—felt intimidated in some way and, of course, the person at the centre of this was, I believe, a strong supporter of the Premier, former Finance minister, Rosann Wowchuk. I'm working—I like to work on the assumption she was innocent of these things, and this is—but this is discouraging when I hear that the committee felt there was sufficient evidence to proceed. The allegations that were made involved—all the Premier has said, I think they had to revote. What does that entail? Revote: what's the process for revoting? I thought they had to—the members had to come in to the convention to vote anyway or is this a mail-in deal?

Mr. Selinger: Understanding was is that they had the ability to do a mail-in on this one.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, thanks, Mr. Chair. Thanks for the clarification.

So this is sort of—this would be like some of the northern ridings where people are allowed to prepare mail-in ballots and send them in from those locations near their home. Okay, well, that makes more sense to me because I know the one person that commented in here, this article, said, improperly—ballots improperly filled out. So I didn't know if it was a combination of a mail-in and then people could drive in.

Can people also drive in from northern ridings to the convention if they wish and vote that way or is it an all or nothing? Do they have to vote by mail?

Mr. Selinger: I think the—it was there for them to vote by mail, but I think the delegates selected had the right to come in if they wished, as I recall. But I have to check the facts on that.

Mr. Pallister: I'd appreciate knowing that. It's interesting to me. The—so the—but the ballot is—am I right on this, the ballot's a preferential ballot, right? So they actually can vote their first choice and second choice and not—there isn't a separate revote on the second ballot as well?

Mr. Selinger: I believe the mail-in ballot did provide for a second choice.

Mr. Pallister: So the mail-in is a preferential ballot. So they actually—they cast the mail-in ballot, they're done, and they cast their first choice on the mail-in and then they also mark a second choice if they wish. But then the people at the convention go back and vote a second time, right? They don't do a preferential ballot?

Mr. Selinger: Correct.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that makes it even more serious, I think, because it's a done deal if, as this local president of the NDP association had said, she had information that at least half a dozen ballots were improperly filled out and that's what led to the complaint.

Does the Premier know if that was who launched the complaint, the local riding association president?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not aware of who specifically launched the complaint.

Mr. Pallister: What role did Rosann Wowchuk play in the Premier's campaign?

Mr. Selinger: She—that individual was one of my supporters.

Mr. Pallister: Well, okay, because the—like, it says in this CBC news brief that she was a co-chair of the election planning committee, is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, that was separate and apart from the leadership contest.

Mr. Pallister: So—I'm sorry. The election planning committee is a separate—that's an agency of the party itself, not of the Premier's campaign.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, correct. *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister).

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, apologize.

What's the role of the election planning committee?

Mr. Selinger: Election planning.

Mr. Pallister: Well, perhaps the Premier (Mr. Selinger) could elaborate a little more on that. Does that include organizing the mailing out of ballots? Cute answer, but does that include the mailing out of ballots and the approach on mailing out ballots?

Mr. Selinger: No, it doesn't.

Mr. Pallister: What does the election planning committee do then, specifically?

Mr. Selinger: It works with the party on long-term planning for coming elections.

Mr. Pallister: Oh, so the election planning committee's not a body that has any role to play whatsoever in the leadership process or the selection of a leader, that's a separate subcommittee?

Mr. Selinger: Correct.

Mr. Pallister: So is this—Ms. Wowchuk still the co-chair of the election planning committee?

Mr. Selinger: As far as I know, yes.

Mr. Pallister: And who selects the members of the election planning committee? Is it just a volunteer committee or is it something that's voted on by party members—is it?

Mr. Selinger: I asked them to serve in that role.

Mr. Pallister: And was the Premier not at all concerned these allegations caused a revote in Swan River because of tampering of ballots? Is he not at all concerned with the conduct of Ms. Wowchuk in respect of her influencing of—or vote tampering during the leadership race?

Mr. Selinger: I was satisfied that the 'barty'—party dealt with it to their satisfaction.

Mr. Pallister: Well, were there any consequences for Ms. Wowchuk for conduct or misconduct?

Mr. Selinger: They dealt with it to their satisfaction.

Mr. Pallister: Does the party have any method for dealing with it beyond conducting a revote? Is there any mechanism for getting an apology from a member who tampers with votes, for example?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I think the member expressed her role in that and made clear her intentions and did express any regrets for any interference that may have been viewed as untoward.

Mr. Pallister: I wasn't aware of that. How did the member—how did Ms. Wowchuk express regrets for her conduct?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I—again, I believe she expressed that through the party mechanisms.

Mr. Pallister: And the Premier's satisfied that expressing regrets for tampering with ballots of members of his party is not a serious enough concern to remove her from any other roles within his organization?

Mr. Selinger: The party dealt with that. The member made clear her role. She made clear her intention was not in any way to do something untoward with respect to the intentions of any specific individual, and the party dealt with it in a way that they thought was appropriate for greater certainty.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's a pretty serious concern, I think, Mr. Chair. The local NDP president, Laura Henderson, said that she talked to a senior about this and basically relayed that she asked, did you have any problems, and the person said, no, because Rosann came in and helped fill it out. I don't know how we voted; it was filled out and put in the envelope.

Well, that's not really a respectful way to deal with someone's right to vote. I don't know that—the Premier seems easily satisfied that expressing regret about what essentially amounts to ballot tampering is sufficient. But, yet, it would seem strange to have someone who's been tampering with ballots at the head of—as a co-chair of the election planning committee. I know it's—I respect the fact that it's the party's—his party's call. But I'm, again, surprised that that would be the case.

Is there—so the Premier is not aware of any other ramifications that would flow to Ms. Wowchuk as a result of tampering with the ballots of NDP members during the leadership process?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not sure the member is properly characterizing what happened. I think the member did—the individual in question did acknowledge that she provided assistance upon request, and then if there's any doubts about that, the party dealt with it in a—with a new procedure where that would not

cloud any judgment about whether the person made their own decision.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) characterizing this as just a misunderstanding that—is that how I'm to take this, that it was just a misunderstanding, that Ms. Wowchuk was going into people's homes, allegedly, completing their ballots for them without them knowing how they voted, and that this was just a misunderstanding?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'm putting on the record that the member expressed any regret with respect to any misperception about the role that she played in assisting somebody, and the party dealt with it by having a revote to ensure greater certainty and clarity about the independence of the vote. And the party dealt with it to its satisfaction.

*(15:10)

Mr. Pallister: So Ms. Henderson, the riding president, is—had alleged, in an early article in the Free Press—I think it was February 20th—that there were—as many as half a dozen ballots were improperly filled out, but she also said there were people who felt intimidated. Were there other practices that were being engaged in by Ms. Wowchuk or others that the Premier is aware of that were intimidating members of the NDP?

Mr. Selinger: No, there wasn't and, as I said earlier, the party dealt with it by having a revote and making sure that all procedures are done appropriately and that's how they dealt with it.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's a pretty rough deal for, I think, the members certainly in that part of the province. I know there were other allegations I'm not going to ask the Premier about in respect of misconduct by other campaigns and so on. I understand that things can—sometimes these things can flow, but this is one which appears to be—go beyond an allegation and go to the realm of actually serious, serious trickery, and that's not something that bolsters people in their desire to participate in the process, especially when people are having a ballot filled out for them without their knowledge. I'm surprised at that.

So I guess there's a cost incurred. Does the Premier have any idea of the cost incurred here, direct cost to the party, because they would've had to conduct the whole extra vote, right?

Mr. Selinger: Again, no, I don't have information with respect to that. The party handled it within a

way that they felt ensured the clarity of the process and the independence of the process, and everybody complied and supported that approach to it.

Now, I just have to ask the member, how would it be handled in his situation where there was a no-contested leadership, or if there was, how would it have been handled? What mechanisms would he have in place to do that?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, we didn't have that situation so it'd be a hypothetical. I don't know how to answer that. The Premier did have that situation so that's why I'm asking him about it.

Now, in respect of government advertising, is the Premier aware of any investigation by the Commissioner of Elections into potential violations of The Election Financing Act for—he or his party are undergoing right now?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the record on that. There—I'd have to check for the facts for the member on that. I do want to point out for the member opposite, he seemed to be comfortable with severance payments being made to people that were allegedly involved in vote rigging back in the '90s when he was a member of government and didn't seem to have a problem with that.

Mr. Pallister: I thank the Premier for his observations.

When will he be releasing the forecasts for Manitoba Hydro's operations to the public?

Mr. Selinger: Manitoba Hydro is currently before the Public Utilities Board with an application for a rate increase and they've provided all that information there for review.

Mr. Pallister: When will the Premier be supplementing the information which did not get published in this year's budget documents for the first time in decades in respect of the forecasts for non-core government operations?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've answered that question and I've just answered it again today. Hydro's got an application before the Public Utilities Board. They provide information. We report on the summary budget each year and we'll continue to do that as we have in the past. And in the meantime, we will also focus on the core budget because the core budget is the one that provides the essential services that Manitobans need, and we want to ensure that those services are protected to the extent we can't give in

the revenues that we have, and to move forward in that regard.

And it's the same approach that the member opposite supported when he was in office, and I just have to ask him why he wants to change that approach now? Why is he switching his approach? If he thinks the summary budget is the way to go, he should say that.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) has spoken very forcefully about the fundamental principles of transparency and the right of Manitobans to information, yet seems to be wanting to hide the information at this point, after years of it being made available.

So, again, I'm asking him, when will he make the forecasts available for the non-core Crown corporations so Manitobans can have a look at these enterprises' prospects for the future? When will that happen?

Mr. Selinger: As I indicated to the member, that Hydro has put its information in front of the Public Utilities Board as part of a rate application, and it's there.

The member was incorrect today when he said that Liquor & Lotteries wasn't providing its information. It's provided in the budget on an annual basis what their revenues are and what their projected transfer to general revenues is as a result of their activities.

And so we're focusing on the core budget because the core budget is where the services are that need to be protected for Manitobans. And that's the approach we're taking. It's the exact same approach the member opposite practised when he was in office, and I hope he's not attempting to practise another double standard again.

The information is there. The focus on the core budget is to ensure that we protect the services that Manitobans are prioritizing and valuing, and that's where we're putting our attention during these uncertain economic times.

Mr. Pallister: Could I ask the Clerk to just move slightly to his right, just so that I can maintain contact with the Chair in case he wants to admonish me at some point on some issue?

So the—but the Premier's surely not suggesting that the operations of Manitoba Public Insurance or Manitoba Hydro aren't important to Manitobans, that they're not—it's—many Manitobans, if you asked them

what core services were, would say, I think Hydro's a core service or I think Autopac's a core service. I think they would say that, and I think those operations of those two agencies are very important to Manitobans.

So I'm asking him again, you know, given the importance of the services provided by those agencies and given the importance of knowing what the outlook is for those agencies for Manitobans, why would he depart from past practice which showed Manitobans what the outlook was, you know, forward outlook was? Why this year decide to suddenly depart from that previous level of transparency? Why now?

Mr. Selinger: He has asked this question on several occasions, and I've given him an answer on several occasions, that we're focusing on the core budget, areas where we can ensure that we protect core services. The Public Utilities Board regulates both of those Crown corporations, and they provide those Crown corporations with all the information that they need to make proper decisions about rating applications.

Mr. Pallister: So, if it's not important this year, why was it important last year and every year in the past?

Mr. Selinger: Always said that summary budget information is important, and it is provided in the budget this year. Forecasts are subject to rate applications and decisions by the regulators. They're subject to changes in weather. They're subject to changes in conditions beyond the control of the government. We're focusing on things that we have a greater degree of control to ensure the protection of services.

And, in addition, if there's other factors that come up, they can be dealt with. But we wanted to focus on those things where we could protect core services, and the regulator will—can take a look at all of those other matters related to both of those Crown corporations in question.

And the member now knows that when it comes to Liquor & Lotteries, their information is provided in the core budget.

Mr. Pallister: That's my point, I guess. If it's important to have Liquor & Lotteries' information in forecasts known to Manitobans, why isn't it important that Manitobans know what the forecasts are for Manitoba Hydro and MPI? And the Premier's departing from past practice, which is well established.

I'm asking him, why is he departing from well-established past practice?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, what I've said is is then—I've given this explanation on several occasions now—we're focusing on the core budget where we can protect public services, as opposed to the summary budget where some events can occur beyond the control of government, which could result in the member's agenda being carried out, which is that if there was for any reason a shortfall there, say of a serious weather event affecting the bottom-line revenues of auto insurance, for example, the member's emphasis on balancing the budget that year could result in core services being cut. And we want to protect those core services.

* (15:20)

There's a very different approach there. The member is consistently looking for ways to cut the budget and cutting core services. He's changed his position. This is another example of the double standard. He used to believe that the core budget was the one that should be focused on. We followed that practice for many years too. The Auditor General recommended we give more information on the summary budget. We have provided more information on the summary budget, and we will continue to do that on an annual basis.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) just misled in his comments, because he said we'll continue to provide, but he stopped providing this year—he stopped providing. So saying he'd continue to provide this information on a yearly basis when he's actually this year stopped providing the information is a direct contradiction of the facts. So I'd invite him to respond to that.

Mr. Selinger: We provide the information on the summary budget in this year, in our budget. That's what we're doing while we focus on the core budget. And I explained to him on several occasions how many—why we're focusing on the core budget during these uncertain economic times to protect core services and to ensure that we focus on things that we have a greater capacity to manage.

Some things are beyond the capacity of government to manage. Very severe weather events, for example, can have an impact on the bottom line. And we want to make sure that those things don't become the focus of an attempt by the members opposite to cut core services in the budget. We know they have that agenda. They haven't declared that. They keep

trying to deflect attention from that agenda. We think it's important to focus on the priorities of Manitobans, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's strategy of focusing on core priorities for Manitobans is to make sure Manitobans don't see what their core services are doing, so that they don't understand and cannot understand what the information is around Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, Workers Comp, as well. And these are—this is a very strange and bizarre approach to addressing the needs of Manitobans to actually see how these agencies are doing and how they're projected to be doing. And the Premier is suggesting that somehow this convoluted argument he's making about hiding the facts from Manitobans is going to better protect Manitobans. It has no logic to it. It makes no sense.

Now he also goes on in his comments to say that he doesn't have control over the issues that affect MPI and Hydro, yet he's the minister who directed Manitoba Hydro to go on the west side with the bipole line—a direct letter to Vic Schroeder, so he's exercised political control at the highest level telling Hydro how to operate its show. To now argue that Manitobans shouldn't see how Hydro's forecasts are when the very decision that he politically induced Hydro to make is causing Hydro to have losses beyond anything previously anticipated is a strange argument to make.

So why should Manitobans be deprived of the right to see the outlook for their Manitoba Hydro by this Premier?

Mr. Selinger: That information is provided through their rate applications to Public Utilities Board.

I have to say the member is completely wrong in his statement of the role of a minister with respect to Hydro. Hydro makes its own final decisions on where they put their assets in terms of any transmission or generation. Ministers have a responsibility to express their views. In the case of the bipole, decision was made by the Hydro board after they commissioned a report commonly known as the Farlinger report. The Farlinger report reviewed the different alternatives for location of transmission, indicated the risks on the east side versus the west side, the advantages of the west side because it's more industrialized and more developed and less risk in terms of pressure both domestically and internationally to stop a project on the east side. And I gave my views based on the Farlinger report, but

Hydro made its own final decision on that at the governance level.

So the member needs to be clear about the facts, and, unfortunately, he hasn't been. He's been misleading this House on that for quite a while now.

The transmission line was vitally important to the security of the energy supply in Manitoba, and the member, I believe, was in government when the existing transmission facilities—the bipoles I and II through the Interlake—were taken out for a brief period of time by a severe weather event which could've shut down the economy in a very dramatic way in Manitoba without access to 70 per cent of their energy. There was always a strong view that additional transmission had to be built for security of the energy supply in Manitoba. It's been a long and arduous process to get there, but it's necessary to do that. That will dramatically increase the energy security of Manitobans, and for the member to try and stop that project going ahead, which he's consistently done, would put the entire economy of Manitoba at risk.

It's projected to be a \$66-billion economy. It's been over \$60 billion for the last few years. It's more than doubled since we've been in office. And it's an economy that counts on reliable energy for their security at a affordable price, and that's what's being provided in Manitoba. And so the member needs to understand that now.

Now he tries to argue that that bipole's an unnecessary expense. There's no obvious in this conclusion that it is more expensive on one side versus the other. It could be much more difficult to build it on the east side. It could be impossible to build but it could be also extremely expensive to build it. It's much more difficult terrain that has never been developed before; a huge number of lakes, a huge number of difficult geographic features that have to be addressed if you're going to build over there. And there had been wide consultations done with the communities on the east side, well over 90 meetings, and they had expressed their desire not to have the bipole over there because of their desire to protect their traditional territory, the territory—their traditional territory where jurisprudence requires that they be consulted under section 35 of the Constitution.

So the bipole's being located in such a way that it protects that opportunity for a UNESCO world heritage site and the views of the folks on the east side. And also it gives greater predictability about

what the costs will be, be provided on the west side of the province. And, in addition, we do see long-term opportunities for additional sales of Manitoba hydro to the west of us. And the bipole could play a feature in that in the future. But right now, its fundamental purpose is to provide increased energy security to the Manitobans and the Manitoba economy.

So it's an important decision. Not necessarily an easy decision to be made but one that couldn't be delayed any longer after the '96-97 near catastrophe with the existing bipoles; the members didn't take any follow-up action on it. They didn't follow up and do anything to increase the energy security of the Manitoba economy and Manitoban residences and businesses and that's very unfortunate. It should have been addressed as soon as possible. The members were quite busy privatizing the telephone system at that time. That's where their major energy was going in terms of dealing with Crown corporations. We've seen the results of that in terms of rates, from among the lowest to among the highest.

We're continuing to find a solution for energy security in Manitoba with Manitoba Hydro while keeping rates among the lowest in North America. And we're pursuing that with governance decisions made by Manitoba Hydro. We're supporting that because of the need to get on with energy security in this province.

Mr. Pallister: I'd invite the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to table any evidence he has that the people on the east side of the lake were anxious to not have the hydro line. I'd encourage him to table that.

And I'd also remind him the Farlinger report was very clear that the route on the east side was far more cost effective than the route on the west, and he can reread the report and he'll be sure to do that I'm sure, and find that there. He'll also find out when he reads the report that the transmission efficacy of the lines is almost 25 per cent less effective on the west side than on the east. So, if you want reliable delivery of power, you put the line where the experts at Manitoba Hydro wanted it in the first place.

But the Premier's denial of his attempt to influence the line to be put on the west side through tornado alley, as a number of experts and analysts have called it, affecting the landowners throughout the route, of a 500-kilometre additional distance at a cost now estimated to be almost 1 and a half billion dollars more than it would have been on the east side, was a bizarre recommendation unsupportable

by analysis that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) claims he did. He instructed and directed Manitoba Hydro to pursue the west-side line, and he did that, knowing the costs would be considerably more.

But he went further than that. He organized and ran last campaign on a promise that Manitobans wouldn't pay a single penny for that decision, and we all know that those costs are now monumental for Manitoba Hydro ratepayers. So would the Premier like to add any further explanation as to how he would justify running an election campaign on the basis of a promise that the bipole west line wasn't going to cost Manitobans a single penny?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member is completely inaccurate in the statements he's making. The governance board of Manitoba Hydro made the decision where they wanted to locate the line. Minister—the Farlinger report said that the issues that needed to be addressed were larger than specific issues of where the hydro transmission line should go. There were larger issues that needed comment from the—at the public policy level and suggested that best practices mean the minister at the time, which was myself, should make their comments. But the final decision is still made by the board of Manitoba Hydro.

*(15:30)

The Farlinger report was commissioned by Manitoba Hydro itself to look at the wider issues, and they did that, and they looked at the associated risks with either option. And they came up with a recommendation that there needed to be some public policy input from the people responsible for public policy, which are the elected people that form the government. And those comments were provided as recommended by Farlinger. But the final decision was still made by the governance board of Manitoba Hydro, which is appropriate.

The location of the line was based on some of the findings of the Farlinger report, some of the pros and cons of the different locations and the risks attended to the reputation of Manitoba Hydro. There was a significant reputational risk for Manitoba Hydro, building in an area that might have put their reputation in a negative light on the international scene where they make the bulk of their export sales. And that could have devalued the product and might have resulted in them having less sales, so there was very significant commercial risk to Manitoba Hydro on pursuing an east line—an east-side option from a business point of view, not just a technical point of

view. But there is risks to the entire province of doing that at a time when the first—and the Farlinger report, as I recall—we can get a copy for the member if he doesn't have one—did identify the community consultation processes that occurred on the east side, and there were well over 90 meetings, and the communities weighed in.

There's always some contrary views, for sure, but overwhelmingly, the communities had concerns about locating the hydro line on that side of the province, and five of those First Nations communities had been working together to apply for a UNESCO World Heritage designation for a territory called Pimachiowin Aki, the land that gives life, which is a very significant, large landscape project in North America and, indeed, on a global basis. It has many benefits, not just for Manitoba, in terms of being a major storehouse for carbon, a major protected area for the southern boreal forest. There's some very significant benefits in protecting that area from development, unnecessary development. The hydro transmission line, on the other hand, had a great need to proceed to provide energy security for the Manitoba economy.

Now, the member suggests that the price is too high. If the existing transmission lines were not to function for a week, that would cost the Manitoba economy potentially over \$1 billion; two weeks, \$2 billion, and on the story goes. And so, Hydro, for many years, has been taking measures to increase the energy security and reliability of their product, and the transmission line was one of the projects that they believed was necessary to dramatically increase their energy security.

And we now know, and we've seen this, and the member, I'm sure, is aware of this as well, that we are seeing more serious, more frequent and more intense weather events in North America, including in the province of Manitoba. And increased energy security is an important dimension of adapting to those changing conditions in the weather. So it's important that the project proceed. Manitoba Hydro is proceeding on it. Apparently, 90 per cent of the rights-of-way required have been acquired and there have done several meetings with where the projected transmission line is, to accommodate the interests in the local community and have made—put on the table compensation at a level not heretofore seen when transmission lines have been built in areas where compensation is required. So all of those things are part of a long-term strategic plan for Manitoba and

Hydro to increase its energy security for the Manitoba economy and for Manitobans.

Mr. Pallister: Only 5 per cent less effective at delivering power, 500 kilometres longer with considerable hundreds of millions of dollars of additional cost—therefore, less reliability for more money. But I'm curious; the Premier (Mr. Selinger) speaks about protecting habitat, protecting natural habitat in a protected area and the UNESCO bid and so on. How is—how does building a transmission line threaten a UNESCO heritage bid when building roads on the east side doesn't? I'm curious about that.

Mr. Selinger: The member needs to read the Farlinger report. All of those issues were looked at there. It's been a few years now, but I think we should get some copies in the Legislature to make them available for the—for all of us.

The road was a project that was requested by the communities on the east side, an all-weather road. They—we had—what we had been seeing is that the winter roads had increasingly been less usable, as the result of weather conditions that did not allow them to function for as long a period of time. And so these communities were winding up in crisis situations where they were not able to get access to essential goods during the winter road season because they weren't able to be as open as long, and that was putting several of those communities at risk. So a long-term approach to building an all-weather road in as least intrusive a way as possible is what is being pursued over there to provide those communities with the same level of access to goods that all other communities enjoy in Manitoba that have access to roads. So this is part of a long-term prospect of providing some basic support to those communities that they've never seen before in their entire existence.

We did have some situations where emergency supplies had to be flown into those communities because the winter roads had to be shut down earlier than anticipated and put some of those communities at very serious risk of not being able to provide basic food, for example, to their citizens. And so the long-term approach of building an all-weather road is one to ensure those communities don't have those crisis situations in the future.

And we started to see some results of that. The road up to Bloodvein has been completed. The federal government came in with some cost-shared

funding to hook up the all-weather road directly to the community, and we're starting to see some of the benefits of that in terms of increased security of access to—for that community for goods and increased security of egress, the ability to get out of that community and get to services they needed for their members.

Mr. Pallister: Well, let's, for argument's sake, let's just set aside—or for not argument's sake, let's set aside the point that people in the communities didn't want a hydro line, as the Premier asserts, but did want a road, because there are quite a few people on the west side who would prefer not to have a hydro line and would like some roads. So I think we can agree that there is disagreement with either route among people along the route. I would think that's not an unfair observation.

But my question centred around the relative environmental impact of building a road versus a hydro line. My understanding is that there is far more environmental impact with road construction on the east side than there would be with a hydro line.

Setting aside also the possible efficacy of constructing jointly the two projects, which a number of people have observed might make eminent good sense, does—would the Premier like to comment on the possibility that the UNESCO heritage site did, may be adversely affected by the construction of the roads on the east side?

Mr. Selinger: The UNESCO World Heritage bid focuses on two outstanding universal values—the ecological features of the large landscape over there—33,000 square kilometres of boreal, virtually untouched by development, and the cultural characteristics of the community—communities that are a part of the application which also have universal outstanding value as Anishinaabe people, and some of whom have put some of those core values in writing as part of their history.

So there's some very strong values that are being put forward over there to protect that area and to designate it as UNESCO World Heritage Site. The access to goods and services is a feature of what's being developed over there; that's done in such a way to protect the integrity of the large boreal landscape. The transmission line, which would have gone down through the middle of that, would have put a greater risk on that landscape in terms of bisecting it, and the road is being built over the traditional routes of the

former winter road except for on the water surfaces, which were frozen in the winter time. But the road's being built in such a way that it can be used all year round, and it's being done with full partnership and support of First Nations in the area, which makes a very big difference on the acceptability of it as part of an application for UNESCO World Heritage Site.

And, recently, one of the First Nations communities over has made additional land available as part of the UNESCO application which is, in our view, strengthened the application.

Legislation was put in place to allow the communities to participate in the land use planning over there, and they've had strong input in building land use plans in their traditional territories, and those form part of the application.

Mr. Pallister: So is the Premier (Mr. Selinger) asserting that the construction of the road network won't have any detriment on the UNESCO heritage bid, and then, if so, what's his best guess on when we'll see that UNESCO heritage designation?

* (15:40)

Mr. Selinger: Winter road—or the all-weather road has the support of the First Nations who are part of the application process. They did not support the transmission line, and therein lies a major difference. And the road is being built in partnership with the First Nations over there so that they can see—have input into it, develop some skills around that, some employment opportunities, some business opportunities, which also is important feature of their future ability to continue to be sustainable cultures in that area.

So that's the major difference. The application, I believe, will be considered in the next—during the course of the next year with, presumably, some decision coming in the spring of '16, as I understand it—spring-summer of '16.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, what's coming in the spring-summer of '16?

Mr. Selinger: I believe the application will be considered and dealt with by the UNESCO procedures in the spring-summer of 2016.

Mr. Pallister: Thank the Premier for that.

Yes, this is a copy of the letter he's aware of—I don't think I'll bother tabling it—from

September 20th, 2007, a letter from himself to Mr. Vic Schroeder, chairman of Manitoba Hydro, which clearly states it's the policy of the Manitoba government, et cetera, et cetera, the Manitoba does not regard an east-side Bipole III as being consistent with their commitments and initiatives in recognizing the 'importance'—importance of the Bipole III initiative to improve system reliability in accommodating future northern generation. We would encourage the corporation to move ahead with required consultations and planning for an alternative Bipole III route.

So, pretty clearly, the position of the government was, as the Premier's enunciated it is his right to do, was made clear to the board of Hydro. Would it be the board of Manitoba Hydro that makes the decision? Is that how that works?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, that's what I put on the record.

The Farlinger report reviewed the options for the location of additional transmission called bipole and indicated that some of the questions at hand were large public policy questions beyond the scope of Manitoba Hydro and recommended that the government weigh in on that. That letter reflects the government's views on that, but the final decision is made by Manitoba Hydro as to the most appropriate way forward to provide additional energy security through transmission in Manitoba. And there were very significant risks for them proceeding on the east side, and they reviewed that, including all the comments that they received from the report they commissioned, the Farlinger report.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, yes, I think that'll wind up that piece.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I did want to ask the Premier a few questions just surrounding some questions that our leader had asked earlier and the critic for Finance as well with respect to the summary versus the core budget.

And I do recall several years ago that the NDP government made a change in reporting from core budget reporting to summary government—or budget reporting as a result of a recommendation, I believe, by the Auditor General. And it was many years ago, one of the times—one of the several times, I believe, that the NDP government opened up the balanced budget laws of the province and changed it. *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister).

Mr. Pallister: We have another staff member, and I'm not sure of the protocol for having a staff member come into the Chamber, if that would be all right?

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): They can just come in, yes.

Mr. Pallister: Is that okay?

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Yes.

The member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson).

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm wondering if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) could indicate what year did that originally take place with respect to the changes to the balanced budget legislation from core reporting to summary reporting?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get that information for the member as to the precise time that happened.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think the Premier would probably recall at least—maybe not the exact date when it happened, but the fact that it did happen. I know that there was significant debate in the Legislature over this issue. And, as I do recall, and perhaps the Premier can indicate what the reason was for the change from the reporting from core government reporting to summary reporting?

Mr. Selinger: At the time, the Auditor General of the day felt that there needed to be more focus on the summary budget in terms of information that was provided. It was in the budget, but it was at the back of it. And we understood that—where the Auditor General was coming from on that.

But there were significant concerns expressed by the opposition in that regard, quite frankly. They wanted a stronger focus on the core budget. They were concerned that the summary budget would be used in a way that would not give full transparency to the core budget, and what we've learned over the experience is that you do need information on both, and that allows for the entire reporting entity of government to be covered. And information on both is being provided.

But we also see during these fragile economic times that there is a real need to focus on ensuring core services are attended to in the way we budget. And that was the approach that the members of the

opposition always advocated. And so we're taking a look at how we can focus on core budgeting to ensure stability of services while still providing information on the summary budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I thank the Premier for that.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) has indicated in the media, and I believe in part of the Estimates process and in Finance as well, that there could be some changes back from where we are now, after the result of the changes of several years ago to the balanced budget legislation to focus on summary reporting rather than core. He has indicated more recently that there could be some further changes back to a focus of core reporting.

Can the Premier indicate whether or not that is the case?

Mr. Selinger: I want to be clear about the question from the member from Tuxedo. Is she asking are there other changes being contemplated?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the Minister of Finance has indicated that he would consider—or that your government is considering changing back to a focus of core reporting when it comes to the budget process. Is that the case?

Mr. Selinger: We're looking at all the options, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I've indicated on several occasions in the House during this Estimates process, and I believe—was the—I believe the member probably heard similar comments if she was in the Finance Estimates. We're looking at core reporting as—well, we are emphasizing core reporting to ensure that the priorities of Manitobans, in terms of things like health care and education, family services, are protected in terms of front-line service delivery and because those are areas that we have greater degree of fiscal control.

Certainly the summary budget items—entities in the summary budget will be reported on as well in the budget, and that is the case today. You can take a look at the budget and you can see that all of that information is there both on a core and a summary basis.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I thank the Premier for that.

And the Premier just spoke about the priorities of Manitobans. And, I guess, is he indicating for the Chamber today, and indeed for Manitobans, that when it comes to the priorities of Manitobans, does a move from core—or a summary focus to a core focus,

does that better serve the people of Manitoba in terms of the priorities of Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: Could. And I've explained this before—I don't believe the member was here in the Chamber—but, for example, if one of the entities in the summary budget reporting field were to have significant losses, for example, due to weather-related events, that that would count as a deficit even if they had large reserves to accommodate that. And so that might put additional pressure on cuts to core services.

The ability to report on a core budget would allow you to focus on those core services. You'd still have to report information that occurred in the larger entity, for example, one of the Crown corporations and make that information available and then look at what the remedies are to address that.

*(15:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Just before we go further, maybe the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) could introduce the new staff member for the Chamber.

Mrs. Stefanson: Oh, yes. This is Phil Joannou, who is responsible for the area of Finance and Jobs and the Economy.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Okay.

Mrs. Stefanson: Welcome, Phil.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Go on, member of Tuxedo.

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry I didn't do that sooner.

I do just want to ask—I mean it was indicated in an article on—just a couple of days ago, well, June 1st, I believe of 2015, and it was quoted in there that: The balanced budget law requires the summary budget, not just the core, to be balanced. But the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) said that the government will likely amend the law to switch to core budget later this spring.

Could the minister—or could the Premier (Mr. Selinger) indicate whether or not the Minister of Finance is accurately reflecting what will transpire this spring?

Mr. Selinger: I believe the minister would like to consult Manitobans on the alternatives available and some of the challenges, and then consider options

after that. But I don't believe that that would result in any legislation as early as this spring.

Mrs. Stefanson: Sorry, just to clarify, did the Premier indicate—did he say that this does not require any changes in legislation?

Mr. Selinger: No, I didn't say that. I said that the minister likely has intention to consult Manitobans about some of the issues related to core versus summary budgeting and the pros and cons of that. And then, after listening to and consulting with a broad section of Manitobans, we'll consider what alternatives after that which—it's unlikely that that process would be able to be completed this spring.

Mrs. Stefanson: So when will these consultations take place? Over what period of time? And what can Manitobans expect to see as—is it sort of this spring, the next couple of weeks, is it—what kind of a time frame are we looking at for this consultation process?

Mr. Selinger: That hasn't been finalized yet, but I do believe the minister will consider looking at doing that during the course of the summer or the fall, during that period.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, well, it did indicate here that he's looking at—he said he'll likely look to amend a law to switch to the core budget later this spring. So, if he's not doing the consultation until the summer or fall, then what kind of legislation is he contemplating on bringing in this spring?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I indicated that I don't believe the member would be in a position to consider legislative alternatives this spring because the idea would be to go out and talk to Manitobans first.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is this not something that would come up normally? And I know the Premier was the former minister of Finance for several years in this province, is this not something that would come up within your—the government consultation that took place prior to the budget coming out and being introduced in the Legislature?

Mr. Selinger: Yes. I believe the current round of consultations the minister undertook focused on how to continue to have a strong economy, and to ensure that there are opportunities generated for people to participate in that economy. That was the focus.

For all the obvious reasons there is a great deal of fragility out there in the Canadian economy now, indeed in the world economy forecasts continue to be revised downwards. I believe I saw a report today

from the OECD where they actually revised the forecast from the Canadian economy down again just as early as the last couple of days, as recently as the last couple of days.

So I think the minister was focused on ensuring that we had a budget that was positive for the economy, positive for job creation in Manitoba and kept us in the forefront of being able to address economic growth issues relative to other jurisdictions across the country. I think that's where his—I know that's where his focus was because that's the kind of budget that was delivered.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the Premier (Mr. Selinger) for that and I guess I would just ask, was there something that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) indicated to him that came out of those consultations that indicated that there might have to be a shift towards this kind of a direction, where he's contemplating what is a major change to legislation?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I just—for the record, I think the member was asking: The first year of summary budgeting, I believed—the new treatment of summary budgets occurred for the first time, I believe, in 2008.

Mrs. Stefanson: And now could the Premier answer this question, then—and just was there something that came out of those consultations that would lead in this direction to what could be a fairly significant change to the balanced budget legislation?

Mr. Selinger: I'll check with the minister on that, but it's instructive that the summary budgeting—the increased reporting based on a summary basis started in 2008, because the member will recall that it was in 2008-2009 that the great recession started to take hold on a global basis and that all governments, if they had balanced budget legislation, changed their rules on that—changed their legislation on that in order to address the challenge of a recession and to ensure that the recession did not turn into a depression. And that was governments of all political stripes, not only in Canada but around the world.

The federal government didn't have balanced budget legislation at the time, but they had been very clearly on the record as saying they would never run a deficit, and they then decided that they had to change their views on that and run a deficit. They collaborated with the provinces on that to ensure that Canada could be in a position to stimulate the economy during a period when international credit markets had dried up and rates had gone through the roof and people had stopped investing.

And there was a very serious crisis going on there, so all governments starting changing their balanced budget legislation where they had it or changing their commitments to balanced budgets where they had made them in order to deal with the realities in front of them. And many governments are still dealing with that today.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I thank the Premier for that, and, yes, I do recall. Yes, it was back in 2008 where the changes were made with respect to the budgeting process, and that was made in the legislation at the time, and the Premier's indicating that's because of the worldwide economic recession that took place at that time. And I know that there were some changes that were made where, as long as we're in this economic recovery period, that the government could run a deficit, and so, I'm just wondering. Those were the changes that were made at the time at a time when we're looking at, you know, some difficult times, I guess, and the changes that were made were made from the core to the summary budgeting process. What would be the indication? Is the indication now that we are—we have recovered from that and that's why we would be moving back towards the core budgeting process away from the summary process?

Mr. Selinger: I want to make sure I understand the member correctly. Is she asking if—have we recovered from the great recession?

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm actually just trying to find out why, all of a sudden, the Premier's—they're considering moving back towards the core government financing away from the summary, when the reason for going there back in 2008 and '09 was because of the recession.

Mr. Selinger: The reason—that was not the reason we went to summary budgeting in 2008 and had more reporting on that. The reason we went to summary budgeting in 2008 is because the Auditor General wanted a greater emphasis on the summary budget. Even though information had been reported, it was sort of in the—deep back in the three volumes of the Public Accounts and wasn't actually put in the budget every year—what was going to happen on a summary-budget basis. This budget shows what will happen on a summary-budget basis, and every budget since 2008 has done that. So that was the stimulus for the change at the time.

Members opposite were very concerned about that and didn't like moving off the core budgeting approach for the reasons I'm enunciating today. They

wanted us to stay focused on the core budget, because that's where we could have the greatest ability to manage expenditure and revenues.

* (16:00)

And so we've seen, since the '08-09 recession, a slower recovery than anticipated on a global basis. We've seen new forms of economic fragility out there, unanticipated in '08-09, including the dramatic decline in carbon-based fuel prices across the planet. We've seen a slowing down of what used to be called the emerging-market economies such as China. There's slowdowns occurring there and in other places around the world such as in South America, places like Brazil and even in African countries as well. And, certainly, there's been real challenges in Europe to get economic growth going again, and a real challenge there to see the economy start growing again.

We've been relatively fortunate as a country in that our economy has weathered and our country has weathered the crisis fairly well. Our banking system had weathered the crisis fairly well. But we also see that there are new risks. The first quarter of this year has had growth levels far lower than what was predicted. The Bank of Canada made a pre-emptive move to lower the interest rates, the Bank of Canada rate. And so all of those things have occurred, and so we're still all working to find the right balance between fiscal prudence and an emphasis on economic growth. We've had good results with our economic growth strategy in Manitoba, and we, in the past 10 years, in—since the recession, and the forecasts indicate that we're going to have good results going forward.

So we want to continue to do that, and that's the rationale for what we're doing. The core budget allows us to focus on protecting core services for Manitobans, and that's something that we want to do. So, for all of the obvious reasons, we want to ensure that health care is there for people that need it; education opportunities are there for needed; support for families is there when it's needed; and we continue to invest in infrastructure. And the member and I both know that that's the focus of most of the questions from the members of the opposition on those priorities.

Mrs. Stefanson: So the Premier (Mr. Selinger) indicated that the reason for the changes back in 2008 to the balanced budget legislation was as a result of recommendations made by the Auditor General. Could the Premier indicate, given that they

are going to go through an extensive, I guess, consultation process over the course of the next several months, and we're not sure how long that will take, but has there been an indication or recommendation by the Auditor General to change back to the way things were prior to this?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not aware of a recommendation from the Auditor General to do that. We know the Auditor General wants information on both, on the summary basis. We're committing to providing that, but, no, we—I'm not aware of any specific recommendation by the Auditor General to do that.

Mrs. Stefanson: So could the Premier indicate what the reasons are that they're—that this government is even contemplating that, and why are they going to spend millions of dollars going through a consultation process? What triggered this?

Mr. Selinger: First of all, the notion of spending millions of dollars on doing this—not going to happen. The minister does regular budget consultations on an annual basis for a far more modest budget than that—single-digit thousands, I would think, if that. But the reasons, and I think the member may have heard me enunciate them once or twice already, is that we want to ensure we protect core services and focus on that during a time of economic fragility and make sure that we can strike the right balance between providing core services at the same time as we continue to have resources in place to grow the economy and make sure people get an opportunity to get educated so they can have those good jobs in the economy and at the same time continue to pay attention to affordability and fiscal prudence issues.

It's a fine balancing act. Different people are taking different approaches. Some jurisdictions are putting a gigantic emphasis on getting to balance as quickly as possible. There are significant consequences for that in terms of loss of employment opportunities, and there are some warning signs coming out that that pursuit of balanced budgets that dramatically may affect economic growth in those jurisdictions, and international agencies are telling us to be appropriately balanced in that and not to overdo it one way or the other. So we're trying to strike the right balance. We know that we're getting good results on economic growth relative to our peers across the country, and—but we also know that the overall growth forecasts for this year have been moving downward by all the major international agencies and forecasters. So we would like to

continue to have good strong growth prospects in Manitoba, and we're ensuring we put investments in place to do that.

Mrs. Stefanson: Have there been changes to the public accounting rules nationally that could, perhaps, trigger this? Is that a reason why this is maybe taking place?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not sure there's any rules that may have been changed that had a dramatic impact on this. As I said, there have been changes in rules, whether they're appropriate or not, probably another discussion. But the reality is, is, as I've said to the member I think at least more than once now, the real focus is to try and make sure that we can say focused on core services that people want.

Mrs. Stefanson: Now the Premier (Mr. Selinger) talks about other jurisdictions. Are there other jurisdictions that are moving back towards core budgeting practices?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check on that. I think most jurisdictions do provide information in their budgets on summary as well as core budgeting. But I don't believe that most jurisdictions have the type of balanced budget legislation we have. I think, in most cases, it's quite a bit more flexible.

Mrs. Stefanson: So could the Premier just indicate again—I mean, I'm just trying to figure out. I know in the budget books from last fiscal year, 2013-14, under Manitoba's balanced financial strategy, underneath that in the revenue section, it said, you know, it indicated and separated out the core government versus other reporting entities. And, as of this budget this year, there's just the Core Government Balanced Financial Strategy. Could the Premier just indicate why the change all of a sudden?

Mr. Selinger: For the same reasons I've already enunciated: to put the focus on the core budget to ensure that those services are paid attention to and how we manage our resources.

Mrs. Stefanson: But, I mean, I think the Premier also indicated a want and a willingness to be more transparent for Manitobans, and I believe that that was the reasons that were originally given as well towards moving towards a summary budgeting process, and with the core actually indicated in there as well as other reporting entities. And, since that legislation changed, that has been the practice of this government, but it has suddenly changed. So, you know, the core was already indicated before. It could be indicated this time, but what is absent is the

summary reporting. And so, when things are absent, that is less transparent. So why is the government moving in the way of being less transparent and accountable for Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: As I've said earlier, we are reporting on the summary budget for this year. It is in the budget. I saw it on page 4 and—page 4 and 5 of the budget papers. So it's there both on an operating and a summary budget basis. And all the information is provided there. But the focus on the core is, as I've repeated on more than once, to protect those core services.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and I guess, you know, you got to get past page 4, because page 4 indicates just what the budget says for this next fiscal year. But, in every other budget since the legislation was changed back in 2008, there was five-year forecast that was given which indicated what the summary would be as well as the projected summaries, as well as the projected core. And that is what's missing from this budget—from these budget papers this year and differs from last year. And I refer the Premier to page 10 of the budget books, which is the Core Government Balanced Financial Strategy, whereas the last year's budget indicated that it was Manitoba's balanced financial strategy, which, again, differentiated between core governments forecasts as well as other reporting 'entities', which is the summary budgeting process. So why the change?

Mr. Selinger: For all the reasons I've just indicated. Look, it's true. The budget on page 10 says, Core Government Balanced Financial Strategy. We're focusing on that to protect those core services. We are also reporting on the Summary budget on page 4 and that hadn't been done before. And, prior to 2008, just the core budget was presented. The summary budget was usually buried in the Public Accounts. It was there, but it wasn't easily gotten to.

* (16:10)

So this is a higher standard of reporting for the budget this year. But, on the summary forecast, I've said, and I don't think the member was here earlier when I said it, but there could be, for example, things that happen in the larger reporting entity, for example, with one of the Crowns where an unforeseen weather event could result in dramatic losses in one of the Crown corporations, which then would put pressure on a summary basis on core budgets. And we didn't want to be in a position where we're putting our core services at risk.

Certainly, that information has to be provided. It has to be responded to. You could actually have a situation where there could—a Crown entity could be running a deficit on an annual basis but have reserves that could accommodate that, but it would still be recorded as a deficit. And, if it was, that can put additional pressure, perhaps from members of the opposition, to want to balance on the summary basis, which could put core services at risk.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, I guess, can the Premier (Mr. Selinger) just indicate, I mean, clearly, back in 2008—and we'll get some quotes from back then—but it was indicated at the time, as I recall, that they are moving in this direction because, in the way of reporting, because this is due to changes in public accounting methods, and the Auditor General was making a recommendation to move in this direction. The government also said at a time that they wanted to be more transparent and accountable to Manitobans. There's many indications of that in the past.

Of course, you know, we know that, at the time, the Crown corporations were perhaps doing better than they are now. Is that the reason why all of a sudden, because from 2008, when maybe those Crown corporations were doing better and they would make the core finances look better, or the overall finances of the Province look better with respect to the reporting—is that why, perhaps, he's considering changing, because things have changed within those Crown corporations, where perhaps they're not doing as well and will have a negative impact on the budget?

Mr. Selinger: That—as I said, there could be events that transpire in the larger reporting entity that resulted in—I just gave an example, for example, auto rates—auto insurance, where they could—and we saw this a couple years ago, I believe, where they ran an operating deficit because of some very severe weather events which drove up the claims for that period of time. And, even though they had reserves that could accommodate the operating losses, it still was recorded as an operating deficit in that entity and was reflected in the summary budget.

So those kinds of situations, during this fragile economic recovery, and with the unforeseen, and, as I said earlier, more intense weather events that are occurring, more intense, more severe and more frequent weather events that we're seeing in North America, could put additional risk on core services.

So one of the things we're considering is focusing on the core budget in order to ensure those core services are provided while still providing information on a summary budget basis as to what's occurring with the Crown corporations that are outside of the core budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could the Premier indicate, are the health authorities part of the core budget reporting within the budget, the core finance?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, because it says, on page 11, the summary budget brings together the results for not just core government, but also—okay, the government's all—but it says, the government business enterprises, such as Manitoba Hydro, MPI, et cetera, but it says all health authorities there, which would indicate to me that perhaps they're not part of the core government? *[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Member—the member—sorry, it's just that I have to recognize you, sorry.

The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: On the member's previous question, the transfers for the health authorities are part of the core budget. I'm going to verify whether the health authorities themselves are part of the core budget. But, certainly, the money that's put in the Health budget is part of the core budget. And that money is available to the health authorities.

Mrs. Stefanson: So how is the money reported from the health authorities, then, is that—is it, like, the net number that is reported, or are revenues and expenses reported separately for the health authorities within the core budget?

Mr. Selinger: Another question, but I'm going to get some further information—

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): Sorry. The honourable First Minister again, sorry.

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to get some further information for the honourable member to be sure that we're completely accurate on that point, and the Blackberrys are humming as we speak.

Mrs. Stefanson: I guess just further to that, before I hand the floor over to my colleague from River Heights, I would just like to know what happens in the event that the health authorities, say, for example, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, runs a deficit. What happens? Where is that reported? Is it

reported in the core budget or in the summary budget?

Mr. Selinger: The inquiries that we're making to verify the actual treatment of that in terms of accounting, we'll get that for the member.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well I appreciate that from the minister—or from the Premier (Mr. Selinger), and maybe if he could just, when he does get that, if he could just put that on the record, that would be great.

And I think in the interest of time, I'll just hand it over to my colleague from River Heights right now. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes. I just wonder, first of all, if the Premier is aware of an individual who's on a hunger strike, I think it's the 31st day, at the corner of Grant and Kenaston. His name is Mr. Michal Vancura, and I just wondered if the Premier was aware of this individual and—

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: Could the member repeat his comments? His voice was hard to hear the first time around.

Mr. Gerrard: Sure. I just wondered if the Premier was aware of an individual who is on a hunger strike at the corner of Grant and Kenaston whose name is Michal Vancura.

Mr. Selinger: I don't have specific information on that.

Mr. Gerrard: My understanding is that the individual is a—he's a father to a son whose name is David Vancura who has been concerned about treatment at the University of Manitoba, and he has exhausted normal routes, that there is a court case launched between the Vancuras and the University of Manitoba, I believe, but, you know, in view of the fact that you have somebody who is on a hunger strike and who is getting a lot thinner and weaker, you know, would the Premier ever consider having somebody act as a mediator to see if this could be resolved in some way?

Mr. Selinger: I would appreciate it if the member would provide me any information he has with respect to this situation and the case and we can discuss it with our Minister of Advanced Education and see what's possible there.

Mr. Gerrard: I will endeavour to do that and get that to you, probably in the morning.

On April the 1st, the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) announced the policy of the government to have no children in hotels by June the 1st.

When was the Premier aware of the nature of this announcement? Did the Premier know that the announcement was going to be made to terminate the use of children in hotels by June the 1st before the announcement was made?

Mr. Selinger: There'd been discussions for quite a period of time about winding down hotel use for children in care. The specific dates emerged as the minister worked through the issues. I think there's that one specific issue that triggered a decision to firm up a date, but there had been continuing work being done to 'reluce'—reduce the reliance on hotels, particularly in downtown Winnipeg, as a form of housing for children in care. And then, when a specific incident occurred, the minister felt that she needed to press forward with a harder deadline to address that issue.

* (16:20)

Mr. Gerrard: The question I have is, you know, whether the Premier or the Premier's Office was notified ahead of time of the timing of the announcement, that it would be related to ending hotel use by June the 1st.

Mr. Selinger: Minister was working on this issue. It was widely understood that we had always wanted to reduce the reliance on hotels for housing for children in care. And, as the member will recall, there was a specific incident where a child had left a downtown hotel and had been seriously injured, and that was another trigger to continue to accelerate the desire of the department to work with the authorities and the child-welfare agencies to reduce reliance upon hotels in Winnipeg. And all of that was part of an ongoing process to not have children in hotels that were in care.

So this had been an issue that had been on the radar for a while at all levels of the child-welfare system, and there was a desire to reduce that reliance, and the minister was working on it. We knew, in general terms, that she wanted to do that. The minister announced that she would like to do it. We knew she was working towards that announcement and genuinely were supportive of the direction the minister was taking, because had it been all of our views—and I'm sure the member from

River Heights would agree with that, that we should try to reduce reliance on hotels as much as possible.

There had been many efforts and, with a good deal of success, to increase the number of foster parents we have in Manitoba over the years, and we'd put a lot of resources into that, to increase facilities for the treatment of children with complex needs. There'd been more resources being put into supporting children after they'd reached the age of majority to continue to function and have supports in the community, so all of these were part of the ongoing efforts to reduce the number of children in care, but, if they had to be in care, to be given proper supports.

Mr. Gerrard: I ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger), was it his impression when the initial announcement was made that this was going to apply to all of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: I'm—efforts had started as early as December to increase more capacity, but they'd been ongoing for years. I—the number of increased foster parents that we've got in Manitoba had dramatically gone up. It was a real contrast to what we'd seen before where foster parents were—had their per diems cut and the Foster Parents Association had been eliminated in terms of the—it had its financial support eliminated from it. And I remember those days.

But there had been going—ongoing efforts to accelerate the number of staff that were available to provide support to children in care, and the number of emergency beds had been increased by over 90. In terms of rural Manitoba, the minister was always seeking further information about what the situation was out there, and, in discussion with the authorities as I understood it, and I listened to the minister even as early as today, had—they'd worked with those authorities to make sure that they had an idea of what was going on out there and what solutions were in hand. And I know that in the rural circumstances that the authorities were working with some of the non-statutory agencies in the community to provide alternatives to children being in hotels, and they were working together at the community level to find an approach that would reduce the number of children in hotels and provide other facilities for them.

Mr. Gerrard: I would ask the Premier when he was first made aware that the ending of hotel use by June the 1st was to be only for Winnipeg and that the rural hotel use was to be extended until December the 1st.

Mr. Selinger: The focus had always been on addressing the issue in downtown Winnipeg where it

seemed that children were at the greatest risk of leaving those facilities and getting involved in circumstances where there was a high risk to their well-being and, indeed, their lives. So that, obviously, was the focus. But, as the department made contact with rural agencies and authorities, they could see that there was a problem there, and the rural agencies and authorities said they weren't in a position where they could ensure that no children would be in hotels as early as early as June 1st and asked for more time to address that but also indicated that they were eager and keen to address it. And I can recall being in one community on some other business related to announcements we were making on increasing investments in skills shops in the schools where I met with a non-statutory agency, and this is before a lot of this became clear that there were some challenges in rural areas. They were already looking at a proactive approach to reduce the number of kids in hotels by going out and seeking financing for a house, a facility where they could look after these children. They knew a lot of these children already because they were providing after-school programming and Lighthouse programming to them.

So people had been working on it at the community level, and the department was simply responding to their level of readiness to ensure that they could have alternatives to children being in hotels.

Mr. Gerrard: Let me move to another area. The Premier has said on several occasions that there will be no subsidy in the sale of electricity to the Energy East Pipeline. So I'm trying to understand, because the Premier himself has used the word subsidy, precisely what he means by the word subsidy.

Would the Premier consider it a subsidy if the electricity was sold at a price lower than the cost to produce the electricity, for example, or does the Premier have a different definition of a subsidy?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I mean hydro—we take advice from Hydro on what they consider to be subsidized energy. Cost of producing the energy is that the levelized cost across the whole system is that the cost based on the newest and latest facility that's come online. The point is this: we do not believe that we should be subsidizing any hydroelectricity which may be asked for by a pipeline if and when it is approved to go through Manitoba by the National Energy Board. I don't think we should jump to conclusions about that.

We are going to make a full intervention, full intervenor status. I know the person who's acting as deputy Chair at this Estimates committee today wants to make sure that the area that he represents is well protected—and I think all of our communities—because we want to protect water; we want to protect communities in terms of safety and want to protect the overall environment.

With respect to—if that project were to be approved and if they had decided to apply to have additional hydro to move that—their products through Manitoba, we have said that we would not be subsidizing that, and, obviously, we would work closely with Manitoba Hydro to ensure that didn't happen.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the issues that's current related to hydro is the regulation of Lake Winnipeg, and there's hearings ongoing at the moment, and just wanted to chat with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and ask him what he—what is happening and what is going to happen in terms of Aboriginal consultation related to Lake Winnipeg regulation.

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to get a note on the specifics. Consultation will certainly occur, but if he's asking for specific information about what the—what's on the ground in terms of planning, I don't have that information in front of me. But there is an obligation for the Crown to consult and I'll—certainly for Manitoba Hydro to consult as well.

Mr. Gerrard: On the—back to the—Energy's pipeline, I would like the Premier to clarify, if he would, why he's not going to produce or have a Clean Environment Commission hearing into the Energy's pipeline.

Mr. Selinger: The jurisdiction for the pipeline is under the federal government, and they conduct hearings through the National Energy Board and people can apply for intervenor status there, which is what we've done, and other parties in Manitoba that have concerns can also apply for intervenor status to make their case directly to the body that's making the decision.

Mr. Gerrard: But the National Energy Board will not consider, for instance, climate change impacts or may not consider adequately, you know, Manitoba's situation, and I—it would seem to me it would be logical to have a Clean Environment Commission hearing as Quebec and Ontario are having their own hearings just to make sure that they have heard adequately for the position of the people in Ontario

and they're able to put that forward, you know, based on what's been actually told to them by people in Ontario and Quebec.

* (16:30)

Mr. Selinger: And, again, we've said we want to make sure that water is protected, communities are safe and the environment's protected, and we'll be compiling our concerns in that regard and making those directly known to the regulator.

We also have obligations to deal with climate change issues in Manitoba, and we're preparing the alternative ways we can address that, and the member knows of what we've accomplished. He's raised it. We've—even though the economy's grown by 31 per cent between 2000 and 2012, we've been able to keep emissions flat, and we're looking for new ways to ensure that we can address the climate change issue. And, indeed, governments all across the country are willing to address that. So climate change policy is—and programming has to be put in place by governments, and we're always interested in people's ideas on how to do that. But, with respect to a specific pipeline, under federal jurisdiction, they have their own hearings, they have their own intervenor application process. And we're encouraging anybody that wants to make their concerns felt on that specific issue to put them in front of the regulatory body that is, in fact, addressing that issue.

Mr. Gerrard: My understanding is that the time period for applications to the National Energy Board may have closed, but that would prevent people from Manitoba who have not already put forward their application to present from doing so. I haven't confirmed that, but that was my understanding.

Let me move on to concerns about homes for individuals with 'electal'—intellectual disabilities. There's been quite a lot of concern over some time, in fact, going back quite a number of years about the funding for services for adults with intellectual disabilities, I think, particularly in rural areas. There's been a home in Boissevain which is closed, and other homes are suggesting that their future is uncertain, because, you know, the funding is such that they are paying workers approximately \$12 an hour and, you know, they're having a lot of trouble hiring trained staff, particularly, you know, in today's world. And, you know, what are the Premier's for dealing with this situation, which is, you know, continued for quite a while?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, there is a fund that we put in place to increase wages for people working in facilities that care for people with intellectual disabilities to increase their wages. And we'd like to see that fund roll out in such a way that we can retain good people. It's important work, and we'd like them to be able to get more support for the work they do in terms of wages.

Mr. Gerrard: When did that fund start, and why was it—not seem to be effective in situations, for instance, of a home in Boissevain?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to get the specifics of what's going on down there, but the fund is—has been in place for, oh, I'd have to check the exact number of months, but for several months now. I believe it was launched—I'd have to check. I believe it was launched probably in the fall of this year—\$6 million over three years, and it's there to address salary issues with respect to people looking after persons with disabilities in group home settings.

Mr. Gerrard: There are also a lot of concerns about the situation of paramedics in rural Manitoba. There's an emergency measures report which, you know, has been, you know, even being generous, slow to implement. The concern about, you know, the paramedic services, their pay, you know, their working conditions have certainly been laid out pretty clearly. Just what's the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) plans with—in this respect?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'll get specific information for the member, but the member will know that we've gone from about 280 paramedics working full-time in Manitoba that represented only about 20 per cent of the service being offered to around 1,500 paramedics being employed full-time in Manitoba, providing in the order of 70 per cent of the services being offered.

So there's been very dramatic investments in paramedics on a full-time basis in the province and there's been very significant investments in the call centre or the dispatch centre available to rural Manitoba, much better equipment, much more staffing, better technology, and very significant investments as well in the ambulances themselves that have been purchased and made available to provide the service. And those ambulances are equipped well with GPS, et cetera, so they can be located strategically to address where high-risk populations might be, for example, during a flood like we had in southwestern Manitoba last summer. We were able to position ambulances out there in

case something went wrong to be available to be—to that population group. So there's lots that's gone on to increasing paramedic service all throughout Manitoba but in particular rural and northern Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, you know, there were quite a number of paramedics who came in and, you know, talked to many of the MLAs, certainly expressed a lot of concerns about the working conditions that people having to work for long hours. There was, as I recall, probably a couple of years ago, an incident where paramedics had been on call a particularly long time, and it was a car accident which may have been because of one of the paramedics, or the paramedics, in the car were tired. You know, we want to make sure that there is safety issues which are addressed, that there's optimum care for people in rural Manitoba. Just seems to be enough attention to this issue that I would have thought that the Premier might have a little bit more in terms of detail and response.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'm getting information for the member on that but I can tell him that there have been very dramatic investments in paramedic services in Manitoba. And we will continue to make investments in those services because they're vital for the ability to respond rapidly to people in urgent crisis in risk of their health. So we will work with them to do that and we've made, as I indicated earlier, very, very dramatic investments in paramedic services and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Gerrard: There's, you know, a concern that a lot of the recommendations for the emergency medical services situation have not been implemented. And paramedics came in and told us that really there was only one that's been fully implemented. The Premier has suggested that the number is higher than that, maybe 18 or 19 have been or may be in the process of being implemented, I think, was the Premier's word. But, you know, that's—for an emergency service which is rather urgent nature, it seems to me that it would be fairly important to be, you know, acting on recommendations fairly quickly in this kind of circumstance.

So I just feel that—will the Premier, for example, you know, get a report on, you know, what's been implemented so that he can then move forward and, you know, have a more accurate judgment of, maybe an independent judgment of, what's been done?

Mr. Selinger: Well, I can provide some additional information to the member from River Heights. Last year we announced 25 additional rural paramedic positions. We also announced the creation of a new 16-seat advanced-care paramedic program at Red River College which will launch in 2015 and mean more opportunities for rural paramedics to upgrade their skills. There's about 210 primary-care paramedics trained in Manitoba each year through Red River College and four other institutions. There has been a province-wide EMS system review to build on the positive transformation of EMS care in Manitoba over the last 15 years. Movement is going forward on the recommendations of the EMS review as part of a 10-year plan to create a new era in EMS in Manitoba.

*(16:40)

In 2012, in direct response to paramedic concerns, paramedics were brought together with unions and regional authorities to work together to address issues of paramedic fatigue in Manitoba. Recommendations were brought forward to address that, specifically on how patients can better be transported between rural and urban areas which could cut down on some of the fatigue and keep paramedics in the community. And also the Southern Air Ambulance Inter-Facility Transport Program was put in place, which saves thousands of kilometres of highway travel, and that promise was put forward in the last election and has been delivered on.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the, you know, measures in addition to dealing with, you know, paramedics working in PAM conditions that was said to be done within the first year, was the request for proposals for basic air ambulance service. This is not the Lifeflight. This is not the air-STARS air helicopter, but it is a service which is contracted out to a number of different aviation companies to provide air ambulance service. And it was recommended that there be a request for proposals so that this could be, you know, standardized and we'll move forward, improved. And I'm just wondering why that particular item has not moved forward in the two years since the EMS report.

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to have to get some information for the member on that. But I do have some information to report to him on the wages for community living support workers. There was a \$6-million program put in place over three years to increase wages for support workers who care for adults with intellectual disabilities. The funding is

intended to help agencies retain workers, especially smaller rural agencies that have a hard time offering competitive pay. Many of them already are paying extra to retain workers. The additional money has been put into specific agencies, for example, in the Westman-Parkland area, an additional \$2.3 million to increase support out there, where some of the concerns were being expressed. Funding to care for adults with intellectual disabilities has increased by fourfold—400 per cent since 1999.

So those are some of the things that we've been doing to address the issue of retaining trained workers for persons caring for people—adults with intellectual disabilities.

Mr. Gerrard: While we're waiting for more information on the request for proposals on the basic air ambulance service, let me move on to the issue of murdered and missing women which was highlighted in the Truth and Reconciliation report once again. The Premier's (Mr. Selinger) had an option to call an inquiry within Manitoba and to move things forward for women in Manitoba, for people in Manitoba.

Why did the Premier decide not to call an inquiry in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: We're supporting a national inquiry and have been in the forefront in doing that, and we're actually, as a result of the conference that was held in Ottawa on missing and murdered indigenous women and children, we made a commitment in this province to bring our justice officials together both on the prosecution side as well as the police on the investigation side and also the victim support services that are offered. And they will be meeting this fall in Manitoba to look at how they can ensure that they have the best possible practices when it comes to investigations, prosecutions and support services. This issue is one that affects missing and murdered indigenous women and children and their families all across the county, and we think that that's where the focus has to be. A lot of these issues sometimes go across our borders. Some of the potential perpetrators have been found in more than one jurisdiction, but we do support it at a pan-Canadian level, and we will continue to provide support to families that have lost loved ones through—as missing and murdered indigenous women and children. And we have—we're quite unique in Manitoba in having a person on staff in the Province that provides support to those families and continues to provide support on a regular basis, as well as advocacy on the larger issues.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I mean, it seems to me that it's been known for some time that the federal government has been rather intransigent on this file, that the federal government has said no and no and no for many times. But, you know, Manitoba's had a particularly high number of missing and murdered women, and given the importance of this file, it would have been—certainly accelerated the process if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) had begun an inquiry here in Manitoba, which potentially could then have merged with inquiries elsewhere.

So I still—you know, the Premier has made the case that—for a national inquiry, but he's not really made a case for not acting in Manitoba. So I give the Premier another chance to provide, you know, an explanation for not acting here, because it's resulted in a considerable delay.

Mr. Selinger: Our—the people we work with—the indigenous—members of the indigenous community support the—national inquiry. I think, in this instance, we have at least two federal political parties that seem to be interested in supporting a national inquiry, and so it's important that we keep the focus there because of the national significance and implications for this issue.

And, in the meantime, we're doing things in Manitoba to prevent missing and murdered women events from occurring, because they're tragic and painful. We've got resources in place to prevent the sexual exploitation of children through Tracia's Trust: Manitoba's Sexual Exploitation Strategy. We've created The Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking Act, the first provincial law to target the property of human traffickers for the benefit of victims. So, we go after that. We support Ka Ni Kanichihk's Medicine Bear Counselling, Support and Elder Services program that supports family members of missing and murdered women. Even in the face of federal cutbacks, we found a way to increase support there.

We've hosted the Wiping Away the Tears Gatherings in Manitoba. Last year over 120 community members participated in a variety of activities aimed at healing, recovery and resiliency. We've supported, around the issue of awareness, the What if she was your daughter? public awareness campaign, featuring 10 of Manitoba's missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and we hosted a provincial summit on missing and murdered indigenous women and children, girls that brought together representatives to share information.

At the national round table, the federal government was there. They've participated and heard from people, families, provincial representatives, representatives of indigenous organizations across the country, and the round table was, in our view, successful in building awareness on a national level or a pan-Canadian level. Did get more awareness, did identify ways that we can increase prevention, community safety, policing measures, as well as support for families.

* (16:50)

And so Manitoba's taking a lead on following up on that and that's one of the forms of leadership we're providing. We volunteered rapidly to host policing officials, justice officials, in terms of prosecution, and victim support service agencies and workers to come together to look at how they could adopt best practices in their various jurisdictions. And so this helps the whole country cope with this issue, and we're pleased to be a part of that. We're also looking at other ways that we can support families that have been the victim of missing and murdered indigenous women and children and girls throughout the country.

So we provide services that, in many cases, are looked at across the country as the leading-edge approach to it, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, you know, as we have pointed out in the last several weeks, there have been big increases in children reported missing from group homes, and I wonder if the Premier has, you know, done an investigation or review of why this is happening and, you know, what needs to be done to change this.

Mr. Selinger: I have had discussions with our minister on this matter. The minister is very aware of some of the risks attendant on people, young people in care fleeing facilities that they're being looked after in. In some cases the numbers are one individual maybe not staying with that facility on more than one occasion. So you could have a situation where that's occurring frequently with one or two individuals or maybe a small subset of individuals.

There is a lot of effort that goes into making sure those individuals are identified and returned safely to facilities as quickly as possible. The StreetReach program is unique in the country in providing that service. We fund that agency to do that and they have contact with people in care that have gone

missing or have gone away from their facilities, and have been successful in returning many of them to the facilities.

So we do have resources in place to address that and we want to do that in a way the supports—and the way we address that, we want to do that in such a way that it doesn't traumatize children any further in the practices that we adopt to deal with that.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean, just as in many other areas, if there is, you know, a relatively small number of children who are fleeing repeatedly, that clearly, you know, one approach would be to look at what's happening with those individuals and to address the situation of those individuals. You know, the numbers suggest that it's, you know, it's probably more than a few, even though a few may be disproportionately giving rise to the problem.

So it would seem to me that, you know, this is an area which needs to be, you know, a focus and which could have been, for example, a part of a provincial inquiry into missing and murdered women because, you know, these are a group of children who are being reported missing and couldn't be ending up, some of them, as vulnerable children as missing or murdered if we are not careful.

Let me move on to ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger) a couple of questions about The Forks. It's been brought to my attention that at The Forks Market there have been six places where there are stalls for shops which have been empty for some time. Two of them, my understanding, empty for three years, and there are concerns about, you know, what's happening there and what the plans are. There was an announcement recently and—but there doesn't seem to have been much in the way of any new construction or, you know, detailed plans put forward, and I wonder what the Premier is aware of in terms of this situation and what his comments are.

Mr. Selinger: I don't have any specific insider information on that, but as a person that goes to The Forks on a pretty regular basis to buy bread products, I do see what's going on there. And there is redevelopment going on there with respect to food court services that are being offered. And there does seem to be some activity going on and they look—it looks to me like they're trying to reimagine the types of facilities that are there and attract more people with new venues for food experience there. And I think everybody's anxiously awaiting to see what's on offer as we go forward.

The Forks is one of the most popular venues in Manitoba for Manitobans, and for tourists, for that matter, to visit. It has millions of visitors every year. That's accelerating with the recent opening of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. And, when I talk to the merchants there, they say business has been improving. And so we'll see what's being developed there.

But I don't have any specific information as to where they're at, what stage they're at, how rapidly they're going to open, but I do know that they've put up some barriers as they're doing renovations there for the new operators of food services in The Forks marketplace.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, you know, one of the concerns has been the high turnover of individuals who are looking after the vegetable area there, concern about, you know, how things are working, and it seems to me that, you know, as a premier location that, you know, we all need to be concerned and the Province has a particular responsibility.

I wonder what the Premier thinks of the concept of allowing people to purchase liquor and walk all over the place at that site.

Mr. Selinger: It's too early to pass judgment on that. I think there's—I'm looking at the release that was done from The Forks organization on—it looks like May 12th, 2015. It looks like that they see about 3 and a half million people walk through there. They're looking for—request for proposals that goes out that day for five new vendors and a wine and craft beer kiosk which will be run by The Forks. It's the first major work done in the food hall since 1989. They're looking to attract some young restaurateurs with shorter leases to see constant refreshment and change in the food hall to keep peoples' interest.

They're looking at a harvest table there, continuous bank of tables that could be converted to become an 80-person harvest table. The design philosophy will honour the roots of the buildings, combining rustic, rich, handmade materials with a contemporary urban feeling.

The building's technology will be updated so teenagers and would-be teenagers can recharge their phones at stand-up charging stations and stations located close to seating and tables. Goes along with the electric car-charging station is there, and, as you know, they—a few years back, they made very significant investments in greening the technology that heats and cools the place; geothermal heat

pumps were involved there. So they've tried to adopt a zero-emissions approach at The Forks.

But I don't have any more specific information about the timelines of these new venues and when they'll be developed other than what's indicated in the release there, that they hope to have it in place by this fall.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the concerns that has been made with—raised with me is this estimate of 3 and a half million people visiting The Forks site, which would be 10,000 people a day, which seems to be a rather high figure.

And I wonder whether the Premier (Mr. Selinger) would look a little further into the figure of 3 and a half million and see how accurate that is.

Mr. Selinger: We could check on that for the member. It says 3 and a half million people. The most traffic is in the summer months and January and February after the river skating trail opens. It is a lot of people.

I know it is a very popular venue. I've never been there when there hasn't been a lot of people there. Even in the earliest mornings on a Sunday, there's usually a pretty good group of people there. There's a lot of programming that goes on there. And the merchants tell me they're seeing more traffic there since the museum's opened up.

So it's a popular venue, for sure, and we'll see how it works out when they develop these new food experiences there, and we'll see how it works out with respect to whether they have a kiosk that allows people to have a craft beer or a glass of wine.

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): 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, June 3, 2015

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