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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew, Hon.	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Point Douglas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 8, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam 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.

Please be seated, and welcome back, everybody.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Infrastructure, and the 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable Minister of Infrastructure please proceed with his statement.

Emergency Preparedness Week

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Good afternoon. This week is Emergency Preparedness Week.

The high waters of 2017 spring flood are receding in most areas of Manitoba, and impacted residents are now in the recovery phase.

Manitoba has a history of pulling together in tough times, and once again we applaud the efforts of our response partners, the emergency-management teams in First Nations, municipalities and communities impacted by the 2017 spring flood.

While the flooding in Manitoba is winding down, Canadians are witnessing significant flooding unfold in eastern Canada. Manitoba officials are in contact with officials from Ontario and Quebec, and Manitoba is prepared to assist if our neighbours ask. Our thoughts are with the residents of Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick affected by flooding.

This year's flooding once again highlighted the importance of reducing the risks and impacts of disasters through effective mitigation and emergency preparedness. Emergency Preparedness Week, otherwise known as EP Week, is an annual event that takes place during the first full week of May across Canada. This year, the theme is: Plan. Prepare. Be Aware. It highlights the importance of having a plan for you and your family and emphasizes the need to keep up to date on current conditions, like the weather, that might impact you.

Disaster resilience begins at home and EP Week is meant to encourage Canadians to know their risks and be prepared to take action to protect themselves and their families during emergencies.

Working together with community leaders, first responders, non-government organizations and all levels of government, we are building a more resilient and safer Manitoba and nation. Manitoba will be conducting a test alert of the Alert Ready public alerting system at 1:55 p.m., this Wednesday, May 10.

Valuable information on EP Week and more is available at the Manitoba EMO website, which is www.manitobaemo.ca.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Manitobans are no strangers to severe weather events: floods and forest fires to tornados and snowstorms, we've got a little bit of everything. That's why Emergency Preparedness Week is such an important time to acknowledge the hard work of front-line emergency workers, but also to make sure we're personally prepared for an emergency.

In honour of Emergency Preparedness Week, people all across the country are encouraged to learn how to prepare for an emergency. While a majority of Canadians agree that having an emergency plan is important, only 40 per cent actually have a planned response to any emergency.

It's important to understand the risks of different emergency situations, to make a plan for what your family will do to respond and to have an emergency kit that includes water, food and a first aid kit.

Our NDP team wants Manitobans to feel prepared to face any kind of emergency, but we also want our government to ensure the safety of all Manitobans. That's why they should be investing—the government, that is—investing in critical emergency infrastructure, like the Grace Lake airport, instead of making cuts and underspending on flood protection.

We need to think of emergency infrastructure as a part of our public health service, and that's why privatizing Manitoba air services should be the last thing on this government's agenda.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for recognizing Emergency Preparedness Week with a statement. It is an important week, and remembering that we need to be ready for events and, with climate change, even more cognizant of potential floods and forest fires.

I also want to recognize that today, May the 8th, is world Red Cross day, to honour the birthday of Henry Dunant, the Swiss founder of the Red Cross, and to acknowledge the tremendous role that the Red Cross has played in emergencies in Manitoba, and continues to play.

I note that the minister said that we're in the recovery phase. I think the minister has a very south-Manitoba-centric view. The flood levels on lake—or the levels on Lake Manitoba are at 813.6 at Westbourne and likely to still go higher, so that there is still a concern about Lake Manitoba.

And on Lake St. Martin, the current levels are 803 feet above sea level. And when you look at the report, 2003, that that report recommended that the Lake St. Martin level should be maintained within a level of 797 to 800 feet. So it's three feet above what has been recommended in the past in terms of Lake St. Martin. And, surely, the minister should have had the decency to comment on the situation on Lake St. Martin after all the tremendous problems they've had and the fact that there are still so many people evacuated.

It is also important that, as we move forward now, we may be entering the forest fire season, and remembering just a year ago what happened in Fort

McMurray, the big question: are we really prepared if there were a major forest fire in the North? I hope we have an update soon. Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Accessible Health Care in the North

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): With every passing day, it's becoming more and more clear that this government's reckless austerity measures are hurting Manitobans, especially northern Manitobans. We already know that they cancelled the grant program designed to encourage doctors to practise in rural and remote areas. We already know that they've cancelled health clinics in both Thompson and The Pas. Now, in conjunction with \$6 million in cuts to the NRHA budget, this government plans to cut a subsidy that offers affordable airfare to escorts of northern patients seeking medical treatment.

* (13:40)

Right now, a one-way ticket from Flin Flon to Winnipeg can cost up to \$860. With the subsidy, patients and their escorts only have to pay \$75 each.

All Manitobans have the right to accessible and quality health care, and the people of northern Manitoba face unique challenges when it comes to accessing these services. The northern patient transfer program was designed to help Manitoba's most vulnerable people, and the cancellation of this subsidy will be devastating to them. Family members of patients with dementia, mobility issues, who are elderly or have children and need assistance, will face the added stress of finding \$1,720 for a return air ticket just to accompany their loved one to Winnipeg to ensure they get there and back safely.

Madam Speaker, the people of northern Manitoba deserve better than this, better than this government's reckless cuts. This government needs to recognize that access to quality health care is a right and maintain the escort airfare subsidy for northern patient transfer program.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hypertension Awareness

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Today, I had the opportunity to participate in Hypertension Canada's reception for World Hypertension Day.

Hypertension Canada's important work advances health and wellness through awareness, prevention and control of high blood pressure and its complications.

Hypertension is an important issue. It was reported in 2015 and 2014 that 28.5 per cent of Manitobans were living with hypertension. In fact, one in five Canadians live with hypertension and these numbers seem to be increasing steadily. If we look around the House today, statistics would suggest that at least 10 people in the House today would be suffering from hypertension.

Many suffering with hypertension like to ignore the facts. They justify not seeking treatment by believing misconceptions like: it's not a big deal; everyone has high blood pressure as they age; it's not that high; treatment has more side effects than hypertension; and finally, treatments don't work; I don't feel ill so I must be okay; I'll change my eating habits and lifestyle, and I won't need to monitor.

Manitobans need to understand the risks of hypertension. Hypertension is known as the silent killer. It can lead to stroke, heart failure, coronary artery disease, renal disease, arteriosclerosis.

Events like the ones held today in the rotunda remind us of the importance of knowing our own blood pressure and the importance of continual monitoring. Once diagnosed, appropriate treatment and monitoring can be initiated to prolong a healthy life.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Hypertension Canada in encouraging professionals and the public to offer and take advantage of blood pressure screening throughout the month of May. After all, knowing your number is the first step in achieving and maintaining healthy blood pressure. I encourage all Manitobans to have their blood pressure checked this month.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Fort Richmond Collegiate 50th Anniversary

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to congratulate Fort Richmond Collegiate on their 50th anniversary.

FRC has a long history of academic excellence with an impressive list of graduates who have made a difference in many professions.

An amazing group of volunteers worked hard over the last couple of years to bring together as many alumni as possible to celebrate and honour a high school that motivates students to be their best and to reach their dreams. Madam Speaker, this group of volunteers consists of current staff, former

students and community supporters. They organized an entire weekend of activities including a wine and cheese, a family-friendly afternoon, an alumni basketball game, a good old-fashioned Manitoba social and a lovely brunch, just to name a few.

Hundreds of former graduates participated in the gatherings, some even flying in for the festivities. There were squeals of delight as classmates from the '60s, '70s and '80s recognized each other and embraced for the first time in decades. Although life had taken them on very different paths, they quickly fell back into the comfort of the friendships that helped form who they are today.

My own connection to FRC is quite the story, as three generations of my own family have graduated from this school. My mother was a member of the second graduating class and my siblings and I followed in the '90s, with my oldest son graduating last year.

I thoroughly enjoyed reconnecting with former classmates and friends on the weekend and catching up with former teachers, some of whom I had to apologize for my silliness as a teenager. Thankfully, most of them had forgotten and freely forgave.

My thanks and appreciation go out to all who made this weekend possible and I look forward to future celebrations of a great community and school.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Cameron Krisko

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I am honoured to rise to recognize Cameron Krisko, a compassionate, caring and dynamic young man from the River East constituency who is making a tremendous difference in the lives of hundreds of Manitoba children.

Cameron is the founder and president of Manitoba SwimAbility, a program offering one-on-one swimming lessons to children with special needs.

Cameron received the Premier's Volunteer Service Award in the youth category. I am proud to congratulate Cameron on this very prestigious honour, and I recognize his efforts as a leader within the volunteer community.

In 2010, at the age of 18, by volunteering as a lifeguard, Cameron noticed the need for increased access to affordable swimming lessons for children with special needs in Winnipeg. Cameron

quickly jumped into action, recruiting a group of 10 lifeguards to volunteer their time to offer lessons to Winnipeg children. Knowing affordability was an issue, he charged only \$2 per lesson, and he even subsidized the cost of the pool admission out of his own pocket, Madam Speaker.

The initial lessons were a huge success, and very soon there was a long list of eager participants to learn how to swim.

The program is now province-wide, with nearly 300 children participating in Winnipeg, Brandon, Carman, Dauphin, Steinbach, and plans to expand to other communities as well.

I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly applaud Cameron's drive and ambition in bringing this important program to our province. I'd also like to recognize the positive difference he is making in the lives of hundreds of children.

Cameron is also employed at St. Boniface Hospital as a physician's assistant, one of less than 100 registered physician's assistants in the entire province. He is passionate about helping others and serves as an inspiration and role model for all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members of this House to thank me—or to recognize Cameron Krisko and thank him for his dedication to all Manitoba children.

Emergency Room Closures

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, Winnipeggers are concerned with the recent announcement of ER closures. Residents in the Seven Oaks hospital catchment area are extremely concerned and are left fearing how they will get emergency services when needed.

This government has told us the ER closure decision is an outcome of expert opinions on health-system efficiency. With due respect to the experts, I raise a few points.

(1) The report on how this improves efficiency should be made public. Citizens have the right to information about public sector decisions. As I consulted with Winnipeggers, most expressed that they are in the dark about the expert findings and recommendations.

(2) Such fact-finding missions should be much more participatory, engaging people from the community and their representatives. I proposed before, and am proposing again, that at least

three MLAs of related ridings should be involved in fact-finding processes such as this because MLAs are legitimate first-hand contacts for the ridings and are much more aware of the needs of the constituents.

(3) According to a CBC news article from April 7th of the year, cost savings and job loss estimates are still unknown. It is confusing and concerning that such a significant decision has been made, even though cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness analyses are still inaccessible, and calculations and estimates are still not made public or perhaps have not even been done.

Madam Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has made a wrong decision that is detrimental to the health system of constituents. Closure of Winnipeg ERs lacks community engagement, lacks community awareness and lacks proper findings to back up such a decision.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests that I would like to introduce to you.

Seated in the loge to my right we have Gary Kowalski, the former member of The Maples, and on behalf of all members here, we'd like to welcome you back.

And I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today two grade 8 students visting from Collège Churchill. They are Yesenia Portillo and Katarina Mohammad Lou. And on behalf of all honourable members, we would welcome you here today as well.

*(13:50)

Also seated in the public gallery from Kildonan-East Collegiate we have 35 grade 9 students under the direction of Susan Lachowich, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

And also in the public gallery from École Van Belleghem, 37 grade 4 students under the direction of Louise Delorme, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Southdale (Mr. Smith).

On behalf of all honourable members here, we welcome all of you to the—our gallery.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Changes to Public Service Wages Request to Withdraw Legislation

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier has decided to pick political fights with working Manitobans. His plan is to divide Manitobans against themselves in order to avoid taking responsibility. He has brought forward heavy-handed legislation to freeze the wages of 100,000 workers while he takes 20 per cent pay for himself. He has brought in heavy-handed legislation which will cost great disruption to front-line staff in our health-care system while he shuts ERs and urgent-care centres across 'winnibeg'—Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker, will the Premier withdraw his legislation and actually start listening to Manitobans?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I welcome members back to the Chamber.

I appreciate a question with a preamble that has some reference to things that the previous government was good at. And one of the things they were good at was dividing themselves against one another and trying to divide Manitobans as well.

This is something that I think our government is very focused on not doing. What we're focused on doing instead is uniting Manitobans, bringing them together in common cause, all hands on deck.

We inherited a major fiscal challenge, Madam Speaker, as you know, a structural deficit of close to \$1 billion a year, and it is incumbent on all of us to do our very best to make sure that we address that situation for the good of our children and for those who come after us, as well as for the good of all of us who will need the support of social services as we age.

I think it's important for the members opposite to do their part to support the government in this, and I hope that they will.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: The priorities of the Premier are clear. He has imported the same tired policies of the Harper government into this province. But these slash-and-burn tactics only serve to divide Manitobans.

The Premier had the 'opportuni' to reach out and listen, but he decided that he knew better. The

Premier has refused to listen to constructive proposals, but he now has an opportunity to truly listen.

Will the Premier stop his misguided attacks on working Manitobans, withdraw his legislation and start bargaining in good faith?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I know it's a tough adjustment for the members opposite, Madam Speaker, who ran the Province for their friends at the tops of public sector unions for a long time. And I know that they worked together to—well, they all sat at the side of—same side of the bargaining table, so there didn't need to really be a bargaining process, as far as they were concerned.

But we believe somebody should sit at the side of the table that stands up for Manitobans and for Manitoba taxpayers and Manitoba families. So that's why we resumed the practice—which is a good practice, and one engaged in by many governments of various political stripes for a long time, Madam Speaker—to actually have fair bargaining between those who represent the public sector unions and those who stand up for the good of all others in our society. That's called the common good. Public interest, that's what this government stands for.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: Imposing heavy-handed directives is not bargaining.

Madam Speaker, the more we learn of this government's actions, the more we see how it does one thing, but says another. It said it would consult with organized labour, but we've learned they did not. It is clear the provincial government needlessly interfered with negotiations with the university of 'manidoba'—Manitoba faculty association. Its ham-handed actions caused disruption to ongoing negotiations and precipitated a strike that hurt tens of thousands of students and parents.

But the Premier has refused to take responsibility for his actions.

Will the Premier take responsibility for his actions, withdraw his legislation and stop interfering in ongoing negotiations?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I have to, Madam Speaker, point out to the member the fallacy of her preamble. We've had numerous meetings with representatives from organized labour, including heads of every

major public sector union. I and my ministers have made every effort to reach out.

The difference, of course, Madam Speaker, between our approach and the approach of the previous government is they had the meetings and then did exactly what they were told, and we have the meetings and do what we think is in the public interest.

And, Madam Speaker, that is what we will continue to do. Because we can either have a province that was run, as it was for a number of years, for certain public sector union leaders and the NDP, or we can have one that's run for the common good of our province. We cannot continue to have billion-dollar structural deficits.

Madam Speaker, the member referred to outdated ideas. Balancing the books isn't an outdated idea. Jack Layton supported it. Thomas Mulcair supports it. Why does the provincial NDP here in Manitoba remain the only group in the country that doesn't think that balancing the books makes good sense? We believe it does, and we're working towards achieving that goal.

University of Manitoba Wages Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): The University of Manitoba offered wage increases to faculty on September 13th, but by October 6th the university was told to freeze wages by this government.

A U of M executive, Gregory Juliano, said it was clear they had to obey the wage freeze directive. Quote: There was a clear indication that anything other than compliance would be damaging. End quote.

And yet on November 8th in this House the Premier said, quote, it would be unprecedented and unhelpful to enter into the foray in the middle of negotiations and certainly that is not what we did, Madam Speaker. End quote.

Does the Premier stand by what he said in this House, and can he say with certainty his government did not interfere? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I know it's difficult for the member and for members opposite to understand about public sector bargaining and how it should work, because it didn't work the proper way when they were in government, Madam Speaker.

[interjection] The member for Minto (Mr. Swan), for example, knows that public sector bargaining should involve people on one side of the table sticking up for the taxpayer. But that isn't what happened under the NDP.

And so I understand that the member for Fort Rouge is bemused and puzzled by the negotiations that he has seen happen and will continue to see happen here in Manitoba between public sector bargaining agents, working on behalf of unions, on one side of the table and working on behalf of all Manitoba taxpayers and their families on the other side.

This didn't happen for many years under the NDP. It will happen now. I'm sure that the public sector union leaders will adjust to it. I can only hope, in the best interests of the NDP members, that they themselves adjust to it as well.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: So again, the university offered a wage increase in early September, but by October 6th this provincial government ordered a wage freeze. Having the Province order the university to change their offer seems like interference. At the very least, it qualifies as entering into the foray in the middle of negotiations.

Yet on November 8th of last year, the Premier told this House, quote, it would be unprecedented and unhelpful to enter into the foray in the middle of negotiations and certainly that is not what we did, Madam Speaker. End quote.

Again, does the Premier stand by his words?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I note that the member has run out of questions and chose to repeat his first one, Madam Speaker. That being said, I will say again that I hope the member can begin to make the adjustment necessary to understand that when bargaining occurs between bargaining agents, it actually has to have some representatives who stand up on behalf—*[interjection]*

* (14:00)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —of the taxpayers of Manitoba involved. And that is something the previous administration didn't require for the process and it is required now.

Madam Speaker, as you know, we inherited a fiscal mess, and the NDP created it and now they disown themselves from it and don't wish to see it addressed. That being said, any government that wants to balance the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Pallister: Any government, given the challenges we have inherited, Madam Speaker, from the previous administration, has to get its spending under control. We will do that, and as the members see that happen, they may decide that they want to support that cause. I certainly encourage them to do that.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: I can appreciate that the Premier is practising his lines in advance of the committee hearings about labour tonight, but we would like to hear answers to the questions in question period today.

One of the other things that came up in the Labour Board hearings last week—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —was that the University of Manitoba was instructed to keep the wage freeze directive a secret.

So when I read through the Premier's words from November 8th again, quote: It would be unprecedented and unhelpful to enter into the foray in the middle of negotiations, and certainly that is not what we did, Madam Speaker, end quote, I'm forced to ask: Was—were those words part of the plan to keep the directive a secret, or did the Premier simply not know what his government was up to?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, the dysfunction is so great among the NDP members and the various subsets and sects within their organization now that it's hard to believe that someone even bothered to write a book about it. But they wrote a book about it before, I guess, because they felt they could explain to people about these stories, stories best left untold.

The member has just repeated his question not once but three times, Madam Speaker, and I guess is preparing lines for something; I'm not sure what. But if he's trying to portray himself as new, he'd best stop parroting the old talking points from the old days. If

he wants to be something new, he'd best not keep defending the status quo because the status quo resulted in close to a \$1-billion structural deficit being handed, every single year under the NDP, to children who have not had the chance to get an education or to really even participate in the economic development of our province, and that is unfair.

We see that as unfair, and we will face the challenge of addressing it where the previous administration refused to accept that challenge, Madam Speaker.

Changes to Labour Legislation Consultation with Organizations

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): This government has shown nothing but contempt for organized labour since it was elected. Our Premier makes disparaging comments regarding democratically elected leadership of organized labour in our province, then proceeds to ignore their constructive proposals. Instead, the Premier offers heavy-handed legislation that undermines good-faith bargaining.

Has the Premier considered the alternative proposals that have been advanced by labour?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, the member rises in this place, and although a new member he uses the same talking points that were in use for a decade prior under the previous administration, about status quo preservation. He wants to keep the system as it was.

I understand the NDP is having trouble adjusting to change. I understand that they were rejected by the people of Manitoba in their attempt to remain in power. But, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is they ran on a promise, and the last time they were elected—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —was in 2011. Last time they were elected was in 2011, and they ran on a promise, and that solemn promise they made to Manitobans was to fix the finances of the province and not raise taxes. And then they proceeded to break those promises, and this led to this new book out about stories best left untold.

Well, I don't think these stories should be untold. I think the people of Manitoba deserve to know what actually happened behind the scenes while the government of Manitoba disintegrated before our very eyes and before the eyes of Manitobans,

Madam Speaker. I think it was largely due to the fact they had trouble keeping their promises.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Lindsey: We have a Premier who dictates his desires before even starting a conversation. We have a Premier who makes demands without listening to alternative proposals. We have a Premier who refuses to even sit down with labour leaders and work out problems.

Will the Premier attend the committee hearings this evening to finally listen to labour?

Mr. Pallister: The difference, Madam Speaker, between the confused members opposite and this present government is that we have no difficulty committing to keeping our promises and they have no difficulty—they have a great degree of difficulty in defending their record of breaking theirs.

The fact remains, Madam Speaker, that we have a province where, for many years, the previous administration ignored the public interest and ran the show according to certain special interests. Now we are in a situation where Manitobans have elected a new government, after a decade of debt, to fix the finances of our province; after a decade of decay, to repair the services of our province, which ranked consistently 10th under the NDP administration; and after a decade of decline, to help work with Manitobans to rebuild our economy.

Now, this, Madam Speaker, is what we ran on. This is what Manitobans elected us to do. This is what we're committed to do, and the members opposite best get used to it. This is what we're going to do.

Madam Speaker: I have found myself in the position of having to call order a number of times, and I just would like to remind all members in the House that we do have students here in the gallery today, and I think it's very important that the students do get a message from us that we are paying attention to the questions and the answers and are allowing those people that are speaking to have the floor. Everybody, I'm sure, would appreciate that same courtesy, and I feel especially strongly about that when we have young people in the gallery and they are looking down at us to learn about how democracy is played out.

So I would encourage all members, please, to show some respect and listen carefully to the questions and answers that are being given.

Mr. Lindsey: The Premier has undermined the right to organization with his legislation. He's undermined the right to collectively bargain with his legislation. He's caused massive disruption to our education and health-care systems with his interference in legislation.

This Premier seems more focused on picking political fights with his opponents than doing what's in the best interests of all Manitobans. He has a chance to change course.

Will he withdraw his legislation, listen to workers, focus on working with all Manitobans? And all Manitobans would really appreciate an answer to that question.

Mr. Pallister: Discounting the irrelevant preamble, Madam Speaker, the member does ask a fair question about listening.

The NDP staged an historic rebellion against their own leader just a couple of years ago because they alleged he wasn't listening. We know already from the brief excerpts of the new novel from Gord Mackintosh that that wasn't the cause at all. It wasn't a fight internally about principle or policy or even listening; it was a fight about polls, Madam Speaker.

The members opposite seem to believe that if they stand up for the status quo loudly and repetitively enough they can somehow become popular again. But, Madam Speaker, change is difficult. The world hates change sometimes, but it is the only thing that has ever brought progress, and it will bring progress to Manitobans now.

Cuts to Northern Patient Transfer Impact on Northern Communities

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): The government decision to make cuts to the Northern Patient Transportation Program comes as a total surprise. No one was consulted before they axed that part of the program that helped northerners escort a family member to Winnipeg for treatment, including my family, Madam Speaker.

Can the Health Minister please explain why there was no consultation prior to a decision that will have disastrous consequences for northern families?

* (14:10)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, I think there's been misinformation put on the record, the public record, not by this member in particular but other members of the NDP, regarding the program. The program is there to assist those who are referred by a doctor to be needing medical transportation via air. That program still exists. When a doctor refers somebody who is in medical necessity of being transported by air, the program still exists for their escort.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lathlin: The decision to cut the travel program for family members travelling with a sick loved one will be devastating for people in the North. It will force families to think twice before sending a child, a frail senior or someone with a mobility issue by themselves to a city far from home for treatment.

It's easy to imagine families delaying treatment in some cases. In other cases, a child could find herself alone on a frightening trip far from home, or a vulnerable senior could be isolated and unable to fend for himself without a family member to assist him.

Madam Speaker, can the Health Minister explain why he felt it was necessary to put families in such difficult circumstances?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, again, Madam Speaker, there's been some misinformation put on the public record, primarily by the member from Flin Flon, but others, in commenting about this program. And I think that's unfortunate, because there are many who rely on the program to ensure that when it's medically necessary and they are referred by a doctor, that they get air-flight transport from the North to the city of Winnipeg, that that be there for them. That continues to be there for them; that hasn't changed. In fact, if they are medically referred by a doctor to need air-flight transport, the program is still there for their escort, and we need to have facts on the record.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lathlin: By cutting the travel program for families, this government is showing an incredible lack of respect for the North. As a reminder to the honourable members across the aisle, it was a plank in their election campaign to protect front-line services. Axing it creates a major hardship for our people. It's simply unfair that northern families will

have to decide between sending a sick family member off to the hospital alone or forgoing treatment altogether because of this added stress for our families.

Madam Speaker, can the Health Minister please explain why he thinks northern families don't deserve his support?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, certainly, northern Manitobans, along with all Manitobans, do deserve a sustainable health-care system, and that is something that we pledged during the election campaign. And we continue to work towards a sustainable health-care system today, tomorrow, for our kids and for their grandkids. The northern transport program was there—intended to ensure that those who needed to be transported by air, referred by a doctor, would have that program there, also to ensure that those who are referred by a doctor for transportation would have an escort who would also be eligible for the program. That remains, and it will continue to remain.

Manitoba Hydro Rates Affordability Concerns

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, it is becoming clearer, by the day, that this government does not care about making life more affordable for Manitobans. Following tactics pioneered by the Harper government, it tried to hide that it was repealing, in its budget legislation, the law which required Manitoba to have the lowest electricity, insurance and home heating prices in Canada.

The government should come clean: Will it commit today to ensuring that Manitoba's hydro rates remain the most affordable in Canada?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Well, Madam Speaker, and over the past 17 years of NDP mismanagement, there is a price to be paid. And the NDP bipole-Keeyask levy that we now are hearing about, that price is going to be paid by Manitobans today, and it's going to be paid for a lot more tomorrows.

The NDP built Manitoba Hydro for American bankers and they forgot to mention that it's Manitoba ratepayers that are going to pay the bill.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Marcelino: I almost anticipated that answer.

This government tries to place blame for all its problems and refuses to accept responsibility, but their agenda is clear.

This minister introduced a bill to revamp the Public Utilities Board in March, and then weeks later a Cabinet order was issued requiring a change to the PUB mandate. The only explanation is that the government wants to ensure that the rates increase.

Will the government take responsibility for its actions and level with Manitobans about—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired. *[interjection]*

Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, one would have to ask the NDP members, I guess, this question: where was this concern about affordability—where was this concern when you were in government?

I mean, the NDP government jacked up the costs for owning a car or—ask cottagers or ask anyone who wanted to get a haircut or home insurance or buy a beer or wanted to provide benefits to their family at work. In every category they jacked up the taxes, Madam Speaker, but it wasn't enough for them. They decided to jack up the PST on top of that and so they had a massive, record, intrusive tax grab that they imposed on the people of Manitoba, and it's hard to believe they—even they believe they have any credibility when they talk about wanting to make life affordable for Manitobans.

The new government of Manitoba is committed to not raising taxes, Madam Speaker, making life more affordable for hardworking Manitoba families, and that's what we're going to do.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Marcelino: I thank the Premier for the answer.

Now, where during—where and when during the election was it promised that electricity rates will be raised?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, if the member would like to consult with testimony before the Public Utilities Board that occurred while he was in government, he would find out that there was a promise made of electricity rates going up for a long, long time because of what the NDP did when they were in government by trying to Americanize our Manitoba Hydro.

They dug a giant debt hole and the leaders at Manitoba Hydro said, we're going to need to raise the rates. The difference though, another difference between the new government and the old one, Madam Speaker, is we respect that there's a process there. They disregarded that process. They didn't listen to the experts at Manitoba Hydro, they didn't let the Public Utilities Board even take a look at the bipole proposal and when they finally brought the proposal on the Keeyask dam forward to the Clean Environment Commission for the NFAT process, they'd already invested over \$1.2 billion in it without any approvals being granted.

That total disrespect has been replaced by our respect for the process and our respect for the people of Manitoba and their best interests.

EIA Program Recipients Links to Food Insecurity

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, it's always a pleasure to rise and ask questions that have been formed with a group of medical students from the University of Manitoba, who join us here today in the gallery.

It is universally known that adequate nutrition is required in order to be a productive member of society. The fact is, food-insecure people tend to utilize government services to a greater extent, reasonably so. The EIA program aims to assist low-income Manitobans in affording a healthy diet.

If this government has done any research to better understand the relationship between the use of EIA and the utilization of health care, would the minister please share the research with us?

* (14:20)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I want to commend the member for bringing medical students to the gallery. We welcome you here today and we certainly wish you well in your studies. We know that you are the future of Manitoba, and we all welcome you here today.

In terms of nutrition and food security, we know that that is an issue for those around Manitoba. There are a number of programs in particular that help those in the North who have a harder time accessing affordable food and nutritious food in northern Manitoba. Those programs continue; we continue to work with communities to ensure that all of

Manitobans have access to quality food at an affordable price, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a supplementary question.

Basic Income Pilot Project

Ms. Lamoureux: We heard time and time again how Manitoba's health-care costs are spiralling out of control. There are many upstream factors that should be considered to prevent the need for specialized and expensive health care. Poverty is one of these factors. Poverty has many layers and a comprehensive plan is desperately needed to address it. The recent hikes in hydro is yet another financial burden for those on fixed incomes

What is this government's plan to address poverty, and would the government consider a basic income pilot project in Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: The member and the—those who helped to write the question are not incorrect. Certainly, poverty is related to health care. We know that there are a numbers of factors that may lead those to have worse health outcomes in the future, and poverty is certainly one of those issues.

We continue to be concerned about the high costs of health care and we do look upstream to try to find savings. So we certainly look at the determinants of health. There are many in our department that are continually working on that.

We know that things like raising taxes can impact those who are trying to get by on an income that might be a challenge. Raising the PST could be a challenge. Expanding the PST to products it never applied to before could be a challenge. So there are a number of different issues, and we are sensitive to those, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary.

Review Process for Setting Rates

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the Manitoba Ombudsman report 2010 quoted a complaint made by the office of the Auditor General in 2008. It noted, in regards to EIA, that the government has no review process laid out and no indication of what measures are used to determine rates. That was more than seven years ago.

Is this government again following the steps of the former NDP government? If not, what measures

are being used now to determine and set rates in the Manitoba EIA program?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Madam Speaker, one thing we do know is under the previous NDP government just in the last five years alone the people—amount of people living in poverty has grown by over 11 per cent compared to a national average of 0.5 per cent increase.

We also know they increased things like the PST that have dramatic impacts on people of low income.

This government has done a number of things to keep money in the pockets of people, whether you are on EIA or poverty, in terms of increasing the basic personal exemption, in terms of Rent Assist program that allows people to have more money in their pockets. This is something that's going to help, whether you're on EIA or low-income, Manitobans strive for a better future for Manitobans.

Public-Private Partnerships Government Position

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we're looking to get the job done and we won't let ideology stifle a good idea. If an idea has the potential to improve services for Manitobans, this—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mrs. Mayer: If an idea has the potential to improve services for Manitobans, this government is open to it. Manitobans elected us to do things differently, Madam Speaker.

Last week, the government took the steps forward to join the rest of Canada in taking advantage of the public-private partnerships.

Can the Minister of Finance please explain how these joint ventures will benefit Manitobans?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for St. Vital for the question.

Public-private partnerships are a long-term performance-based approach to providing public infrastructure. There are many benefits of P3s. They can cost less than traditional models. They can reduce life-cycle expenditures on assets and, in addition, the private partner and not the taxpayer assumes the risks of overruns.

A public-private-partnership model has proved to be successful throughout Canada and even in

Saskatchewan, our neighbours to the west. The majority of provinces have in place specialized agencies and offices with expertise in delivery.

Madam Speaker, our government values innovation over ideology when it comes to delivering cost-effective ways to improve Manitoba infrastructure and rebuild our economy.

Tracking of Fish Exports Role of Conversation Officers

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Wondering if someone from the government might be able to update all Manitobans on the important role that conservation officers play in tracking fish exports in Manitoba.

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I'd like to thank the member opposite.

I know that when I was in, you know, Churchill, when I was in Norway House, I've talked to conservation officers and many more throughout the province and actually talked to them—I've been on the river and I've been out to Playgreen Lake and had the opportunity to talk to them about, you know, fishing and exports within the province and also within the entire—the globe, Madam Speaker. And I know that at the present time what we're doing is we're actually giving the opportunities to fishermen to provide them more opportunity to make more money and keep more money in their pockets through those exports. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, now that the minister's back from her globe-trotting boat ride, she may be surprised to learn that according to a letter that I have, and I will table three copies of it, it says, and I quote: Enforcement priorities of our conservation officers are shifted away from tracking down fish exports, effective immediately.

This letter was written by the minister. Does she have an explanation for us?

Mrs. Cox: I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question and, as I said earlier, we are moving towards allowing Manitoba fishers to make—or, provide them more opportunities, keep more money in their pockets, and as part of that we're moving away from the single-desk system and allowing them

to actually have many other opportunities to market their fish. As we move forward with that single desks—desk system, there will be opportunities for them to market interprovincially and internationally, as well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary.

Freshwater Fish Corporation Timeline for Licence to Operate

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Or, in plain English, the minister doesn't know what she's doing.

To put—to take this even one step further down the rabbit hole of incompetence, Madam Speaker, in this same letter the minister should realize that in the second paragraph she indicates that the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation will continue to be an option for fishers, but then later on in the same letter, just a few paragraphs later, she hints that the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation's licence to be a fish dealer only lasts for another year.

Is she hinting to fishers that this option is not going to be available to them under this government?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, it's the level of arrogance portrayed in that preamble that makes his own riding association try to organize to get rid of that member, and, Madam Speaker, I expect that in the book by Gord Mackintosh there won't be much reference to that member because he makes himself less relevant than he needs to with comments like that. His level of approach and personal attack on members, not just on this side of the House, but on his own caucus colleagues, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Pallister: —has really no place in politics. And it's extremely disappointing and disheartening, I know, to his own colleagues, that he chooses to take this approach in this Legislative Assembly. I'd encourage him—because I know he's capable of better—I would encourage him to adopt a better approach in this Chamber and outside of it as well, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: Order.

**City of Winnipeg
Funding Model Inquiry**

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): My question is to the Premier (Mr. Pallister).

We've asked, in this House, for the Premier to explain its funding for municipalities, including the City of Winnipeg, and yet the government refuses to answer our questions. It's been weeks since the budget. The City of Winnipeg is still unclear on what the funding model is going to be.

Question is, Madam Speaker, why is the Premier leaving the City of Winnipeg in the dark?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations): I thank the member opposite for the question.

It's been an ongoing process for well over a year since the previous election that we have been working—in fact, I was mandated to work more closely with the City of Winnipeg and municipalities to pursue the Fair Say option, including a single application for funding, and they were all very responsive to that.

And we have been working every day since then and we will continue.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

Following oral questions on Thursday, April 13th, 2017, the honourable member for Kewatinook (Ms. Klassen) rose on a point of order regarding comments she attributed to the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon). In raising the point of order, she advised the House that she had heard the honourable member for Emerson say, and I quote, let them die on a doorstep, end quote, comments which shocked her and comments which she requested the honourable member for Emerson apologize for. I took the matter under advisement in order to verify the comments complained of, in Hansard.

Subsequent to taking this point of order under advisement, the honourable member for Emerson rose on a point of order to explain that his full comments, and I quote, they sent them home in a taxi to die in a doorstep, end quote, in reference to policies and actions of the previous government. The

Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Maloway) also spoke to the same point of order. I then reminded the House that the point of order was taken under advisement in order to review Hansard.

I thank all honourable members for their advice to the Chair on this matter.

In reviewing Hansard for Thursday, April 13th, 2017, the words complained of do not appear in Hansard. However, the honourable member for Emerson did, in the subsequent point of order, advise that he did say the words, and I quote, they sent them home in a taxi to die, end quote, which was not the same as, and I quote, let them die on a doorstep, end quote. It is clear to me that this situation does not involve a breach of the rules or practices of the House; it is a case of a member hearing one thing and a member advising that he had said something different. Therefore there is no point of order.

Though there may not be a point of order in this situation, I would like to raise a concern with the House about the extent to which heckling has become a disruptive factor. As I have mentioned in the House recently, there will always be a degree of heckling; however, in recent days, heckling have been going too far in terms of noise level and with hurtful intent. Even when I am calling for order, no sooner have I sat down when members immediately start up again. Members are even continuing to heckle while I am standing to bring the House to order, and this is demonstrating a lack of respect for the institution of the Office of the Speaker and for the Assembly in general. I would respectfully request that when order is called for or when the Speaker stands, the Speaker is heard in silence as the procedural authorities instruct us.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind all honourable members of how powerful words can be and of the hurt and damage they can inflict, even if uttered without that intent. I take the issue of having a respectful workplace very seriously, and as Speaker, I will always do my best to ensure that the Chamber is a place where members can have differences of opinion while respectfully disagreeing with each other.

I understand there are strong feelings held by most members of this Assembly on a variety of matters, but it is important that we conduct ourselves in a dignified way and that we act with respect towards each other and in the performance of our duties of this House.

I thank the House for attention to this—these remarks and I hope we can all move forward in continuing to share differences of opinion in a respectful manner.

PETITIONS

Concordia Hospital Emergency Room

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government has announced the closures of three emergency rooms and an urgent-care centre in the city of Winnipeg, including closing down the emergency room at Concordia Hospital.

(2) The closures come on the heels of the closing of a nearby QuickCare clinic, as well as cancelled plans for ACCESS centres and personal-care homes such as Park Manor that would have provided important services for seniors in the area.

(3) The closures have left families and seniors in northeast Winnipeg without any point of contact with front-line health-care services and results in them having to travel 20 minutes or more to St. Boniface hospital's emergency room for emergency care.

(4) These cuts will place heavy burden on the many seniors who live in northeast Winnipeg and visit the emergency room frequently, especially those who are unable to drive or are low-income.

(5) The provincial government failed to consult with families and seniors in northeast Winnipeg regarding the closing of their emergency room or to consult with health officials and health-care workers at Concordia to discuss how this closure would impact patient care in advance of the announcement.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse the decision to close Concordia Hospital's emergency room so that families and seniors in northeast Winnipeg and surrounding areas have timely access to quality health-care services.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

I would also, just at this point, like to remind members to—that there are people that are trying to read petitions, so I would ask that conversations—please lower their level or attend to the loges or to the chairs at the back of the room for having any conversations, and I guess I would have to remind retired MLAs that there are to be no discussions going on with members as they leave the Chamber. Thank you.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) The regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There was no consultation with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition has been signed by so many Manitobans.

Mr. Greg Selinger (St. Boniface): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislature.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

* (14:40)

Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

The regulated taxi system has also made—taken significant measures to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service, and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city, and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service, and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city, and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Kelvin High School Gymnasium and Wellness Centre

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

(2) Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the health and welfare of all students.

(3) All forms of educational infrastructure, including gymnasiums and recreation centres in general, represent an incredible value-for-money investment, whereby the return is improved physical and psychological health and wellness.

(4) Kelvin High School is one of the largest high schools in the province, with over 1,200 students.

(5) Kelvin High School spent several years raising almost \$1.2 million towards the construction of a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

(6) Some Kelvin students currently have to pay to use outside facilities to obtain their mandatory physical education credit.

(7) The provincial government, in a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for the Kelvin gym and wellness centre for political reasons, despite the extensive community support, fundraising and engagement.

(8) It is wasteful and disrespectful to the dedicated efforts of students, staff and the community in general to simply lay their goals aside without consultation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the need for excellent recreation facilities in all Manitoba schools, to reverse this regressive cut and to provide Kelvin High School with the funding necessary to complete a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to the petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure that there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihoods of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer

jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition was signed by many Manitobans.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

* (14:50)

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead in—lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, this afternoon we'd like to continue with Estimates.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): 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 Executive Council.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): We'd like to ask the Premier if he can confirm if the Manitoba—Building Manitoba Fund still exists.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I can confirm that.

And—but I also wanted to—I undertook, as is the custom of the—certainly, with the interim leader

and I, when she asked me questions and I undertake to get the information, I get the information.

So I wanted to continue to do that if she would like me to, unless she has another line of questions she'd prefer.

Ms. Marcelino: Yes, first like to thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister). I did receive the responses to the previous questions asked of him, and it was fairly-sent to us expeditiously.

But for this one, is the Premier saying you have a response forthcoming?

Mr. Pallister: No, these-I gave the information on the previous questions to the member, but this is on questions-these are additional questions that she raised at our last Estimates-remember?-about staffing and David McLaughlin and things like that? *[interjection]* No, not this. This is additional information.

Ms. Marcelino: Okay, please, if the Premier would like to provide it to us now.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, there were four that I recall, and if I've missed anything I encourage the member just to-I apologize if I haven't got responses to some questions that she asked.

But I'm endeavouring to do something that-and I'm encouraging our ministers to do the same. If they undertake to get information for members, they should follow up and provide it. And so trying to take that tone which we did-we got away from a little bit, I think, in the last few years, but I'm trying to bring that back to the way we do things.

So, first of all, the member raised questions about the interprovincial plan to reduce reliance of diesel fuel in First Nations communities. I'm not sure if the member raised it or it was the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) might have raised it. And I would say-I'll just read the answer here into the record-but activities in Manitoba generated significant interest nationally. And this, the credit belongs, I think, in large part to the previous government in respect of initiating some of this dialogue, and especially I would reference the member for-current member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) and former premier. We were part of-and I've continued with this-forming and an ongoing provincial-territorial task force to reduce diesel fuel use in remote communities. We chair it currently.

I'm trying to get the-the plan is-the first plan was released, and I think we can get copies of that

for the member. I didn't bring copies today, but if the members are interested, I can get them copies of that report.

As well, there is a further, more detailed study under way, and I did not bring the other members of the committee their names, but I can get that for the members if they're interested, in addition.

Secondly, the member-oh, I'm sorry-the member had asked about David McLaughlin specifically. I have brought some information here in respect to-the questions were about what is his role and what does he do. He has been assisting us with climate change development of a made-in-Manitoba climate change plan.

Members have-I think, are aware, of a lot of the consultative work that he's done. I haven't brought a list of all the groups or any of the work that Mr. McLaughlin has done, but he has done considerable work in respect of outreach, met with-I think it's now well into the six figures of groups across the province, around the province and nationally as well, to help us develop our climate change plan.

So that's-that has been his role, but currently he's also in an acting status role as the director of Communications and Stakeholder Relations. His salary is \$133,375 annually. His travel costs since May of 2016 are \$39,942.31. That began-his original date of hire was August 8th of last year.

Ms. Marcelino: I thank the Premier for the answer. The first question, I believe, was asked by my colleague from Flin Flon.

I have a second question for the Premier, please.

I would like to ask the Premier: What was the size of the Building Manitoba Fund program for 2016-2017? If it's not an available answer, we'd like to receive it in due time.

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for the question. We'll undertake, and I won't-I'll get her that information as soon as we have it. I won't bring it to her at our next sitting, so I'll get that immediately.

I had another question she had asked, though, I wanted to elaborate on. I'd been asked about the number of political staff, and in this, including special assistants and technical officers across the province, and so I brought the information on that. I will go through that with the member.

The previous administration had 108 technical officers; our government has 57. The previous administration had 19 Cabinet ministers, including the Premier; we have 13. The Cabinet payroll is considerably lower. The technical officer payroll which, broken down—I should reference that broken down, that 108 under the previous administration comprised 44 so-called junior staff. This would be special assistants and executive assistants, and 64 mid to senior staff. Our—the total payroll for those staff was \$8,025,127.

Our government has not 44 EAs and SAs, but 26. Mid to senior staff—we have reduced that by 106 per cent from 64 to 31. Our total payroll for so-called technical officers is reduced from \$8,025,127 to \$4,359,335, a reduction of 84 per cent.

This, I should mention, assumes that we reduce our deficit by a minimum of \$100 million in the coming year because Cabinet payroll, should that legislation be adopted, will reduce that compensation for all Cabinet ministers by 10 per cent in the first year, so this payroll amount could be actually considerably lower if Cabinet does not achieve a reduction in the deficit number by \$100 million.

*(15:10)

Ms. Marcelino: Going back to the first question regarding Building Manitoba Fund, would request the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to provide us a response on the projected figure for that fund in 2017-2018.

Mr. Pallister: I have instructed staff to look it up, both previous number and projected number. And so I'll wait for those rather than comment further on that topic, if that's all right with the member.

Ms. Marcelino: Yes, thank you, Mr. Premier.

Another question, Mr. Chair: Can the Premier explain how he is funding municipalities in this year's budget?

Mr. Pallister: Well, using taxpayers' dollars taken from the taxpayers of Manitoba who supply us with the revenue that we allocate by various departments, of course, we have to make the decisions as to how we assign departmental budgets. We go through an Estimates process to ascertain to what degree we can continue with previous programs, to what degree we can introduce new ones, to what degree we can apportion money differently than may have been apportioned in the past in order to achieve larger goals of moving towards balanced budget and some sense of sustainability.

So the funding mechanism for funding municipal governments remains largely the same as it would've been under the previous administration and as it would be under any government process.

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to ask the Premier to explain how the City of Winnipeg will receive funding this year.

Mr. Pallister: Sure, well, very similarly to what it has in the past.

What we're working towards and what the minister has been working very diligently on, not exclusively with the City of Winnipeg but with other municipalities around the province, the minister has a long-standing record of working with the municipal governments, a background as a municipal—as an elected person in a municipality, and a very good working relationship with the members of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities.

She's working very diligently also to build strong working relationships with the Metis and First Nations communities, Indigenous communities of our province, which have a very wide array of concerns and interests and needs. And the diversity within our province is a beautiful thing, but it's a challenge certainly in terms of— as the members know when they were in government it's a challenge to deal with that vast array of groups. I think the minister is doing an admirable job of doing that, as are other ministers.

We committed in the election campaign to work in a co-operative way to develop a new approach to infrastructure investment that would provide municipalities with a fair say, and that was one of the concerns they raised even going so far as to buy advertising, I think, in respect of that. They wanted a fair say on how infrastructure dollars would be invested. They also recognized, and we certainly do, that returning the province to fiscal balance is a goal that we have to work together to achieve.

So key to that is this partnership process around building a basket-funding model that would utilize a—more of a single-window approach.

What this would do also, and what we're working towards achieving, is lessening the amount of application-based processes, the paper processing that—I was going to reference some of the previous members of the NDP caucus are very aware of who have worked—had worked at local government in local government roles. But, certainly, Ron Lemieux would be an example of someone who—we've talked

about this—who knows full well the older system imposed tremendous burdens on local governments, and he certainly got an earful from the members of AMM on numerous occasions about the challenges of the red tape that is created not just in this area of application-based funding practices, but in many other areas.

So, based on consultations with the municipalities and an internal review of how we were working on the—how these funding programs were working or not working effectively, this year's budget has introduced a new basket funding model for municipalities, and it will consolidate the funding from various sources into a new, single basket.

This is not done yet; the process is under way, and we'll continue to work very diligently to make it happen. I think it will most certainly make sure that we respect the time of local elected people as well and their staff and their officials that have to deal and have told us, so consistently, have had to spend so much time dealing with the various paper processes around each of these various baskets. So trying to simplify that—other provinces have moved forward on this. I believe—and I will not have the exact number in my head, but, I think, Ontario went from over 100 different envelope processes to fewer than 20 as a result of their review there. And so we're attempting to do something similar here.

I should mention that budgetary allocations—our operating funding is the same. The overall—oh, I—okay, well, we have \$361 million that says, in these points, if that's what you're looking for. That may answer the member's first question. Municipalities and the community organizations they work through will receive—work with will receive, this year, \$361 million. That's approximately a 1 per cent decrease from last year. But I would mention that there's a mitigating factor here, in the amount of time that that would save for them at the local level, that they have acknowledged to me in conversation, I know, to the minister as well.

So the time savings is worth something. It's hard to put an actual dollar value on it. But I would say that this—it would be very accurate to say that this maintains the levels of funding in spite of the reality that we have a significant structural deficit to deal with. The municipal governments—continue to have good support.

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister): Is the funding for transit—Winnipeg Transit still on a 50-50 cost-shared basis?

Mr. Pallister: I'll grab the additional detail for the member on the transit issue.

I would mention, though—and I think it's important to understand that what the goal is of this basket funding approach that we're trying to implement and have made some good progress on—the first aspect to understand is that what this allows us to do is focus on outcomes that result from the investments in municipal projects by using performance-based goals and measurements so that we can actually see what the return is or what the result is of the investment.

Secondly, it enhances the accountability and transparency for the funds, because it identifies intended outcomes for the projects, and reporting is simplified but made clearer as a result of that.

And, finally, it bases the—it helps us to be uniform in basing the investment decisions on return on investment and value for money. When I say uniform, not just in respect of our transference of funds to the municipal governments are we taking that approach but also in our own infrastructure allocations or prioritizations—doing the same thing.

So I think that's an overview of the reasons why the funding structure, we think, will work better for municipalities. It isn't something that other jurisdictions haven't attempted to undertake. And there's been much talk about it over the years. I remember discussions with local municipalities suggesting that simplifying the red tape and the process application mechanisms that they have to face should be undertaken when I was part of the provincial government back 20 years ago. But we're—what we're trying to do is land this plane, not just take it off. So we're trying to get to the point where the municipal government are able to save time; have greater assurance of their funding; know where it's coming from; and be able to deal with a simpler, more effective process.

* (15:20)

I would mention also that when I referenced earlier the need to move to balance, that that is a really important issue. Of course, municipalities must balance their books by law. But, when provincial governments fail to balance their books, this can have a negative impact on the Province's credit rating and also has a negative impact on local governments as well.

So, just as an example, our credit rating was downgraded on two separate occasions over the past couple of years. What that—why that happened, a number of reasons were given by various credit rating agencies, but, essentially, large and growing deficits and a buildup of overall net debt caused our credit ratings to be downgraded. Now, you combine that with the fiscal situation of Manitoba Hydro and the growing debt there as a consequence of what I consider to be somewhat ill-advised projects being undertaken by the previous administration. Now you've got massive debt growth at Hydro, massive debt growth within the Province, a doubling over the last—about seven fiscal years and a downgrade from Standard & Poor's and Moody's, which reflected deterioration of our fiscal position, and that's what Moody's said, for example. And then in '15 they lowered their expectation of the previous government's commitment to balance the books in 2018-19, an expectation that some didn't take seriously at the beginning.

What did that mean for the City of Winnipeg? Well, it resulted, then, in a trickle-down effect, and their credit rating was then lowered and that cost them millions of dollars, and that is not healthy for them. So local governments recognize—who also issue debentures, borrow money—they also understand how important it is to move back to a balanced situation here, and they recognize that they're part of finding that solution, and that's the partnership that we need to develop going forward.

Moody's has also told us that that rating could face further downward pressure in the event of further deterioration of our fiscal position and an increase in our deficits, greater accumulation of debt beyond our existing plan. But, if we demonstrate existing fiscal commitment to our, you know, restoring fiscal balance in our province and we can improve our progress and achieve progress towards balance sooner with clear signals, that that may well assist us in achieving a restoration of our previous credit rating. That would be good news, and we want to make sure that we're conscious of that and that we work together with our municipal partners to achieve the greater goal of moving to sustainability in terms of our relationship and in terms of the way we manage money at all levels of government.

Ms. Marcelino: Just want a little clarification from the Premier (Mr. Pallister). I didn't hear a yes or no, so I'd like to ask again: Will the funding for the

transit be still on the cost-shared 50-50 basis, moving forward?

Mr. Pallister: Just want to be clear the member's not talking about rapid transit, right? Talking about the transit agreements for the various—*[interjection]*—yes. No, the plan is to have the existing funding levels to remain this year as they have been. So that's if you're asking about the commitment for funding levels for the coming year, will be the same as for the previous year.

Ms. Marcelino: I wish to give the time to my colleague here for more questions for the Premier.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I'd like to ask the Premier how much time he spent in Costa Rica since the election in April of 2016.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's an interesting question. Since the election of last year.

I'd like the member to agree that when I provide him with this information, he'll also provide me with all the information on any vacations and travel that he's done. If he would do that, I'd appreciate that. And I think in fairness that might be a reasonable request.

Mr. Swan: I'm not the Premier of the province. I'm actually an opposition member asking questions in the Premier's Estimates, so I'd appreciate his answer.

Mr. Pallister: We will have to dig that up for the member then.

Mr. Swan: So, just so it's clear, the Premier is undertaking to provide that in a timely way.

Mr. Pallister: Anything I've undertaken, I've provided the information in a timely way.

Mr. Swan: I'd like to ask the Premier: In the times he's been at Costa Rica, and he'll be providing us with the undertaking as to how much that's been since the election, have there been any situations that have required the Premier to communicate with his Cabinet ministers or with his individual MLAs while he's been down in Costa Rica?

Mr. Pallister: I'm in regular touch with my office and deal with any issues of importance and urgency on a regular basis—always accessible.

Mr. Swan: I appreciate that. The question is whether the Premier can recall any issue since the election when he's been down in Costa Rica when he's actually spoken to one of his Cabinet ministers or one of his MLAs.

Mr. Pallister: I'm in regular communication with my office, via my office, through them, either way, we communicate with our team. We have a team, actually, so it's pretty good and we work together really well.

Mr. Swan: Yes, the question is whether the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has actually spoken to or otherwise been in contact with any of his Cabinet ministers, MLAs. I'll get to his senior staff in a few minutes.

The question, though, to the Premier, is: Has there been contact while he's been in Costa Rica with Cabinet ministers or members of his caucus?

Mr. Pallister: Lots of contact with our team. I like to stay in touch with our team, and we use mechanisms to stay in touch that make our team very functional. Teamwork matters to me, and I like to see a government function as a team. It's something that's important. I think that the people of Manitoba value a government that can function like a team does: effectively, in a healthy manner, positively, sharing responsibilities, co-operatively, respectfully, and I—that's what I endeavour to do with our team. I think it's important to make sure that that kind of focus and working together effectively with one another is something that demonstrates that focus.

Mr. Swan: Can the Premier recall any contact he had while down in Costa Rica with any other politicians at the federal level or municipal level while he was down there?

Mr. Pallister: I recall numerous instances where I've been in communication via my office with people at various political levels.

Mr. Swan: And, when the Premier talks about communication, is that strictly by telephone, or what is the method of keeping in touch with his team?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'm told, and I've been advised on this, that in the interests of protecting the integrity of the information that we share and the conversations that we have, of course, and the member would respect and know that I wouldn't reveal the contents of personal conversations—I think he's not asking me that, I know—but that I also will be very careful about guarding and very diligent about guarding the nature of how it is that we exchange information. But I've assured the member and I continue to assure him that I am in touch, available all the time, and make sure that I remain in touch, because I like my job and I like doing it to the best of my ability.

Mr. Swan: I appreciate that, but I'd like to ask the Premier: When there is the need for communication between the Premier when he's in Costa Rica and his team back in Manitoba, is that done strictly by telephone or are there other ways that the Premier keeps in contact?

Mr. Pallister: There are numerous ways to communicate. I like to use a variety of ways to communicate, and I like to guard the security and safety of the information that I involve myself in discussing with others, and so I'll continue to utilize processes which do that, which protect the integrity of the information, which protect the integrity of the relationships I have with others within my organization and elsewhere, and I'll continue to follow that.

That's why I am pretty proud of the fact that we haven't—in part, that's why we haven't had a single leak from our caucus, for example. We've had some made up, but we haven't had any real ones. I know that's been frustrating to some members of the media, certainly none present, but others, and I think it's important to understand that that is a part of protecting the integrity and functionality of an organization I really value.

I have concerns actually right now about this release of this new book that Gord Mackintosh is putting out, and I certainly hope that he doesn't release any Cabinet secrets. I don't think that would be appropriate. I would hope that he would remember that the oath he took applies to him now as much as it did when he took it, and I don't think it's appropriate for him to release any discussion or any detail, of any kind, in any way, that pertains to discussions he may have had pre-rebellion or post, for example. I think that would be unhelpful, I think that would be disreputable conduct and I don't expect Gord to do that.

* (15:30)

Mr. Swan: I'm a little surprised by the opaque nature of the Premier's response to the question of how he communicated. He's told us, I believe, that he's used telephone and has said other means.

The Premier earlier had said, and we had no reason to disbelieve, that he doesn't actually use email when he's down in Costa Rica. So I guess I'll just ask that on the record today.

Does the Premier use email when he's in Costa Rica?

Mr. Pallister: The member might like to review his research, and he would see no reference to me making any comment about not using email. He would actually see—to help him in this—he would actually see a quote, I believe, if he's using newspapers for research, that says I prefer mechanisms, or something to that way of thinking, other than email, because I do.

Mr. Swan: I'm sorry, is the Premier (Mr. Pallister) confirming that indeed he does use email when he's down in Costa Rica?

Mr. Pallister: I'm confirming that the member's presupposition is incorrect that I don't use email.

Mr. Swan: You know, I practised family law for a long time, and I haven't had a—this isn't intended to be a cross-examination.

I'd like to ask the Premier the basic question: Does he use email when he is in Costa Rica—to quote my colleague from Fort Rouge-Riverview—yes or no?

Mr. Pallister: I use all kinds of ways of communicating, and I find them to be very effective when I use them. And I like to use communications that allow me to get the nuance of the person I'm talking to, to make sure I understand fully what it is they're trying to say. I think that helps build communications.

The member—or it may not have been the member specifically, but I remember some members of the previous government launching some personal attacks on one of their colleagues, saying that he didn't listen. I don't know if that was wholly due to the reliance on email, but I don't think—and there's lots of business school courses on this and, you know, articles in business sections of newspapers. If the member likes to use newspapers for research, he can probably google them, search The Globe and Mail or Financial Post or any number of different periodicals which talk about the dangers of the overreliance on email, the dangers of a pre-occupation with it in a business setting. And I expect those same dangers exist in abundance in the political world. They can also be—they can be very useful as a tool, but the tool shouldn't use the person.

And so I tend to be careful not to overrely on one method for communication. But there are certain topics that require face-to-face and others that don't, to the same degree, and so that's why I'm pointing out to the member that I like to use a variety of

means to communicate, including email when in Costa Rica.

Mr. Swan: So I think the Premier may have got to that at the end. So the Premier is acknowledging that he has used email when he's been down in Costa Rica since the election.

Mr. Pallister: I'm acknowledging that I use a variety means of communication. I prefaced my answers, and so what he's misinterpreting as reluctance is really a very, very sincere commitment to make sure that I don't say or do anything that would give less security to the information flows that I have to deal with on a daily basis, whether I'm in the country, out of the country or anywhere else for that matter. So I'm trying to make sure that I protect the integrity of how we run our office—been doing pretty well with that. I count on the support of my caucus colleagues and other associates at the various government levels and elsewhere to protect the integrity of information flows and to make sure that that information is guarded where appropriate. And I think that that is—all too often I think there's a danger that people might assume that wanting to protect information flows is somehow a bad thing. There is a very real and important aspect to it in terms of working in government.

I could quote from a document that I know the Clerk's going to provide me here in a minute which speaks about the need for the civil service, people within the civil service, when dealing with information, to do so confidentially. Some of these things are—can be taken to be a desire—I think can be given a negative air when such is not the case, and I think that's a—is dangerous.

There's a real desire on my part and on the part of my colleagues to be as open and transparent as we possibly can, but, at the same, we have to balance that with the protection that the member knows, as a former Cabinet minister, must be given to certain aspects of our dealings and responsibilities which require us to guard information very, very carefully, and so balancing those things, because one never knows when that could come up. Someone could be with friends at a Jets game, in Phoenix, say, just as an example, and shouldn't be criticized for that, and yet, at the same time, might have some information come to them while away, which might be of a confidential nature, which might be communicated by email or in some other manner. The key thing is to make sure that information is protected, and, if it

is protected, then the member is observing their responsibilities as a member of a Cabinet.

What I endeavour to do is place the protection of the confidential nature of confidential information first and foremost while, at the same time, as I'm doing here in Estimates, making sure that fair and legitimate questions that allow for—that I am allowed to give out answers to, that I certainly do that. And I've been doing that with the member's colleagues repeatedly, and I'll continue to.

Mr. Swan: Well, I don't think I've asked a single question about the nature of any particular communication the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has had. What I've been asking is the way that he communicates with his team, which he went on some length about. He claims his government's being open and transparent, yet he won't even answer simple questions that are very specific.

So let me try another one: Does the Premier use a government email account?

Mr. Pallister: I use a variety of email accounts. Let me just share with the member, because I think we paid short shrift to this, and I must pay a little more attention to it.

The difference between—and, I think, it reflects on something the member is alluding to, which is the importance of respecting people and the taxpayers of the province, I just read into the record, but I want to elaborate on it, the number of technical officers that were employed by the previous administration in the year before the last election. It was 108. We employ 57 now. That is a difference in payroll of three—over \$3.6 million. This demonstrates our commitment to keeping our word. We said we would fix the finances, and we said we'd begin by setting a proper tone at the top.

Now I'm referencing this, because I am endeavouring to set the proper respectful tone at the top in terms of protecting confidential information in every way I can. I've been advised that it makes sense not to disclose in every single detail or every aspect of how I communicate my information, and so what the member interprets as evasive is actually an attempt to do something which is a real responsibility I have.

Now, the member knows, and I have not referenced it specifically to him, but I will reference that part of the challenge the previous administration faced was a lack of respecting Cabinet secrecy. And so I recognize that, and I've seen that, and I know the

member is aware of it. Part of it was having Cabinet members or 'formanant'—former Cabinet members air their concerns publicly and, in this way, create a very dysfunctional environment where perhaps one existed prior, granted, but an even more dysfunctional environment which made it difficult for the government to do its job.

I am endeavouring to protect the integrity and information flow of this government, so we can do our job. The member was part of a government that did not do its job and is now, quite rightly, asking me questions about how we do ours, and I'm attempting to explain that to him.

Mr. Swan: And, just a few minutes ago, when I asked the Premier whether he uses a government email account, his answer, which surprised me a bit, was that he uses a variety of email accounts.

So he didn't answer the question—provided a question that leads to more questions, frankly.

Is the Premier using a variety of email accounts? Does he believe that's more secure than using the government email that he's been assigned?

*(15:40)

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member didn't ask me what I use as Premier. He asked me what I do, and I answered him accurately and honestly. I said what I do, and that's the information he asked, and that was the information he was given.

On the staffing levels of the NDP, let me also mention that not only was their Cabinet 46 per cent larger than ours, but it was 150 per cent less functional, and I think that's fair to point out.

Let me also—without reading the names of the people into the record, because I don't think that would be appropriate—let me describe the various positions that the previous administration—in spending over \$8 million on technical officers, the various positions that they had and that they used resources to pay for.

And I'll begin with the position of press secretary to Cabinet. Jobs and the Economy was the specific area. That was a \$79,000—seventy-nine, one hundred and six—\$79,163 salary on that one. That was classified at professional officer 7.

In the Agriculture, Food and Rural Development portfolio, there was a livestock engineer—engineer 4. They were classed as a P7, and their salary was \$76,163.

In Executive Council, there was a special assistant to the Premier, and that classification paid \$71,794.

The executive assistant in Aboriginal and Northern Affairs—and I emphasize to the member that these are the positions that were salaried at the time of the government's termination or right—just prior to the government's dropping the writ, so to speak. The executive assistant in that portfolio received \$66,896 in salary.

In Family Services, the special adviser to the minister in—the job was called planning program analyst 3—was paid \$66,673.

In Infrastructure and Transportation, the special assistant received \$64,456.

In Multiculturalism and Literacy, the special assistant to the minister received \$64,456.

In Education and Advanced Learning, the special assistant to the minister received \$62,092.

In Labour and Immigration, the special assistant received \$62,092.

In Tourism, Culture and Sport, the executive assistant received \$62,092.

The special assistant in Jobs and the Economy received \$59,690.

In Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the special assistant to the minister received \$59,690.

In Housing and Community Development, the executive assistant received \$59,690.

I should mention this is just the salaries; this doesn't include benefits. So benefits can vary, of course, but generally are 20 per cent or so in addition to these numbers that the taxpayer would be funding.

The executive assistant in Conservation and Water Stewardship received \$54,886.

In Housing and Community Development, \$54,886.

We'll continue with this list momentarily, but I emphasize to the member that we take the responsibilities very seriously, and the responsibilities of getting our fiscal house in order after a decade of accumulating debt at record levels are very serious.

And so I would also emphasize that any communication costs involved wherever I am, I absorb personally and do not bill to the taxpayer.

Mr. Swan: I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister)—yes, I have been advised that you've made it clear that you make sure taxpayers in Manitoba don't pay for your phone bills from Costa Rica. Do you use your own personal phone then, or what phone do you use to communicate with your team back in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I'd encourage the member to respect the fact that I have given him this answer in various ways, and I'll keep giving him the answer until he understands.

I'm trying to protect the confidentiality and the information flow that I'm responsible for as Premier at all times, and I'll continue to do that because Cabinet confidence matters. I'll just read why it matters into the record. Cabinet confidence—the member could reflect on this, because it is an important issue—matters, as it is a 'tenet' of a stable government. Confidentiality extends to minutes that result from any Cabinet discussions and applies to all employees of the government. Absolute confidentiality allows ministers to discuss proposals frankly while developing a collective position. This confidentiality—collective position, I should emphasize that—this confidentiality covers Cabinet, subcommittees such as Treasury Board, and planning and priorities committees of Cabinet as well.

Cabinet ministers are collectively responsible for all actions taken by the Cabinet, and they must publicly support all Cabinet decisions or, as the member chose to do, resign. In order to reach final decisions, ministers must be able to express their views freely during the discussions held in Cabinet. To allow the exchange of views to be disclosed publicly would result in the erosion of the collective responsibility of ministers. Consequently, the collective decision-making process is protected by the rule of confidentiality which upholds the principle of collective responsibility and enables ministers to engage in full and frank discussions necessary for the effective functioning of a Cabinet system.

The formal text of a Cabinet minute must always remain a confidence. The substance of a decision reached by Cabinet may be disclosed to the public as deemed appropriate by Cabinet or by a minister with the approval of Cabinet. There is no discretionary power provided to an individual minister or government institution to make a Cabinet confidence accessible to the public.

Further, Cabinet confidence applies to all civil servants within government. Civil servants hold a

unique place of trust and, therefore, upon employment with the government of Manitoba must take an oath of office and allegiance. The oath is a solemn promise by government employees to discharge their duties responsibly and to refrain from disclosing any information in any form which may come to them throughout their—by reason of their employment in the government service. The obligations of the oath of office apply throughout their employment with the government of Manitoba and continue to apply after the employment relationship ends.

I read this into the record for the member because it reflects the importance of guarding information and of dealing with it very, very carefully, and this is what we've endeavoured to do. I've been involved back in provincial politics now for the last four years. We've treated information very carefully and with real respect in opposition. We continue to do that in government, and I would want to make sure that the member understands that that is something that we take very seriously.

Mr. Swan: It is disappointing the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is either incapable or unwilling of answering the simple questions I've been asking. And I think he's actually quite a capable individual, so we'll leave that where it is.

Could the Premier please put on the record which of his senior staff he has actually communicated with, whether it's on the—by the phone or whatever other method he has set out today with the following senior staff: with Philip Houde, with Olivia Baldwin-Valainis, with James White, with Jonathan Scarth and with David McLaughlin. Which of these staff has the Premier communicated with while he's been down in Costa Rica?

Mr. Pallister: I'm not sure if that's a question that deserves or merits an answer.

Mr. Swan: Is the Premier refusing to answer that question?

Mr. Pallister: I'll undertake to get some advice from my senior staff on whether that's the type of question that I should be answering and get back to the member with that. If I am advised that that is a question which is more respectful in substance than in delivery, I undertake to answer at a future point.

In the meantime, I want the member to be assured that I stay in regular touch and am accessible through my office to every member of our team as is needed. As far as laying out individual discussions

and who, in fact, they were with or the nature of them, I won't go there. So, we'll get an interpretation on this from the senior officials that have more experience than I do in my first year with this type of question. I'm not at all reluctant to tell the member that I am available and have been available on a regular basis, that I communicate with my office regularly, regardless of where I am, and that I am certainly in touch with team members of our government, including and not limited to Cabinet ministers, senior staff and so on.

But to get into individual discussions, to start talking about individual staff members, the member would note I haven't read any individual staff member's name into the record when I'm talking about the employment list of the NDP prior to the last election out of respect to them. And I don't think that bringing up individual discussions with staff members is entirely appropriate, but I'll—as I said, I'll—if I'm advised otherwise, I'll certainly look at—to giving the member more detail.

* (15:50)

Mr. Swan: Late in January, when the Premier was down in Costa Rica, there was an article that was published in Maclean's magazine, a national magazine. And, frankly, I think, when the article came out, it wasn't a good day for Manitobans of any political stripe. There were comments attributed to the Premier about young indigenous men. And I won't read the entire quote in; the Premier is familiar with the quote that was attributed to him.

What I'm really getting at—not at the fact the Premier was down in Costa Rica, or frankly even the details of what was said, the concern I have is that by the next afternoon, the Premier's staff had released to the media a list with names and communities of individuals that had been charged, not convicted but charged, of a certain offence under The Wildlife Act. And I'd like to ask the Premier how his staff came to acquire the list of names and communities of those individuals charged with those offences under The Wildlife Act.

Mr. Pallister: Thank the member for that question, because I want to undertake to make sure that we have exactly the process of how that information is made public. I want to share that with the member.

But I also want to read a little bit of an excerpt to the member. And it may be helpful to him to understand that using techniques other than email can actually be very useful. This is from the Harvard

Business Review. It's an article that says: don't send that email; pick up the phone. This is very useful. And the idea of live conversations, as much as you can have them, I think, is something that's helpful. It's hard to get the emotional quotient out of an email. Biggest drawback and danger with an email is that the tone and content are easy to misread, so live conversations can be very helpful.

I also would mention—and, you know, there are a lot of articles on this topic. It's an interesting thing to look into. It's something that a lot of business organizations and even some governments have started to take different approaches as a consequence of, because they're finding that email and text often promote reactive responses. There's the time issue, of course, of being tied to your device, whatever it may be. Email can prolong debate beyond the point of usefulness.

The member may even have had some of these experiences himself and would know that there are real advantages to using a variety, as I have done in my business life prior to politics and continue to do in my role now—I have found that there's a right way and a wrong way to communicate. I know that some members of the previous government were particularly harsh in their criticisms of the previous premier and felt that he wasn't communicating effectively. I think the—one of them said that he wasn't listening. It's hard to know whether a person's listening if you're just relying too much on the old email, and you're not really sure if anybody's reading it at the other end. It's nice to have those personal conversations as much as you can.

The information on those charges that the member addressed in his preamble was public information. There are other examples of information that is made available publicly, as well, in a variety of areas. The member is a former Justice critic—Justice minister. He knows that, so he would have known that previous governments also made the lists of charges public when they were filed. So it's not a departure from previous practice to re-release information that's made public already.

Mr. Swan: I'm sorry—is the Premier (Mr. Pallister) suggesting that a list of individuals charged with a particular offence under The Wildlife Act and then released to the media by the Premier's communications staff—is the Premier suggesting that that is a normal activity of the Premier's staff?

Mr. Pallister: I'm not suggesting anything; I just answered the member's question.

Mr. Swan: Why would the Premier's staff release a list like this with names of—and communities of individuals charged with an offence, not convicted but just charged, with an offence?

Why would they release it to the media, and why would they do that the very day after there were some damaging remarks attributed to the Premier that were contained in Maclean's magazine? Why would that happen?

Mr. Pallister: Well, first of all, I've already stated and I'll restate for the member's edification that the remarks that were quoted in that article were not mine and I have said that. That article contained numerous errors. I won't choose to attack the journalist at this point in time, I'll just simply say that any questions that are prefaced on the basis of what it was—asserted in an article, which was—which contained too many errors to be respected, are not likely going to lead to a point of inquiry that would be very useful.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Minto. *[interjection]*

The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: I would say further that it is—and I hope the member would understand this—it is one of the most difficult positions for any person in public life to deal with when someone makes a false assertion through the media about them. That's an extremely difficult thing, to be put in that position of having someone make an assertion about you that is false, that is fact-less, that is groundless, to be put in that position is to be put in a very difficult situation.

Mr. Swan: I mean, I want the Premier to understand I was quite careful in my question to say the comments attributed to the Premier. I understand the Premier's—their view on that.

Whatever the case, the fact is that within hours of that article in Maclean's being published, the Premier's communicators had sent to the media a list of all the names and communities of individuals charged with a particular offence. To the media's credit, they didn't publish those names and communities because, I think, the media understood that there was a problem with the Premier's office going ahead and doing this.

I'm asking the Premier why he and his staff thought that it was a good idea to forward the names and communities of individuals charged with an offence to the media, I suppose, in the hope that the

media would publish this information. Why did the Premier (Mr. Pallister) think this was a good idea—or a fair idea, for that matter?

Mr. Pallister: The information the member is alluding to is public information, and so the information is freely available.

The member is asking whether it was a good idea, a right idea or any number of different things. Much to the chagrin of some, I choose to allow staff to make mistakes sometimes; in my estimation, sometimes they do. In this case I'm not suggesting this was a mistake, but I would suggest that there are things that happen in every organization that on—*in* hindsight perhaps should have been done differently.

For example, I mean, the awarding of—what, seven or eight contracts to a friend of the NDP by a minister, surely somebody on reflection thinks that that was a bad idea. The difference between these two things is that those contracts were awarded in secrecy and what the member's objecting to here was the re-release of publicly available information. So there's a pretty big difference between those two things.

An error—the member calls it an error of openness versus an error of non-disclosure. You know, the member can't have it both ways. He's asking me questions about personal phone calls with staff and wants me to talk openly about that, yet was part of a government that covered up and failed to disclose untendered contracts to literally dozens of different suppliers, many of them linked to donations to his party and the—these aren't observations I'm making without the support of the ombudsman, who looked into this situation and said that this was not appropriate. I'm also backed up by the Auditor General, who said that the—expressed significant concern about the non-disclosure of untendered contracts by the previous administration, and so these are issues of concern, obviously. The member's expressing concern about too much information being out there that was already publicly available. I would think that many Manitobans would have a greater concern about information that pertains to how their tax dollars were used being covered up.

We're endeavouring to change the practices of government to move towards more information being available, not less, and we'll continue to pursue that goal.

*(16:00)

Mr. Swan: Well, the Premier talks about the information that was released by his political staff to the media hours after the Maclean's story broke as being publicly available. Could the Premier just tell me how that information of the names and communities of individual Manitobans charged with an offence under The Wildlife Act, how would that be publicly available on a list that could then be consulted by Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: I'm not sure. The member was the Justice Minister. So the member knows the rules around the posting of charges and would know that these would be posted publicly.

Mr. Swan: So is the Premier saying that the fact that, over the past year, there would've been dockets with a particular name of someone in a section of The Wildlife Act, that would've been posted in each individual court circuit location around the province so that anybody who wanted to compile a list would've had to go to every single court circuit, on every single court day, that that constitutes public disclosure—which was simply followed up by his communications staff providing this to the media? Is that what the Premier is suggesting?

Mr. Pallister: I apologize to the member. I was just trying to get an answer to an earlier question, so I would ask him just to repeat that. Sorry about that.

Mr. Swan: I will repeat it. I know that, of course, the gentleman sitting next to you is very knowledgeable with Conservation matters, so that may help us move things forward this afternoon.

I'm very aware of how someone charged with a particular offence would have their case treated, and, if a case was going forward, there would be a docket posted in whichever particular provincial court circuit location across the province would be hearing the case. So, for an average Manitoban or for anyone to try and find out everybody charged with a particular offence, in a particular year, that would require someone or their friends to go to every single court location around the province and note every single person charged with that particular section of The Wildlife Act.

What is abundantly clear is that the information was collected by one of the departments and was then handed over to the Premier's political staff for release to the media. And, based on that, is the Premier truly saying that what his staff did was simply provide the same kind of public disclosure

that was already available? Because I don't think that makes any sense at all.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think, what the member's doing is criticizing the staff for collating the information, which was available, and assisting the public in getting it. He's also attempted to link the Maclean's article with the release of information. Nonetheless, the fact is that many Manitobans had expressed concerns to me, to other members of our caucus, about night shooting for—in an increasingly frequent—an increasingly frequent basis over the number of weeks and months prior to that time. And so I'm not sure if he's trying to build a case by linking these events, but that appears to be what he's trying to do.

But there is a real concern among many Manitobans—indigenous, non-indigenous, as well—that there wasn't sufficient action being taken to prevent the incidence of night shooting, night hunting. The—and I'm waiting for some more detailed information to share with the member in respect of charges laid, but, I think, that one very reasonable argument that could be made is that there—the information was released to answer the concerns that Manitobans had about the lack of any attention being paid to night hunting. The concerns were coming to us in significant variety, but they were basically that people felt—some who had engaged in night hunting and felt endangered; some of whom were in areas where night hunting was happening were concerned about safety; and others, of course, who have never night hunted—indigenous people, non-indigenous people who have never night hunted—also had concerns about the practice and the prevalence. It seemed an increasing prevalence of it. Yet not one, I think, but two incidents of people losing their lives as a consequence of engaging in night hunting, and so it's not a practice that is one that has gone without notice by Manitobans. I think many people are concerned about it and have expressed their concerns about it.

I'm trying to get for the member the frequency of charges. I'd like to actually see the document that—and I'll share it with the member—but one of the concerns that was very frequently communicated to us about the previous government's approach was that they were ironically turning a blind eye to this practice.

I have had discussions with indigenous leaders on this topic, and there are certainly more concerns shared by them with me and by me with them about

the practice of night hunting and about the dangers that it poses, not least of which for the—also for the animal itself.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister), and certainly it's an issue that we agree needs to be taken seriously, but here's what I just want the Premier to consider: There was a list that was then sent out to the media by his staff. That's not contradicted in any way. I believe that's accepted by the Premier. There was a list of people charged with a particular offence. We know just recently, there was a conviction under a section of The Wildlife Act. It was actually an American hunter who had committed a fairly serious offence. I don't think anybody had a difficulty with his name being made public. I think everybody would agree that that was appropriate.

The problem is—in this case, in this situation—the Premier's staff provided to the media the names and communities of a number of people charged with an offence. Many of those people, if they were indeed indigenous, would be able to use their treaty rights as a defence which would cause the Crown attorney to stay the charge. There are others who may have their charges stayed because the police or wildlife officials or others might have had incorrect information but, by doing that, the Premier's staff really didn't worry about that. They simply put the names and the addresses out there to try to make what appeared to be a political point.

And can the Premier understand why that would create a problem and why there would be people concerned about the decisions that his staff made to release that information back at the end of January?

Mr. Pallister: I can understand that the Winnipeg Police Service, for example, posts the names of all those who are charged in their Check Stop program. I understand that that is the practice today and that it was the practice under the previous government.

So I'm not sure what the member's insinuating in respect of that. There's definitely been a bolstering of enforcement, so there is no doubt that with that—because this is dangerous hunting. Yes, there are treaty rights and certainly the treaty rights must be respected. That's been well established in jurisprudence. There's also illegal hunting, and the illegal hunting has to be enforced and it wasn't being done, so we've stepped up enforcement in respect of that.

This—the member raises the issue of—and criticizes it—but the media asked for a list of people

that had been charged and we released the list to the media. So, you know, I'm not sure where the member is trying to go with this.

* (16:10)

I do know that the safety of people in our province matters to him and it matters to me. And I would hope that in recognition of the fact that we've had people killed and we've had people injured as a result of unsafe hunting practices and that some of that has been night hunting, that he'd recognize that if someone was killed next year as a consequence of night hunting, he would be quite right and the first one, very likely, to launch accusations against this government and me, personally, for not taking action to address it. So we're trying to address it. We have—we've redeployed conservation officers, we've increased aerial enforcement and I should mention that also we've stepped up some of the enforcement mechanisms. And the Sustainable Development Minister be better equipped than I to—for the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), to give him more detail on this, but we've also done some targeted blitzes in areas where there were reports of unsafe hunting and illegal hunting. We've launched 39 this—I don't have the date on this document, so I don't know if this is up to date, but it—the—do we have a date on this? There's no time on this. Up to the time of the printing of this document, there'd been 39 unsafe hunting charges laid, which is approximately double the—*[interjection]* Oh, it's from January 16th. So, yes, so nearly double the rate for last year.

So that, you know, there I hope I've assisted the member somewhat in understanding the practical approach we've taken to providing information when requested, the steps we're taking to address the issue of illegal hunting, in particular illegal night hunting, which are—in an effort to try to better protect the safety of those who engage in the practice, but also those who are in the vicinity of the practice where it is engaged in.

Mr. Swan: Well, look, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) uses that example of the decision of police services in certain occasions to release the names of drivers stopped. That's a decision that's made by the police service, and, generally, it's a decision that's actually announced in advance of the Check Stop program, which I think both the Premier and I would equally support.

But that's a far cry from having the Premier's own political staff decide to release to the media information that is not in any way practically

accessible to other Manitobans. And I guess maybe we can end it this way, Mr. Premier—maybe we can end this area of questioning very quickly. Will the Premier undertake not to have his political staff release to the media similar information like that—this which list names and communities of people charged with a particular offence? We don't have to talk about whether this was the right or wrong thing. Is this something the Premier would undertake to do, given the concerns that have been raised and the impact of the decision to release this information to the media? Is that something the Premier's prepared to undertake to do?

Mr. Pallister: Well, in reference to that and the earlier question, I've undertaken to get advice as to what would be the appropriate and respectful way to deal with the information. Your previous question was similar in respect of how to handle information flows, how to release them, to do it in a respectful way. I want to be respectful to those charged. I also want to be respectful of general public interest and I think also respectful to members of the media who do launch inquiries sometimes which cannot be satisfied. And the member and I both are aware of that.

For various reasons, they—we can't sometimes provide information that is asked for by the media or that is FIPPA'd for. So I want to balance the need for information with the respect for the public and the right for the public to know and have answers through the media or through us directly. So I will undertake for the member to get that kind of advice but will—I can't undertake to not disclose information that is already in the public domain to the media. And he would understand why not.

The previous administration did receive some rather harsh criticism at times, not exclusively from me, in respect of its handling of emails and of the release of said information in those emails to the media when it was requested. The member may recall a Canadian Press story from December 14 about the Ombudsman's report. This was in respect of the Christine Melnick incident when she was—long story short, she was accused of using partisan civil servants to organize political activities and said first she didn't, and then remembered that she had, and then remembered that the premier had been aware of it the whole time. And so, as a consequence of that sequence of remembering and the peeling away of that onion, we launched some inquiries, but so, too, did members of the media on that issue. And the report from the Ombudsman was—said that there

was no plausible explanation as to why a revealing government document that contradicted the government position was withheld from the media and it— withheld from the opposition at the same time.

So the member, in citing that—I don't wish to get into the details of that specifically, but for the member's—to the member's question, this is partly—it's incidents like this that give us all a black eye. When it comes to covering up information, I want to make sure we balance the interests of those charged—balance the interests of them with the public and the protection of the public and the respectful role the media plays and we must respect as well. So, to do that isn't an easy thing, as the member knows, but is the balancing act that we're all faced with any given day in government.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for that, and I look forward to whatever he's going to provide with the undertaking. I hope it will provide some answers and won't lead to more questions, but we'll see what comes.

I just want to return to some of the questions that I was asking earlier on about the Premier's communication habits when he is down in Costa Rica. Maybe I should restate this more clearly.

Has the Premier spoken on the phone to his team from Costa Rica ever?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

An Honourable Member: Point of order. What is the relevance—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Assiniboia.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): What—this has no relevance to the governance of governing Manitoba. If it's communications, how he communicates is irrelevant, so I—it seems like a question that is not appropriate for the scope of this committee.

Mr. Chairperson: I believe—oh [*interjection*]-does anybody—the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), on the point of order.

Mr. Swan: Yes, just on the same—on that point of order. I mean, the member doesn't suggest the violation of any rule. We had asked a number of questions; I can't say they were fully answered, but we have had a discussion about this.

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairperson, this has everything to do with governance of the province of Manitoba. When—we don't want to know details of exactly what the Premier is talking about. We want to know how he communicates when he's away for—whether it's six weeks or eight weeks or 12 weeks of the year down in Costa Rica, and we do want to know how he can satisfy Manitobans that he is indeed in contact as he needs to be and using the appropriate technology to be able to communicate with his staff and with members of his team.

Mr. Chairperson: The First Minister, on the point of order.

Mr. Pallister: Well, there are lots of divergent views on the relevance of the member's questions, but I respect the member's right to ask them, and I hope he respects my right to answer them.

So I'll simply say that a question about how I operate is—I think is fair within reason. I've addressed as a caveat to that, though, a concern which I think the member respects—I hope he does—which is to make sure that we guard the confidential nature of exchanges with members of the team, and so I've already undertaken to address the substance of this question. So I don't think relevance at this point is really relevant.

Mr. Chairperson: I don't believe the member from Assiniboia has a point of order. It's a dispute of the facts, and I believe this—we're in a global discussion where questions from—that will be global questions will be asked.

Mr. Swan: So I'll return to the question. And again I accept entirely what the Premier is saying that the actual details of what he discusses is not something that it is open for examination or discussion in the course of Estimates or elsewhere.

But the question is: Has the Premier, when he's been down in Costa Rica—since becoming Premier, has he ever used the telephone, whether it's a land line or his personal cellphone or his government cellphone or somebody else's cellphone, has he ever actually spoken on the phone to his team from Costa Rica?

* (16:20)

Mr. Pallister: The member could do a little bit of research and might understand that not unlike many Manitobans I came from relative frugality in my life, built something of a success in my personal life,

thanks to being blessed by the trust of a lot of generous people in my province, and I did this through mustering whatever capabilities I have.

I—and I think that's not a unique story. And so in doing so, I've used whatever tools were available to assist others and have done so with the ultimate goal of trying to find success for them. And as a consequence, some success for me in my life. I've done that in community work, I've done that in sports, I've done it in business and I do it now in public life. So I use the tools that are available to me as effectively as I can to achieve results.

Perhaps Manitobans will measure our government as they did the previous government on our ability to achieve results, and I will let our record at achieving those results stand as testament to my effectiveness as a business manager or my effectiveness in terms of my use of time, my use of the tools that are available to me, and my ability to build relationships that work with my colleagues.

I know the previous administration suffered on each of those fronts and that was very public and it was put on display. I certainly didn't need to see that failure to know what failure looks like, I've failed many times in my life. I've failed on the sports field, I've made mistakes in business, I've made a variety of mistakes. I'm not a young guy by any stretch, I understand I might even be the oldest Premier, but I've learned a lot through my life and I apply everything I have learned to the best of my ability to run this organization co-operatively, respectfully and always respecting the dignity of my colleagues and the sacrosanct responsibilities that I have and I'll continue to do that to the very best of my ability.

Mr. Swan: The Premier's (Mr. Pallister) talked about all the tools that he has. Is one of those tools to communicate with his staff a telephone?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, the member is, I think, facetiously raising a question which he knows the answer to. And so given that he knows the answer to the question, and given that the question itself is somewhat disrespectful to the competencies and capabilities I've put on display throughout my entire adult life, I choose not to dignify his question with the kind of response he's looking for.

Mr. Swan: Earlier this year, before one of the trips down to Costa Rica, the Premier had made a show of having the media in to take a look at various reading material that he was going to be packing up and taking along. Does the Premier take Cabinet

submissions or Treasury Board documents to review when he heads to Costa Rica?

Mr. Pallister: Again, and the nature of—

An Honourable Member: A point of order, I'm sorry, I—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher), on a point of order.

Mr. Fletcher: Is there—these are questions about security of documents which should not—which are being secured, and this is not the forum to try and create unnecessary comments that are not productive to the governing of the province.

The Premier is entitled to, and has the right to go, you know, I don't remember us asking any questions about if there was telephone access to former premier's cottages in northwestern Ontario, or if they took Cabinet documents to their cottage or if there was even road access to the cottage.

Like, I'm new to this forum, but if these are the kind of questions that the best the opposition can do, well, I guess that's good for the government. So I withdraw my point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: You can't withdraw your point of order, but if there is anybody interested in speaking back to the point of order, I'll accept the—

An Honourable Member: You know, can we provide leave for him to withdraw his point of order?

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Minto (Mr. Swan).

Mr. Swan: Yes, I would ask the committee if there's leave for the member for Assiniboia to withdraw his point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave for the member to withdraw that?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

The point of order remains on the table. If anybody wishes to respond to the point of order, I will take that now before I make a ruling.

Nobody wishes to respond to it.

I see no point of order, as the minister is not obligated to answer a question that he feels is not relative to that. So I think, there is room in there in

order to provide the minister with an option if he so wishes not to answer the question.

* * *

Mr. Pallister: Yes, so I appreciate the question from the member as it pertains to something I consider very important, which is the protection of confidential documents. And I would put forward our record at protecting those documents, knowing that it is a perfect record at this point, but knowing also that things can happen in the conduct of government affairs, and sometimes you don't control everything. So I know that; I respect that.

But I would also let the member know that in—over about a two-decade period, I also handled confidential documents, and, when I wasn't in public life, without a single leak—not one. And this was—has been referenced at professional forums. Others of my colleagues know that that's the case. So I do this to emphasize to the member how important I feel it is that we safeguard the confidentiality of information, and I make every effort to do so.

But his specific question, which I don't consider unfair, was: is—are there sometimes secret documents—documents that fall under that category—other than research, for example or, you know, personal-interest study, that type of thing, are there sometimes documents that I do take with me if I'm taking a vacation? For example, this year, I might have a total of three or four weeks of vacation time, and, if I do that, do I take confidential documents with me? And the answer is yes, I do. And, if I do, I guard them very, very carefully. I have systems for doing that, and they seem to have worked throughout about 35 or 40 years of my life, and I'll continue to use those kinds of systems to safeguard, as best as I possibly can, the public interest and the security of confidential documents.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the Premier (Mr. Pallister) for that. As the Premier knows, in my previous life, I also had the duty to protect confidential documents. We know the next leader of the Conservative Party, Maxime Bernier, may have had a little difficulty with that, but, I think, the Premier and I can both agree that we both have better judgment than Mr. Bernier exhibited at that time in his political career—

An Honourable Member: Point of order—relevance. Different party.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher), on a point of order.

Mr. Fletcher: That member's comments are irrelevant speculation on media reports that may or may not have been accurate, probably not, and it is, again, dealing—raising issues outside the purview of the Province of Manitoba. And he's just speculating on other events that have nothing to do with this.

Is he going to now talk about the Roman Empire? Like, come on. Let's go.

Mr. Chairperson: Does anybody wish to comment on this point of order?

Then I will take it there is no point of order. As I had said before, it's a dispute of the facts. So we will not accept this point of order.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Minto (Mr. Swan).

Mr. Swan: I'll continue on.

The Premier, just a few minutes ago, said that he now plans three to four weeks of vacation time. Is that the Premier's intention for vacation time for the remainder of calendar year 2017, or is that just a figure of speech that the Premier was using?

* (16:30)

Mr. Pallister: Well, I have a pretty good record of getting things done, so I'm going to stand by my record, and I'll get Manitobans' measurement on my ability to achieve results and our team's ability to achieve results at the end of the term.

So, in terms of how I manage my days of work, I've been known in sports, and business, and in politics to be pretty much a workaholic, and I'll continue to apply myself to the best of my ability.

I want to give an answer, though, to the previous question. One of the questions that the member—that the interim leader had asked—now I've got some information, so, in the spirit of continuing to provide that—the question was about that diesel task force. She'd mentioned that there—this is the committee on reducing diesel use in First Nations communities. And they're a represent—there is representation from every province except Nova Scotia and New Brunswick involved in that committee. So it's a transnational effort.

I may as well, while I have the time, continue to read into the record for the purposes of clarification and clarity and of openness, some of the other positions that the NDP funded. This is—should not be taken, Mr. Chair, as any criticism of the staff persons, whose names I do not read into the record here, but rather to point out the great disparity between the amount of investment made in political positions by the previous administration and the amount that we have chosen to invest in political positions under our administration. For example, the total technical officer payroll under the previous administration was over \$8 million: \$8,025,127. And our total payroll is \$4.3 million. So that's 84 per cent less than the previous administration.

And now some of those positions were—and I'll just continue here: in Municipal Government, a program policy analyst—this was a part-time position—\$23,480; Labour and Immigration, an executive assistant, \$54,886; also, in Mineral Resources, an executive assistant paid \$54,886; in Health, an executive assistant, \$57,288; in Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, an executive assistant, \$57,288; in Aboriginal and Northern Affairs—I mentioned that—Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, an executive assistant to the minister, paid \$57,288; in Children and Youth Opportunities, \$57,288 for an executive assistant; Education and Advanced Learning, an executive assistant to the minister, \$59,690; Children and Youth Opportunities, a special assistant, \$59,690; in the executive office, an—and I should mention that the premier's actual—premier's and Cabinet payroll is considerably higher as well. My office, considerably smaller than my predecessor's. That being said, we haven't had a rebellion yet, and we haven't had a leak of private documents yet, so that's so far, so good, and I haven't hired any former union staff to work on the taxpayer dime on my leadership campaign, but that hasn't been necessary either, thank goodness.

In terms of the Justice department, they have a special assistant that was paid \$59,690; in Finance, an executive assistant who was paid \$59,690; in Health, another special assistant, \$59,690; in Executive Council, a policies and issues manager who was paid \$61,767; in Justice, an executive assistant, paid \$62,092; in Health, another executive assistant, paid \$62,092; and Jobs and the Economy, an executive assistant, paid \$62,092; special assistant for Family Services, paid \$62,092; an executive assistant in Tourism, Culture, Sport, they were paid \$62,092; Municipal Government, an executive

assistant, paid \$62,092; Vehicle and Equipment Management Agency, also a planning and program analyst, paid \$62,092.

And the list goes on, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): My question is in regard to suicide. I just met with a group of young Manitobans, as well, upstairs. And that's one of their primary concerns, as well, that they brought to us. And these are urban—largely urban youth that have come to meet with us, and they are quite concerned as well for the statistics for suicide.

I'm wondering what is the Premier (Mr. Pallister) doing in regards to the suicide issue in the North. Is there a mental health strategy in place yet? Is it being tabled soon to combat youth suicide crisis?

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the member's question, and any question on this issue is of great relevance, deep relevance to her and to I, and I know all members of the House.

It's very timely too, because we've just released an RFP, request for proposal, on—for co-ordination of a mental health strategy specifically for—the North, or not—no, a mental strategy on suicide prevention specifically. Yes, so we've just released that, and so I can offer up the minister to give the member more detail on that, and I'm sure, whether in Estimates or in another way, he should be able to provide you with more detail on that important issue.

Ms. Klassen: I thank you for that offer and I'm deeply appreciative of that, we're finally moving forward on that front.

And, personally, I took care of my niece who just got out of the psychiatric ward for taking an entire bottle of iron pills, and so—and she's only 14 years old. And just the stress that puts on me—I only watched her for 24 hours. I can't imagine her foster parents—what they're going through; let alone my cousin, who is the mother of this young girl.

And that brings me to another point. She's only allowed to go into that ward for a number of times before she gets rejected, and how are we, as parents, as concerned adults, able to get other supports if they're being rejected by the hospitals once that occurs?

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry I can't give the member the detail that she would like on this. This is an important topic and, again, I would encourage her—I expect that the Health Minister might have some

information, but I think this—the RFP is going out through Health or through Child and Family Services? *[interjection]* So the Health Minister would be able to provide more detail to the member than I can.

I can only say, I thank the member for her—generally, for the references and the openness that she's made to her personal experiences in respect of dealing with a lot of these issues. I think it's important we talk about them.

I was given a great honour by the Canadian Mental Health Association, being named a friend to Canadian mental health, and, really, I did far, far less than the member for Kewatinook has done and many other Canadians. But what I tried to do was advance the cause of ending the stigma of mental health challenges that is—that was put forward by the Canadian association through the prebudget consultations that we did as a progressive—as a Conservative government. And Jim Flaherty was kind enough to listen when we made this—when the committee—all-party committee, I should emphasize that—backed our recommendations on this—supporting this campaign. Minister Flaherty has—was a fine man and he had dealt with a child who has faced tremendous challenges—I'll just say, in his life—and so he was very empathetic to the situations the member raises and that others raised in this process.

It is important to talk. It is important for our children to know they have someone to talk to. It is important for adults as well. As someone who has lost friends to suicide, and I'm not alone in this, and I think it's important to know when these things happen, they impact on many other people. And the importance of speaking—being able to be heard, being able to share thoughts at those times—is particularly important.

A very touching example that we dealt with close to our family was a good friend who chose to commit suicide, and within two weeks, another young girl in the area that we used to live in near Portage la Prairie, the area I used to represent federally, also chose to commit suicide. I think those two things were not entirely separate, and so the—and it's not because they knew one another, but it was because, in part, I think, there was such a high profile given to the incident the—involving the adult and their choice that it may have influenced the young mind.

* (16:40)

These are difficult, difficult issues. We can't begin to understand. I—unless it's been something we've faced personally in our own lives or in our own families, I don't believe we can begin to understand, for example, the torment that a parent feels as a consequence of a child's suicide. It's difficult, but it's not impossible for us to do better. And so this is part of the focus of the RFP: is for us to work to develop a better plan of action.

I believe there were—I want to say that I know that the previous administration faced a number of challenges, and I've referenced those, but one of them, certainly, was the issue of youth suicide in a number of northern communities in—an—one in particular, and so—but I think it's not isolated, clearly and sadly, to one community or one circumstance. And so we need a plan that can—a plan of action that can work more effectively than has been the case in the past, and that's the challenge we must face together.

This is, I think, a great example of what I've been saying about a number of public policy issues. This should not be a non-partisan—this should be a non-partisan issue. This should not be treated as a partisan issue, so I want to congratulate the member for her willingness to come forward, speak about these issues and, also, I've said to her and her colleagues, as I did to the opposition caucus in the pre-Estimates process, and I mean it, I'm very open to their suggestions and ideas, on this and on other files as well—very open to hearing from the member and hearing from others in terms of their thoughts on these important issues.

Ms. Klassen: Thank you for that, and my condolences. I know that when somebody takes their life, that death haunts forever.

This niece that I have, she was—she is a CFS child, and part of the suicide ideation stems from being locked in her room with her younger brother for nearly two years before the—as the process wasn't explained to her that she could go to a Children's Advocate until she was 12 years old. So, in between, from when she was nine to that age, you know, it was a matter of ignorance on part of the CFS worker and the system itself, where they hadn't checked up on her and they hadn't 'validitate'—validated her concerns and her complaints. And so she felt that she could not—when she said it—you know, if you know what a northern Aboriginal person, it's, like, we're very shy, we're very timid; if we don't get the recognition, if we don't get the respect, we tend to

collapse and enclose ourselves. And so she was caught in a Steinbach area and in a Steinbach CFS system and not validated, and so all that effect was coming out as a teenager throughout the—you know, teenage years are very traumatic, in and of itself. And so I appreciate those comments, and definitely this is a non-partisan issue. It can happen in the North; it can happen in the south; it can happen anywhere. And the better we're equipped—and so I thank you for that answer.

My next question is in regards to food security in the North. As you know, with climate change—well, with the shorter and shorter winter road—ice-road seasons, we're not getting as much product up north. Costs continue to rise when we have to fly in our perishable goods.

I believe that there is ways that we can combat that, and just wondering what this government is doing in regards of food insecurity for our northern residents.

Mr. Pallister: First of all, I want to offer clarification for the member. I was—on the RFP—actually it was awarded last week. On the mental health strategy, it was awarded—contracted to VIRGO planning and evaluation, Virgil, VIRGO—

An Honourable Member: VIRGO.

Mr. Pallister: —VIRGO to develop a mental health and addiction strategy, and so they'll be working through the balance of the year, and the deadline for reporting back is the end of the year.

I'll attempt to secure some information for the member on the food security issue and, again, encourage her for more detailed answers to utilize the greater expertise of our Health Minister, I know, is working on this as well, and also, I believe Eileen is working on some issues. Isn't Eileen, our Indigenous Minister is—our—sorry—the member for Agassiz (Ms. Clarke), the minister for indigenous affairs, has also been working on this.

I was going to say, too, and I encourage the member in this, we know that in respect of just the east-side communities, which are in her riding—circumscription [*constituency*], I was going to say—that access issues have been a concern. The—we've been reaching out, and we'll continue to, to get the federal government involved in partnering to assist us there. The previous administration made commitments there, but it would have taken many, many, many years to get those—as the member

knows—those projects would have taken decades to get done.

We believe by working in partnership with the federal government, whether this one or a subsequent one of another party, we would be able to achieve better results more effectively, because really, a lot of these lands, as the member knows, are federal constitutional responsibilities that they have not necessarily done the best possible job on, regardless of the party. Over a long period of time, these issues have not been addressed effectively.

Now, the previous administration did commit to east-side road construction, but the lion's share of the dollars didn't go into construction projects, and so roads weren't actually built as much as, well, money went to other things. And the Auditor General's report was rather scathing on that subject, on not only the lack of results, because we know that we have close to \$500 million that had—was invested, and yet we have 50 miles of road as a result. Well, this is not really helping address climate change impacts on ice roads and so on and so forth in the area, right? So it's not addressing the food security issue effectively for those communities, many of—I grew up thinking I was isolated, you know, 15 miles from the nearest town. It's nothing compared to what many people in northern Manitoba face, not even close. And I recognize, from the feelings I had of isolation as a young man growing up in that environment, how imperiled it is psychologically and really for people who live in very small isolated communities, whether indigenous communities, mining communities in the North, or you name it.

So, for that reason, I encourage the member to encourage the federal government to partner with us in terms of the east-side road projects as we move forward. I know they have challenges, fiscal challenges, too. They have made, however, a lot of noisy commitments to investing in support of indigenous people. They have also federally said that they are very supportive of us addressing infrastructure projects. So let's have a partnership then, and let's address the needs of northern and indigenous communities.

Let's address the needs to get a partnership going, because this should not just be on the treasury of the provincial government alone, in my estimation. This is a good example of where a partnership could work a lot better, such as we are doing now with the Shoal Lake access road as an example, such as we are endeavouring to get off the

ground with the outlet at the north end of Lake Manitoba, because this will assist a lot of those communities in not having to be removed from their homes in the future as a result of high water.

Clearly, that—you know, I think as much as the challenges are real in these communities, and I think the member would agree with me, the vast, vast majority of the people in these communities don't want to move out. They prefer to live there. And they know there are challenges in getting access to especially affordable food as an example, but they would rather have those challenges than getting easy food in Winnipeg and living in a hotel.

Ms. Klassen: I would wholeheartedly agree that home will always be home. And, when I was home recently, there's no—nothing else that can compare to being at home. And, despite not having an actual homestead still up north, it was still home to me.

* (16:50)

I'm wondering about our northern airports. When I had asked the question, there was made mention of—that the airport that—in The Pas that would be remaining, was paved. And that was a great thing that it's the paved airport that we're saving. And so every other community that I land in is gravel. So does this mean that we're now going to be able to look forward to paved runways in the communities I land in?

Mr. Pallister: I don't think so, but I have undertaken—and I have spoken to the chief at Mathias Colomb and the minister about this, to, respectfully, to give a little more time—for the minister's benefit here, to give a little bit more time for the air services that are being operated by that band out of that site, which we are closing, to give them time to adjust to that.

And I put it out here now because I haven't had a chance to actually—I have talked personally to the chief, but I haven't had a chance to talk to him since I got some communication in respect of this, or there may be—he may have misunderstood that we weren't closing the airport. We are closing the airport, but we're going to allow, because he operates—his band operates a service out of the airport, to give them more time to allow them to transition more effectively with respect to their customers, as well, you know, the people who deal with their company.

In respect of—I'm looking for more information for the member on questions she raised the previous time in respect of Northern Healthy Foods Initiative.

At this point, all I can say to her is the regular programming support is in this year's budget continue—five community-based Northern Healthy Foods Initiative partners. This is administered through the minister of indigenous and rural and municipal affairs. Okay?

Ms. Klassen: Our farmers are very important to the economy of the province, and it was recently—well, still is tax time. And as an accountant, I felt the call of a—the accounting and I offered all my families free returns and if only they would let me handle their information, and so I got to satisfy that. That's my normal brain at this time of year.

But many farmers have seen their property taxes double, so what is our government doing to make sure that our farmers are helped in this respect?

Mr. Pallister: Let me say we—I personally take the concerns of our agriculture producers very seriously since I was raised by one, and his—he was raised by one, and he was raised by one and so on and so forth. So I have an understanding of which end of the cow you feed and which one you don't.

I get that—also, that the ag economy is critical to our province, and there are a number of challenges, clearly, not least of which is climate change, which has to be something that I think is on the minds of a lot of producers. As we see the rain events affecting other provinces, we're reminded of the rain events that have affected our province and the somewhat erratic and unpredictable nature of farming doesn't change the fact that it's becoming increasingly apparent to many producers that we have some climate-change issues that we need to start addressing, and not least of which is the abundant water that seems to be making itself available to our producers.

The—using appropriate techniques, additional techniques, to start to do a better job of storage and retention is part of that plan. We're excited to be nearing a time when we'll understand what the federal government's plan is in respect of its carbon tax but, at the same time, we're developing a Manitoba climate-change strategy that we believe will position all Manitobans to mitigate risks, additional risks, but also to be in a better position to achieve sustainable business operations in the case of farmers.

Apart from the Carrot River just west of The Pas, we—our elected members of our government represent every farmer and every producer in the

province of Manitoba. And that may change if climate change results in more arable land being able to be used in, you know, Kewatinook, but in the meantime it's definitely a concern we take seriously. Six billion, approximately, of cash receipts each year from farm families and it's been said—and where I come from, it's said a lot—if it's a good year for the farmer, it's a good year for the community. And that can be said of the province as well.

So we're very aware of the contribution that farming—that the ag industry makes to our province. It's just over 30,000 Manitobans that are employed directly or in the agri-food industry as a consequence of what our farmers do in producing the commodities they produce. Our food processing alone is responsible for about a quarter of the goods manufactured in our province this year and an additional about \$4 billion in sales. So none of that impact would be occurring without primary agriculture, to take that very, very seriously.

Our exports—we're an exporting province when it comes to ag commodities. We have over \$5 billion in ag products exported this year, and we anticipate an about 67 per cent of manufactured food products leave the province as well. And so it's a massive industry; it's tremendously important to our province.

There are a number of areas that we are looking to assist with. For many farmers, they say to me, in good years, at least—over the years, I've had the privilege of representing ag producers; in good years, they generally say, just stay out of my way. And so, in reference to that, there are areas where we can help, I think, by reducing some of the overlapping paperwork.

The member alluded to tax time. There's a reason that most Manitobans hire someone else to do their taxes. Part of it is expertise, part of it is it's a great deal of hard work and frustrating for many people.

I remember, my dad used to say that he didn't particularly enjoy tax time. My uncle came over and helped him do his tax returns, and he said, you know, where were all these guys from tax—the taxation authority when I was harvesting that crop. They weren't around. They're only around now that it—we sold it and we got some money. They weren't helping him plant, they weren't helping him do any of the work around the yard, or me, as his best hired man, as he used to call me.

And so, you know, we're looking for ways to assist the ag producers of our province every way we can, while respecting the needs to protect our environment—balance those things—recognizing we have to be respectful of neighbours always. And so, whether it's drainage issues, it's marketing opportunities, it's partnering on trade initiatives, it's the red tape I alluded to, the safety issues around farming, because there—it is a high-risk occupation. Those are important things. I spent a fair bit of time in my life working with groups to assist in making the ag, an industrial workplace, a safer place in which to work, and preventing accidents is the best approach.

So there are a lot of—more things I'll add to the record, but I see my time has elapsed here.

Ms. Klassen: So, in order to save money in the long term, there also must be meaningful investments.

You know, the east-side road is one example of the NDP—how they mismanaged some vital funds that our people needed.

So I'm wondering: Will this government invest more in—when he's choosing the current investments, are—is there a process to—that you're undertaking to see what works and what doesn't?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, that's a very good question, and it's a really important question, because it isn't just how much you spend, clearly; it's what you get for it. I mean, that's sort of rudimentary to the way Manitobans manage their own money. I think we're—we have the deserved reputation for being the most value-oriented shoppers in the country of Canada, and we have to apply that same logic with the money we take from Manitobans in taxes. So I'm very concerned about that.

You know, some people consider words like thrift and frugality to be old words, but they shouldn't be when it comes to responsibly managing resources entrusted to you by other people who work hard for their money and then have to pay taxes.

I think Manitobans very much are giving people; they want to pay taxes. They want to see value for money derived from those taxes, though, and so that return-on-investment piece is really particularly important when it comes to every dollar managed by government.

That's why I emphasize, you know, our expenditures, for example, on political staff are just a little over half of what the previous administration

was. Because I don't think if we listed, you know, 20 things including infrastructure, better health care, mental health initiatives, education for our children, and we listed political staff in there, I—with all due respect to the important work that political staff do, I don't think they'd make the top five, you know.

So I think we have to understand that we have to use the money that is entrusted to us well but not just to say we're spending money on things; rather, to get value for the money we spend.

So, with that in mind, we are reviewing our economic development strategies for the province. We have done an extensive fiscal performance analysis and review. We had a—there's a—which had a public side to it, as you know. The member participated, and I thank her for that—in the—some of the public consultations, and I hope enjoyed them. And those are a very important part of getting ideas from Manitobans.

We also employed, through a tendered contract that was hotly contested, we arrived at—the winning tender was KPMG. We did—we've engaged in the Look North strategy, which, now moving forward in co-operation with both indigenous and northern community leaders and community representatives, I am very excited about. I would say these and many other initiatives are a way to gather the ideas, synthesize those ideas, and act upon them to get the best possible return for Manitobans.

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

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (15:00)

Madam Chairperson (Colleen Mayer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume considerations of the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): So I think today we're going to spend a little bit of time talking about immigration, and so obviously I think that we all know how important immigration is to the Manitoba economy, and certainly, when we look at the current refugee crisis, I think that it's a timely discussion, so I look forward to our discussion today.

So would the minister be so kind as to tell me how much total funding has the department allocated for refugee settlement supports for 2017-2018?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): And I thank the member for the question. The funding for this year is \$75,000 in funding provided to the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations, the MANSO group, in support of a refugee response co-ordinator and, in addition, there is \$110,000 in funding which is provided to the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council—Welcome Place, in particular, to support services including paralegal services and transportation to Emerson and now, I would assume, Gretna to Winnipeg.

Ms. Fontaine: So, to be clear, that's the total funding the department has allocated for refugee settlement supports?

Mr. Wishart: That is the funding of support that comes from Education and Training. Housing and related supports like EIA, and there's quite a number of other services all come from the Department of Families.

Ms. Fontaine: Would you be so kind as to—the refugee co-ordinator—is it the emergency refugee co-ordinator position, and is that a brand new position, and—first off, is that a brand new position?

Mr. Wishart: That is the funding for the—that's funding for the newcomer serving organization, for MANSO. That position was created last year when the Syrian refugee numbers were brought in. Prior to that, it did not exist, so that's an increase in funding from, of course, the year previous. So, just the last year we carried it forward, but we don't have the big number of Syrian refugees. We still have a few coming in, but we do have the asylum seekers and so that they've changed their focus from just Syrians to Syrians and asylum seekers.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, sorry. So, to be clear, this position was created last year—under your administration or under our administration?

Mr. Wishart: So, to be absolutely clear, it would have been created in January, so January of 2016 would have been the previous government and we carried it forward.

Ms. Fontaine: And the exact roles and responsibilities of this co-ordinator?

Mr. Wishart: So this position was created to support refugees, to support community, and settlement

sector co-ordination efforts are related to refugee settlement and refugee claimant supports. So they work in conjunction with MANSO, finding job connections, working on housing connections. We also have to work with CBSA, related to issues from the border crossing. They do a co-ordinating role too in terms of donations that are focused on refugees of any type. So it is complex and you do work with a lot of groups as part of that, and of course, keeping track of all of the refugee claimants is a complex issue in its own right.

Ms. Fontaine: So, since the creation of this position in January 2016, has it been the same individual that's been employed as the co-ordinator?

Mr. Wishart: The answer to that would be it has been the same individual right from the start.

Ms. Fontaine: Does the minister know if the department was involved in any of the hiring, or was it just a separate hiring process in respect of that particular individual that was hired as the co-ordinator?

Mr. Wishart: MANSO was responsible for that and did it entirely on their own.

Ms. Fontaine: Perfect. Would the minister just explain a little bit more in detail in respect of the \$110,000 that was allocated, and more specifically, is that new dollars, or is that dollars that was also carried over by the previous administration?

Mr. Wishart: Now, been a slight change. In '16-17, the money was for both the privately sponsored refugees and the public one. This year it's—covers just there—there isn't nearly as many privately sponsored refugees this year. So it's really focused on providing the publicly sponsored one or the asylum seekers.

Just for the record, there was—in '15-16, there was \$40,000 provided to Welcome Place. In '16-17, there was \$110,000, and we have carried that forward.

Ms. Fontaine: So, to be clear, in '15-16, there was \$40,000 that was allocated to Welcome Place to support both privately and public refugees or newcomers. This year, in '16-17, there's \$110,000. So that's an increase to this year's budget to support, in your words, predominantly publicly sponsored refugees?

* (15:10)

Mr. Wishart: Just to make it really clear, the 110—when they increased to 110, it was really in response

to the Syrians and now continued for the asylum seekers. And that's really where the focus is now, is with the asylum seekers. That's where our big numbers are.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay.

So the increase of—what is it \$70,000, if I'm doing my math correctly—it is in respect of the influx of people that are crossing over at Emerson?

Mr. Wishart: Well, to some degree. I mean we—it was increased initially in response to the Syrian influx and has been continued because of the additional costs related to—'inditional' pressures really, of having asylum seekers. They can be fairly high-needs in that they often arrive with very little paperwork.

Ms. Fontaine: I can appreciate that. I think that we all see them crossing over and understand the—well, in some respects understand the conditions in which they arrive.

So would the minister then just map out for me—as best possible—what, you know, this \$110,000 goes to exactly? So how is the dollars supporting—really asylum seekers—that are coming into Manitoba?

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

The biggest chunk of that, of course, is the paperwork. As I said, many arrive without very much in terms of paperwork. Transportation from Gretna and Emerson, related to that; and also any paralegal activities that we support are the biggest costs related to this particular file.

Ms. Fontaine: So I just maybe—I should've prefaced this before I started my questions, and I'll have a lot of questions and they may seem like common sense or I should know it. I just got this portfolio so if—I apologize if my questions seem—I am just trying to get a good grasp on the department. So I appreciate your patience with my questions.

So the \$110,000 flows to what agency or—slash—agencies?

Mr. Wishart: I understand the situation having—this is only my second term so I had to learn files as—on the run a time or two.

So the actual formal agency is Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council. But the operating group that we're most familiar with is actually Welcome Place. Really, they—it's their responsibility to provide the co-ordination role between all of these and also a lot of the charitable groups that are

involved in that as well. So it is very, very difficult I guess sometimes to make sure that all the bases are covered, but there is a lot of community support that flows in through there. A lot of volunteer and not-for-profit groups that are participating in this, as well as, of course, the associations on behalf of the different immigrant groups—so—are often very involved with those folks as well.

Ms. Fontaine: So I kind of just want to—because we're talking about the 75 and the \$110,000, and I know that there was an announcement just several months back, and part of that—which of these dollars were kind of announced, and the way it kind of came across was that it was as if it was new dollars to this kind of, you know, trying to deal with or mitigate some of the issues that we are facing out in Emerson and with asylum seekers. But that's not entirely the case, then, because if the \$75,000 was kind of carried over, that's not necessarily new dollars, and then the \$110,000, really, there's only an increase of about \$70,000, so, kind of not entirely new dollars as well.

I guess I want to kind of understand the 14 beds, as well, that was a part of that announcement as well. Were those 14 beds anywhere already in development or they were being carried over or they're absolutely new beds, and where are those beds?

Mr. Wishart: Well, and some of this I can answer and some I should really refer you to—you're asking where they were in terms of development on the housing unit. As the housing was supplied from Families, really, that question would have to go to them, but it was made available to the asylum seekers to use. Where it was in terms of development prior to that, I think you'd have to get clarification on that, as I'm not sure that we can actually answer that, but what we did was increased the funding, and the previous government was involved in that as well, from 40 to 110 and we carried that forward.

We committed additional funding for a different purpose, in all argument, because it shifted from mostly Syrians to mostly asylum seekers. So that was a commitment that we made in regards to that, so we have made a point of making sure that there are dollars available to help the asylum seekers as they come and we're monitoring that situation in terms of numbers very, very carefully because they continue to arrive. Not every day, but almost every day there is someone crossing the border. So we continue to provide the supports through that and we've talked a little bit about that plus, in the meantime, of course, we need to get these people into the community and

get them—well, get them jobs, get them settled in housing of their own in the community.

So we've developed a program we're calling the REDI program. Now, it was originally—the concept was originally developed to help deal with the Syrians because many of the Syrians who arrived—though they had work history, it wasn't really relevant to our work history, and, of course, their language issue was—while they were fluent in their own language spoken, they weren't even always fluent in their own language written. So it was kind of a particular learning challenge, and it's difficult to have grown people sit in a classroom all the time and keep their interest up, so we developed program that is partly classroom related, so half the day on education and then half the day in the workplace, and what we did is we looked for industry partners that were prepared to work with us on that.

We've had good success, we've had three—actually, four different areas, I guess, step up, and show some interest in working with us on that. The first one out of gate has been painting and drywalling. So there was a number of people that—number of refugees that—or, Syrian refugees that indicated they had experience in that area so we worked with them and an industry player that had stepped up, so we've done the classroom thing. It's mostly language of work that they learn in the classroom so that they're safe in the workplace and that they can communicate well enough to do the job, and then they are now spending time working with the private industry player in terms of learning how to do the job and they'd get some work experience here in Manitoba. Very often, they're hired by the industry player. It has worked out very well for that, but everybody gets to learn the capability and what the workplace is like here in Manitoba.

*(15:20)

We're working on one for agriculture, one for hospitality industry.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable minister.

Mr. Wishart: Yes, and the fourth one is actually just general labour, in terms of construction.

Ms. Fontaine: So the program is called REDI program? *[interjection]* And when was this started? Like, when was the official kind of execution date of the program?

Mr. Wishart: That was started in April of this year. And it's Refugee Employment Development Initiative—REDI.

Ms. Fontaine: So I do notice that some of the industry partnerships or kind of development is, as you indicated, painting/drywalling, agriculture, hospitality and general labour.

I'm curious in respect of, you know, what are women refugee or women newcomers' participation in that, because, I mean, just from a kind of 'cursorary' glance, it seems that it's very male-focused? However, I could be absolutely wrong on that.

Mr. Wishart: None of the programs are gender-specific, of course. But we do have a tendency for male in some and female in others. The hospitality industry in particular has been one that there's a lot of female participants in. We're also in development of a early childhood educator program, which, we think, is a really good fit, as well. And—but that is still in development.

As I indicated, I think with the—when I talked about the painting and drywalling, when we find an industry partner to work with in regards to that, so that's sort of one of the key drivers so that we know that they actually are able to find job experience, work experience at the end.

This isn't just training; it's training to a job which is different than some of the previous training has been, either for, you know, EIA or for refugee or for even immigrant programs. So this is a little stronger connection. We're finding that's working very, very well, because very often with either asylum seekers or refugees, they don't have that strong connection with the workplace to follow through. So we're providing that as part of the whole program.

Ms. Fontaine: So I—and I get that, you know, industry is a key partner and it can be a driver in respect of, you know, what is the, you know, practicum that newcomers and asylum seekers will get and refugees will get.

I guess my question is, as everybody knows, or as everybody should know at the table, that, you know, one of the most key factors in respect of a family's, you know, own economic driving is for women to be educated and to have their own employment, right. And so, again, when I look at this, it's—and again, I get that it's not very—it's not gendered specific. I get that piece. However, you know, what is the department doing in respect of

reaching out to industries that perhaps are a little bit more inclusive of women to be able to support refugee and newcomer women to be able to get independent and all of these pieces, which, again, I cannot stress enough? And I know that everybody at this table knows how important it is to lift up and educate and provide those supports for women, all women.

Mr. Wishart: Well—and thank the member for the question, and I absolutely agree it's important that all members of the family have an opportunity for economic success here in Manitoba, and certainly, I concur that for a family to be successful, we need to get both male and female members and especially the older children, in some cases, also engaged in that.

The hospitality industry, well, of course, does have a significant portion of female players in it. And it was really our own thinking in regards to what other sectors do we need to get to get more women involved in the workforce that brought the ECE concept forward. And we're working, actually, with MITT in the development of a special program for that, that would have a combination of languages and the skills required for ECE training, to Manitoba standards, as part of that. So, it'll—as it emerges, it'll be a fairly specific course for that particular peer group.

Ms. Fontaine: So will the department develop a more comprehensive strategy in respect of reaching out, I guess, to industry or, I guess, in respect of what newcomer and refugee women's, I guess, place will be within the Manitoba economy? And when does the department think that they might have that ready, if you do?

Mr. Wishart: I mean, we're already into the development of a strategy that covers all immigrants. I mean, in particular, the refugees and the asylum seekers. And we're trying to work with the expertise that exists in the sector. So, there are other groups out there that we're bringing in through the MANSO connections like the Muslim Women's Organization, which has been a very key player, and a number of other of the ethnic associations to provide the strength and supports, because it is sometimes new to that culture to—for the woman to spend time in the workplace. So, we're strengthening that as part.

We have a number of other post-secondary or colleges that we're working with to try and help us make this connection to the workplace. Besides that I mentioned MITT, we also have Red River and

Manitoba Start that are helping us in regards to all of this. And—yes, also Opportunities for Employment. Sorry, that's the fourth one that we are working with in regards to that.

So we're not completely where we want to be, of course, yet, because we'd like to provide opportunities for everyone to get to the workplace, but we have begun the process in serious, and we do have some courses that are already nearly completed, and we also have some new ones set up to start right away. There'll be some done over the summer, and then there's another group that's in—that we will be starting out in the fall period. So it's an ongoing process, without a doubt, but we do have a strategy to try and get everyone engaged in the workforce.

* (15:30)

Ms. Fontaine: So earlier, a couple questions previous, you had mentioned something about early childhood development program in respect of refugee or newcomers. Would the minister be so kind as to elaborate on that?

Mr. Wishart: And actually that's in conjunction with MITT. We're working to find suitable prospects in terms of those that are—have indicated an interest in working in this area, so that will be women that either are asylum-seekers or refugees.

And then, of course, we're also—because we're working from the employers' side of things, we're trying to identify an employer placement, so that once they're through the training process, they have someplace to go to try the employment opportunities so that we make those strong connections. We talked a little earlier about needing to have very strong connections here to make sure that they had their opportunity in the workplace.

Training is good on its own, but training to a specific job seems to give us much better success rates, and so certainly that's our intent on—in this area.

Ms. Fontaine: And what would that support look like? Would that mean that the training would be provided free? What would that support look like exactly?

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

So, just to be clear, I mean, we know that many of these folks are high-needs and require a lot of supports. So as part of the process, we also have a work liaison that works with them on a daily basis to help provide those additional supports so that

they're comfortable in the workplace, because they're multi-barriered in some cases. Not only is language an issue, but, you know, education is a bit of an issue as well. Many of them have been—come from very traumatized experiences before they became refugees, so they provide mental-health supports—is also part of that program.

The dollars—the \$1.1 million that I referred to as labour market development initiatives money, that is jointly federal-provincial money.

So I hope that answers the question, but it's a very supportive workplace that we're moving them into, and we take the time to make sure that they have—we've dealt with as many of the barriers as we can before we bring them into that workplace so that their chance of success is much higher because of that and continue to provide the ongoing supports. It's—there's no—really no reason that we would want to traumatize anyone further in terms of bringing them into workplace and having a failure in that workplace. We want success, so we are trying to get it right the first time.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, so I—just from that response, I have several new questions.

But, actually, my question was: What are the supports?

Like, you're—you spoke about the development of an early childhood development program that's going to be specifically geared towards newcomers. So my question was: What are the supports that are going to be offered newcomers in respect of this program development?

Mr. Wishart: Now, we're working with MITT, as I said, and the course will be designed specifically to the particular cohort, so the group that's specific—so it'll try and meet the needs of that particular group. So things like Canadian work experience and Canadian standards will be part of that. Workplace standards will also be part of that, so that they know what to expect from the workplace; expectations as to what our child-care standards are here in Manitoba and in Canada would be also part of that.

They'll be working towards their level 1 EC so that there is something in terms of recognition at the end of that program so that they have a goal and, if there's any cultural differences that will have to be dealt with as part of that retraining process or support process, so it's very much designed for the particular group. We know that there is some differences sometimes in cultural upbringing as to how they

manage children, but we do want to make sure that they're aware of and informed of what we expect here in Manitoba.

Ms. Fontaine: What does the minister mean by we know that that group has cultural differences in raising their children?

Mr. Wishart: I think the member knows that every cultural group has different norms and standards as to how they raise their children. We want them to be aware of what we expect here in Manitoba, so that's part of designing the course to make sure that they're aware of what is expected in a EC facility, whether it's a private one or a not-for-profit one here in Manitoba.

Ms. Fontaine: So, again, this program that's in development stages, will that be offered to newcomers and refugees, like, for free? They'll just be able to take that training?

Mr. Wishart: There is no cost to them to do that once they've indicated that this is an area that they have interest in.

Ms. Fontaine: And how will you be—once this program is ready to go, which I am curious when you think that it might be ready to go—how will the program itself be disseminated to newcomers so that they—if they find that they are interested in this, which I think would be a great training program, how are they going to find out about this?

Mr. Wishart: So far, in terms of developing interest, we've put the organizations that are providing the service, like MITT, Red River, Opportunities for Employment, Manitoba Start, in touch with the different groups in the community, really using the context supplied by Welcome Place.

We are fortunate in Manitoba in that, because we have one central agency, we can much more easily track all refugees and asylum seekers in the province of Manitoba, as compared to some other jurisdictions that have multiple sites, so we have a very good contact base and we take advantage of that in terms of making sure.

* (15:40)

If there's greater interest than any of these four organizations can meet, we will look at other ways to provide that. But so far, that's what we've been doing.

Ms. Fontaine: So, in support of this program—and the early childhood development program that you're

getting underway, will it fall under the REDI program? And—

An Honourable Member: I should add that—I have to answer that.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, that's correct.

Ms. Fontaine: And so the—you mentioned the \$1.1 million. Is that the dollars that are earmarked for these—this REDI program, or what is that \$1.1 million for in its totality?

Mr. Wishart: I hope I can provide all of the details that the member wants.

Currently, we have—the \$1.1 million is—we project to use over two years. We currently have 174 participants in this program, and we have the four service providers that I named initially. There was some development and some start-up that was needed in terms of making changes to accommodate that.

We did this, actually, in consultation with the refugee community, in discussion with them about what they thought their areas of interest would be and how we would best develop that. And that has proven to be very worthwhile, as is often the case.

We think this is a really good way to move forward. It should be noted that we're really the first province to do this. Other jurisdictions are having a look at it, but we've been out of the gate very quickly with this, and we're trying to tailor it to fit the specific needs of the immigrant group, driven a little bit by the Syrian refugees in that the level of education in—to different provinces seems to be a little bit different.

We had—and I think the member has heard me commenting—we have a lot of very large families, and with those large families, we've got a lot of very rural people that had different experience base. I remember—recall very much having a discussion with the minister from Ontario, and she was worried about her doctors and lawyers and how to get them appropriate experience. We didn't get many doctors and lawyers here in Manitoba. The most common level or type of experience was actually agriculture-related. They were most often olive farmers. That doesn't apply too well here in Manitoba, so we have to move them into related sectors. But, certainly, their experience had value.

Ms. Fontaine: So miigwech to the minister for the answer there.

So it's \$1.1 million over two years, which is about 550 per year. So you said earlier that those were federal dollars as well. So what is the percentage of dollars if—in respect of that \$1.1 million?

Is it—our—Manitoba contribution is \$1.1 million in its total and then there's an additional 1.1, or how does that work?

Mr. Wishart: Okay, this gets a little bit complicated because LMDA, the Labour Market Development Agreements, are ongoing agreements we have between the federal and provincial government. Really where those dollars come from are they are dollars that are designated out of employment insurance, usually out of surpluses, but there is ongoing agreements; they go back into the '90s, I believe. They've been going a long time. We just actually signed new agreements for the coming year, but the 1.1 comes out of that; it's federal dollars, kind of like the federal health transfer dollars are. They're given to us. We spend them on our needs to meet a joint benefit in terms of labour market, but it's always traditionally been spent by the province completely.

There's, you know, accounting procedure in terms of accounting for it, but we have discretion over how we spend those dollars. We've initially put \$1.1 million into this particular program. We'd be quite happy to put additional dollars in that and additional dollars could be redirected in that direction if the demand increases. We think that's enough to get us started but we'll certainly look for more opportunities. One of the reasons we've been consulting with those that are in the sectors because, you know, they see the opportunities as well.

So we're working very closely to try and expand this area. As I said, we're the first province to move forward in this area. I think it's a very innovative program. I think it's quite a creative approach and it's showing early signs of being a very successful program because of the very strong linkage, as I referred a couple of times, the very strong linkage between training and the workplace getting much higher levels of success.

So we can get specific numbers for the member if she so wishes but, really, the dollars come to us through the labour market agreements, so their origin is the federal government; their discretion on how they spend is completely provincial.

Ms. Fontaine: That clarifies a little bit, and I appreciate that.

So just so I'm entirely clear, so that \$1.1 million comes from the feds, this labour market agreement.

So is the province allocating any of its own dollars towards this, you know, strategy, REDI, all of these other programs that we're looking at?

Mr. Wishart: And I thank the member for the question. The labour market agreements are an ongoing thing, so, technically, those are our dollars to spend. They're part of what the Province budgets every year, and so they're not just given specific for this program. They are part of our dollars that we use to deal with labour market issues, a wide range of things from programs that sometimes are used for incentives in private industries. I think the Skip the Dishes dollars, for instance, would—one that the member might be familiar with, were some of those same types of things, but they also apply to retraining opportunities in a wide range of areas, and it's an ongoing thing where we meet the need that has jointly—a joint responsibility between the federal and provincial government. We do all of the work in terms of delivering that, and it's through our staff and our connections and the not-for-profits that we work with in the community. The federal government's only contribution to this is actually the dollars.

* (15:50)

So, in terms of calculating how much from whom because we do the delivery, what's that worth, that probably varies from sector to sector quite a little bit, and we don't actually attempt to do that as a rule. We do the delivery. We're trying to get a jointly—a mutually agreeable outcome between federal and provincial dollars. The total amount of labour market money that comes to the province is very substantial.

Ms. Fontaine: So the \$75,000 and the \$110,000 is that a separate part of dollars or—it is a separate of dollars.

Mr. Wishart: Yes, that's a separate part of dollars, and those are provincial dollars.

Ms. Fontaine: What is the percentage of total government funding for refugee supports that comes from the Education Department, because I do understand in respect of when I asked about the 14 beds, I understand that there are other departments? So I recognize that it's kind of—we have

to go all over. So—but what is the total percentage and what is that actual amount?

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I appreciate what the member is trying to get at. She really wants to know how this is being done.

There are really four departments that are players in this whole thing. We are one, as the member is, you know, is discovering. Justice, of course, related to the Legal Aid in particular is a player in that. Health is also part of this because they provide health care and other special-needs services that might be required by refugees and, of course, Families, and the biggest part for Families, of course, is the housing side of things.

So no one really attempts to try and calculate who's doing what percentage of the whole thing. What we're doing is jointly between the four different departments. We're meeting the needs of the refugees and the asylum seekers. We all know we have a piece of the puzzle, but no one has it all. It is not run out one department or the other, we simply co-ordinate between, and that's actually a role that MANSO plays a fairly significant part in.

So, in terms of calculating a percentage that comes from here or comes from there, frankly, it would be an awful lot of work and it would vary almost from case to case because you do have some—for instance some refugees or asylum seekers that come with a high level of skills and good English capability, good language capabilities. Theirs would be quite a bit lower than some that come with very low English and very low educational experience.

So it is pretty nearly impossible to do this with any degree of accuracy, you know, to be very honest with the member.

Ms. Fontaine: So—and I understand and I get the complexities of having a bunch of different departments. I remember when I was a special adviser, some of the projects that I worked on, like \$10,000 came from Housing and then \$5,000 came from Status of Women, and those are small, small numbers. But, you know, when I had submit a budget to AICC for a project that I had wanted to work on, I had to map that out. I had to map out, you know, I was asking Housing for \$10,000 or I was asking, you know, the department of CFS for \$25,000 or whatever it was I had to map it out so that I could budget and, hopefully, get the dollars that I needed to be able to execute the activities that I

wanted to do. So I get that in a very, very small level obviously.

So, I mean, I'm curious because how do we forecast, you know, any of our or, you know, really doing an environmental scan on the needs if we're not really kind of figuring out then what are the percentages and what are the dollars that each of the departments are allocating towards this specific, very complex interconnected issue.

So, I mean, I am trying to get at, you know, what are the total supports, because as those numbers increase, you know, one would suggest then, you know, those dollars should increase. I mean in theory, right, they should increase or if they decrease they—those dollars should decrease.

So I guess I'm just trying to get a better sense of how are the four departments going to work together to kind of get a better sense of, you know, what are the resources that we need, and I'd like to see some of that.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you for your patience on this because it is a complex issue.

We can provide very detailed numbers on what it cost last year. As for what we're looking at for this year, we, even as of this moment, don't know how many asylum seekers we are expecting, and that is part of the problem for everybody here. One of the reasons that housing is a never-ending issue because we have people transitioning in and out of housing every day, and then, of course, we have new people coming in to the province every day, or virtually every day, as asylum seekers.

What we try and do—we have a working group between these four departments that tries to deal with the ongoing issues as they develop. We know what our costs are related to, you know, our portion of what we're doing, though never with a high degree of accuracy because we don't know the educational needs of the people that come or their capability or their English skills or any of that. Justice is probably the one department that has the most straightforward approach because it's roughly the same amount per individual asylum seeker in terms of legal aid, though they don't know the total number either, any more than we do. Health is highly variable, as the member, I'm sure, appreciates, because especially when you're dealing with mental health issues costs can get quite high, but even physical health issues can be very variable depending on the needs of a particular group. And Families, the size of the family

is a big factor, you know, in terms of the amount, in terms of housing. It's more controlled, but we don't know from day to day what the numbers would be.

So this is one of those things we can tell you after the fact with a great degree of accuracy, but we cannot project because of the—simply too many unknowns on that. We've simply put in place programs to make sure that we have supports in all the areas that we believe that they need them in and as—if this continues to grow, I know a number of departments will have to revisit their budget to see what we need to do.

One of the reasons we've been asking for more federal co-operation on this is because of the unknown factor on that. This is—much of what's going on here is actually a federal responsibility, as the member appreciates. The asylum seekers, in particular, are coming across not Manitoba's border; they're coming across Canada's border. So they become a federal responsibility, but we provide and deliver the supports initially and then we do attempt to recapture some of this. I know Justice makes and attempt to recapture some of theirs, and we have—we do know that we have had some support in the past for refugees in addition to what normal programs are and in particular for the Syrians, but we've had no solid commitment made on the asylum seekers other than some vague promises that were made by the previous Immigration—federal Immigration minister. And nothing specific related to that, and we've had some ongoing discussions. We would certainly dearly like to have some more so that we all have some level of certainty. We know that other provinces are sharing this concern as well.

Ms. Fontaine: So, okay, well, miigwech for that. I appreciate that.

* (16:00)

In respect of—and it was, some of the questions that I was going to ask in respect of what has been occurring in respect of your federal counterparts in respect of the supports and what has your department done or, I guess, all of the departments or even, you know, what have they done in respect of process of trying to engage the feds for additional supports.

Mr. Wishart: We have ongoing discussions with them, particularly from our department as we're really the lead at the federal level in regards to this. So we talk about the immigration-related issues.

Mr. Scott Johnston, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

We talk with them all the time about the housing issue in particular, though Families is the deliverer of housing here. Federally, housing is touched on out of a couple of departments. So we certainly look for additional supports from that.

We don't have a lot of specific commitments there. They do have an agreement between Justice and the federal government related to that. And Health as well—they have an agreement there as well. Just a moment.

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): Honourable Minister.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, and I'll repeat that to make sure it's on the record clearly.

The fed—or sorry—the Department of Health does have an agreement in place with the federal government related to the health services that they provide.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

So I want to talk about the Provincial Nominee Program. Would the minister be so kind as to tell us how many nominees were processed by the program in 2015-16 and then 2016-17?

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): Honourable member from St. Johns.

Ms. Fontaine: Can we just take a three-minute recess so I can go to the bathroom? Good, okay.

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): Committee recesses for three minutes.

The committee recessed at 4:03 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:06 p.m.

Mr. Wishart: Just to be clear, on the terms of the numbers for PNP, we do them on the calendar year, so they're not on the fiscal year. So for '15, we had applications from 6,423, of which 4,977 were approved; for '16, we had applications from 6,251, of which 4,621 were approved; and year to date in '17—and these are approximate numbers because subject to updates—we've had applications from 2,500 year to date and, of which are approved, 1,400.

Ms. Fontaine: How many nominees is the department projecting for this 2017, then, I guess?

Mr. Wishart: So, of course, you're—we're projecting into the future. We'll have between 4,500 and 5,000.

But I would remind the member that we have changed the methodology. We now have expression of interests that are given to us and they're not actually applicants until they're brought down. And that's based on that they fit a particular profile of an identified job opportunity need.

In the expression-of-interest pool right now, there appears to be just under 15,000 that have expressed an interest in coming to Manitoba. We don't know, and, of course, it'll be a higher number than as approved, but we don't know what that would be in terms of those that'll be called down into the pool—out of the pool. There are some people that are called out of the pool that are not approved for whatever combination of reasons. But that number will—should be reduced.

Ms. Fontaine: So, if we could spend some time mapping out exact—the exact changes to the program in respect of, I guess, now, the expression of interest, what does that look like, and, I guess, the criteria of the new kind of application model, in as much detail as possible.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I think—thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the member for the question. And if she'll bear with me for a little bit, I'll read you some of the things that we are doing now.

* (16:10)

So under our new labour market strategy for 'immigration,' to nominate more skilled workers, better matched to labour market demands and business investors with potential to make higher investments in Manitoba in terms of sooner for businesses.

Manitoba's 2016-2022 labour market project has indicated there will be at least 167,700 job openings. We estimate that at least 25 per cent of those will be filled by new immigrants. The remainder, of course, we are training to fill. There are critical demands for labour in multiple sectors and I list a few of those: engineering in particular, life sciences, information technology, agribusiness, financing, manufacturing, service providers, trades and transportation, and health care.

A new in-demand occupations list will be regularly updated on the MPNP website, based on real-time labour market information provided by industry and post-secondary training partners, and we are working very closely both with industry and the post-secondary markers—partners to make sure that we're getting good information, so this will be

much more current information than has ever existed before. What we had previously tended to be a summary of what happened last year. This is actual development and the in-demand occupations list will be used to prioritize invitations to apply for the MPNP expression-of-interest pool, so that's the information you're asking about: how do we determine who should be or who would be the best applicants out of the pool. They themselves, we can scan them for their experience, based on what they told us, and they also have access to this information so that they have opportunity to look at the pool on a regular basis.

MPNP will publish a regularly updated nomination plan that will communicate to potential applicants Manitoba's nomination and occupation priorities based on the in-demand occupations list and related to strategic priorities including franco-phone and regional immigration. We are linking our international education strategy with our immigration strategy, and I don't know whether—the member didn't really ask about the student side of this yet. Do you want me to go into that now?—[interjection] Okay.

Through partnerships with post-secondary institutions to increase the number of international students coming to Manitoba, and, of course, we benefit and as do the post-secondary institutions when they come to be educated here, that the particular benefit is that we're actually training Manitoba—to Manitoba standards.

So, if a foreign student comes and trains here in our post-secondaries, we know the standards—and one of the barriers that occurs all the time with new immigrants is do we recognize their training standards, and it can be quite complicated and often very difficult and disappointing to a lot of people because they think they have something when we—what we find is that by Manitoba standards, it's not exactly what they thought it was.

It's a lose all around, because we lose the opportunity to bring them here, the employer doesn't have someone trained to their specific standard, and, of course, the—those that are applying, themselves lose out because they didn't get what—didn't get into the—or, didn't get recognized here for the program that they were—and frankly, even their country of origin loses out because they've invested time and money in training them as well, so it is—we want to avoid that as much as possible.

So I hope that that provides you a little bit of background, but this is something that will be available for those that are in the expression-of-interest pool to monitor all the time to see what we're looking for, and we also will be in a position where we can help an employer be directed and connected with someone who's in the expression-of-interest pool who might have their particular combination of skills that they're looking for. Some of them are very specific in terms of what they're wanting; others, it's a little more general. That would provide greater opportunities in terms of numbers.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I appreciate that.

I have, as you can quite imagine, several questions from that. In respect of this, like, in-demand occupation list in, I guess, real time, is there a new position or slash positions that have been allocated to be able to do that?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question. And, getting into some of the real gritty details, I guess if you want to put—how this will be working, we do have a group now, of course, whose responsibility it is to put LMI information out as—has—as it has existed, and I mentioned that it was often very dated. Now we're using the same people, but we're depending a lot more—we're bringing in the linkages that our department has been able develop, partly because of restructuring.

So we have information that's coming to us from our post-secondary partners, and also the chamber of commerce are another big source. The various sector councils are also ones that we are using an awful lot, and they are—and though they vary in their level of intensity, I think it would be fair to say in terms of their connection with industry, some provide very good, up-to-date information in terms of different developing opportunities, in terms of their businesses in their sector and specific needs of those businesses. And so we can work very closely with them so we know that they have engineers—a need for engineers coming.

Part of the problem is with—especially those that are coming as students in training, you're trying to project down the road. So we know that we need engineers in a particular area and we need them now. Well, we'll get what we can in terms of those that are available out there now. Students that may also look at that and say, well, there's a need for these types, we'll come and go to school here, but it'll be several years before they're actually ready for the job market.

So there's a bit of projection down the road in terms of filling that particular need.

The number of particular engineers right now, the number—the demand for engineers is quite substantial, so we're certainly looking very hard at opportunities there. We work with various professional organizations as well to help monitor their demands as they grow.

So, I hope that gives you some indication. We're trying to update the website as well so that it is a little more user friendly so—for those that wish to monitor what job opportunities are there.

Ms. Fontaine: So I want to kind of just explore a little bit in greater detail this expression-of-interest pool, which I think you indicated is a new piece to the PNP program. So how does that work? First off, so they—how does that work?

Mr. Wishart: Okay so people that are in the expression-of-interest pool have—in most cases—had a look at what we need in terms of labour market needs here in Manitoba, and probably looked at all of our other amenities in terms of potential, because they're looking—in most cases—opportunities not only here in Manitoba, but other places in the world. So they're going to have looked at the labour market needs.

* (16:20)

They'll have expressed their qualifications as they relate to—and things like the standard of English and things like that are part of that base of information. And so they'll have looked at that, and they will be able to say, well, there are—this particular position that has skills that we think we qualify for. They'll be able to express directly to that, and that will give us the particular linkage to them so that we can look at—see whether we agree with their premise that they have these certain skills, and then we can make the connection.

There's a ranking system that we use, and we can get into that a little bit. And part of that ranking system does include family connections. I think the member may recall that I have referenced that. But it also gives various rankings based on the skills and the in-demand nature of that. So those that have the best alignment with the skill need would score the highest, and they would be given priority out of—when called down out of the expression-of-interest pool.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, so the ranking system, would you be able to provide me with a copy of what that ranking system looks like with all the particular criteria and its rankings?

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Wishart: We can. And I can certainly share that with you in a printed copy.

In regards to how this actually works, I would offer the member, if she wants to take the time, a chance to come and sit with my department officials sometime in the future and have a full briefing on the mechanics of it, because we're getting into quite a bit of detail.

There are actually six different areas, and the scoring system is quite complex, as she can probably see. I just wanted to share with the member that we have made some changes. There used to be a negative factor attached to this, one of which was having a relative in another province. We have removed that negative factor because it was viewed by many in the industry as being very unfair. Not everyone has control over whether you have relatives in other provinces. I recall, when I was critic, having worked with a number of people that, under the system as it was in place, were simply never, ever going to get to come and be immigrants in Manitoba here. And we were basically chasing people away, even though they had specifically mentioned interest in being in and, in many cases, were actually here in Manitoba. So we have removed that.

Ms. Fontaine: So I appreciate the offer, and actually I would take you up on that, because I would really like to kind of systematically go through that, so I'd really appreciate that. And perhaps we can figure out a best time to do that.

So I'm trying to understand, then, how do people get out of the expression-of-interest pool? You did say that you reach out to them, and I'm imagining you would encourage them then to apply, and if that could be confirmed, and how long do people typically sit in the expression-of-interest-pool stage?

Mr. Wishart: Okay, I hope I can answer the question well enough for the member.

Of course, people can remain in the expression-of-interest pool for up to a year, and at that point in time, if you have—we haven't reached out to you by that time, or you haven't been able to align yourself with one of the job opportunities, we'll basically reach out to them and say you need to apply again or

need to do expression of interest again if you want to, or it becomes their discretion.

Once we reach out to them, then they become an applicant. That's the point at which the fee is charged, and then we put them through the whole process aligning them. And at that point we would have a specific position in mind that they had qualifications to fit; that's how they align. And we take into account all the factors, as I mentioned, including family connections and things like that and other skills that make you a good candidate to be—to come to Manitoba here under the MPNP program. And we would then, through that process—can be as little as three months, I think, from that point in time, but certainly we've committed to try to having everyone through the process in six or less.

Some of that is a little bit out of our hands, because there's still a federal process that they touch on in that in terms of they're coming not just to Manitoba but they're also coming to Canada, so we have to go through the federal program as well. We would certainly like to align that better and try and reduce that duplication, but we're still in the process of getting there.

Ms. Fontaine: So, how did—how does it work for the individuals that are on the expression-of-interest pool that—like, who in the department is reviewing those interests and aligning them with particular positions and then reaching out to them. Like how many individuals are doing that, and how does that process work?

Mr. Wishart: Okay. So we have people that are in contact all the time and have access to the expression-of-interest pool. So when we have a position within certain qualifications, we reach out to those that best align, and that's that point. We invite them to apply, and that's when their application—it becomes an application from expression of interest. That's when the fee is assessed related to that, and they begin working with them from that point forward.

And, as I said earlier, those that are still in the expression-of-interest pool at a year, we also do the renewal part of that, so it's at that point when—and they're scored at that point.

Ms. Fontaine: So again though, it's staff—it's government staff that review the expression-of-interest pool.

Mr. Wishart: Yes, that's correct, but of course, they're getting their information from industry.

Ms. Fontaine: So how is the department kind of aligning or dealing with whether or not you've identified now someone from the expression-of-interest pool, you've invited them to apply, we've taken their \$500, but what if that position that we've kind of identified for them—and we know that Nahanni is coming to Manitoba to be whatever—I don't know—whatever—an engineer or whatever—but that position actually no longer exists. So then what happens in that case?

Mr. Wishart: Okay, thank you very much for the question.

Now, on the old system, if someone had been in that position that you laid out and the job had disappeared, they would have come to Manitoba and there would have been no job for them.

Now we're focused on the high-demand fields, so that person—if a specific job was no longer in place, that they came for a specific job—they still would be in a high-demand field. So they'd be welcome to come here, having been identified, and they would be in a field that we know has a high demand, so their chances of finding employment in that field would be greatly improved.

* (16:30)

This is never a one hundred per cent direct linkage situation; it never has been, probably never will be, but what we're looking at is we got as low as in the mid-30s in terms of coming for a specific position. That had dwindled quite a bit from where it had been, so that left you with roughly 60 per cent that were coming and finding work. They're often very motivated people. They do find work after they come here, but they're not finding work in their particular field.

What we're doing with everything that we have changed here is trying to turn that around so that 60 per cent or better, if we can do it, will be coming to a specific position. The other ones will still be coming and looking for a job in that field, and they'll be as motivated as was previously the case.

The number of people that come under the MPNP program and don't find a job is quite low. They're very motivated people, but what we want to do is basically better align them with the highest skill needs from our workplace. MPNP is an economic immigration program. It needs to be a win for both sides, not just the immigrant, but it also needs to be a win for Manitoba and the industry in Manitoba and strengthen their competitiveness, so aligning

them better in terms of getting people into the high-demand, high-needs jobs makes our industry more competitive, not only in Manitoba's workplace but nationally and internationally, so that's what we're trying to do with that program is improve the results than what we're doing here.

Ms. Fontaine: But you did—you did say that it was—they did have a high rate of success once they did come to Manitoba. Am I correct in that?

Mr. Wishart: Absolutely. People that come under the MPNP program now and in the past are very motivated people. They have taken the risk of leaving their home country. Really, put everything on the line to come to a new jurisdiction takes a lot of ambition to do that, absolutely, and they did find jobs. They didn't often find—as often find jobs in the area of their speciality.

One of the more telling numbers was the number of people that changed jobs in their first three years to get into their field of expertise, and that was quite high, running up into the 70 per cent range. That tells us that we're not doing a really good job of aligning them. What we're doing now, we think, will give us better results and we have every reason to believe it will.

Ms. Fontaine: So, when we're looking at applications, so if somebody has made it through the expression-of-interest pool, they've been invited to apply, they've paid their \$500, and now within three to six months they're going to come to Manitoba.

Does that include their whole family? Is that part of the whole application process?

Mr. Wishart: That's the applicant and, yes, that includes their whole family.

Ms. Fontaine: And is it \$500 per application, which includes the family unit, or is it \$500 per person within that family unit?

Mr. Wishart: That's the principal applicant only. The \$500 fee—and we've mentioned that we'll be using it for other areas as well, so a lot of those dollars will end up being applied, in some cases, to the family unit members' benefits, so if, well, I'll use the spouse, for example. If the spouse's English skills are not good enough to get a job in the workplace, they would have access to programs that would be partially funded by that fee.

Ms. Fontaine: So I do want to spend a little bit of time talking about the fee. So I'm curious how the

department or the minister started conceptualizing this idea of a \$500 fee—application fee.

Mr. Wishart: So the \$500 fee—go—take a step back for a moment and say, well, when someone comes to Manitoba, they have to be able to show that they have—as it's an economic immigration program, they have the wherewithal to establish themselves here in Manitoba. As part of that, the application process, it's always said that you have to demonstrate that you have access to \$10,000.

Now, we all know that there's been some games played with showing the money needs to be in your account on any given day. It doesn't necessarily mean you have full axe to—access to it, not that we've had any particular problem in that area. What we looked at, is what some other jurisdictions were doing. For example, Ontario has a fee in place—and it's \$2,500 to come to Ontario—so do a number of other jurisdictions including Nova Scotia and BC, both of which are higher than ours.

And, because we were free, effectively, prior to the implementation of this fee, we were getting a number of applications that were basically shopping. So that—they were not really that interested in coming to Manitoba, and they tended to tie up the process a little bit. So that was one of the factors in determining that a modest fee need—should be put in place.

Some of the other jurisdictions, we are sure, are covering their processing costs. We're not attempting to do that. Our processing costs, we know, are higher than the fee that we charge. The fee is focused specifically on meeting gaps for those that want to come here to Manitoba. And we don't have existing programs to help them deal with their—with the gaps in terms of their opportunity to get into job market, so we're trying to help reduce the barriers with that fee that I mentioned earlier.

Well, I'm sure we'll end up doing some programs around English as a second language, absolutely. We can also do some specific courses to help people get their experience in other jurisdictions qualified here in Manitoba, so-called retraining and things like that.

There are also—it's—a significant portion of that will probably end up helping in refugee support programs as well, because that also is covered under this. So that's why we chose a fee. We think \$500 is a very modest fee, and I think if you look around the country, you'll find that it is.

As I remind the member yet again, they have to demonstrate that they have access to \$10,000 which is necessary to help them establish themselves here if—should they had, you know, financial need in the first few months.

Ms. Fontaine: The minister noted Nova Scotia and BC's fees, and actually that was one of the questions that I wanted to ask—some other jurisdictions and, you know, what their fees were like. You did note them. Can you just advise me what their fees are?

* (16:40)

Mr. Wishart: Okay, I do have some numbers for the member: BC's fee is \$700; Ontario's, as I indicated, is \$2,500; Nova Scotia is \$250, as is New Brunswick; Quebec is \$1,500. And the country of Canada has a fee, as well, of \$550 for adult and \$150 per child.

Ms. Fontaine: So I do note that when my colleague, the critic for Education, had asked some questions in respect of this, in respect of language training, and we had—you know, you had mentioned about the \$500 fee, and so I believe that you had said in one of your answers that the feds are still funding language until June. I believe that's what you said. I don't have my notes here, but I believe that's what you said. And that—to that end, we weren't entirely sure whether or not they were going to continue or maybe that they would continue funding the program.

And so I think that the question was, and I want to kind of explore it a little bit, is that I know that we've talked about, you know, using the \$500 and whatever that's going to look like, which I would like to know what you're projecting those dollars to be, towards that English language. But, if the feds are paying for it, then where is that \$500 going?

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

So the federal government has extended the status quo until June. We don't know what they're going to do after that. They did—made changes already in response to pressure—remains to be seen.

Now, this can supply in regards to language training, and I would remind the member that tends to fall into two categories, zero to four and five to eight, which is of the—high level, but we also provide not only education support but language support and education support for the family members, so those are the non-eligible for support under the federal program, either. They would not get any help with

language or have any access to language programs under the federal program. So we're picking up that.

We're also doing—finding that there's a high need for mental health related to that, and that is something we're also expecting to have to do more of. We're trying to do a more wraparound support process here, deal with the needs, whether it's a health-related need, whether it's an education-related need, and the \$500 provides us with funds that we can be a little more discretionary with in terms of meeting the wraparound needs. So sometimes that's going to be issues like retraining in terms of languages, sometimes it's going to be mental health issues, sometimes it may be helping to get paperwork out of the—not paperwork out of the way, but recognition of particular programs, training programs that they have in other countries dealt with as well. It's to reduce barriers more than anything.

Ms. Fontaine: So I understand that the \$500 will flow into the department. Now, does that \$500 go into a separate pot of dollars—that this is, you know, under the budget line \$500 application fee—and how would you account for where those \$500—total dollars go to?

* (16:50)

Mr. Wishart: Okay. Thank you for the question. It turned out to be fairly complicated.

The revenue shows as general revenue to the department. The expenditures that we make out of it will show up as appropriation number 26 1B-2—so in appropriations.

Ms. Fontaine: I almost forgot what I asked.

So I was going to give our colleague the member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux) some time, but that last question took a little bit of time. So I do want to—just for the purposes of scheduling, let you know that we will continue on with immigration for the purposes of your lovely staff.

So I just kind of want to explore a little bit about the \$500 flowing into the departmental revenue and appropriation. So is there going to be a way to be accountable in respect of those \$500 to actually—to the applicants, so that they know where those \$500 went to, because I think that the minister had noted that family members are ineligible so—for some of the language training?

An Honourable Member: On the existing ones, yes.

Ms. Fontaine: Yes. So is there going to be a mechanism put in place so that applicants can

actually see their \$500 going to what the government has said it's going to go to?

Mr. Wishart: Well, yes and no, which is I know a politician's answer.

Through Public Accounts, what we spend the money on, they will be able to tell absolutely. And so we'll have to account for any particular program that we decide to fund through that to meet any particular identified need for either refugees or MPNP people that are directly benefitted.

But the specific \$500, it'll just be part of that whole pool. So we can't be able to tell an individual we spent your \$500 here, we will be able to show them that we spent the dollars that came from that program in these types of trainings and these types of initiatives.

Ms. Fontaine: So what are you estimating the dollars to be that will come into the government revenue, or the general revenue?

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

We do our full quota, would be a total of \$3.5 million.

Ms. Fontaine: Per year?

Mr. Wishart: Okay, \$3.5 million per year, but as you recall from earlier, our numbers are actually by calendar year so we have part of a year to start with.

Ms. Fontaine: And what are—what are you determining is your full quota?

Mr. Wishart: Okay, our current quota is 5,500 people per year under MPNP program. Fifty-five hundred is the current quota.

Ms. Fontaine: And—I'm a little confused in respect of the quota. Like, where are you determining those numbers from? And what—

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Wishart: Fifty-five hundred per year is a number that's given to us by the federal government out of the total number of immigrants under MPNP allocations across Canada. All the provinces get a specific number. That's been our number for the last couple of years. There is discussions ongoing, but we have no new number for the coming year yet.

We are always asking for more capacity. We think this is a great program, think it works for Manitoba; we think it works for the immigrants, but we do not have a new agreement yet.

Ms. Fontaine: So I'm sorry—can you explain to me—so, it—we're allocated 5,500 applicants that can—or 5,500 individuals that can come into Manitoba, but we were—no?

Mr. Wishart: Just to make it really clear, it's 5,500 principal applicants. So, if they have family members with them, they're not part of that total.

Ms. Fontaine: So—but when we were looking at—and I don't know where I put this—when we were looking at the total applications that had come in, we were looking somewhere upwards of 6,500, 6,200. How does that then work in respect to the 5,500 quota, because that's above the quota that we're allocated?

Mr. Wishart: So the numbers we were quoting were applicants. They're never all approved, so there's always a difference between that.

And just to make it increasingly confusing, those numbers are fiscal year, not calendar year. So those two never quite align. They're always some few hundred difference, but during the course of the year, we try very, very hard to make sure that we get to the quota or slightly beyond the quota.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, that's just totally blowing my mind as we're coming close to the end here, so that is definitely something I need to work out in my head.

So, in respect of—then when we're going from the expression-of-interest pool, and we have requests for—or encouragements to apply, does that go over the 5,500-person quota? And what I mean to say is that, is the Province going to make extra money off of \$500 application fees?

Mr. Wishart: Okay, just to make sure that we all understand, you only pay the \$500 fee once you're called out of the pool. Now, your chances of success are extremely—

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

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): 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, Seniors and Active Living.

At this time, we invite the ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Could the minister and the critic please introduce their staff in attendance.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Mr. Chairperson, we again have joining us this afternoon for our section of Supply Deputy Minister Karen Herd and Dan Skwarchuk, who is our CEO of Finance—CFO, make sure—I don't want to underscore his position.

As I mentioned in the last meeting, Mr. Milton Sussman, who had joined us for the sections of Supply last round is not going to be joining us unless there's a reason for him to be joining us, because he has other things to do, but he—we certainly will be trying to endeavour to get answers to questions that might relate to his area of work if there are such questions.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Concordia, if you introduce the staff member.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): With me again is Emily Coutts, our research co-ordinator with the opposition caucus.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

As previously agreed, questioning of this department will process in a global manner based on what the minister has requested that the critic—if they can make sure that, if there's a certain topic—is to give the heads-up so that we can make sure that the right employee is in the Chamber.

Okay, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: Is the WRHA projecting a deficit for the 2017-18 year, and if, how—and if so, how much?

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

He'll recall for the 2016-17 year, there was some amount of media discussion around the deficit for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. I believe there was a report at one point that indicated that the deficit would be close to or north of \$100 million at that time, and I think it was prior to Christmas—indicated that we certainly expected the RHA would not be in deficit by that amount. I think time has proven that to be the case as the deficit for their fiscal year of—which has just concluded, would show that that deficit was significantly reduced. And those who, I know, were raising the alarm about the deficit, things changed in a positive direction, although, of course, we know that there is more work to do and we certainly understand that.

When it comes to the 2017-18 year deficit, which is the matter of discussion for this afternoon and these Estimates books, we have indicated to the regional health authority—not just the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, but all of the health authorities in the province—the five of them that are in the province: Northern, Southern, Prairie Mountain, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and Interlake—that it is our expectation that they will balance their budgets, that they will ensure their part of the health sustainability is met and that's been a critical part of it.

I know that that's not an easy task and I don't want to underestimate or to say that it would—is not going to be difficult for health authorities to meet the mandate of balancing their budgets, but I also don't want to underestimate exactly how critical it is that each of our partners in the health authorities undertake this in a serious and significant way, as I think that they are, to ensure that we have long-term sustainability within the health-care system.

So it is not an easy undertaking for them, or for us, or for those who are working within the regional health authorities, but I do think in the long term, it is the—one of the best things that we can do for the health-care system, is to ensure that it is there today, tomorrow, and into the future.

And that, of course, starts with the Department of Health, and we've taken a lot of steps. I'd be happy to note for the member that in the previous fiscal year, the Department of Health, separate from the regional health authorities, ran a surplus which doesn't happen often in the health-care system. But I credit the good work of those who are working within the department, led by our deputy minister, and it was important to demonstrate that that tone has to start at the top.

The system overall, I believe, will also be in balance as a result of that. But for the '17-18 year, we have asked through mandate letters that regional health authorities maintain their budget in such a way that they be balanced at the end of the year.

Mr. Wiebe: How much will the WRHA be receiving from the department in operating revenue for 2017-18?

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

The regional health authorities have not, at this point, received their funding letters, which I'm advised by officials in the department is not an unusual state of affairs at this time in the year, that it

would be more unusual that they would have received their funding letters at this point. And so their funding letters have not yet been issued, but that's not an unusual thing.

Mr. Wiebe: And I'm just struggling here a little bit to understand that if the money is in the budget and in the Estimates book, and the minister must have some understanding of where that money is going to, maybe it's constructive to ask then how much funding will go to each RHA and how will it be divided. Maybe he can give some insight into that.

* (15:10)

Mr. Goertzen: No, I mean it does—I know, for the member it does seem a little—he asks a good question in terms of when RHAs would receive their funding notices. And I've asked that question too, internally, both this year and last year, and I've been advised that it's not unusual for the funding letters to be several months after the budget is announced.

It's perhaps not the ideal state, but it's not an unusual state for the RHAs. It was that way under his government; it may have been that way since the creation of the RHAs. But it's not the most ideal situation, of course, when it comes to funding, but it's not an unusual situation either.

Mr. Wiebe: So maybe we can get the information coming from a different direction.

Can the minister—going back to my first question, but just maybe asking it a little differently and, hopefully, getting an answer—the WRHA, what is the budget—what does their budget look like for this year or what is their total funding request that they're asking for from government?

If he's saying they cannot run a deficit, that number, I would imagine, is pretty close to the amount that the department will then give. So what is the total request from the WRHA? What is their total budget for 2017-18?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and maybe I can answer it in a different way, as well, and so I appreciate the question.

The regional health authority, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—and it would be true, I think, for all of the health authorities in Manitoba—are not expecting that their budget for the 2017-18 year will be less than the 2016-17 year. So they will—their budget will be at least equal, but likely greater by a degree to what it was the previous year.

And so they obviously can begin their planning and begin their work—or continue their work, I think, would probably be a better explanation of it, based on the fact that their budget wouldn't be less than last year. And of course, you know, they'll have more precise numbers well into the budget year. But obviously that gives them a base to work with.

And I think it's an important question, because there is this notion out there, not necessarily perpetuated by the member opposite, but perhaps some of his colleagues, that there are cuts happening to the funding of the regional health authorities, that they are getting—in some ways, get less money than they got last year. That's not the case. They won't be getting less money than they got previously. In fact, it's helpful to reiterate that there will be a greater increase or, I should say, more investment in health care in this budget year than there ever has been in any other budget year previously, including the 17 years that the NDP were in government.

And so, while I know it might make for interesting opposition news releases, having participated in the some of them myself in the past, it's not actually factual that the budget for Health is being reduced. In fact, it'll be at a record level this year, globally, but also within the regional health authorities. And so, you know, when members opposite and others might comment that the budget is somehow too lean for things to happen, I wonder what they would say about the 17 years that the NDP were in government, how bad must have things have been if they don't feel that a record level of investment in health care is sufficient. Things must have been quite awful under the NDP when funding was hundreds of millions of dollars less for health care.

So the health authorities—and it's also worth pointing out now as we've—you know, we've had some discussion about labour, both in question period and beyond that—that the vast majority of increases that happened for health care over the last number of years weren't to provide additional service and to deal with issues of volume, they were to meet the labour agreements that had been agreed to by the NDP, some of which were record agreements.

And so there was a great concern, I think, within the health-care system when they would see significant increases in terms of a percentage basis—6, 7 per cent increases annually within the Health Department, and folks would rightfully believe, well, that must mean that there's going to be greater access

to diagnostics or there might be more funding for cancer care or there's going to be more funding for a project in a local community when, in fact, the vast majority of those increases were not related to volume increases at all, even though those volume pressures existed; they were related to meeting the increased labour demands. And so it's helpful on this day, as it is on every day, but in particular as we deal with bills that touch on labour this evening, to remember that: that those increases did not go necessarily to direct patient volume in terms of providing additional service. They were as a result of labour negotiations being fairly generous.

Now, in terms of the budget, though again I would reiterate that the regional health authorities will not—in my understanding—will not receive less this year than they have in the previous year. They—and for the majority, there'll be a percentage increase. And so this notion that somehow there is a reduction in funding for health care is simply—is not accurate, and, in some ways, I think is dangerous and deceptive to the public. And, while I know the member himself hasn't personally participated in that, I would hope—I certainly—I believe that there are perhaps others in this caucus who have.

Mr. Wiebe: How much has the WRHA allocated for long-term facility funding in 2017-18?

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

In the Health Estimates book, page 117, under Funding to Health Authorities, which is perhaps some—where the questions are being derived from, it would indicate that there is an increase for funding for long-term care services which would essentially be the personal-care homes in the province this year to being increased to a record level \$641 million, approaching \$642 million. So that would be the services of the personal-care homes. That would pay for, in my understanding from officials, is it would pay for about two thirds of the cost of care for an individual who is resident in a personal-care home. The balance—the vast majority of the balance of that being paid for through the individual fees that residents pay, and so that would be the money that's being budgeted this year, a record level amount of funding to long-term care services and personal-care homes, recognizing that's an important part, of course, of the health-care system.

There are many different ideas and thoughts that are happening in Canada and internationally around how do we ensure that in a time of an aging population—of course, we're all aging daily, but in

terms of the cohort of individuals in the public where you have less people in the workforce paying for an increasing number of those who need care and living longer, which is good news—how do we ensure that that is being appropriately funded?

* (15:20)

So those discussions, of course, happen not just in Manitoba but across provinces and across the world. And I'd be happy to engage in those discussions further with the member if he has other questions about that, but in terms of the particulars of his question, the \$641 million—more than \$641 million—that are allocated this year for servicing and funding personal-care homes.

Mr. Wiebe: So, once again, I'm asking about the WRHA. How much is the WRHA allocated for long-term care community therapy services, 2017-2018?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, yes, trying to provide more specifics for the member when it comes to funding for personal-care homes. I think it's worth noting that the \$641 million—which I referenced, contained within the budget books—the record amount of funding for this fiscal year, when you—if he's referring back to funding for last fiscal year, I would think that 'approximinely' more than half, maybe getting close to two thirds, but not quite, of the funding that's allocated for the regional health authorities for the personal-care homes would be funded by—or to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

So, certainly, more than half and probably approaching two thirds of the funding that comes from the Department of Health to the regional health authorities for personal-care home funding would flow to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, which, of course, would make sense being the largest in terms of population of the regional health authorities.

Mr. Wiebe: How much does WRHA allocated for community health agency funding in 2017-18?

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

So, referring back to page 117 in the Estimates books, the funding to health authorities, the line item that would contain this funding from the department is the Community and Mental Health Services funding. They are collated together, and so he will note that for the 2017-2018 Estimates, there is an increased funding. I believe it's probably a record

level of funding of three hundred—more than \$355 million that's been allocated to Community and Mental Health Services, so obviously a significant part of the budget.

We're pleased to provide, even in difficult times in terms of trying to ensure that there's sustainability within the health-care system—pleased to see that there's an increase in that line item and recognize that there is good but difficult work that is happening there. I know this includes the issue of mental health services. I suspect the member might have questions in the days, weeks, months ahead on the issue of the task force that's been formed for mental health services, and I would look forward to hearing questions that he has related to that.

Certainly, the desire to bring mental health and addictions more closely aligned is something that many in the system have called for, for years, knowing that there is a close correlation between mental health and addiction such that—I've seen some studies that have indicated that up to 60 per cent of those who are living with a mental health challenge are also dealing with addictions. And so the notion of bringing those two together, I think, is particularly important when we look at providing services. So the mental health task force, which was announced last week—the Province are awarding the contract for those who are the successful bidders on the tendered contract—I think will provide us good instruction going forward when their work is completed late this year. And we look forward to that.

But I am pleased to advise the member that there is an increase of funding for community mental health services in this budget. I'm—well, I was going to say he'd probably support that, but I think he's already voted against it. But, nonetheless, we are pleased to see that there is an increase of funding for community mental health services in the budget this year.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I want to focus a few questions now on my favourite topic right now, the Northern Patient Transfer system. Can the minister tell us how many patient transports did the program service in 2016-17?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. I'm happy to respond to this question. Similar to, in question period, I was concerned on the weekend when I saw some media reports where members of the Assembly and others might have been suggesting that this program had somehow been eliminated, and that concerned me.

I certainly know that all members in this House would strive to provide accurate information to their constituents, and I know that this member does as well, and maybe it was just a misinterpretation within the media report or perhaps he was dealing with incomplete information himself. But I don't think there was anything nefarious or purpose in terms of the suggestions, because I got some calls and emails from individuals who were wondering if the program had been cancelled because that's what they were being told.

And so I welcome this opportunity for the many folks who are listening this afternoon to emphasize that, in fact, the program remains. And I think it remains as it was always intended, to ensure that those who, where a doctor authorizes air travel, of course, the air travel for that patient is covered by the Northern Patient Transportation Program, I think, as it was always intended to do.

* (15:30)

But even further than that, and I think this was particularly lost in some of the media reports over the weekend, that the escort service for those who are authorized to travel by air by a doctor, were seen to be medically necessary for a patient to travel—that the escort is also able to access the Northern Patient Transportation Program and that there is no charge, you know, in this scenario. And I think that that is important because that seemed to have been lost over the weekend, over the descriptions that were made from members opposite, and I think it's a disservice.

It reminds me a little bit of the work that we've had to do in terms of providing information to the public as a result of members opposite saying that hospitals are closing in certain parts of Winnipeg—very unfortunate, and it's required, you know—a great deal of communications effort to those communities who, you know, would rightfully believe that when an elected representative says something they'd think that they were speaking based on a factual basis. But we've heard that repeated in this House where individuals have said that hospitals are closing, and so there's been a great deal of time and effort and had to be some resources put into trying to ensure that people understood that, in fact, that is not the case.

And I would hope that this member—and I think he will—will ensure that people understand that when doctors authorize and recommend travel for individuals that the program remains for them and for their escorts because it's—it was always intended to be that way, always intended to be such. And so,

glad to see that the program remains and will continue to provide those services.

It's also, you know, worth noting that, you know, this is a program that's been in place for some—20-some years, I think more than 20-some years. And you know, the premise of the program continues as it did under the former government. I know I've heard members opposite say, including this member, that perhaps the former government just didn't follow the program and the policy as it was designed in previous times and they just simply ignored the policy and did things that were beyond the policy.

I would hope that that is not true. If it is, of course, then we'll have to look fairly closely into why the government would have ignored their own policies. But, most importantly, for today, I think it's important to remind the member that the program remains. It is there for those that it would most need to serve and we're happy for that.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I thank the minister for possibly clarifying—possibly not, I guess.

My concern with what's been reported in the media—the first inkling I had of a change in respect to the escort was a question from the media based on information that they told me they got from the Department of Health—which, I guess, department of Seniors, Active Living and whatever the official title is—and that is where they became concerned about cuts to escorts being able to accompany people that needed medical transportation.

So is the minister today very unequivocally saying there is no change to that service which was previously provided?

Mr. Goertzen: Well—and again, I think it's important to—and I hear the member saying that perhaps some of the comments that even he maybe heard on the weekend he now recognizes were not correct or were not accurate and I'm glad that he's put that on the record. I think that's noble of him to do.

It's important in Health—and not that there aren't difficult decisions, and I don't want to suggest to the member that I'm not tasked, as all ministers are, with making difficult decisions. There are difficult decisions in Health that are made each and every day and we recognize that every decision, regardless of how large or how small, when it comes to dollar volume or service provision, impacts somebody and we recognize that completely and we hear about it. We hear about it through emails and letters and we know that that's the case, but we also have to look at

programs from the potential sustainability of them and whether or not they are operating the way they were originally intended to operate. And I think the member would appreciate that as well. I mean, he would have a great interest on behalf of his constituents to ensure that the northern patient transport program remains in place and remains active for—not just for his term in office, however long that'll be, but for future MLAs who will represent the area.

I mean, we all want to do what's best for constituents in the long term, and for Manitobans more generally, but the reality is that the policy, as it existed previously, when it came to transportation, just simply wasn't being adhered to and there was a drifting away of adhering to the policy that existed, a policy that existed under the previous premier, a policy that existed under the previous-previous NDP premier, and under the then-previous Conservative premier, going back into the 1990s.

The policy is something that they didn't change, but the application of the policy did change, and that became confusing for folks in the North as well, because as much as we've heard emails over the last few days of people wondering about the program, we'd heard those same concerns previously, where people were wondering about the application because it wasn't consistent and they didn't understand how it is that some individuals were getting references as escorts for flights and others weren't.

So this is simply ensuring that there's clarity to the program. Clarity is important, that if you—if you're referenced by a doctor and you are referenced medically necessary needing air travel, that there is no change, that the policy remains exactly as it existed before, but it's actually being adhered to, so, you know, patients that are deemed by a physician to medically require air travel and medically require an escort, there is no change to the policy.

But, more than that, I think what's important for the member to understand, and I think he does, knowing that he needs to represent, you know, the concerns that he hears, but I think he needs to understand that the program has to exist much further into the future, and that by not adhering to the policy there was a risk further down the road that, you know, even the policy as it is currently written and is intended to be applied over the last 20 years, may not have been sustainable, and so by ensuring that it is adhered to properly, it brings clarity to those

in the community. They know when they're eligible for a reduced flight, but also ensuring that those who are deemed to be medically requiring air travel and medically requiring an escort have that, not just today, but into the future as well.

So I appreciate the member indicating that there may have been some confusion over the weekend. He recognizes now the program remains as was intended. It continues on for his residents in his area, but others as well, and our hope, of course, is that it will remain much further into the future. I'm sure his next question will be asking me about the \$30 million that the federal government owes the province on transporting patients from the North and I look forward to answering that question.

Mr. Lindsey: I'm sure we'll get to that question in good time.

I guess the minister talks about there needs to be clarity, and certainly, not just myself but everyone in northern Manitoba would look forward to the clarity that this minister speaks about, well, in fact, including the CEO of the Northern Health Region. I spoke to her last week and asked about this very thing and she seemed to be of the opinion that, yes, the escorts were in jeopardy of being cut based on a directive from the Department of Health. She made it very clear that it wasn't her that was making that decision; it was the overall department that was making that decision.

So, I guess, if I was under some misconception, then so is the CEO of the Northern Health Region. So perhaps the minister would like to put out a statement clarifying exactly what the position of this government is on northern patient transfer and I would ask the minister if he, in fact, would be willing to do that.

* (15:40)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, one of the things that they teach you very early in law school is the value of—or lack of value, sometimes—of hearsay evidence. And so I know that the member, being an honourable member, brings forward his comments in an honourable way, and I'm not trying to suggest that he's not, but it would be, you know, not the wisest decision for a minister or anyone to act based on something that he now tells me he heard from someone else, not having spoken to that individual directly or personally, Mr. Chairperson.

But I do nonetheless—despite the fact that I'm not going to be putting great value in hearsay comments

in committee—I do nonetheless, do feel that clarity is important, and we certainly strive to provide clarity where there's been misinformation. I haven't seen the caucus news release from the NDP clarifying the position and apologizing for suggesting that hospitals are closed or that programs are being completely discontinued, but maybe it just hasn't reached my iPhone yet. I look forward to seeing it yet, prior to the end of the proceedings today.

But, certainly, on behalf of the department, we can commit to reaching out to the officials in the northern health authority and making sure that there is clarity where some may or may not exist, if that's the case. Again, not wanting to take second-hand information and presenting it as factual, not having heard it directly myself—but we will ensure that our officials—and they're making note of it now—will reach out to the northern health authority and ensure that there is clarity.

Mr. Lindsey: And I guess, would the minister agree that the world has in fact changed since it was in 1995, when the original policy that included some suggested guidelines—although that's all they were ever intended to be, was suggestions, not hardened fact: this only and only this.

Would the minister agree that there's different diagnostic tests that are available that will provide medically required answers for doctors, nowadays, that weren't available back then; that the program obviously has to change, expand, grow to accommodate the changing needs of health care in 2016 compared to what it was in 1995?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I mean, I would agree the world has changed in many ways since 1995.

I'd just graduated from the faculty of commerce, which is now called the Asper School of Business, so that was a change. I was looking forward to going into a long and fruitful career in finance. That obviously has changed, much to the chagrin, I'm sure of some members, who would have been happy to see me somewhere else, maybe.

So lots of things have changed; there's no question about it. *[interjection]* Well, I mean, now I'm getting some affirmation from the members opposite. I feel good about that, that they're happy to have me here, and I'm happy to be here as well.

But, certainly, things have changed in many different ways in medicine in the last 20-some years. I reflect back on—not to become overly personal about it, but, you know, I—back in 1995 I sustained a

blood clot as the result of an injury that I had, and I had to go to the Grace Hospital at the time. And, as a result of that, they kept me in hospital for almost a week, which surprised me at the time, being a lot younger than I am now—both surprised by the diagnosis, and surprised that I had to stay there for a week.

But, more recently, when I've dealt with some of the similar issues, I've been told things have changed dramatically: you don't stay in the hospital for a week when you have these sort of things happen. And it was explained to me by the doctor that, you know, in 20 years they just treat things very, very, very differently than they did in 1995. And so I know that, from personal experience, that things have changed in the health-care system. No question about it.

But another thing has changed, and I—within the health-care system. Back in the 1970s, 1980s, even in the early 1990s, the pressure, in terms of volume, on the health-care system was quite different. And you had many more people working—within their working lives and fewer people who were accessing the medical system as a result of, perhaps, being at an older cohort when it comes to demographics. You know, since then, over the last 20 years, we've seen quite a shift, and we're going to continue to see a shift in the next 20 years, where there are less and less people in the workforce who are going to be paying taxes into a system that is trying to support more and more folks who are needing health-care services.

So, yes, while it is true, as the member says, there have been changes when it comes to how things are treated, and I gave him a very personal example of in my own experience since 1995 of how things are done differently in the medical system, the pressures on the medical system have changed, too, and that relates specifically to this particular issue in terms of ensuring that sustainability in the health-care system is there, something every province, regardless of political stripe of the government, is dealing with and is sometimes struggling with in trying to ensure that the most critical services, core services, important services, remain, even under times when there are more and more people accessing the health-care system and less and less people who may be adding to the tax cohort to pay for those services. So, there are a lot of different dynamics that have changed in health care in the last 20-some years. Some of them are medical; some of

them are financial; and they all have to be looked at together.

So it brings me back to the previous comment that, while I understand that any changes can be difficult—although this isn't a change; this is just simply adhering to the policy that has existed for some time—it is important to ensure that you are trying to maintain sustainability for the system so that his constituents and, God forbid, him or others that he knows who might need to use the system—I wish him nothing but good health for the remainder of his years—but for those who do need to use the northern patient transport program, we need to make sure that it's there as intended for the many, many years to come, long after we are not sitting here in the Legislature having this very civil conversation, but when others are doing it after we have gone on to some other great reward in our lives.

Mr. Lindsey: Can the minister tell me what the total cost of the Northern Patient Transfer Program was last year?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I can provide that information to the member, and it's helpful context, I think, when we're having this discussion. So, if you were to look back in 2004-2005, the expenditures on the Northern Patient Transfer Program were just over \$8 million, \$8.1 million. If you were to look at last year in 2016-17, of course, the most recent year that we would have information, the expenditures were \$18.3 million. That's 124 per cent increase over that time frame. And it speaks to the fact that the program was being used in, I think, in a differential way than maybe was originally intended. And, frankly, at 124 per cent growth rate, it did potentially put the program in jeopardy in the future.

And I would suggest to the member that if he were to speak in those terms and to provide that kind of information to the residents of his areas and to other members in the North who represent northern communities, they would understand, you know, the difficult financial situation that this poses when the program was being utilized in a way that wasn't intended, that it had grown in terms of its intended and stated policy, that it wasn't actually being adhered to in the way that the policy describes, and 124 per cent increase over that time frame, to play that out over the next many years, it simply wouldn't have been sustainable.

And we might be having, or others might be having, a very different conversation about a program like this in five or six years, and that would

be unfortunate if the program couldn't be sustainable in the way that it was intended. I believe that it was always intended to ensure that individuals who were medically necessary in terms of having air transport or—and were medically deemed to need an escort, that the program would be there for them.

* (15:50)

And so I certainly look forward to the program remaining in that way for the years to come. And I hope that those figures which I provided the member, as he's asked for, will speak to the fact that sustainability of the program was at risk based on the growth of it.

Mr. Lindsey: Does the minister—or can the minister tell me how much money is budgeted for the Northern Patient Transfer Program for this year, in this budget?

Mr. Goertzen: The member asks about the specific budget number for this year, and while I don't have that on hand for the Northern Patient Transfer Program, my expectation is that by simply adhering to the policy as it's been for two decades and ensuring that those individuals who need a—and are referred by a doctor for a flight—are able to access the northern patient transfer policy, as well as escorts who are referred by a doctor were required in addition to those who could travel by land—those patients can also access and pay a reduced airline fee.

So the program essentially remains the same as it would've existed previously under the policy that's existed for 20 decades—or sorry, not 20 decades, 20 years; sometimes feels like 20 decades when you're in Estimates here—but existed for 20 years, for two decades—that we might find that the savings from just simply adhering to the policy might be—it might be about 13 per cent of what the existing program is right now. So you might see a savings of about 13 per cent from the budgeted amount last year, which is a far cry from the elimination of the program, but it is certainly a step towards sustainability of the program, long term.

Mr. Lindsey: So, just to be clear, the minister is indicating that he believes the budget for Northern Patient Transfer Program will be reduced by approximately 13 per cent in this budget. Is that correct?

Mr. Goertzen: I think it's fair to say that we believe that by actually adhering to the policy as it exists, and as it has existed for the last number of years,

there will be a savings—oh, and I'm sorry—not of 13 per cent but of 5.6 per cent. I think I hit times two on my calculator, and so that would be the expected saving.

So, again, you know, by adhering to the policy as it exists, is there a change? Well, there's not a change to the policy, but I think what's happened over the last many years is it hasn't been adhered to. So what has changed is that there has been a lot of confusion previously. There's been a lot of uncertainty when it comes to the program. People didn't always know whether or not they'd be eligible. There'd be rumours from neighbour to neighbour about why so and so is eligible but another person wasn't eligible.

So this will bring clarity, I believe, to those who are using the program to know that if they are deemed by their physician to medically require air travel and medically require an escort, then nothing has changed with the program, because that is what the policy would've contemplated. They will still be covered to travel together by air. But just by ensuring that the policy is adhered to properly, officials advise me that the savings would be about 5.6 per cent.

So, certainly, not the elimination of a program is what seemed to be reported in the media and perpetuated by some members opposite, certainly not the closure of a program as some members may have suggested in their comments, but simply adhering to the program as intended and bringing clarity to the program. And I believe bringing a long-term sustainability to the program, which the member opposite I know will support because he will want the program to be sustainable for his constituents, as I want it to be for them as well.

Mr. Lindsey: You know, the minister keeps alluding to somebody on this side of the House said that the program itself was being cut and I don't believe that, certainly speaking for myself, that I ever said that. I did, however, say that it had come to our attention that there was a plan to eliminate the escort portion of the program, and the minister has indicated that that is, in fact, not happening.

However, he has said that the plan is to follow the 1995 policy. Now in that policy it had, I believe—and I haven't got the policy in front of me, unfortunately—I believe it had four suggested criteria for when a medically necessary flight was allowed. And one of them talked about being in a full-body cast; one of them talked about a certain point in time

in a woman's pregnancy; and the other couple escape my memory at the moment.

But is that going to be the hard and fast rule of the only time a medical flight will be determined as being necessary as those four or possibly five suggested criteria that were in the 1995 policy?

* (16:00)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and the member, you know, indicates at the beginning of his question that he only indicated to the media that the program would be ending for escorts, but there again, that simply isn't true. We've indicated—I've indicated for the past hour, perhaps, that where medical professionals deem that there's a medically required need for air travel and a medically required need for an escort, then there has been no change to the policy. So those escorts would continue to have coverage, and to suggest that it's been cut, I think, is a disservice to northern Manitobans, to all Manitobans.

It reminds me of the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), you know, suggesting that hospitals are closing when that's simply not true, and repeating it doesn't make it any more true and, in fact, I think it can in some ways be harmful for—it can be harmful for Manitobans to hear such things because not only does it cause unnecessary, I think, concern among Manitobans, but it might give them question about where they find or access care in different situations, and so I think that—now, I've been around in this Assembly for a long time—some might say too long—but I know that people misspeak at times and I've misspoken at times in the House and—not purposely, I don't believe, but, you know, you sometimes say things the wrong way or you maybe received wrong information and so you say the—provide that wrong information. And so I don't, you know, put any malfeasance onto the member, but he indicates in his early part of his question that we've eliminated the program for escorts when, in fact, it's not true when it comes to those who are medically deemed to require one.

And, you know, he talks about it being a policy from 1997, but I mean, he shouldn't forget that the policy also existed, yes, in 1997, but it existed in 2001, in 2002, in 2003 and '04 and '05 and '06 and onward when Premier Gary Doer sat in the chair on the government side and the policy existed with him as well, and maybe he, you know, maybe he doesn't like Premier Doer. I personally liked him as an individual. We certainly had disagreements on policy, some of which were well known and can be

googled if you like, but I don't know, if the policy was good enough for Mr. Doer, I don't know why the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) would feel that it's such a bad thing.

We want to ensure, though, that it is here, not just today but for the future, so we continue to look for ways to ensure that programs are sustainable. We believe that by adhering to the policy as it exists, it will make this program sustainable so that patients who are deemed to need it and those escorts who are deemed to be required to be with those patients will have the program in the future, will have the program in the years ahead, and that's critically important.

And I think the member—I know he has a job to do in the House here and I respect that, and I respect him as an individual. And he needs to come and do what he needs to do on behalf of his constituents, but I think in his heart of hearts—*[interjection]* I think the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) is telling me I should go on longer. If he gives me leave, I'd be happy to. I think in his heart of hearts, he would say that, when he goes home, that he understands that sustainability is important and he wants us to ensure that we have a sustainable system and sustainable programs, and I know he would join us in that endeavour.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for that.

Unfortunately, the minister really didn't answer the question that was before him, which was there's, I think, four criteria—suggested criteria for when medical transport by air was contemplated in 1995. Is the minister saying that those are the only four, or possibly five, examples of when medical transport by air would be required today?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I mean, I don't want the member to think that—you know, the Health Department's a big department, and there's a lot of things that happen everyday in the Department of Health. And I've mentioned in this House before, the department receives a foot and a half, two feet of mail everyday.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

We don't measure it in terms of numbers; we measure it in terms of feet. And I think—but there's a feeling sometimes that somehow, as the Minister of Health—and maybe I had this misconception as a opposition member that somehow the Minister of Health is making all of these individual sort of

decisions when it comes to how things and other individuals are moving. It is important to know, though, that it is not as though somebody in a northern community is requesting air transport, and, you know, they fax to the Minister of Health's office their medical condition and information, and then it comes into my office and I make a determination based on the medical knowledge I have, which is pretty scant, about whether or not somebody should be loaded up onto an airplane and transported.

I mean, that is left to the discretion of medical professionals—physicians. They make that determination based on their real-time and real-life interaction with the patient, whether or not it's medically necessary. They would obviously have to look at other issues in terms of what alternative forms of transportation might do to a patient in their condition, and they would weigh those factors.

But these are not decisions that are made on the desk of the Minister of Health. I am not provided with the synopsis or the medical conditions of individuals who are looking to transport from the North under the northern patient transport program. I'm not making an evaluation. I don't have a stethoscope. I'm not listening to people's heartbeats. These are decisions that are made by physicians in the place that they should be making those decisions. And so the discretion lays in the hands of medical professionals, as it should and as it will continue to.

Mr. Lindsey: Again, the minister is dancing around the question without really answering it.

I've never once suggested that every request for medical transport would come to the minister's office. I asked him very specifically, based on the 1995 policy that had four or five suggestions for when a flight would be deemed medically acceptable, is that the only reasons today that a person would be entitled to fly or medical transport, or will it be expanded from that to when the doctor makes that determination?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I think the difficulty that we're having here is that the member opposite is taking the—you know, the examples that might exist in a policy as something of a definitive list, and that is not the case.

Whether you're looking at legislation or policy, you know, they might cite examples about where a certain application might apply in a policy or in a program, but unless it specifically says that these are the definitive things and it can—and no others can be

considered, would that be the case. And I don't believe that that is the case in this policy.

I think what the member is citing is examples of things that doctors can take into consideration, but the overarching decision lies with physicians. And they can certainly look at those examples as guideposts or as potential things to consider, but they're not restricted by those. And ultimately, they make the decision about whether or not it would be to the benefit—medical benefit—of the patient to have air transport and whether or not they would then require an escort as well.

* (16:10)

And so I think the—where we're getting hung up on is that the member feels that these are four specific, immovable examples—or five specific, immovable examples—and nothing else can alter that. But you couldn't do that in a medical environment, I don't believe, because things change. And as he mentioned himself, things change in a medical environment, and so they will be up to the discretion of the doctor to determine whether or not an individual patient medically requires air travel, and whether or not they medically require an escort.

And I don't think we would try to be overly prescriptive, but it's not an unhelpful thing to have guidelines in terms of how doctors can evaluate things, but ultimately it still remains within their purview to make that decision.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank you for that response. It actually does clear up some misinformation that perhaps people working in the northern patient transport area had, as well as a concern that I had. I'm glad to hear the minister say that the decision as to when a person should be entitled to air transport for medical reasons and whether they're entitled to an escort to be included in that will be left up to the individual's doctor. So, I appreciate that answer. That would certainly go a long way to clarifying some of the concerns that have been expressed about northern patient transport from within the bureaucracy as well as from people trying to access the system.

So, with that, I just want to make sure that I fully understand, and the minister may suggest that I'm beating him to death with the same questions, but I just want to clarify that it's the patient's doctor who will make that determination whether they're entitled to medical transport and whether they're entitled to have an escort accompany them paid for through the Northern Patient Transfer.

Mr. Goertzen: Well I mean, just for clarity—and I don't take offense if the member thinks he's beating me to death on the subject. I'm happy to be here for weeks at a time to answer these questions.

An Honourable Member: Months.

Mr. Goertzen: I see the Government House Leader (Mr. Micklefield) saying it could be months, and I can tell him there's no place I'd rather be than the House. I—as the former House leader, I used to be in the House all the time. I used to always say that the House leader's office was in the House. But I don't get a chance to be in the House nearly as much as I used to, so I'm more than happy to be here for a long as the Government House Leader and others would like me to be here. I may not speak on behalf of the department staff when it comes to that, but certainly, for me as the minister, I'm more than happy to be here answering your questions.

Just in terms of clarity, I mean, you know, again, not being sort of on the ground making these specific referrals, I think the member also has to know that people might be seeking out specialists for certain things, might be itinerant doctors who are involved with the referral, so it may not always be the individual's family doctor making the—making a reference. You know, it might be a specialist who is involved with it—so, just in terms of clarity of language, but the broader point is that ultimately, of course, it is medical advice and physicians who are making the decision, not the Minister of Health or the deputy minister or anybody else who is making the decision whether or not somebody medically requires to have a transport.

Now, you know, I know the member will know that, of course, we would expect, as he would expect, that you know, the system will be honoured for what it is, right? I mean, ultimately, every system is as much—has as much integrity as the people who are using it, and we're very fortunate to have people with great integrity within the health-care system, but we want to ensure that programs are used appropriately and used for the intention that they're used.

And I have no doubt that physicians and residents, in fact, as well, will work to ensure that this program is used in the way that it was intended, and that is to ensure those who are medically required to have air transport, and required to have an escort, will be afforded that escort and that air transport for the patient. Because to not use the system in that way would be detrimental, of course, to the long-term sustainability of it, so I have no

doubt that there is no concern about that. It'll be used in an appropriate and effective way and certainly, I hope, by doing that it'll be here for many, many years for others to use it in the North.

Mr. Lindsey: Just to switch gears a little bit, then. Right now I believe the Northern Health Region has a deal negotiated with Calm Air that basically what northern patient transfer pays is the cost of a bus trip. My understanding is presently you can turn that cheque over to Calm Air and pay them \$75 from your own pocket, and then you're entitled to fly for medical reasons as opposed to riding the bus for 12 or 14 hours.

Is that program still going to be in place?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. So he is correct that there has been a program previously in place such that if a patient is—needs to come from the North to Winnipeg presumably for a medical procedure, that that patient could pay \$75—I'm not sure if that was the equivalency of bus fare, exactly how that number was derived at, but I'll take the member's word for that. The patient could pay \$75 and then upgrade to an air ticket, so essentially it would cost them \$75.

* (16:20)

I think that the rationale for that is that otherwise the patient, if they were travelling by land, would have been eligible for travel costs, and essentially by allowing them to upgrade by air, it becomes more or less cost neutral for the patient.

That program remains in place.

Mr. Lindsey: So that program remains in place for the patient. Does it remain in place for the escort as it presently does?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm advised from officials that there never, in fact, was a program that provided for an escort of a patient who didn't require air travel to be—to get a discounted air flight to fly with a patient who wasn't required to travel by air, that that program didn't exist.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, so it's my understanding is that right now, what the minister is saying is that a patient that's determined to require transport to Winnipeg, for example, gets the equivalent of bus fare provided to them. They can turn that over to Calm Air, plus \$75, and they would be allowed to fly to Winnipeg.

Presently, somebody that's entitled medically to an escort is also entitled to the bus fare, which they

also can turn over to Calm Air and pay \$75 and accompany their loved one to Winnipeg on a flight, as opposed to a 14-hour bus ride.

Is the minister saying that that's not going to be the case anymore?

Mr. Goertzen: The member is asking whether or not a policy that didn't exist has changed. And the answer to that is no. It was never the policy that an individual who, as a patient, was eligible—or was eligible to travel by land as opposed to medically necessary air travel, was entitled to have an escort paid for by air. So the policy didn't exist. Whether there was a practice that developed either incrementally or partially or inconsistently, that might be something different. But the policy has not changed. But they are adhering to the policy now that patients who are deemed by their physician to be medically required to require air travel and medically required to have an escort, there has been no change to the policy. The policy has not changed. They will still be covered to travel together by air. In addition, if an individual is a patient and is not required to travel by air and not required to have an escort, that patient can still upgrade to air travel as the current policy exists. But nothing else has changed, I'm advised by officials. Nothing else has changed in the policy.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, the minister talked earlier about clarity, and he's just jumped right into the middle of the mud puddle, because now I'm very confused again. Presently, someone whose doctor tells them that they are entitled to Northern Patient Transfer bus fare to come to Winnipeg for medical treatment, and they are entitled to have an escort, they can presently pay \$75 in excess of the money they're entitled to for bus fare, give the bus fare money to Calm Air plus \$75, and the patient and the escort can then fly to Winnipeg. Now, from the minister's answer, I believe he's saying that because that was not an official policy, that's no longer going to be allowed. Is—I am I correct in what I think I've heard him say?

Mr. Goertzen: The policy has not changed. The policy remains as it was. When it comes to patients who are deemed by a physician to medically require air travel and medically require an escort, there has been no changes to the policy. They will still be covered to travel by air together.

The member talks about—or asks about the agreement for individuals who are not required medically to travel by air to—from the North, that those patients—he is correct that they have been allowed to—by virtue of agreement, they have been

allowed to choose to upgrade by paying \$75 out of pocket to Calm Air and then upgrade to a flight. I don't know if the \$75 was based on bus fare, but I accept that from the member, but the policy did not apply to escorts in that circumstance.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Chair, I have some quick questions for the minister on Concordia ER, and I'd just like to get from him the time frame for this ER closure. I've been getting asked that question quite a bit.

* (16:30)

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. I know he has been busy out on the hustings on this issue, and I would ask him as an honourable member to ensure that the facts that he is putting out there—and we can certainly disagree on the plan and disagree on the direction, even though it's direction that came under his former government under the NDP-commissioned Peachey report. And he can disagree with his government if he'd like; there's been lots of disagreement in the NDP, so it wouldn't be unusual or unexpected.

But he has to be clear in terms of ensuring that people understand that Concordia is not closing. Yes, the ER is going to be repurposed, but I believe—you know, and I, having seen the Statistics Canada report recently about the aging population in Canada—that Concordia's place in terms of its place in the health-care system in Winnipeg—I believe, in the future, it will be greater than it ever has been as a result of the need for dealing with our growing aging population. I believe it'll be far more valuable to the health-care system in the future than it probably is even today.

And I hope that that's borne out, and I hope the member would convey some of those sentiments at the—when he's handing out T-shirts, that he might also want to pass that along; that far from Concordia closing, I think—which is patently not true, I think that they will take a greater responsibility in the health-care system in the future and might become one of the greatest assets in the health-care system as our population continues to age and the need for concentrated care for that aging population only increases. I hope that that proves to be true, and I believe it will prove to be true.

And based on the folks that I know who are involved at Concordia, both in the foundation and in the hospital, I believe there's a tremendous opportunity for that facility to be an absolute jewel in terms of the place that it has within the health-care system in Winnipeg. In particular, when he talks

about the transition of the emergency room as indicated at the announcement when the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, together with Dr. Peachey, who was hired by the NDP to develop the plan, when they made the announcement, they made it clear at that point that the transition would not happen until the Grace ER expansion was complete; that it's important to have the Grace ER expansion complete in terms of their additional capacity and the different things that the Grace ER will bring.

And so—and now, again, we didn't invite Mr. Sussman here today not knowing if there'd be continued questions on the plan, but we certainly are open to that. But, you know, the expectation both for the Grace ER, but then more tied together with the Concordia, would be it wouldn't transition 'til next year, you know, probably the early part of 2018. There's not a specific date because it does somewhat depend on the Grace and what the expectation for the completion of the expansion is, but not in 2017, but perhaps in the early part of 2018.

Mr. Maloway: Thank the minister for that answer. I didn't think he was going to actually answer it, but—so he's saying early 2018 depending on when the Grace is finished. Now, of course, we are getting—the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) and myself are getting questions about this constantly as to—people are asking whether they should go there or not, because there's a suggestion that somehow the services have already been diminished. And the minister then, I guess, is—could assure us, then, that that is not, in fact, the case, that all of the services that are—have been offered there over the last while, are going to continue until this magical date in early 2018.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm glad that I could exceed the member's expectations in terms of providing an answer on the previous question. It's always good to have the member of Elmwood, the esteemed Opposition House Leader, happy on that side.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

I would say to him that, yes, the changeover from the Concordia ER is somewhat dependent on the progress of construction of the Grace, and our expectation at this point is that the conversion would happen—not happen this year, but likely in the early part of next year.

But he is correct and I would ask him, you know, while we can have a civil disagreement on the

changes that his government recommended and that we are acting upon, there are no changes at this point in terms of the services at the Concordia ER.

We've committed to—or, sorry, the WRHA has committed to ensuring that prior to any changes happening both at Concordia or any of the other sites, for example, that there would be public education into those local areas so that residents would know before any services changed.

They would have significant notice about where changes are changing or improving and they could be well advised of that and so we will endeavour to ensure that there is a strong amount of communication. I have no doubt that at some point in this process, the member will criticize us for over-communicating and saying that we are providing too much information on the plan.

An Honourable Member: No chance of that.

Mr. Goertzen: No chance of that happening? Well, I'm glad to see that the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) was—has put on the record that we will not be criticized for communicating the WRHA plan. I'm glad for that, but I do know that there will be notification to the affected communities when there are changes, but at this point I'm advised that no changes have happened at the Concordia ER.

Mr. Maloway: So, of course, that begs the next question that I guess the government and the organization can have all the plans they want for a timely closure of the ER at Concordia, however, they have to take into account that, I'm told, that some of the staff are applying for jobs elsewhere knowing that this is, in fact, going to happen, that I think there's a doctor—there's an ER doc there who's applying for a job, I believe, in St. Boniface. I think some of the nurses are applying for jobs.

So then, if that scenario were to develop and the nurses are no longer there and the doctors are no longer there, is—in effect—the ER going to close itself at that point, and is the minister then going to be communicating that?

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

You know, it's actually a good question and—

An Honourable Member: Surprising.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, other members are surprised; I'm not surprised. I've seen the member ask a good question now and again over my 13 years here, but my understanding from officials is that the

emergency room doctors work as a group in Winnipeg and they are required, by virtue of their contracts, to provide the services in Winnipeg as a group, and so there is a contractual obligation that, as a cohort, that while an ER remains open that they provide the services to that ER collectively. So, and I think that that's important, you know, the information to get out there.

* (16:40)

Now, obviously, I've never shied away from the fact that the NDP—a plan, as put forward by Dr. Peachey, it's going to have some disruption. We understand that, we know that. The RHA said that at the announcement, Dr. Peachey, who was hand-picked by the NDP to put together the plan, has indicated that. So there'll be questions around labour movement and those are legitimate questions. I think the RHA has indicated that, for those who are seeking employment, that there'll be the ability to find employment within the RHA. And so, you know, they certainly are aware of some of the labour challenges as you realign the system to provide better care, and I know that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and their officials are fully engaged in that discussion. These are legitimate questions to ask and I think they're important questions to ask.

Is the NDP plan going to be without disruption? Well, I don't think it will. You know, will there be challenges along the way? Of course there are. But nobody should be fooled into believing that there haven't been challenges in the health-care system for many years. The fact that we were last in wait times, last in a number of different areas and issues when it comes to health care indicates that there were problems.

Now, I don't remember, maybe the member opposite produced yellow T-shirts that said, reduce our wait times, over the last 15 years and headed out onto the picket lines and demanded that the former government, under Mr. Selinger, reduce the wait times at the Concordia and other ERs, and I just missed the news broadcast when he did that. Or perhaps he demanded that Dr. Peachey be hired to fix the problem, and maybe that's the reason why—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse—

Mr. Goertzen: —we have the Peachey plan.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, order.

I just wanted to remind the minister, you referred to the previous premier as Mr. Selinger, so I just

wanted to make sure that you take that back. By constituency name.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes. The Selinger government, I know, commissioned Dr. Peachey and selected him, so if the member opposite protested the long wait times under the Selinger government, then I would like to see those news broadcasts or maybe see the T-shirts.

But, in terms of, you know, disruptions might happen. Sure, we understand that those could be part of them. And I know the RHA has committed to working through them in the best they can where there are labour issues, but the cohort of doctors that represent ER doctors work to provide services to Winnipeg as a whole. They will continue to do that, and my hope is that, in the long term, they will provide even better service when the system is realigned as the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) wanted it realigned when he and his government commissioned the Peachey report.

Mr. Wiebe: Just a question for the minister with regards to the Peachey report. Recommendation D-04 recommends that, quote, "that the Emergency Departments in the other three community hospitals become urgent care centres," end quote.

I'm wondering how the minister reconciles that with page 62 of the report.

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

And he refers properly to page 62 where Dr. Peachey outlines where the system should be aligned and how it should be envisioned and be done.

I know when you look at Dr. Peachey's report, I mean, he references urgent care centres in different places. On page 61, for example, in the second-last paragraph—the last line of the second-last paragraph, he does reference that potentially, urgent-care-type departments could be developed in remaining sites.

So he—there he raises the spectre of it being a possibility, but that is not the outline that he provided in terms of how he would see the system aligned and it's worth noting that Dr. Peachey did attend the announcement in Winnipeg. When the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority made the announcement in terms of the new system design, Dr. Peachey not only attended but he was one of the prominent speakers at it endorsing the plan, giving credit to the regional health authority for moving forward with the plan, recognizing that it was difficult .

He spoke about the fact on CJOB radio I believe it was or maybe on CBC, but certainly on a Winnipeg radio station, that the—reducing the number of ER services, he believed would actually improve ER services in Winnipeg. He gave his rationale and his reasons for that. So, yes, the report talks about a potential urgent-care-type department so not particularly prescriptive. But certainly what I do know is that the plan, which he laid out very clearly on page 62, in terms of how the system should be designed is clear that there should be two subacute units—urgent care centres—three emergency rooms, and a transitional-care facility.

And, most importantly, Dr. Peachey travelled to Winnipeg to be part of the announcement, to speak to the media, to talk about he believed that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority was doing the right thing by enacting the NDP plan and believed that, ultimately it would prove to provide better care in the city of Winnipeg. So I don't believe that Dr. Peachey would have come and spoken at the event if he—and spoken the way he did—if he didn't believe it to be a good decision based on what his report outline and the system design that he created.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and this is what is frankly so confusing about this that, again, is very clear recommendation, D-04: "Critical care units in Winnipeg Regional Health Authority be consolidated to three sites (St. Boniface General Hospital, Health Sciences Centre, and one community hospital)—that's understood, but then goes on to say that, quote: "the Emergency Departments in the other three community hospitals become urgent care centres." End quote.

* (16:50)

He goes on to say in recommendation D-08, quote: "Where it is determined independently that the nature of the use of the hospital beds will change, and/or that the Emergency Department will close or change to urgent care, . . . the clinical governance will assess whether replacement regional services are available or can be made available." So that's D-08.

I'm wondering if the minister can educate us on whether the clinical governance did that assessment about replacement regional services for the northeast part of the city.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the member for the question.

There's no question that Dr. Peachey was clear on how he thought the system should be designed, so clear that he actually designed it on page 62 with a

easy-to-reference graph, which the member has already referenced, in terms of how the system should be set up.

You know, and certainly one of the things that he cautioned about when it came to emergency rooms, is that when you dilute the system by having more emergency rooms than the population size would warrant, you end up providing a care that doesn't make sense in certain emergency rooms. And, in fact, you end up having people present in places where they're not best to present at, and often they have to be transported.

So I've heard of situations—the member of course will in his own constituency heard of many situations where people have presented at Concordia and then are quickly transported to St. Boniface because the emergency room at Concordia simply isn't designed to deal with their needs. And, when you talk about precious time lost, that is certainly one of the issues about precious time lost.

But Dr. Peachey was clear in terms of how he believed the system in Winnipeg should be established when it comes to emergency rooms, and that having too many emergency rooms actually is not helpful, that it dilutes the system. And that would be true for urgent-care centres, as well. If the member were to compare other cities the size of Winnipeg to other centres, he would see that having too many urgent-care centres would have the same dilution when it comes to services.

And so we don't want to get into the same situation with urgent-care centres as maybe we've gotten into with emergency rooms. And I suspect that that is why the Peachey report—Dr. Peachey, who was hand-selected by the Selinger government—maybe at the recommendation from the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), I don't know, but certainly from the government—was specifically selected to do the work that he did, is very clear in terms of how he believes the system should be aligned.

And we are following the NDP recommendation on this particular instance. We know that their past efforts failed. The NDP set guidelines for wait-time reductions in the RHA in 2013; they failed to deliver on those wait-time reductions, and people continue to languish in emergency rooms. And so I—that is probably concerning for the member opposite, though I didn't hear concerns from him when he was in government at the time, but I have no doubt that he was concerned in his heart of hearts, even if he didn't verbalize those—so deep that they never got

verbalized in the House or anywheres else, but perhaps—but I don't doubt that the member was concerned about those.

And that's why I suspect the Selinger government moved to hand-select Dr. Peachey to do the report that he did, and we are continuing to looking forward to the transition within the department. *[interjection]* It is also worth noting—I'm advised that Vancouver has one urgent-care centre that is open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. I had the opportunity to visit Vancouver briefly on a layover on the one-week vacation that I had in the last three years in February, but it was a wonderful vacation.

An Honourable Member: Where were you flying to? Where were you on your way to?

Mr. Goertzen: And I can tell the member for—the former minister of Education has little sympathy for—and I'm not seeking sympathy; I'm just putting it as a matter of fact, and I know I didn't have a chance to seek out the urgent-care centre, thankfully, but I'm advised that a city the size of Vancouver, which would be three times, I believe, the size of Winnipeg, only has one urgent-care centre.

Mr. Wiebe: At the end of the day, well, I guess it was a couple of weeks ago now, I had asked a question with regards to the wait times. I think I just asked about Concordia Hospital, but maybe I'll, in the interest—and maybe the minister has this. If he has it to provide right away, that'd be great; otherwise, if he can endeavour to get that for tomorrow, the average wait times at the emergency rooms in Winnipeg as well as the urgent-care at Misericordia as well as, I guess, maybe, you know, in terms of comparison, the average wait time as at Concordia Hospital, as it compares to one year ago, because I understand the hospital's quite proud of the progress they've made on their wait times at that particular facility, and that would be helpful to put it in context.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, we will endeavour to provide that information to the member. Of course, there's real time information on wait times that exists on the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority website that any person can access, but in terms of the average wait times, we can certainly work to put that together for the member, and I can try to report back to him tomorrow, unless we're wrapping up Estimates today, and then I would provide that to him in a letter by the end of the week. But if Estimates are going to continue, then I'm happy to provide that to him

tomorrow. We believe we can get it tomorrow, at least at the earliest convenience.

But I'm glad he raised the issue of wait times because it is important to note that Winnipeg has continually lagged when it comes to wait times, being the worst in the country.

I know that Concordia times has been cited as being the longest wait time of any ER in all of Canada, and that is, of course, no reflection to the fine people who work in the facility, but there are just sometimes structural and systematic issues that make it a challenge for wait times to come down, something that was identified in Dr. Peachey's report.

And so it is always critical to remember not just where we're going, but where we're coming from. And, when we're coming from a system that has the

worst wait times in Canada, that change is something that I think should be looked at in a positive fashion.

Now, we can debate change and the nature of the change—certainly the change was instructed by the NDP, and so they may want to debate themselves on the change. They may not believe in what they recommended themselves, and that would be fine; that internal division can continue on. But I do think we need to continue to have the—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 p.m.—10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 8, 2017

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