

Fifth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
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WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	Inkster	
<i>Vacant</i>	Lac du Bonnet	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 26, 2011

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 218—The Elections Finances Amendment Act (Abolishing the Vote Tax)

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), that Bill 218, The Elections Finances Amendment Act (Abolishing the Vote Tax); Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement des campagnes électorales (abolition de la subvention sur les votes), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, this bill deletes that portion of the election finance bill introduced by the government three years ago that brought into place a third form of public financing for political parties in Manitoba, namely an annual grant to political parties. The bill takes into account the fact that with deficits, with pressure on taxpayers and with pressure on public programs, that there are better ways to spend tax dollars than on annual grants to political parties, and that's exactly what this bill intends to do.

We look forward to the support of all members, including those who have already acknowledged, by their refusal to take the money, that it's the right way to go.

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

PETITIONS

PTH 5—Reducing Speed Limit

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Concerns continue to be raised about a number of motor vehicle accidents at the intersection of PTH No. 5 and PR No. 276 and at the intersection of PTH No. 5 and PR No. 68.

The Rural Municipality of Ste. Rose and the Town of Ste. Rose have both raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about the current speed

limit on the portion of PTH No. 5 in the vicinity of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Other stakeholders, including the Ste. Rose General Hospital, Ste. Rose and Laurier fire departments, East Parkland Medical Group and the Ste. Rose and District Community Resource Council, have also suggested that lowering the current 100-kilometre-an-hour speed limit on a portion of PTH No. 5 may help reduce the potential for collisions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider the importance of reducing the speed limit on PTH 5 to 80 kilometres an hour in the vicinity of the town of Ste. Rose from the west side of the Turtle River Bridge to the south side of the access to the Ste. Rose Auction Mart to help better protect motorists' safety.

This petition is signed by M. Denys, D. Wildeboer and J. Guillas and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Auto Theft—Court Order Breaches

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to the petition is as follows:

On December 11th of 2009, in Winnipeg, Zdzislaw Andrzejczak was killed when the car that he was driving collided with a stolen vehicle.

The death of Mr. Andrzejczak, a husband and a father, along with too many other deaths and injuries involving stolen vehicles, was a preventable tragedy.

Many of those accused in fatalities involving stolen vehicles were previously known to police and identified as chronic and high-risk car thieves who had court orders against them.

Chronic car thieves pose a risk to the safety of all Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all court orders for car thieves are vigorously monitored and enforced.

And to request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all breaches of court orders on car thieves are reported to police and vigorously prosecuted.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by B. Wiltshire, S. Rybczuk, D. Czarnecki and thousands of other Manitobans.

Convicted Auto Thieves—Denial of MPI Benefits

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

In Manitoba, a car thief convicted of stealing a car involved in a car accident is eligible to receive compensation and assistance for personal injury from Manitoba Public Insurance.

Too many Manitoba families have had their lives tragically altered by motor vehicle accidents involving car thieves and stolen vehicles.

It is an injustice to victims, their families and law-abiding Manitobans that MPI premiums are used to benefit car thieves involved in those accidents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Justice deny all MPI benefits to a person for injuries received in an accident if he or she is convicted of stealing a motor vehicle involved in the accident.

And this petition is signed by L. Whitehead, K. Hodgson, C. Froese and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Bipole III—Cost to Manitoba Families

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba Hydro has been directed by the provincial government to construct its high voltage direct transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Manitoba.

This will cost each family of four in Manitoba \$11,748 more than an east-side route, which is also shorter and more reliable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to build the Bipole III transmission line on the shorter and more reliable east side of Lake Winnipeg in order to save each Manitoba family of four \$11,748.

And this is signed by M. Grenier, M. Grenier, C. Froese and many, many other Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): It's my pleasure to table the first report of the Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner on The Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Act, its Implementation and Effectiveness from December 2008 to December 2010.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flooding and Ice Jams Update

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): It was yet another busy weekend for Manitobans dealing with flooding across the province.

The total number of evacuees has risen to 1,954, primarily as a result of the evacuation of over 870 people from Roseau River First Nation due to access concerns.

Provincial and municipal crews were at work in The Pas area putting in place tubes, earthen dikes and sandbags to protect properties threatened by high water on the Saskatchewan and Carrot rivers from ice jams. The jams were successfully cleared by the Amphibex and other heavy equipment, and levels on both rivers have now declined.

In western Manitoba, the Qu'Appelle River crested at St-Lazare, as did the Souris River in Souris, but water levels remain high. Additional homes were sandbagged around the Plum Creek in Souris over the weekend.

*(13:40)

On the Assiniboine, dike repairs have been completed to accommodate higher flows on the river near Baie St. Paul. As such, flows on the river downstream of the Portage Diversion are being increased over the next few days.

Outflows from the Shellmouth Reservoir are also being increased in advance of expected spillway overflows in the upcoming days.

I'd like to note that without the Shellmouth Reservoir, the Portage Diversion and the floodway, it's estimated that James Avenues in Winnipeg would have been 28.3 feet yesterday, almost 10 feet higher than the current level. In Brandon, water would have been two feet higher without the capacity of the Shellmouth Reservoir.

Mr. Speaker; in the Red River Valley the river 'cristed'—crested in Emerson Sunday and is expected to crest in Letellier today.

The west ring dike at Morris at PTH 23 was closed Monday due to high water, but the community still has road access to the east end of the dike.

In addition, at St. Adolphe, PTH 210 has been ramped at the east side of the dike to allow for local access, and work is under way to construct a similar ramp on the south side at PTH 200.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I wish to thank the minister for his latest update.

I know, over the weekend, several of my colleagues were out surveying flooding damage in the western part of the province. It certainly was a busy long weekend on the flood front, and the number of evacuees has continued to rise.

We recognize these are stressful times for the evacuees, but many departments and agencies are working together to try and make this process go as smoothly as possible. There was not a lot of rest over the weekend in the communities like Melita, Souris and St-Lazare, as efforts to hold back the flood waters continued.

Work continues on the Assiniboine River dikes to ensure they can accommodate higher flows.

It was positive to hear this morning that the ice has now disappeared from Manitoba's major rivers thereby eliminating the threat of ice jams and the problems associated with them. It was also very positive to hear that the crest projections on some rivers like the Red will not be as high as initially anticipated. However, it will still be days or weeks before people can return to their homes, assess any damage and begin the restoration work. Repairing damaged infrastructure such as municipal roads will take considerable time.

We do appreciate that the government announced on Good Friday that there will be a disaster financial assistance program to help individuals and communities recover from the effects of the flood event. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by thanking the minister for his update.

It's clear that the things along the Red are moving along with the crest coming north but at a level which is at or below the level of 2009.

And it is good to hear that the initial situation, so far, in Brandon has been kept under control to the extent that it has, although we're watching very carefully as the crest moves downstream and concerns about how the extra water, when it comes from the Lake of the Prairies, as it must come when the levels reach a certain point—that this will bear close watching.

It is, I think, important that we continue to consider those people who have been evacuated, and we look, in the long run, at steps that can be taken to minimize the need in the future to evacuate so many people from Peguis and from Roseau. I think it's also important that we look about—not only about long-run planning in terms of the Red and the Assiniboine, but longer run planning in many areas of Manitoba where there were roads and culverts which were—are out and what can be done to minimize these—extent of these problems in future years should there be floods like this one.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from École Van Walleghem School, we have 63 grade 4 students under the direction of Ms. Alison Palmer. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you all here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III Impact on Ratepayers

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): With many Manitoba families dealing with rising costs of food and energy and other basic necessities, Mr. Speaker, we also know that Manitoba's monthly hydro rates are increasing.

Mr. Speaker, as part of his rationale for the massive expenditures on the west side—the long west-side power line, the Premier has repeatedly told Manitobans that the cost of those expenditures will not be borne by Manitoba ratepayers but will instead be entirely paid for by American customers.

Does the Premier maintain that position today?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, growing the export market is the best way to keep Manitoba Hydro rates low in Manitoba; there's no question about that.

When Limestone was put forward to build that major dam, the members opposite criticized it. They did everything they could to stop that project from proceeding. That project paid itself back within 10 years and has resulted in Manitoba Hydro rates remaining low.

We expect the same results from future hydro development in Manitoba, Keeyask and Conawapa. But they can only be built, Mr. Speaker, if there's converter stations which will translate the power into usable power at the local level and an additional bipole which is—or a transmission line which will allow for increased capacity for exports in Manitoba—outside of Manitoba and increase the reliability within Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, and again, the question to the Premier is that he said on April the 1st, just a couple of weeks ago, and I quote: "The cost of the bipole will be built into the price of the product being sold to the customers to the south of us. . . . It will be paid by the customers, not by Manitoba ratepayers."

I want to ask the Premier again whether he maintains the position that 100 per cent of the cost of this project, which they're now estimating internally at \$4.1 billion, is going to be paid for by American customers, Mr. Speaker, or are Manitoba Hydro ratepayers, who are already paying increased costs in other areas, going to be stuck with the tab?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the number the member is using means that there would be no additional transmission built in Manitoba, which is at—estimated at about \$1.26 billion. There would be no additional converter stations built in Manitoba with the number he's using, because right now 75 per cent of the power goes through one converter station, the Dorsey station.

Without building additional conversion equipment in Manitoba, we put at risk the entire economy of Manitoba. That's a \$56-billion economy projected in this year's budget, more than a billion dollars a week. For one week, the member opposite would cancel all the increased reliability and affordability of Manitoba Hydro, and it would not be possible to build additional dams for export revenue which would keep Manitoba Hydro's rates the lowest in North America.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, exports generate revenue which keep Manitoba hydro rates low. The members opposite want to mothball that and put the entire system at risk and then move towards privatizing it.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why the Premier is having such a difficult time responding to the question.

What he said on April 1st was that the cost would be built into the price being sold to customers to the south. It will be paid by the customers, not by Manitoba ratepayers. And then, Mr. Speaker, lo and behold, last week every Manitoban received in their mailbox with their latest Manitoba Hydro bill a notice from Manitoba Hydro, and that notice says that the rates paid by Manitoba Hydro ratepayers, by Manitoba families, is—are going up, and the notice says, and I quote: "The new rates are necessary for Manitoba Hydro to meet its increased cost of operations and to maintain a financially strong corporate structure."

So I want to ask the Premier, who's been telling Manitobans that the costs would be borne by Americans, why is it, Mr. Speaker, that as of last week Manitoba Hydro is sending out notices to Manitobans that it is them, that it is Manitoba families that are paying the cost for the increased cost of these projects that are being directed by this Premier.

Why not just come clean, Mr. Speaker? He says one thing; Hydro says something different. Why doesn't he just own up to the fact that his decision is

going to cost Manitoba families thousands of dollars each?

* (13:50)

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, that—the member opposite has achieved a new level of misleading information in the House. He now says that a hydro rate increase, which keeps the rates the lowest in North America, can be attributed to a project which is not yet even built. It's several years away. The environmental reviews are just beginning. The planning stage is beginning. There has been no rate increase in Manitoba related to building additional reliability for transmission or for additional converter stations in Manitoba.

The member likes to mush all these things together, put big numbers in place and—which bill is he referring to, the phony bill that his caucus put out or the real bill that Manitoba Hydro put out which shows Manitoba Hydro rates are the lowest in North America, because Manitoba Hydro exports about 40 per cent of the power it produces in this province, one of the highest export ratios of any Crown utility in the country, and those export revenues keep our rates the lowest in North America.

Bill 218 Government Support

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

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): And I'll just—because the Premier is telling Manitobans that Americans are going to pay, Hydro's not saying it, and I'll table it for his information, just because the Premier's got all of his facts wrong once again, and so we'll table what's being distributed by Manitoba Hydro to ratepayers.

Mr. Speaker, taxpayers in Manitoba are also concerned about waste and mismanagement under this provincial NDP government. One way that the government could send a positive signal to Manitobans that they are on their side, that they're concerned about the level of the deficit, that they're concerned about the level of taxes they pay, will be to support our bill to get rid of the million-dollar grant they want to pay to the Manitoba NDP every four years.

Mr. Speaker, will they support the bill? Will they abolish the vote tax?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I just want to thank the member for issuing me this piece of information from Manitoba Hydro. He missed the line: Manitoba electricity consumers will continue to benefit from the lowest electricity rates in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro goes farther than I did: and among the lowest electricity rates in the world.

Thank you for tabling that. We appreciate the information. It's great. And I know it's hard for him to get that all out in his question, but I appreciate him tabling that information.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as to his question, this is the provincial government that was the first in history to ban corporate and union donations in Manitoba, and the members opposite voted against that, and the Leader of the Official Opposition has never, ever said that he will support a permanent ban on corporate and union donations in Manitoba.

If he's serious about protecting democracy and making it available to all Manitobans, let him stand today and make a complete statement that he repudiates corporate and union donations in this province.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the Premier was last week but, as I said in the House last week, we are very happy at the level of support we're getting from individual Manitobans. We are working hard on behalf of regular Manitobans, and that's why we got twice the support. We got twice the support from regular Manitobans as they did, people contributing under \$250 a year.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, he is completely wrong in terms of our position on that issue. It's nothing more than a smokescreen. It's nothing more than a diversion. Why won't he answer the question? The bill has been tabled. Why not stand on the side of Manitoba taxpayers and say no to the million dollars he wants to put into his party's pocket?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, it does—a careful observer would note that the member never yet has repudiated corporate and union donations in Manitoba, and I'm sure he's satisfied with the level of public support he gets. The largest subsidy to any political party, in the last election, was to the Conservatives of Manitoba, over \$1.1 million of public subsidy. So which public subsidy do they want to cancel? Just the one they don't like so they

could get the largest subsidy of any political party of Manitoba? Are they being selective?

Let them be clear. Are they in favour of banning corporate and union donations in Manitoba? Let the Leader of the Official Opposition stand in this House and be absolutely definitive: Does he or does he not agree with banning corporate and union donations in Manitoba?

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the Premier to go back and read the record which has been very clear. We support grassroots fundraising. We support contributions from regular Manitobans. We reject the excessive influence of special interest groups like those that they have come to rely on.

We also reject the practice of falsifying election returns. We also reject the practice of falsifying election returns in order to get more from taxpayers than they deserve, Mr. Speaker. We also reject the practice of getting letters that absolve oneself when they get caught doing illegal things and then shredding those letters, as the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) did when he received his letter.

And, so, we are opposed unequivocally, Mr. Speaker, to special interest groups having excessive influence in politics. We are opposed to taking money from taxpayers, and it was their party that took more than a million dollars after the last election and then turned around and said, that's not enough; give us another million.

We call on them today, Mr. Speaker, to say no to the second million that they want to take through the vote tax.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I just want to note for the record that was a long-winded way to avoid the question. I have to tell you, I did not hear a clear statement repudiating corporate and union donations in Manitoba. I did not hear a clear repudiation to turn back the clock to the '90s when the backroom financed the Conservative Party of Manitoba.

Is he or is he not in favour of banning corporate and union donations in Manitoba? It's very clear that he supports public financing of political parties, because he took \$1.12 million of public financing in the last election.

So it's not the principle that's at risk here; he's nitpicking. Will he or will he not ban corporate and union donations in Manitoba forever? Let him be clear on that.

Violent Crime Increase in Summer

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems to already be practising answering—or asking questions. Maybe he'll get his chance after October 4th. We'll let the public decide.

Last year, Statistics Canada identified Manitoba as the only province in Canada where violent crime was increasing, and this was backed up by a Winnipeg police report in December that said that 14 per cent—there was a 14 per cent increase in violent crime year over year.

Never is that more pronounced than in the summer months, Mr. Speaker. Winnipeg—Winnipeggers have come to expect violent crime in the summer, random shootings, random stabbings and home invasions. As the weather warmed up this weekend, so, too, did the streets of Winnipeg. Attacks with knives, with guns, with pepper spray, with axes and with bats were all recorded.

Can this Minister of Justice indicate, in his discussions with the Winnipeg chief of police, are we again expecting a record summer of violence that we have come to expect under this NDP government?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly welcome the question from the member opposite who—whose side-mate last week said that before 1999 there was no auto thefts in Winnipeg. So I guess the 6,000 auto thefts that occurred in 1994 are part of the Tory vision—the Tory memory loss that occurred along with the thousand nurses and doctors.

But to the point in question, Mr. Speaker, I know that the minister has talked with the new—the police chief about the hundred new police officers added to the city of Winnipeg for a total of 225 officers, each and every one that were voted against by the member for Steinbach and every one of his colleagues over the last 10 years.

They can't vote one way and then ask for something else the other way. It doesn't work that way, just like it doesn't work that there was no auto theft in the '90s. *[interjection]*

* (14:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to remind members that, for your information, I am doing timing and I don't need no assistance from anybody. I will keep track of time, and if you think you're intimidating me by

calling time, time, to get the member to sit down, it's not going to work.

I'm keeping track of the time. I don't need encouragement from other members when the time is up.

Mr. Goertzen: And, speaking of time, Mr. Speaker, it seems that time has flown since it was the Attorney General, the former attorney general who was in charge of crime in the province when it increased to such a level that we are now the violent crime capital of Canada. Over 11 years we've continued to see violent crime increase under this NDP government.

Each and every summer Manitobans are shocked—and sometimes they're not even shocked anymore—at the increased level of crime. In some ways they've become immune to it, unfortunately. It's a black mark on our province. It's a black mark on what is otherwise a great city. Violent crime continues to go up and it seems that it's going to go up again this summer.

I want to ask the Attorney General: In the discussions that he's had with the chief of police for the city of Winnipeg, can he indicate whether or not Winnipeggers can again expect a record level of violence? Is that the expectation? Has it become the expectation under this NDP government over the last 11 years, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the one thing that we won't do is use the politics of crime, as the members opposite have done for a decade, as a political wedge issue to try to somehow position themselves as against crime when, in fact, they denied the fact that gangs were here in the '90s and refused to do anything about it. They denied the fact there was auto theft—in fact, 6,000 in '94—and refused to do anything about it.

It was up to this NDP government to hire 225 more police officers, 50 more prosecutors, hire more guards, and more programs that actually help people who perhaps we can keep out of crime. The member never talks about the hundreds of people that you can keep out of crime instead of just throwing them in a jail, because members opposite seem to think there was no jails prior to the Conservatives being in office.

And, you know, there are alternatives. You can put in place programs and you can be tough on crime—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: What the former attorney general cannot deny is that violent crime is worse in Manitoba and in the city of Winnipeg today than it's ever been, and that is his record and it's the record of his entire government.

And so Manitobans are wondering again, as we saw this last week, and violent crime increased again over the weekend—axes, guns, knives, pepper spray, bats, all used as weapons—and they're wondering if this is going to be a repeat of the horror movie that we've seen over the last number of summers.

Can the Attorney General or the former attorney general or anybody who actually has an answer stand up and tell us whether or not, in their discussions with the city of Winnipeg chief of police, whether or not we can expect increased violence again this summer? It's become the pattern under this soft-on-crime NDP government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chomiak: You can't get elected on a one-trick pony of only talking about violent crime. Yes, Mr. Speaker, there are programs in place the members voted against: the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, the after schools arts program, the Black Youth Internship program, the Bright Futures program, the career development program, the Career Focus program, careers options for students.

High school graduation is up, and, yes, there's still more police on the street; there's still more prosecutors. We put a helicopter in place; the members opposite take credit for that. I suppose they take credit for the police cadets that are on the street now for the first time in history. I suppose they take credit for the amendment to the Criminal Code. We did what the federal government—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mining Exploration Expenditure Decreases

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): The minister forgot the Slurpees and the Goldeye tickets to gang members as well.

Mr. Speaker, during the recession, mining exploration expenditures across Canada saw a sharp decline. As a result, mining exploration expenditures in Manitoba have been down by 40 per cent. Last month, Natural Resources Canada announced that they forecast a return to 2008 levels of activity at about \$3 billion for Canada. However, Manitoba is continuing to drop rather than recover like the rest of the country.

Why is the Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines putting such an important sector of our economy at risk? Why is the minister—why is the mining exploration rapidly declining in Manitoba and not in other western Canadian provinces?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): You know, Mr. Speaker, it's a common practice of the members of the opposition to only see the negative.

I wonder if the member would—perhaps the member would like to accompany us up to Snow Lake to see the largest mining development in the history of Manitoba, at \$650 million, under way right now by Hudson Bay Mining & Smelting. Or maybe he'd like to go up to Bucko Lake or in Crowflight, where they've recently—within three weeks, they're reopening another mine.

Or maybe, perhaps, he'd like to go up to the expanded Bissett mine or perhaps he'd like to go to southwest Manitoba where they're investing a billion dollars in the oil patch, Mr. Speaker, saying that the Manitoba economy is the best for investment in the country.

Mr. Borotsik: Or maybe, Mr. Speaker, the minister would like to explain why exploration expenditures in the province of Manitoba are on the decline. Manitoba is the only jurisdiction to post declines—exploration declines for 2009, 2010 and 2011. We know that mining is a very important sector in Manitoba, that their jobs are at risk.

Mr. Speaker, this government is detrimental to the mining climate in the province. How can the minister justifying ignoring the mining sector, putting the jobs at risk and damaging our economy, not mines that are already in existence but new exploration and new mines?

Mr. Chomiak: Oh, I see, Mr. Speaker. If the member's talking about new mines, maybe he ought to consult the Pricewaterhouse report that said Manitoba has the second best financial incentives in mining in the country. Or maybe he wants to consult some of the companies that have come in recently that invested \$1 billion in Manitoba. Or maybe he ought to read the *Maclean's* article that talked about the Manitoba miracle.

Maybe he ought to talk to one of the 5,000 people working up north. North is north of Winnipeg, for members opposite. They have a bunch of mines in the north that have a variety of mining ventures, and perhaps he'd want to know something

about the fact that it was our mining initiatives that developed the Lalor mine and helped develop the Lalor mine to make it the largest mine probably opened in Canada this year and certainly the largest opened in Manitoba in the past 50 or 100 years.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, it was this NDP government that chose to reduce mining exploration expenses in this past budget.

Mining makes up 4 per cent of the GDP, 12.5 per cent of our exports. Many communities, as this minister has just indicated, it's their main income, their main industry and it's their main employee.

Now, Mr. Speaker, why is it that this minister still is putting mining at risk? When is the minister going to admit that there is a problem and what is he going to do about it?

We've reduced exploration costs, Mr. Speaker. Why is this minister reducing exploration? Why is he not looking forward to the future and looking at new mines that are going to be open in the north, not old mines?

Mr. Chomiak: Okay, Mr. Speaker, I want to get this straight. Last year's budget, the Conservatives said we should take half a billion dollars out of the budget. [*interjection*] In one year. Now, that would have equated to more than the 1,500 nurses they laid off, more than the hundreds of doctors that left, more than the technicians, more than the cancelled programs with respect to that.

This year we've increased the mining resource benefit for prospectors by a million dollars, and they still voted against it, Mr. Speaker.

So, I don't know, Mr. Speaker. They voted against last year's budget and said, hey, half a billion out. This year we put in an additional billion dollars for exploration initiatives, Mr. Speaker, and they voted against it again.

There's a little pattern, Mr. Speaker, and the pattern is they do not have any faith in Manitoba or the future of Manitoba, don't leave any hope for Manitobans as we do on this side of the House.

Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead Public Reviews Completion

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): It's been almost two years since Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead was killed, bitten, kicked and suffocated by her

mother after being returned to her by the Child and Family Services system.

Mr. Speaker, reviews were undertaken by the agency, by the authority, by the Children's Advocate and by the department. Can the minister tell us today how many of those reviews have been completed?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs): Well, of course, it's profoundly difficult for any Manitoban to understand how a mother can murder her child and especially with supports around her or, as according to professional assessment, making strides with her parenting, apparently. It was a terrible crime, and we are pleased to see that at least the court process has come to a determination. Whether there's an appeal, Mr. Speaker, we'll await news of that, but there has to be no uncertain denunciation of such a horrible crime.

* (14:10)

And, of course, in addition to that, there are triggered reviews, and the Children's Advocate is required by law now as a result of legislation introduced to this House, opposed by the member opposite—called a special investigation report. That has been launched, I understand.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And it's been two years—two years—since the minister and his department stood up and said that reviews were going to be undertaken, not just one by the Child Advocate, but one by the agency, one by the authority and one by the department.

My simple question to the minister, two years later: How many of those reviews have been completed?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, we're certainly familiar with the respect of the member opposite for the independent office of the Children's Advocate, Mr. Speaker, but that office reports to this Assembly, and that is an independent process that we respect on this side. That's why we enabled the Children's Advocate to be able to do those reviews when there is a tragic death of a child, as was the circumstance here.

And, as well, I can assure the House that the department, as well, has launched a review of the Native Women's Transition Centre, and I understand that those reviews now can unfold as a result of the conclusion of the police and criminal proceedings.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But two years ago this child was killed—two years ago—and the minister stands here today and says that a review can now be started?

His department and this minister committed two years ago to review the circumstances and the situation. Simple question: Has that not been long enough? What reviews have been completed and what action has been taken?

Mr. Mackintosh: You see, what the member opposite is working into her question is this assumption that government should tell the Children's Advocate of how and when that report should be done, Mr. Speaker, and that is done by an independent office of this Legislature.

She actually reports not to myself, as the member opposite, I know, really—you know, we—I can go back—oh, let's look to see what their record was when it came to the Children's Advocate. I don't have to tell the story; the headlines will: Funding lack hurts system, Children's Advocate; Advocate says system fails kids; 1998, Tories trying to dump me, Advocate says; 1999, Children's Advocate loses his job.

That's their respect for the independence of the Children's Advocate. That report is being done independently for the good of the Legislature and the children—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Assiniboine Valley Flooding from Saskatchewan Drainage

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, municipalities and residents along the Assiniboine River below the Shellmouth Dam are witnessing devastation that they have never, ever seen before. Tributaries that had basically emptied their streams have suddenly turned into raging rivers.

I want to ask the Minister of Water Stewardship whether she is aware of the thousands of cubic feet per second that are entering the Assiniboine Valley from the province of Saskatchewan from illegal and uncontrolled draining that is causing millions of dollars of damage to personal and municipal property.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, we are aware of water coming into Saskatchewan—coming into Manitoba from Saskatchewan, and we were aware that this was going to be an important year, which is why we negotiated an unprecedented agreement with

the government of Saskatchewan on Fishing Lake that there would be no unnatural releases of water during this time.

We're monitoring inflows into the Shellmouth Dam as well as outflows to minimize damage not only in the immediate area but all along the Assiniboine River. We started to draw down at an unprecedented time to an unprecedented level to prepare for what we knew would be coming this spring.

So, yes, Mr. Speaker, we're very aware of what is happening at the Shellmouth Dam.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, from the answer the minister just gave, it is obvious that she doesn't know what she's talking about.

Mr. Speaker, this is water entering from Saskatchewan into tributaries below the Shellmouth Dam. This is water that's coming in at unprecedented levels, causing millions of dollars of damage to municipal infrastructure and private property. It's all coming from Saskatchewan and—from uncontrolled draining, from unlicensed draining, from backhoes that have worked through the winter, cutting drains.

I want to ask the minister whether she's aware of this, and who's going to be accountable for the damage that is caused to Manitoba infrastructure by Saskatchewan water?

Ms. Melnick: Well, I think it's the member from Russell who's a bit confused, because his first question was flows going into the Shellmouth Dam. I answered that question for him. Now he's talking about—*[interjection]*—a bit more confusion on the other side of the House. Now he's asking about the tributaries. Most of the tributaries have drain, Mr. Speaker.

We are, again, working with Saskatchewan on a long-term plan. We have a very good working relationship with them, and we will continue to do that again. We are monitoring the flows coming into the Shellmouth Dam, leaving the Shellmouth Dam, all along the Assiniboine River, and I want to say a thank you to all the folks who have worked so hard to contain the flows along the Assiniboine River. People have literally spent the night in their truck—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Shellmouth Dam Spillway Levels

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, this minister does not know what she's talking about. I referenced the fact that these were residents in municipalities below the Shellmouth Dam in my first question and in my supplementary. It would help if she would listen to the question and at least address the issue.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister of municipal—or Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation. We were told last Wednesday that the Shellmouth Dam would never reach spillway levels this year. Two days later, a flood warning was issued to the people downstream of the Shellmouth Dam that, in fact, there would be flooding. Yesterday, the lake—or the Shellmouth Dam was within two feet of spilling through the spillway.

I want to ask the minister whether or not he can give us an accurate estimate as to how high the water's going to get going through the spillway, Mr. Speaker, in addition to the 6,000 cubic feet that are being let out through the conduit.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, unlike the member from Russell, the Shellmouth Dam is not going over the top. We are monitoring levels—*[interjection]* We are monitoring levels. We have—we're looking at how the Shellmouth Dam level is rising. When it goes over the spillway, we will look at what is being let out of the outlet, and we will monitor that, again, to ensure that there is not unnecessary flows going through the Shellmouth, going through the Assiniboine, affecting producers in the immediate area.

We are also looking at the water that we are putting through the Portage Diversion. We are also looking at the water that we are putting through the floodway. So we are looking at every area from the Saskatchewan border into Lake Winnipeg to work with local communities.

And, again, he's insulting the work of local communities by not giving them credit for the work that they're doing. And we will continue to monitor that. We know water levels will be very high—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Education System Student Test Scores and Drop-out Rates

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in the last few weeks, quite a number of Manitobans

have shared with me their concerns about how the NDP school system in Manitoba is failing their children. They worry about the fact that the international test scores, the PISA scores in their schools, are among the lowest in Canada, and the NDP Minister of Education has done nothing. And they worry that dropout rates are among the highest in Canada, and the NDP Minister of Education has done little.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Minister of Education be accountable for her do-nothing approach to PISA scores and her do-little approach to high dropout rates?

* (14:20)

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased and honoured to have the opportunity to answer a question about education in this House. It provides me with an opportunity to inform the members of the House that our dropout rate has decreased by 29 per cent since we got into government.

And I think it also would be appropriate—*[interjection]* No, they didn't want to hear that, Mr. Speaker, but it is the truth, and it also provides me with an opportunity to inform members of our latest graduation rate that is now at 82.7 per cent. It has increased almost over—it has increased almost 3 per cent since just last year and it has increased 14 per cent since we got into government in 1999.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, sadly, compared to other provinces, Manitoba's high-school dropout rates are still among the very highest in all of Canada, and, sadly, I have never had so many business people come to me and say the graduates of grade 12 aren't performing where they should be.

The PISA scores now are among the worst in Canada. Since the NDP took power in 1999, sadly the PISA scores have got worse and worse and worse and it's making it harder for kids to be competitive for jobs. It's making Manitoba look bad.

When will the minister admit that her education policies are failing our children in Manitoba?

Ms. Allan: But I think it's appropriate to put the correct information on the record.

We believe that a strong education strategy is a strong economic strategy, and I don't know what business people he's talking to, but I also talk to business people and I think it's important for the member opposite to know how well Canada is doing

in regards to PISA results. We are at the OECD average in regards to our results, and I think it's totally important and unfortunate that the member opposite likes to spread information that isn't correct about those studies.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well that the PISA scores in Manitoba have been going down and down and down in the last 12 years and that we now rank among the worst in Canada. It is terrible what is happening under this minister.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba families work hard to have their kids succeed. Teachers and principals put in long hours for their to—students to succeed, and yet because the NDP educational policies are so far behind the rest of Canada, our PISA scores here continue to fall and fall and fall. The Minister of Education is leaving our kids behind.

Will the minister not admit that after 12 years the approach has failed and will she tell us what she's going to do about it, because it's been a disaster.

Ms. Allan: It gives me an opportunity, once again, to talk about how we've invested in our public education system. It also provides us with an opportunity to talk about our graduation rate that is increasing.

We've also put \$600,000 in our recent public announcement for public schools into a project that provides mentorships to young people around the 15–grade 9 category, so that they can continue to stay in school and be mentored by teachers, Mr. Speaker.

And I find these questions from the Leader of the Liberal Party quite interesting, because when he was in the federal Cabinet, he cut transfer payments to education, Mr. Speaker, all across this country. He should be ashamed of himself that he's raising these issues. He's making politics out of an education system that educators in this province call the best in the world.

Electric Vehicle Development Government Initiatives

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. You know, last time we were gathered in this marvellous Chamber on Thursday, it was the day before Earth Day and, well, the opposition didn't ask any questions about the environment. I thought, all right, maybe the start of this week, maybe Tuesday. I've had the long weekend. Again, no questions on the environment. I guess it would be a

bit much to expect them to actually connect environmental issues with economic opportunities for our province.

I've also had the pleasure on those last two days, Thursday and Tuesday, to attend amazing events with our hard-working Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines. I'm wondering if he might want to enlighten members opposite on what the 21st century actually looks like.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Well, first, Mr. Speaker, we've been able to outline for Manitoba—it's an electrical Vehicle Road Map that outlines a plug-in partnership, an electric vehicle advisory committee, an electric vehicle learning demonstration centre.

We were able, Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate some plug-in—complete plug-in electric vehicles, as well as today announce a partnership with Manitoba Hydro—which is public and as long as it stays public will be producing for all of Manitoba—and New Flyer and Mitsubishi and Red River to demonstrate, in Winnipeg, an all-electric bus, an all-fossil-free electric bus.

And, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans, as early as next year, will have a chance to be 100 per cent fossil free if they so choose, and that's no small feat in a world where—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Oak Park Raiders Hockey Teams

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I rise today to congratulate the Oak Park Raiders hockey teams, both the men's and the women's team. The Oak Park women's hockey team won the Winnipeg Women's High School Hockey League's Division A championship series on March 24th.

The Winnipeg Women's High School Hockey League has been in existence for 14 years and Oak Park has been in the final seven of those 14 years, winning five times. This year marks a three-peat for the team as they beat the St. Mary's Flames 2-0 in an emotional final game.

The Oak Park team wasn't the biggest team in the league, nor the fastest, nor the deepest, but they played together as a total team. With just under seven minutes in the final game, the girls took a time out, and they all went up to the goalie to give her a

hug. It may sound corny, but it was what this team was about, and it worked in their favour with their goalie Amanda Pushka stopping everything that the Flames brought her way.

Although the defending champions, the Raiders, had only five returning players from last year, and when tryouts began only 17 players showed up, the roster minimum. They were also without a coach at the beginning of the season until alum-turned-teacher Kelly Smith stepped up. They overcame a lot of hurdles this year and were a team that everyone underestimated.

Congratulations in particular to two Oak Park women who won awards at the recent Women's High School Hockey League Awards of Excellence: Jessie Hilton as top defence, and Amanda Pushka who won a scholarship award.

The Oak Park men's team had their own story and it included second chances. Controversy swirled about a game lost on purpose by another high school team, which would have forced Oak Park out of the playoffs. The wrong was righted and the Raiders went on to play St. Paul's Crusaders in the city final, losing 5-0. This was not the end, however, as Oak Park got a chance to play in the provincials. On March 16th, the Oak Park Raiders fought to a 4-2 win against St. Paul's Crusaders in the AAAA provincial men's high school hockey championship game. It was Oak Park's first win in five tries against St. Paul's this season, which just shows that no one should underestimate the Oak Park Raiders.

Congratulations to Oak Park on winning this provincial championship and once again validating their motto of "Excellence in Art, Athletics and Academics." Kudos also to the coaches, managers and volunteers who give so much of their time in order that our youth may benefit from this experience.

Charleswood is very proud of both of these teams, Mr. Speaker, and also proud of our local high school. And I would ask leave to have the names of the teams recorded in *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Boys Hockey Team

Team Coaches: Joel Nedecky, Brad Sparrow, Ryan Furst. Manager: Evan Duncan. Roster: Tyson Bannatyne, Tyler Bell, Cole Benedikton, Riley Daly, Nic Demski, Isaac Hedenstierna, Alex Hollyoake, Jack Josephson, Tyler Morwick, Dylan Noga, Colton Plante, Garrett Shaw, Tyler Smith, Kyler Sobiak, Connor Staub, Daniel Swidinsky, Garrett Urick, Cory Yeroschak.

Girls Hockey Team

Team Coach: Kelly Smith. Assistant Coaches: Michelle Sparrow, Melanie Jones. Team Managers: Doug Bunting, Larry Argue. Roster: Carrie Minion, Jessie Hilton, Leah Suderman, Heather Muir, Sydney Pheifer, Aly Robinson, Jackie Ormel, Aundra Fort, Rayna Sokalski, Lauren Watts, Erin Kucheravy, Kira Bannatyne, Megan Stefanson, Robyn Fraser, Breanne Syvret, Erika Horvey, Amanda Pushka.

OCN Penguins Hockey Team

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the OCN Penguins hockey team—went home with the North American First Nations hockey tournament championship just a few weeks ago. This year's win makes it the fourth consecutive championship for the Opaskwayak Cree Nation Penguins.

Not only did OCN come out of the tournament as champions, they came out with five straight wins and outscored the opposition 30-8 and allowed no more than two goals against in any game. But that's not to say that the final didn't come out without its excitement. OCN was matched up with Sandy Bay Feathermen and it proved to be a fair match.

*(14:30)

After being down for the first two periods, the Penguins managed to fight back to the end sending the game into two overtime periods. The winning goal was thanks to an assist from Donald Melnyk and, of course, Mike Young who dropped the puck in the net during the second overtime. The result was a close 3-1 win for the Penguins.

OCN came out on top of the 20 teams and their efforts certainly paid off. OCN also claimed the first prize of \$20,000. There were 1,400 people in attendance to watch the intense final game of the 22nd annual North American First Nations Tournament of Champions. Many more filled out the audience throughout the course of the tournament. The tournament is truly a source of entertainment

and sportsmanship in many communities around the province.

Thanks to all that have a hand each year in organizing the tournament, including Buck Matiowski, who is stepping down as organizer this year.

Congratulations again to the Opaskwayak Cree Nation Penguins. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Carolyn Ransby

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): It is with sadness that I rise today to recognize the passing of Carolyn Ransby. Carolyn passed away March 19th, 2011, after a battle with ovarian cancer. She was an outstanding woman who contributed a—in numerous ways to her community.

Carolyn was born and raised in Winnipeg. She attending Gordon Bell High School and the University of Manitoba. After graduation, she began her career as an executive secretary at Prudential Insurance of America. She stayed at this position until 1970 when she left to focus on starting her family.

In 1981, Carolyn rejoined the workforce taking on the role of division director at the United Way. She went on to work with the Children's Hospital Research Foundation. Following this, Carolyn became the executive director of the PC Manitoba Fund for seven years until her retirement in 2001.

I had the great honour of working with Carolyn as a volunteer board member of the PC Manitoba Fund in the mid-to-late 1990s. She was a class act and always someone you could trust to get the job done and done right.

Carolyn and her husband, Ted, married in 1966 and were together nearly 45 years. He survives her as do their son, Ross, and daughter, Karen, and four granddaughters. Family was very important to Carolyn and she loved spending time with children and grandchildren.

In addition to her family and professional commitments, Carolyn was a dedicated lifelong volunteer. She participated as a senior member of many organizations and boards, including the Humpty Dumpty Club, St. Luke's Church, the Junior League of Winnipeg, the Assiniboine Park Rangers, the Rehabilitation Centre for Children, many political campaigns, the art gallery and the Black and White Ball. She also served as chair of the Manitoba

Canada Day committee and as co-chair of several prostate cancer dinners.

In her leisure time, Carolyn enjoyed her participation with several groups which covered a broad range of interests. She was a member of The Book Club, The Walking Girls and The Mahjong Club. Carolyn also loved to travel. She and her husband took many trips together, including an annual trip to Maui and summers at Lake of the Woods.

Carolyn will be remembered for the energy she brought to everything she did and her graceful manner in the face of difficulties. She touched many lives and will be missed by all who knew her. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Women's Health Clinic 30th Anniversary

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, our health is something that we often take for granted until it's put to the test. Thankfully, we have institutions like the Women's Health Clinic to support us. This March, many Manitobans, including myself, paid tribute to the clinic at their Annual Gala Dinner in celebration of its 30th anniversary.

The Women's Health Clinic opened in 1981 as the first feminist women's clinic in Winnipeg. The clinic offered services that specifically address some of women's distinct health concerns. It has now expanded to include a drop-in teen clinic and the provincial eating disorders prevention and recovery program, using a holistic approach that emphasizes prevention, education and action.

The Women's Health Clinic focuses on providing resources, information and confidential support to women so that they may make the best choices for their well-being. Some of the concerns they deal with include: endometriosis, infertility, family planning and menopause. The clinic staff is made up of medical practitioners, counsellors and nutritionists to provide women with the care they need, whether that be medical examinations or compassionate support.

The Women's Health Clinic also works in advocacy to improve the systemic conditions that work against women's health. The clinic reviews provincial initiatives, facilitates community consultations and raises awareness on issues. One of its biggest undertakings, beginning this summer, will be the operation of the new birth centre in south Winnipeg. I am sure the Women's Health Clinic will

excel at this project. Their staff's sensitive and knowledgeable care will help countless parents find options that work best for them.

Mr. Speaker, the Women's Health Clinic provides our mothers, sisters, daughters and granddaughters with support whenever they are most vulnerable. I hope everyone will join me in congratulating them on their 30th anniversary. Thank you to all the clinic staff and volunteers. Our families are safer and healthier because of your dedicated care.

Cavena Nuda Naked Oats

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to the innovativeness and resourcefulness that is occurring right here in Manitoba.

Uli Gehrer from New Bothwell and David Shott from Arborg have no shortage of talent as farmers. But what's important, Mr. Speaker, is that they're going beyond the borders of this province. Four years ago, these two farmers started planting Cavena Nuda oats. These are a new variety of oats developed by the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada scientists that are hullless and hairless.

Naked oats cooks and tastes like rice but has—have a wider nutritional profile. They have twice the protein, 10 times the fibre and five times the iron of white rice. Naked oats are also suitable for gluten-free diets, a growing area of need for Canadians.

When Uli and David started planting the Cavena Nuda oats, there was no clear market in sight for this product. But now Campbell Soup Company is using Uli's and David's naked oats to create a hunger-fighting supplement called Nourish. Nourish is a complete meal. It does not require additional water and has a full serving of vegetables, protein and fibre.

Campbell Soup is using this product in an upcoming campaign called Feed the Hungry. These cans can be used in food banks and disaster-relief efforts all around the world. A hundred thousand cans will also go to food banks in Canada, and Campbell's is getting their oats from southern Manitoba for these purposes.

From no market to a world market, this is just a shining example of the kinds of products that we can and should be developing and promoting right here in Manitoba.

I applaud these two gentlemen on their agricultural success and encourage others to get involved with the industry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff). The title of the resolution is Water Quality.

Mr. Speaker: House business pursuant to rule 31(8), it's been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one put—that will be put forward by the honourable member for the Interlake. The title of the resolution is Water Quality.

Ms. Howard: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to table for the House an updated Estimates order. The order remains the same; some of the names have changed.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. The order for the Estimates, the new order that's just been tabled for information of members.

Any further House business?

Ms. Howard: Yes, I wonder if you would call the Committee of Supply to move into Estimates.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): I wonder if you'd canvass the House to see if there is agreement to allow for up to two staff members to attend in the Chamber with the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) for the duration of the Executive Council Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for up to two staff members of the official opposition to attend the Estimates session in the Chamber? Is there agreement on that? *[Agreed]*

So now that I will be now calling Committee of Supply, and in the Chamber will be Executive Council, and in Room 255 will be Education, and in Room 254 will be Advanced Education and Literacy.

Would the appropriate Chairs go to their respective rooms, please, to chair their committee.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND LITERACY

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Selby: I did want to put a few words on the record, being that I'm new to this portfolio, and the first thing, of course, to say what an honour it is to be in this portfolio. It's an exciting time in Advanced Education.

I do also want to take a moment just to thank the staff as well, and especially my deputy minister, who have shown a lot of patience in their guidance over the last few weeks as I've come into this new portfolio, and they have patiently answered all my numerous questions, which I'm sure was good preparation for today for them.

I also want to take a moment to thank my predecessor, the former minister, who has also been a wealth of information and has been very helpful as we've made this transition.

As I said, there have been so many exciting things going on in this portfolio. There's new campus expansions all over the province, and I look forward to touring them. I haven't had a chance to get outside of the Legislature very much as of yet, but I do look forward to touring all our campuses, both universities, and colleges and our adult learning centres and literary programs. I know that just driving around Winnipeg, or anywhere in Manitoba, you can see infrastructure projects at every campus in this province, and it's just a sign of growth. Enrolment is up and things are exciting around our campuses as they are.

I also just wanted to take a moment to talk about the budget that just came out. Proud of that it's continuing to build on our commitments to affordability and accessibility and excellence in our universities and colleges. We've seen a lot of growth in our post-secondary education, in our adult learning centres, and we continue to support that.

I'm also looking forward to continuing on that good work so far and making sure that we have a post-secondary education system that is as seamless and as transparent as possible and to make it as easy as possible for students to move all the way from early childhood right through our K-to-12 system and on to post-secondary school, whether that means a university degree or college or apprenticeship. Whatever their choice may be, I think it's an interesting move how we see school is student focused now, and I look forward to supporting that and continuing to increase our graduation rates and getting students into the workplace. And I look forward to working with the critic, who, I know, has got a lot on her plate now with some new duties as well. So I look forward to working with her, and I want to thank you for the chance to put a few words on the record.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Yes, Mr. Chair. Just briefly, I'd, first of all, like to congratulate the new minister on her recent appointment and best wishes to the former minister of Advanced Education on her—in her new role and also thank the staff for coming today.

So I just wanted to put those words on the record, and we can proceed.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic for those comments.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered by a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 44.1.(a) contained in resolution 44.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

Ms. Selby: Yes, I am happy to introduce the staff that has joined me today.

My deputy minister is Heather Reichert; the secretary to Council on Post-Secondary Education, Sid Rogers. We have the acting executive director to Manitoba Student Aid, Kim Huebner—did I say it right, Kim?—Huebner; the executive director, Adult Learning and Literacy, Lynette Plett; and the manager of finance and administration branch, Andrew Henry. Thank you for joining me.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of the department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mrs. Taillieu: I think normally we've just gone as a global discussion. I do tend to try and follow the Estimates books a little bit, but I jump around, so if global is okay, that'd be great.

Ms. Selby: I think that would be fine if we do global, but I wonder if I could ask the minister—or the member—if she has the ability to sort of put them into the categories of the staff that is here and perhaps, as we finish with one section, we can let them know that we've finished with them before we move on to the next one, if that's going to work for the member.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, I will endeavour to do that. There may be occasion, though, they may need to go back and do some more questions. So, with that in mind, I'm going to start then with the Manitoba Student Aid section.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreed that it will be a global manner? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Taillieu: And just some questions on the Manitoba Student Aid program. I'm just wondering, can you—the minister say if there—I mean, I know that there's been additional monies put in every year to the—oh, let me rephrase that—I'll specifically talk about the Manitoba Bursary Fund, okay, rather than just Student Aid, I'll zero in on that.

Can you just tell me how the Manitoba Bursary Fund operates, what is the mandate of that fund and how does it work?

Ms. Selby: Yes, I thank the member for the question. There is a number of different things that go on through the bursary program, but the main mandate would be debt remission. It's about paying down student debt to make sure that when students are

graduating have their debt below a certain level, which would be a—the main purpose of it.

But there are a few other—shall we say—divisions within the bursary program as well. The Bright Futures program is within that. Also, for students who may have to travel from rural or northern Manitoba beyond a certain distance in order to attend a post-secondary institution, there is a bursary involved as well for rural and northern students. There's also a Student Success grant which is for students who may have some unmet needs.

But, as I said in the beginning, the main mandate for the bursary program is debt remission, paying down student debt and keeping it at a certain level.

Mrs. Taillieu: How many—sorry—how many students would apply, then, to the Manitoba Bursary Fund for the payment of their debt, and then how many are actually awarded with the bursary fund and have paid down their debt?

Ms. Selby: So the students don't actually apply for it; it's an automatically debt remission. Students are automatically considered for this bursary when they submit their application for Canada and Manitoba student loans, and the bursary assists students. In 2009 and '10 it was 2,870 students were awarded this way. It is—it's considered against the student's debt, and most of them would get an award average of about \$2,959. As I said, they don't apply for it. It's automatic, as we look at the amount that they're loan is, and, of course, it's also considered what that is they're going to be graduating, in some of the professional programs where we expect that they will be probably quickly earning a significant amount of money would probably see a less award than a student who has a significant debt and depending on what career path they're taking after graduation.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate, in the line item Manitoba Bursary Fund, then, what other programs are included in that? That would be on page 51, (c)(1).

* (15:00)

Ms. Selby: That would be the programs that I spoke about in the first question, I believe it was; that would include the Bright Futures program, the rural and northern bursary and also the Student Success grant. Those are ones that are included in that bursary line.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm wondering then, let's just discuss the Bright Futures fund. Can you tell me what the purpose of the Bright Futures fund is?

Ms. Selby: What the Bright Futures program targets young people—kids, actually—as early as grade 6 and some of the lower grades, such as kids who are at risk of possibly not attending a post-secondary education or perhaps think that they wouldn't have the opportunity, in some cases might not have anyone in the family mentoring them in terms of role modelling, someone who's gone to post-secondary education, from families that may be disadvantaged and wouldn't think that it was something that they have done before or possibly something that they would be concerned about being able to afford.

So the Bright Futures supports children in different ways; there's a number of different programs. I have a list of several programs that I could read to you or could provide to the member. But just, basically, there's an RESP element to it; there's a mentor program; there's a scholarship for children. And it provides opportunity for children, as I said, as young as grade 6 to start considering that perhaps a post-secondary education is something that would be for their family interest. To name a couple of the places that these Bright Futures money goes towards, places like the Boys and Girls Club, SEED Winnipeg, some of the school divisions, the Manitoba improvement program, and just to name a few. As I said, there's a number of different initiatives to help at-risk kids see their potential.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate how the success rate is measured in terms of how many students actually get funding from the Bright Futures fund—and I note that there are several, which I'll go into in a minute—but—and then how many actually go on to university or graduate from university? What—how does—how is the success measured in the Bright Futures fund allocations?

Ms. Selby: Well, it's divided into each of the programs, and I certainly could give the member a more detailed answer if she gave us some time to just sort of add up all the numbers from the various students that are in different programs. However, the program is only four years old, and so the children that are enrolled in it have not actually had the chance to go through post-secondary education yet. We're still in the period of supporting the kids as they head towards that future.

Mrs. Taillieu: What is the criteria then for an organization to request and receive funding from the Bright Futures fund?

Ms. Selby: There's an application process and the applications are reviewed by a department committee. Of course, as I said, it's only been in function for four years now, and it is cohort-based, which means that as the kids move forward, then there are new openings at the lower grades. So as a child moves into grade 7 and grade 8, then there's another opening in grade 6 and grade 7 and so forth. So we do see new kids joining the ranks. We see increased numbers, which is why we've had to increase the funding to the Bright Futures program, because every year we bring in more children as the next group move forward.

Mrs. Taillieu: I recognize, of course, the value of encouraging young people to finish high school and to proceed to university. I'm curious, though, why this particular program would fall under Advanced Education and not under Education. What is the rationale for that?

Ms. Selby: Originally, the Bright Futures program was just within the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy, but I must give credit to the former minister who felt that, because it is working with young children and watching them and nurturing them as they go through the school system, that she felt that it would work best as a joint program with Education, which it is now.

It was originally considered a program that fit with Advanced Education both because the focus, of course, is to make sure that these children have an opportunity in post-secondary school, should that be the direction that they choose to go, but also because of research that was done in Ontario that looking at it this way was the best way to ensure results of kids moving through elementary school, high school and then going on to post-secondary education. So it does have a joint aspect with Education because, of course, they're our partners in nurturing the children as they go through the system.

Mrs. Taillieu: So if it's a joint program, how much funding, then, comes from the Department of Education?

Ms. Selby: The funding is joint as well. It's 50 per cent through Advanced Education and 50 per cent through the Department of Education.

* (15:10)

Mrs. Taillieu: In the annual report I'm just referencing, it says that these—the funds support community-based, non-profit organizations and lists several: Career Trek; Boys and Girls Clubs; Community Schools Investigator Summer Learning Enrichment Program and Power Up! Seven Oaks School Division Bright Futures program; Manitoba School Improvement Program; Peaceful Village; Community Education Development Association Pathways; Pan Am Clinic foundation Medic Careers Exploration Program, and SEED Winnipeg. Just wondering why these aren't listed as a line item in the Estimates book. I'm referencing from the annual report; I'm just wondering why—

Ms. Selby: We traditionally just don't go into that level of detail in the Estimates, but that level of detail, as the member pointed out, is in the annual report and that's how it's traditionally been broken down.

Mrs. Taillieu: Then I would ask: Of the \$14,260,000 in the Manitoba Bursary Fund, how much of that is actually used to pay down student debt and how much is used to support these various programs?

Ms. Selby: I can give you a breakdown right now if that helps you. So there is \$600,000 to the Rural and Northern Bursary, \$600,000 to the Student Success program, \$9 million to debt remission, and \$4 million to Bright Futures.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, so just for clarification, nine out of 14 million is used for debt reduction and the rest is for other programs, correct?

Ms. Selby: Well, it's a bit of semantics, but, of course, the other bursaries, of course, also go towards bringing student debt down. If you receive the Rural and Northern Bursary, you're going to have less debt. If you receive the Student Success bursary you're also going to have less debt, and the same could be said for the scholarships within Bright Futures as well. So \$9 million is directed at, you know, the line item of debt remission, but, of course, then the other sections as well would go towards the bigger picture of reducing student debt.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm just wondering, though, if there's the primary mandate of the Manitoba Bursary Fund is to pay down student debt, as the minister initially said, is it not taking away from that mandate, then, to have a significant amount of that money not used to pay down student debt. Is there a rationale behind that?

Ms. Selby: Well, I think, Mr. Chair, you could also look at this as preventing student debt. So there is \$9 million going towards debt remission but there's \$600,000 going to prevent debt for rural and northern students. There's another \$600,000 going to the Student Success program to prevent debt in the first place, and \$4 million towards Bright Futures, some of which is scholarships, RESPs as well that would go towards preventing debt, and then the bulk of it, \$9 million, going to paying down student debt.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister say what formula she is using then to determine that this is actually preventing student debt?

Ms. Selby: Well, for example, Mr. Chairperson, the Rural and Northern Bursary students are applying for a student loan, and they are travelling beyond a certain distance to attend a post-secondary institution in Manitoba. Then they will automatically get the northern—the Rural and Northern Bursary, which would go against the amount of student loan they would need in the first place.

In terms of the Student Success program—and let me just clarify that if they go beyond 50 kilometres from their home base to have to go to a post-secondary institution, then when they're applying for a student loan, they will be automatically given the Rural and Northern Bursary, therefore automatically reducing their debt load right up front.

In terms of the Student Success program, it's a little bit more complicated but in terms of meeting unmet needs, so that if a student reaches a maximum of their loan and still requires some additional funds in order continue their studies, by going through the Student Success program, it does prevent them from having to find a third party to fund them through whatever means that may be. So both of them go towards student debt, and in case of the Rural and Northern Bursary, up front as soon as they apply for a student loan.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, thank you very much. But there are certainly some of these bursaries that are intended for students that are already in advanced education levels, but there's a lot of money being channelled to other funds that are targeting younger children.

So—and you were saying, as I thought I understood you to say, that this was going to go a long ways to avoiding student debt. So I'm wondering how you can—what formula you're going

to use or how you manage or measure that, if you're giving students money in Career Trek, for example, out of the Bright Futures fund, when they're in K to 12, or K to 4, how does that actually prevent student debt in the future? How do you measure that?

Ms. Selby: The money that a child may earn through the Bright Futures program goes into an RESP plan, which is a trust, which the child doesn't have access to that money until they go to a post-secondary institution. And, so, they have the opportunity to know that as they go through the program, they are being supported through funds through the RESP trust that will be there for them when they are ready to attend school, a post-secondary institution.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, thank you for that.

Are you—does this Bright Futures fund also support other things like awards dinners?

Ms. Selby: No, it does not.

Mrs. Taillieu: So, just to clarify then, there's no funding under this. Where does the funding come from then that supports the Helen Betty Osborne awards dinner and the Aboriginal education awards dinner?

* (15:20)

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, this obviously is a complicated line, and we wonder, because there are three party contributors to it—the federal government helps towards some of those grants, the business community helps, as well—that perhaps we could get back to the member with a more detailed breakdown when we've had time to look at it more closely.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, okay, maybe tomorrow when we come back for Estimates, we could discuss that further. We'll see how we do with getting through this today.

I guess, my—I actually was going to ask the question about the level of funding. How much is provincial, how much is federal and how much comes from other sources? So, can you answer that, or is that something that will be answered—

Ms. Selby: If I could just clarify the member's question, Mr. Chair. I just wanted some clarification on the member's question. Do you mean just within the awards of what the breakdown is or do you mean, sort of, the entire portfolio, or how specific are you looking for?

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, let's start, then, with the entire bursary fund. Is that all provincial money? Is there some federal money in that?

Ms. Selby: If the member looks on page 51 of the Estimates, you can see that it is broken down into—in (c), it's Manitoba Bursaries and Funds. Everything within (c), which is one, two, three, four, five, six different line items, are all funded by the provincial government. And, if you go down to (d), the Canada Grants and Funds, there's three items in there that are funded by federal government.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, then I am—then I don't understand then, because now the Manitoba Bursary Fund has money—or subsidiaries, several organizations that get money from that, and which you indicated some of those would be federal and private.

Ms. Selby: Thank you for the moment—the chance to just put some clarity.

When you're looking at the Estimates book, the money that's listed under the loans and bursaries is just the provincial contribution, in that section under Manitoba Bursaries and Funds. However, there are some awards, such as the Aboriginal award, that is in addition to the provincial funding that's listed in the Estimate books, also matched by some other contributors.

But, in the Estimates, it is already broken down to provincial and federal in the two sections. However, some of the awards within those categories, although in the Estimate books only shows our contribution in terms of the provincial contribution, they are being matched in some cases by the federal government or by a business community, third parties. And we will get you a more detailed breakdown of those.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister tell me exactly what happens if students do not pay their student loans back on time?

Ms. Selby: We do have various programs to insist with students in paying off their student debt. One thing is that they don't begin to pay off that debt until several months after they have graduated, and by that point we're, of course, hoping that they have found a job in their chosen career.

If a student is having a difficulty in paying it, they do work with the staff who will help them work on a repayment program. And, as of April 1st, we have brought in the repayment assistant program,

and, again, it's working one-on-one with students and determining their particular situation and seeing how we can work with them and with our knowledgeable staff at Student Aid in order to help them pay off their student debt.

Mrs. Taillieu: At what point would students be reported to credit agencies or collection agencies?

Ms. Selby: I just wanted to take a moment to further add to the first—the last question that the member had and then to proceed on to this current one.

But just to talk about the fact that there is an interest relief program, that under this provision payments are suspended in Manitoba, with the government covering the loan, and you can apply every six months for up to 30 months to have the interest suspended. There's also debt reduction: If borrowers are reaching a point where they are unable to meet their commitment, then there is a ability to have—once their Interest Relief has been exhausted, that they can have their principal amount can be reduced by 50 per cent.

* (15:30)

But I do want to point out to the member that Manitoba—the Province does not send—we don't use collection agencies, we don't send any of our student loans names to debt collection. Revenue Canada does do that for their federal student loans but, of course, we don't know how they manage that program because that's within federal jurisdiction.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'll just ask the question then: Was there an error in the department in inaccurately reporting students to Equifax who had, in fact, paid—made their minimum payments or even paid back their loans in full?

Ms. Selby: We are just currently changing over the system at Student Aid. When phase one was implemented there was an error. There were some students that were referred incorrectly. That problem has been fixed and the agency—the mistake that was mistakenly involved was given the names and the corrections were put on the record so that students would not have any impact to their credit rating, and this problem has been fixed since then.

Mrs. Taillieu: But first the minister said they don't report to credit agencies and then she said that there was some information that was referred incorrectly, so I'd like to ask how many students were affected by this?

Ms. Selby: We don't have that number but we are keeping note of the member's questions and, of course, referring to *Hansard*, and we can get back to you with that number.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Chair, when a person's credit rating is negatively affected and someone actually knows that this has occurred, those students need to be notified that this happened. So to say you don't know how many students were impacted, it means you haven't notified them. I just—I can't believe that. Are you saying that you don't know how many were affected and nobody's been notified about this?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I'm saying that we don't have that number with us and that we will get back to the member with those details.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the member—minister explain how private financial information could have been shared with a credit agency, and then, how was it determined that this happened? Was it because a student complained?

Ms. Selby: This was during the transition of implementing a new system. As you can imagine, it's a complicated system as well, dealing with all the students and all the details, and we will be happy to get back to the member with all the details that she's asking, but we don't have those numbers with us today.

Mrs. Taillieu: Does the minister know exactly the time frame of when this happened?

Ms. Selby: The transition happened in November.

Mrs. Taillieu: The transition to the system happened in November, but when was the information erroneously given to Equifax?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I do want to put a correction on the record that Equifax is not a collection agency. It's a credit agency, but as per the member's other questions, we will get back to her with all those details.

Mrs. Taillieu: I simply asked the question: When was the information given to Equifax in March—what dates?

Ms. Selby: We understand the error occurred in November when phase one of the transition was taking place from the new—old system to the new system.

Mrs. Taillieu: So the minister is saying that information went to Equifax in November?

Ms. Selby: The transition happened in November when we switched from the old system to the new system, but we don't have the details with us today that the member's asking for. But, of course, we are keeping track of all her questions, and we'll refer to *Hansard* and we'll have those answers for her.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I find it odd that the minister would come unprepared to answer the questions. She's had quite a number of weeks now to have been prepared for the questions. She must have known about this error that occurred and first of all then, tried to say that it didn't occur, and now finally admits that it has.

So I think it's just a stall tactic not to put it on the record. So I want this information to be put on the record, and I'm hoping that she'll bring that tomorrow.

Ms. Selby: Well, Mr. Chair, and I just would like to remind the member that her original question was about collection agencies, and I did state correctly that the Province does not refer students or student debt to collection agencies.

The company that she is speaking of now, during the transition period, is a credit agency, and there is a difference, Mr. Chair, and we will be quite happy to bring all the details of all the questions that the member has and the answers tomorrow. Thank you.

Mrs. Taillieu: What personal information does the department collect on students' financial data?

* (15:40)

Ms. Selby: Of course, there is a detailed application that students fill out when applying for a student loan, but it looks at things such as their employment income. We have a formula for their expenses that we look at. It looks at their assets, whether they have a vehicle and, of course, takes into consideration the scholarships or bursaries that they may receive.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate what protections there are, then, in this new system that seem to have a breakdown some—at some point, that there is protection of the students' personal information.

Ms. Selby: We do have security mechanisms within place and would be happy to provide those details to the member. Of course, they are—it's a rather detailed,

technical sort of paper, but we would be happy to share that with the member.

And, also, we'll be checking exactly what information is available. We suspect it's probably a student name and not all the detailed information of their financial situation. But, if the member would like me to let her know and give her the technical paper on the security mechanisms, we'd be happy to provide that.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, thank you very much. This system that we're talking about, the Student Financial Aid Information System, correct? There was a capital investment made last year in the Estimates book, and it's—actually on the very—pretty much the very last page, on page 71, of \$6,162,000, and then there is an estimate of expenditures of \$1,132,000 because—reduced requirement for capital investments as the completion of the Student Financial Aid Information System is expected in 2011-2012.

Does that mean that this system is not going to be ready for this year's student intake and it's not actually going to be completed until next year?

Ms. Selby: As you can well imagine, it is a very detailed program and a lot to take into consideration, security being an important aspect with it as well. And knowing that the way a student loan program works, you have a whole lot of intake at certain times of the year, so you want to make sure that your program can sustain that amount of users getting involved.

We will have the program. It is on track to be implemented this year, and it should be operational and running as of this year.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is it online right now?

Ms. Selby: The new system is not online right now.

Mrs. Taillieu: When will it be online and available for students to register applications?

Ms. Selby: We are still working with the program and ensuring that it will provide a seamless transition for students and to make sure that it is meeting their needs and, of course, also, ensuring that the system is a secure system. We are looking at having it online this year, and implemented this year, but are still looking at when is the best date to go forward with that.

Mrs. Taillieu: Just for clarification, when you say this year that can be anywhere up till December 31st,

I suppose. But I'm wondering if it's going to be ready for this year's intake in the fall.

Ms. Selby: There are several intakes into our post-secondary education system throughout the year and we do believe that it will be ready to begin intaking students this year.

Mrs. Taillieu: And I recognize that there can be intakes all through different parts of the year, but the general process is, I think, the most students would be registering in the fall, and I'm just wondering if there is a projected date that this is going to be online.

Ms. Selby: We are planning that the system will go live and be implemented this fall.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate the total cost of the—of this new rebuilding of this student—let me get this right—student financial aid information system? What is the total spent to date on this new rebuild and what further will need to be spent?

Ms. Selby: The spending to date would be about \$12 million.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is that the total cost, then, or how much more is going to be spent or needs to be spent or is projected to be spent, budgeted for?

Ms. Selby: As I said, the expected—or the total to date is \$12 million approximately, and the total is expected—estimated to be at about \$14 million.

Mrs. Taillieu: Was this contract tendered?

Ms. Selby: Yes, the contract was tendered.

Mrs. Taillieu: And who was awarded the tender?

Ms. Selby: Deloitte Touche was awarded the contract.

Mrs. Taillieu: What was their bid?

Ms. Selby: We would be happy to get back to the member with that information.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Taillieu: How many companies bid?

Ms. Selby: We shortlisted three companies. There were three that we looked at in detail.

Mrs. Taillieu: So, three companies were considered. Was the lowest bidder chosen?

Ms. Selby: This was a very in-depth evaluation, looking at the three that we shortlisted. There was a lot of criteria involved, along with the financial

concerns. But along with that we also had to look at experience and expertise. I don't know offhand—we don't have the numbers of where 'delush'—or Deloitte Touche came in, but we will be happy to get back to the member with that, keeping in mind that it's also beyond the financial; there's also the question of experience and expertise in the matter that was considered.

Mrs. Taillieu: A project worth 12, 14 million dollars, it's a significant chunk of change, I think. Certainly, if a company puts in a bid, if there's a tender process and a company puts in a bid and is awarded that tender, most times they're required to live within the cost restraints of what they bid on that project, barring any unforeseen difficulties that would be inside that—written into the contract. So I think that it would be appropriate to see the three companies that were considered, their three bids and the basis of the award to the—Deloitte and Touche.

Ms. Selby: Our government policy is that if we do not select the lowest bid, we do have to go back to central government for approval if that's the 'prosse' that is taken.

As for the details that the member's looking for, we are going to have to check under the freedom of information if this is something we can give, and if it is not a problem then, of course, we'd be happy to share it with the member.

Mrs. Taillieu: When you're dealing with a public tender, it's public information. Certainly, if you don't want to give the names of the companies, I don't mind about that. I'm not really asking for the companies; I'm looking for the information who bid what—or I shouldn't say who. I'll say how many companies bid what and was there the lowest tender awarded and what criteria were other—was used otherwise in the tender? What was the tender? Can that be provided? And then we can look at the bids.

And certainly I don't know any—you know, most companies that are bidding on something are quite interested in the public knowing about their services and how well they are able to deliver them, so most companies are not too worried about the fact that people know that they're in the business for that service, so.

But I'm not asking for the names; I'm asking for the accountability of 12 to 14 million dollars, and ensuring that that money was well spent with the appropriate company. And I'm not saying it wasn't, I'm just asking that there should—there needs to be

accountability when you're talking about that kind of money. And there certainly needs to be some rationale as to why you would not choose the lowest bidder with—when you are dealing with significant public funding, such as 12 to 14 million dollars.

Ms. Selby: And, of course, the tender is public, so we would be happy to provide that information to the member. And, again, I did want to go back and just put again on the record that it was a very in-depth process of evaluation. There was a lot of criteria looked at and be happy to provide the member with some more details, but, along with the financial criteria, there was also an extensive list of being sure that the company had the right experience and the right expertise in order to pull—to perform this sort of very complex kind of programming that we were looking for.

Mrs. Taillieu: It certainly sounds to me like the award was not given to the lowest bidder. Was there any push back from the other bidders that they didn't get the contract?

Ms. Selby: I did want to just remind the member as well that we are not sure at this moment, and we will give her some more details on whether Deloitte Touche was the lowest bidder or not. We're going to confirm that, but to remind the member as well that this was a very detailed evaluation that required a very extensive look at the experience and the expertise that the companies were able to bring to the table because of the nature of what a complex system that this is.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, thank you very much, and you indicated—the minister indicated that they did shortlist three companies that obviously had the expertise that you were looking for. So, all other things being considered to be equal, you would need to choose the lowest tender when you are dealing with public funds, unless you have a very good valid reason why you wouldn't, which—that would have to be provided to the other people that tendered for the project, bid on the project as well, because they would be under the assumption, when you put a tender together, you spend a lot of time putting that tender together and, if you're not going to get it based on the lowest bid, there needs to be some kind of upfront explanation beforehand in the tender to say that. And was there that in the tender to say, you may not be considered if you are not the lowest bid?

Ms. Selby: Usually, we do include a clause in the tender explaining that it will be more than just lowest bidder, that there will be other criteria looked at. We

will confirm if this was the case in this particular project that we're speaking of. I do also want to point out to the member that there was more than just a written tender required from those who were interested. There was also a formal presentation to the evaluation committee as well.

Mrs. Taillieu: When was the project tendered?

Ms. Selby: The project was tendered at least two years ago.

Mrs. Taillieu: What was the budget for the tender two years ago?

Ms. Selby: We'll have to include that in the information that we will be providing the minister—or member.

* (16:00)

Mrs. Taillieu: You know, I find that really hard to believe, that no one in the department would know what the budget was for this information system two years ago when it was put out to tender. You're talking about spending 12 to 14 million dollars. There must have been a budget. There must have been an amount talked about that this was going to cost and over how long a time. Otherwise, how could you even award a tender, if you had no idea what you were talking about in terms of cost?

Ms. Selby: We'll be happy to provide that information to the member.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'd like to have that information tomorrow read into the record.

Ms. Selby: Yes. Thank you.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I was going to ask if the project is on budget, but if the department has no budget for the amount that's going to be spent on this system, how do you know if you're on budget?

Ms. Selby: I would like to remind the member that her original question was she asked what the original budget was, and that information we will have for her. We'll bring that to her, but as of last month the project does remain on budget.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, you know, the minister's just playing with semantics here, but really what I'm trying to find out is what was the original projection for the cost of the project. There must have been an initial idea of what this was going to cost. I'm asking what that cost was projected to be, and what is the cost today, and is it on target for the amount of

money that would be budgeted for the project and spent to date?

Ms. Selby: And, as I said, that we would be happy to provide the member with the original budget as she asked, but once tendered, the budget was \$14.3 million and the project remains on budget.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is the project on time?

Ms. Selby: The project was—it was to be completed in this year and it will be completed in this year.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate if the initial launch date was to be June of this year?

Ms. Selby: As I said, the project remains on budget as was the budget was tendered. Original estimates—and, of course, we're talking original estimates before the scope of the project was fully realized—was June, and we are on schedule to have the system online this year.

Mrs. Taillieu: It sounds like the original projected date for completion and to have the system up and running was June, and now it's the end of the year.

Ms. Selby: The original estimate was June. The current projection we will have this project online this year, fall of this year.

Mrs. Taillieu: So if the project is not on time then, is it going to cost more money?

Ms. Selby: As I mentioned earlier, the project is on budget and it is a fixed price contract.

Mrs. Taillieu: So then the minister does know the price put on the contract and who it was awarded to and whether it was the lowest bidder.

Ms. Selby: As I mentioned earlier, once the project was tendered, the budget was \$14.3 million and it remains on budget.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I will look forward to getting the information for the record for tomorrow, the complete information.

I want to just ask a few questions in regard to the Training Completion Fund. What is the current balance in that fund right now?

Ms. Selby: I will have to get back to the member with the number that she's looking for, but I do want to just explain that of course the training completion is a fund that the private vocational schools put into. They must put a portion into the Training Completion Fund, but I will have that detailed number for her.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you. I imagine that will be for tomorrow as well for the record?

Ms. Selby: Yes.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm wondering if the minister can indicate how much has been paid out of the Training Completion Fund every year since its inception and to whom.

Ms. Selby: I will have to get back to the member with those detailed answers.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, again, I'm quite disappointed that we don't have that information available today. It is part of the Estimates process and part of the book, so I would have thought that it would be here.

There was an issue with—I think it was Giselle's School closing. I just want to ask the minister: Have all the students from Giselle's—the one that just recently closed April 4th, I believe it was—have all those students been relocated to other learning centres, and have they been compensated out of the Training Completion Fund?

* (16:10)

Ms. Selby: There were 26 students who were enrolled at Giselle's at that time. Mr. Chairperson, 25 of them chose to be relocated to another school that continued with their studies. One of them chose not to continue with their studies at another school and was compensated.

Mrs. Taillieu: Was she compensated for the amount of her tuition that she lost or how did that work?

Ms. Selby: There is a formula. The department sent a letter to the student explaining how it works, that they are rebated according to what they would have had left in the studies, but not for those studies that they've already completed.

Mrs. Taillieu: When the students—I'll use this case—when the students, then—and I'm not sure if they had to pay extra tuition, but if they were then going to go to another school to complete their training and the tuition was higher, would they be eligible for money from the Training Completion Fund to offset that increased cost? Is that part of the mandate of that fund?

Ms. Selby: Again, it's a somewhat complicated formula, but I'll try to explain it in simple terms.

The students would be, if they chose to be relocated to another school, the remainder of the tuition that they would have normally paid at the first

school will move over to the second school. And in the case where the student may need additional funds, even through our private vocational schools, they are eligible to apply for a student loan.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister, then, just indicate the mandate, then, of the Training Completion Fund. What is it there for and who is eligible to access it and to what level?

Ms. Selby: The mandate for the Training Completion Fund and, of course, this is a fund that the private vocational schools are obligated to pay into. It ensures that the students are not out of pocket for unused tuition should a student have paid their tuition in full at the beginning of their term or the beginning of their classes, and the private vocational business, for some reason go out of business before the student's able to complete their courses or complete their time of study, the Training Completion Fund will support the student so that they don't end up being out of pocket for courses or classes that they may not have had the opportunity to attend because of the untimely business going out of business.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think there was another carpentry program that was shut down at Neeginan because it lost its accreditation through Apprenticeship Manitoba. There was 15 students in that program. How were they assisted?

Ms. Selby: I also just wanted to mention that, of course, that the students are—should a private vocational school go out of business, that students, of course, are assisted by the department to see if they can find another school that will accept them. And, as in the case of the specific one that we were speaking of, 25 of the students were able to relocate to a new school.

I do want to remind the member that Apprenticeship is not under this department, that it's under—CTT? ETT.

Mrs. Taillieu: So the Training Completion Fund, then, is not available to any students not registered—please clarify that then. The Training Completion Fund is only available to some post-secondary students?

Ms. Selby: The Training Completion Fund is available to students who are registered in a private vocational institution. Those are the institutions that support the fund and pay into it and are required to pay into it.

Mrs. Taillieu: Then Neeginan is not one of these?

Ms. Selby: If the member could just spell that for us.

Mrs. Taillieu: N-e-e-g-i-n-a-n. Neeginan.

Ms. Selby: That's not listed as one of our private vocational institutions. The member mentioned that it was an apprenticeship program, so that would probably not be under this department then.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm going to take another line of questioning. I'm going to—I'll just start at the beginning. I wanted to ask the minister if she has any political staff in her constituency office.

Ms. Selby: I was wondering, before I answer that question, if the member is finished with the Student Aid folks, if perhaps we can let them move on.

But the answer to the question is, no, I do not have any political staff in my constituency office.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think at this point I'm not going to ask any more questions on Student Aid, but that doesn't mean I won't later. I mean, not—it won't be later today. Not later today, how's that? How's that? We'll move on with other questions for today, but when I review, there may be questions for tomorrow.

Just to clarify, the minister said she had no political staff in her constituency office, and last year she—I believe the minister indicated that she did have political staff in her constituency office, so has there been a decrease—sorry, let me rephrase that. So you do not—the minister does not have any political staff. Do you have just one constituency assistant then?

* (16:20)

Ms. Selby: I have no political staff in my constituency office. My staff in my constituency office remains the same as before I was appointed minister and is paid through members' allowance as before I was appointed minister. There have been no changes at my constituency office since being appointed.

Mrs. Taillieu: I know that the minister's travel is listed on the website, and I know that the minister being new, likely that travel does not relate to her. But I'm going to ask her anyway, if she's—what her travel expenses have been to date or projected for the rest of the year?

Ms. Selby: It's not a very glamorous portion to report. I have been to Brandon one time since being appointed minister, but that was for the MLA day, and so I believe that would have gone under the

Minister of Agriculture's (Mr. Struthers) bus that he provides for all the MLAs. While I was there, I had a coffee meeting with the president of ACC and I did buy his coffee. So that might show up as \$2 or \$3, but I have not done any other travel, and it's only been a month I've been appointed in this office so—and so far it's been the one trip to Brandon as the MLA for the fair.

Mrs. Taillieu: I notice that in the Estimates book, on page 27, there is a section, International Education, which, I'm wondering, there's likely some travel involved within this particular area. Does the minister get to travel, then, internationally in regard to her portfolio?

Ms. Selby: No, there—the—that section of International Education, the—would not be—the minister wouldn't be travelling within that section, or for that section of the department.

Mrs. Taillieu: Could the minister indicate, then, what level of staff would be going on these trips and how often would these trips occur?

Ms. Selby: That travel would be by the director of the International Education department. He would travel with the university staff on various education missions. His role is to organize and co-ordinate and to promote our post-secondary education system in countries such as Mexico or China, places that we've formed partnerships in that we know that we have a number of international students that are interested in coming to Manitoba to attend our post-secondary institutions.

Mrs. Taillieu: Has there been an increase, then, in the number of students, international students, coming every year?

Ms. Selby: Our post-secondary institutions, our universities and colleges, are recognized around the world as centres of excellence, and because of that, people know that Manitoba has a reputation of having high-quality education and, of course, an affordable living in Manitoba.

So, yes, we have seen a significant increase in international students coming to our post-secondary institutions right across Manitoba. The numbers are up by about 218 per cent over the last—I think that's from the last 10 years.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Congratulations to the minister on her new portfolio and all the best to you in—as you move forward.

I'd like to ask a question with regard to the free public trunk fibre optic that is available between the university of Brandon, ACC, U of M, U of W, et cetera—Red River, I believe, may be part of that, I don't have that written down—but it's an excellent tool that provides, you know, public interaction with those post-secondary institutions.

I'm just wanting to know if there's any thought by her ministry to expand the use of that public trunk fibre optic to school divisions. What we're seeing right now are school divisions like Prairie Spirit, Rolling River, Park West, Fort la Bosse actually develop—are—they are in the process of developing their own fibre optic or, you know, Intel link, and I think what we need to see is just something that's a little more unified between school divisions. This is becoming a very costly endeavour for school divisions to move forward on. I do believe some school divisions are actually debenturing these types of projects.

So I would really like to know if there has been any discussion or any interest by this minister's ministry to look at sharing that.

Ms. Selby: I thank the member for her kind words. That innovation that you're speaking of—that the member is speaking of is through Innovation, Energy and Mines. It's one of their projects, so it'd probably a question better put to the Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines (Mr. Chomiak).

Mrs. Rowat: But I'd like the minister to comment on that. If there was a fibre optic tool that would be, you know, that is being used by her post-secondary institutions, you know, you would think that that would be something that the minister could bring up at Cabinet with her colleague and discuss, because what we're seeing right now are school divisions paying up to—upwards of \$4 million to get access to this type of a system. And, if there was a more unified approach, I believe that this would be something that would be of benefit to all students within Manitoba.

Ms. Selby: It's certainly an interesting innovation. I think if the member is—if I'm understanding correctly, is talking about the K-to-12 system and whether it would be available for them, and I think that would be a question for the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan), who is responsible for K to 12.

Mrs. Rowat: Yes, I do realize that that would be something that would be useful for K to 12, but right

now it's used only within the post-secondary universities and colleges in the province, so what I'm asking for is the minister to give it some consideration. What we're seeing is a huge cost to school divisions to create their own network, and I believe that this is something that, I believe, as the Minister of Advanced Education and training would be interested in and see if there's a way to partner with the school divisions on something like this and encourage her colleagues at the Cabinet table to participate in.

* (16:30)

Ms. Selby: I thank the member for her interest. I think she's correct that it is an interesting concept and certainly on the edge of new technology as well, so I will take her considerations into mind and will take the opportunity to expand my own knowledge through the Innovation, Energy and Mines Minister on this particular program.

Mrs. Rowat: And I look forward to further discussions with the government on this important initiative.

Another important initiative which is very important to communities that I represent, and I believe that would be the case across the board, we've seen an influx of new Canadians in the Westman area and we've seen a number of adult learners come forward and participate in adult literacy and English as a Second Language programs, and I'm wanting to ask the minister, because in her press release on April she talked about adult learners being some of the most courageous people that she's ever met, and I don't disagree with that. I totally agree because, often, when people come forward and they want to better themselves they are overcoming challenges often in the past to get to that level.

Specifically, what I'm wanting to talk to the minister about is the adult literacy program and how there appears to be a bit of a disconnect in some of the communities that I represent. For instance, Souris, the community on the south side of No. 1 that I represent, had an English as a Second Language program and they lost that program because there appeared to be a disconnect in the funding model. Souris was taken out of the Brandon model and moved into jurisdiction of another community or another area, and there appeared to be no funding available for Souris at that time. So they had to work very hard to develop a relationship with a

community that was then their leader or their partner in that area, and I believe it was at the misfortune of that new region because funding had to be found to include Souris in that funding model. So there was less money, more communities, and it did appear to work and is appearing to work, but at a very, very difficult process to follow to get to that point. And I believe that there's still a lot of challenges associated with that.

So can the minister just give me an update on how funding will flow in this budget year to communities such as Souris and others who have been shifted from one jurisdiction to another?

Ms. Selby: The member is talking about English as a Second Language programs, but those are not under this department. Those actually are under the Minister of Labour (Ms. Howard), so this department is responsible for adult learning and literacy programs but not the ESL programs.

Mrs. Rowat: Then we'll talk about adult literacy and the community of Minnedosa who has lost their centre, their adult learning centre in the community of Minnedosa. PULSE adult literacy programs in that community are very important. We have, within a very short distance of Minnedosa, a community called Neepawa who has a number of new Canadians, and HyLife provides employment for a lot of the people from various countries, Ukraine, Columbia, the Philippines, et cetera.

This facility has recently closed and the concern that they raised was that there were just too many hoops to jump through, too many requirements, and it appeared that there just seemed to be a lot of confusion with regard to who was responsible for this program and how it would move forward. So the community has lost their program, and I'm just wanting to know if the minister was aware of this and what she could put on the record on this issue.

Ms. Selby: The program that the member is speaking about in Minnedosa was located in the same building, my understanding, as the—as well with the Minnedosa Adult Learning Centre. So the program that the member is speaking of did decide to close its own doors and the department is working with the Minnedosa Adult Learning Centre to make sure that the students are being accommodated there and that they are being transitioned to the new centre and to make sure that they are—that the learners are still being able to be served in Minnedosa at the adult learning centre that still exists there.

Mrs. Rowat: So the minister's indicating that these adult learners will not be leaving the community? That there is going to be a program that's going to be available for them within the community? She's saying new centre. I'm assuming that it's going to be another community; it wouldn't be the community of Minnedosa?

Ms. Selby: It's an existing centre, Mr. Chair, that I'm speaking of, the Minnedosa Adult Learning Centre, which is operated by the Rolling River School Division that is located in Minnedosa. That's an existing centre that will continue to work with adult learners in the area.

Mrs. Rowat: It's my understanding that the program is—will not be funded as a new—they will not be offering any language programs out of that—or literacy programs out of that facility—adult literacy?

Ms. Selby: We just need to get some clarity because, of course, if it is English as a Second Language program, that's not through this department. But, in terms of literacy, it is prepared, of course, to offer adult literacy and learning programs.

Mrs. Rowat: What the minister is indicating that Rolling River will be offering the adult literacy programming through there? Because that was not clear to the community at one point.

Ms. Selby: The Minnedosa Adult Learning Centre, of course, has the mandate to provide literacy programs as well as adult learning. Since the other program that was located in the same building with them closed, we're working with them to make the transition so that students can be served in Minnedosa at the Minnedosa Adult Learning Centre.

Mrs. Rowat: And that would be under the Rolling River School Division?

Ms. Selby: It's operated by the Rolling River School Division.

Mrs. Taillieu: While we're on the topic, then, of adult learning and literacy, on page 57 of the Estimates book, the total cost of running adult learning and literacy is \$22 million. That seems to be a very large number. How many people are employed in the department? Does it say here anywhere?

Ms. Selby: If the member is able to turn to page 59, the next page, it does have a detailed breakdown of the staff within that section of the department.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Taillieu: In—on page 58, under expected results, 2,700 adults expected to be enrolled in provincially funded adult literacy programs. Just—I'm seeking some clarification here. Adult learners expected to gain high school diplomas is 1,200 of 8,500 enrolled in adult—okay. I'm getting mixed up here with adult literacy and learning centres—right?

There's adult learning centres and adult literacy—okay—yeah—okay. I'll try and get this clear. There's 8,500 adults expected to be enrolled in registered ALCs—adult learners expected to earn approximately 1,200 high school diplomas. So 8,500 students enrolled in adult learning centres and 1,200 high school diplomas—is it not the objective for people that once they're enrolled in adult learning centres to gain high school equivalency?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, there can be different objectives. Yes, the member's correct. For some people it is that they are back at the adult learning centre in order to gain a high school diploma. That may take them a different amount of time. It may take them a year to do that, depending on what they came in with.

If they come in with grade 9, it will likely take them a lot more than just one year in order to complete enough credits in order to graduate—also keeping in mind that many of our adult learners are also working full- or part-time. They have families as well. So they don't always have the same amount of available time to commit to learning at the same rate as one usually does if you go through high school in the more traditional manner.

But there are students, as well, at our adult learning centres who are not going back to necessarily get a high school diploma. In some cases they're just upgrading skills in a particular area. They may just need to get a particular mark in a class for another program that they want to take elsewhere. Or perhaps their employer requires them to do one or two courses at the high school level in order to meet a certain criteria.

So there are various reasons why people are attending our adult learning centres with a high school diploma being one of them, but not necessarily the reason for everyone being there and, again, different timelines in which it may take someone to complete the number of credits required in order to get their high school diploma.

Mrs. Taillieu: And people registering at ALCs get tuition free?

Ms. Selby: Yes, that is correct. There is no tuition charged for our adult learning centres.

Mrs. Taillieu: The funding for adult learning centres, does that all come through provincial dollars?

Ms. Selby: Yes, that's correct. The funding of adult learning centres is entirely under provincial funding with the exception of adult learning centres that are on First Nations.

Mrs. Taillieu: Then—just to clarify then—adult learning centres on First Nations don't get any provincial funding?

Ms. Selby: Adult learning centres that are on First Nations land would be registered through our act, but are funded through their own band council.

Mrs. Taillieu: How do—how does the department, then, measure the success of—I mean you have a number of students going into the centres and they may or may not receive a high school diploma. So how's that—the success rate measured against the investment of dollars—I guess is what I'm trying to ask.

Ms. Selby: Because as I said earlier that not everyone's goal is, of course, to get a high school diploma. There can be many different reasons why somebody is returning to an adult learning centre. But it might help the member if I just explained that, if we look at the 2009-10 numbers for credits completed, there were 12,743 courses completed through our adult learning centres, which is the equivalent of 11,715.5 credits through our adult learning centres, which might be a better way to look at it than just to be looking at completion rates—which, actually, and we can see, looking at the numbers compared to 2008 and 2009, we've got about—more than 2,000 more courses completed in that year from the year before, 20 per cent increase in the courses completed.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thanks for that. I'm just going to use an example, though. If I went to an adult learning centre and I took some courses, if I did not progress in my job to a higher level because of that, what have I actually achieved? I mean, I know I've achieved some learning, but I'm trying to measure how you actually measure the results. You know, you've got more people taking courses, but are these people actually going into the workplace and getting better jobs? And how does that—how do you measure the success, I guess, because you have to have some kind

of measurable outcome, I guess, from the investment?

So is there a way to indicate how many people have actually increased their livelihood or gained employment in a different area? Is that reported?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, I think we've gotten into the philosophical side of education, and I think that we probably all agree in this room that education is never a waste of time, that learning is valuable just for learning itself, without having a specific measurement at the end of it. But there are, of course, tangible results for people who are getting a high school diploma who've never had one before. That does open doors for them, whether it's to continue into post-secondary education or just more available jobs to them.

But I think also, Mr. Chair, that there is a lot of intangible results for someone going back and completing either some of their education or completing their high school diploma. Certainly, when I've met with adult learners at a learning centre that I visited recently, they all spoke of increased self-confidence and better self-esteem. And, while that may not be easy to measure right against monetary value, I have no doubt that people who are feeling more confident and have better self-esteem are, in general, feeling better about their lives.

We know that we do have a knowledge-based society, and that our knowledge-based society requires a more educated worker and a more skilled worker. And although I would be hard-pressed to tell the member specifically what each and individual credit would mean in terms of somebody's increased earnings, I certainly feel confident that every credit, every one of those 12,000 courses completed and 11,000 credits, are increased self-worth for those learners who were brave enough to walk through the door after, in many cases, has been a number of years since they've been in an education system.

Mrs. Taillieu: I guess I'm just looking at how you measure accountability in terms of—when you provide free tuition, then, you need to know that that is—you're getting the value for that.

So I'm wondering if graduates or people that have taken courses from the adult learning centres, are they followed through into the workplace, and is there any reporting back required from them as to what they've progressed into?

* (16:50)

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, of course, our adult learning centres are—have to meet the same standards and criteria as our Manitoba high schools do. They are required to have certified teachers and are bound by the same act as The Public Schools Act that our high schools are.

So courses that you'd take at an adult learning centre would be put to the same strict measures that we do for all of our public schools in Manitoba. The standards must be met. The certifications must be there and the quality, of course, is expected to be maintained at the same level as our high schools across the province.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is there a system whereby the department would be able to—would be able to know the graduates from the adult learning centres, how many go on to another post-secondary education?

Ms. Selby: No, we do not track and collect that information at this time.

Mrs. Taillieu: Do the adult learning centres—they need to affiliate with a school division or another school to grant the high school diploma?

Ms. Selby: Yes, they do have to be affiliated with a school division to make sure that the standards and the—or a college. They have to be with a school division or a college to make sure that they are meeting those standards and—as laid out in The Public Schools Act.

Mrs. Taillieu: And are these centres funded according to the number of students that they take in?

Ms. Selby: No, they are not funded on a per-student basis. They are funded on a more global basis.

Mrs. Taillieu: Then can the minister indicate what criteria is used, then, to determine the funding for each centre, because obviously some centres would be larger, have more staff, more students, than others. So I'm wondering what the criteria or the formula is for funding for the centres.

Ms. Selby: I can read the list into the record. The criteria used to register an ALC, or adult learning centre, and determine the grant allocations are in compliance with the requirements of the ALC registration. It's pretty technical. It's per section 8 of the adult learners act, but I can tell the member that some of these things are that they must provide an educational program that meets the purpose of adult learning as stated in section 3 of the act.

They need to demonstrate the need for a centre, evidence that the program is responsive to the learners' needs, availability of sufficient financial resources to support the centre, evidence that the centre employs qualified director and teaching staff, that they have an acceptable enrolment policy, evidence that they have appropriate facilities for students to learn in and, where applicable, acceptable partnership agreement with either a school division or a college.

They also have to have qualitative and quantitative evidence that their program is effective. They have to adhere to what are known as accepted adult learning principles. And there is, of course, an analysis to determine the greatest need, and they need to work with these priorities with the department to make sure that we are looking at a place where there is a great need and, of course, a great interest to supply the programs.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is there a minimum number of students required to have the centre operating?

Ms. Selby: There's no specific number laid out in the criteria, but there is the line that says that they must demonstrate evidence of need for the centre.

Mrs. Taillieu: How are the centres evaluated? Are they evaluated yearly, or?

Ms. Selby: The staff does typically visit annually each of the centres, but also each year the centres must apply for annual funding. At that time, there is a thorough evaluation just to assess whether the regional need is still there and whether the rest of the criteria is still being met by the centre.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is part of the evaluation, then, to determine the success rate of graduates from the adult learning centre as well?

Ms. Selby: As I read into the record a little bit earlier, there is criteria used to register the adult learning centres. Many of it, of course, is in response to student needs. As I said earlier, it's demonstrated evidence that the program is responsive to the learners' needs, that they are adhering to adult learning principles, that they can show that it is effective program.

So, certainly, the students' needs and what they're attaining from the program is something that's looked at both when a new program looks for registration, or every year when it's being evaluated to make sure that it is still meeting the needs of both the individual students and the community at large.

Mrs. Taillieu: Are the adult learning centres audited?

Ms. Selby: Yes, they are audited, and as I mentioned, they also do have a staff visit. Typically, that happens annually, and every year when they apply for funding, they have a thorough evaluation if the need is still both being met and required.

Mrs. Taillieu: Are those audits public information?

Ms. Selby: By our legislation, the adult learning centres are required to submit their annual audit. They are expected to have an audit yearly. We will confirm whether or not that that is public information.

Mrs. Taillieu: I am looking at the 2009-2010 Annual Report, Adult Learning Centres.

I'm just curious—on page 16 and 17, it's listed, there—well, adults—okay. Here I go. I'm getting confused again between the two of them again. But these are the adult literacy programs on page 16 and 17. You don't have—oh, okay. Okay, you don't have that.

Okay, well are a number of them, and I guess I'll just ask a general question: If all of these adult literacy programs are still open? Have any closed in the last year?

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

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

EDUCATION

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Daryl Reid): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Education.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement, honourable Minister of Education?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): Yes, I do.

Mr. Acting Chair, thank you. I'm pleased to be here today to talk to you about Manitoba's education system as it continues to be a cornerstone in improving the social and economic well-being of our citizens.

Our government demonstrates its commitment to education by helping to meet the needs of parents, students, and taxpayers across the province. In

2011-12, education continues to be a priority area as the Manitoba government is once again exceeding its commitment to fund public education at the rate of economic growth, with a 2.7 per cent increase to public school funding for 2011-12. This is consistent with funding increases to school divisions at the rate of economic growth since 2000-2001, including in 2008-2009, the largest funding increase in 25 years of \$53.5 million, or 5.6 per cent. Mr. Acting Chair, 2011-2012 is the 12th consecutive year the Province has met or exceeded its commitment to fund public schools at or above the rate of economic growth, and over the last 12 years, funding has increased by \$363.7 million. Over those 12 years, funding to public schools has grown from \$800 million to \$1.135 billion.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Chairperson, in the Chair

During this same period of time, government has provided significant direct and indirect school tax relief. The tax incentive grant, introduced in 2008-2009, encourages school divisions to avoid education property tax increases. This year the TIG is helping 27 school divisions hold the line on taxes. Public school funding has an increase of 47.2 per cent, including the 2.7 per cent increase for this year.

This increase in funding to public schools is being made despite difficult economic times. It reflects the co-operative work with school divisions, encouraging restraint in order to ensure that expenditures are managed carefully and property taxes in support of education remain affordable.

The following are some examples. According to Statistics Canada, Manitoba is the only province whose average property taxes have remained virtually unchanged since 2000, compared to an increase of 33.7 per cent for Canada as a whole. Elimination of the education support levy on residential property is complete. The education property tax credit has increased by \$350 to \$750 since 1999. The Province's tax incentive grant is being continued for a fourth consecutive year to allow divisions to increase expenditures and hold the line on property taxes.

This year's budget sees every school division receiving at least a 2.2 per cent grant increase which provides stability in the face of reassessment effects on funding and enrolment declines.

Some of the highlights of this year's funding include \$690,000 in new funding for stay-in-school

initiatives to 'probote' student engagement, further support and enhance the inner city science Lab, and develop new ways to help more students be successful; \$600,000 toward the Student Success Initiative pilot project in the Winnipeg, Lakeshore and Kelsey school divisions, aimed at keeping children in school and increasing graduation rates; \$1.3 million more for special needs students and a 3 per cent increase for level 2 and 3 funding; nearly a million dollars more for English as an Additional Language; and \$303,000 for Early Childhood Development Initiative to ensure children are ready for school; \$75,000 to hire a new Technical Vocational Initiative co-ordinator to enhance TVI education in the Interlake and central regions; \$118,000 for the Winnipeg Interdivisional Student Services program to support Ji-zhaabwiing centre, which serves high-needs youth in the centre in the care of Manitoba Child and Family Services; \$10.8 million more for equalization funding to help ensure school divisions with low tax bases are still able to offer high-quality programs and services to students; \$165,000 to assist school divisions and First Nations in Portage la Prairie, Border Land and Lakeshore to improve relationships and understanding between students and communities to help increase student success.

Our government strongly supports public education. We have invested more than \$737 million in public school capital projects. To date, we have built 18 new schools and 13 replacement schools and completed extensive renovations and additions to existing schools. This year's record investment of \$94.2 million represents the third year of a record \$366.2-million, four-year funding commitment to our public schools. This year Manitoba Education will commit \$41 million to support both the ongoing infrastructure renewal of mechanical, roofing, structural and accessibility systems in public schools and facilities. As well, work and investment continues on the construction of three middle schools in La Broquerie, Steinbach and Schanzenfeld and two new high schools in Steinbach and Winkler. As well, design and planning are under way for the construction of the new replacement school in Woodlands and a new early-learning-to-grade-8 elementary school in northwest Winnipeg.

Of particular note, this year marks the first year of the Active Schools Fund, a five-year, \$50-million capital funding commitment to ensure quality gymnasium facilities are available for healthy living and high school graduation in our public schools.

We are also taking important steps to link early learning and child-care facilities to our public school building facilities by making room for child-care spaces in both existing and new schools with the support and co-operation of school divisions and local communities.

We continue to monitor the need for schools from both record levels of immigration across the province and from robust residential development in Winnipeg and Brandon.

We can see that stable, increased funding for education pays dividends over time. Steadily increasing rates of high school completion demonstrate the social and economic benefits that can result from consistent investment in education. Increased resources to support the hard work of teachers and administrators, trustees and parents, in partnership with the provincial government, have helped improve graduation rates and helped to evolve more alternative approaches to increase student success.

The government also recognizes the importance of the connection between children's early learning experience and their successful entry into the formal K-to-12 system. In support of this, we've created the Early Childhood Education Unit and increased funding to Early Childhood Development Initiative grant by \$300,000. Staff from the unit will work with school divisions, other government departments and early-childhood community to support high-quality, co-ordinated learning opportunities for Manitoba children.

School and community partnerships provide a wide range of innovative programs to engage, encourage and mentor students, ensuring that schools are safe and accessible places to learn. Schools collaborate with many partners to support those who are unrepresented in our system, working closely with immigrant, war-affected and Aboriginal students at risk of dropping out of school. These combined efforts have seen Manitoba's graduation rate increase by 14 per cent in the last decade, from 72.4 per cent in 2001 to 82.7 per cent in June 2010.

There is considerable research that tells us that when students are engaged with learning and their school, they are more likely to successfully complete high school. In order to support even more students to reach graduation, we have begun to focus on ways to help students stay in school and be successful. Bill 13, The Preparing Students for Success Act,

when passed, will require young people to pursue their education until they are 18 years of age or complete the requirements for a high school diploma. In the modern economy, nothing is more important than keeping young people engaged in school and in their education.

* (15:00)

We also updated our assessment policy to ensure that there is a consistent framework for the promotion or retention of students' academic honesty and consequences for late and missing work. The updated policy reinforces the existing practice that decisions about passing students or holding them back when necessary are made by the school principal in consultation with teachers, parents and other specialists as appropriate.

It is important to note that our government continues its commitment to inclusion and education. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the challenging needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. Our government embraces inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community.

By working together we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us. We are proud to be a partner working with teachers, specialists, administrators and trustees to advance the key strengths of public education, that everyone is welcome in our schools and our schools are committed to nurturing all students' growth and development.

I'd like to thank my partners. We have many partnership agreements. We work with First Nations, the Manitoba First Nation Education Resource Centre and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to provide funding and support Aboriginal languages and culturally relevant programming, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my education partners that I've had the opportunity to work with for the last year and a half. We have all worked together in a collegial manner and there's been a lot of really good work that has been done by our education partners in regards to strengthening our public education system, and we're all in this together and I appreciate all of the hard work that we have done together, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): We thank the minister for those opening comments.

Does the official opposition critic have similar opening comments to make? Please proceed.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I do want to thank the minister for her opening comments and, certainly, I would concur with her in a lot of respects. Obviously, education, I feel—I know our party feels—is the cornerstone to the future for our province here in Manitoba, and it is important that we keep our students engaged in the process, and, I think, as we would agree, life is an ongoing learning experience and we hope that, you know, we keep our students engaged and allow them all kinds of opportunities to continue in that regard.

Clearly, there is a lot of stakeholders, as the minister mentioned, in regard to education. Obviously, we have a pretty competent workforce out there in terms of our teachers and principals and superintendents, and, of course, our school trustees are faced to make pretty tough changes—decisions from time to time, and sometimes changes as time goes on. So we certainly respect the decisions that they have to take. And, obviously, the other thing is obviously the parents, you know, where you certainly want to be supportive of concerns that the parents have, and I think you also touched on, in your comments, that we have to be, as a government, responsive to what the taxpayers and the issues that we represent on their behalf. And I do want to, certainly, commend the people within the department that do good work throughout the year to, you know, further education throughout the province.

I think the other comment that I wanted to make was that, you know, we—as students growing up in Manitoba, we are faced more and more in the global arena, and we are faced with the competition from, you know, not just our provinces next door or country next door, but from countries around the world, and, obviously, the onus is on us as government to make sure that we have policies in place that are effective and make sure that our students are up for that challenge, and I think that's important. And, ultimately, we're responsible to the children, and to make sure that they have all the tools that we can provide them for their future and their learning future as well.

So those are just a few of the comments I wanted to make in opening, and I look forward to our discussion or our communication on education here in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the opposition critic for those opening remarks very much.

Now, under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 16.1.(a) contained in resolution 16.1. Also, at this time, we'd invite the minister's staff to come join us at the head table, and, Minister, perhaps when they're settled, you'd be kind enough to introduce them to all of us here.

Honourable Minister, introductions, if you please.

Ms. Allan: It's a great privilege to introduce the Deputy Minister of the Department of Education, Gerald Marthing, who is certainly no stranger to the Department of Education. And I'd also like to welcome Lynne Mavins, who is the acting director of the schools' Finance branch, and this will be Lynne's first time in Estimates as the acting director, and we're thrilled to have her with us today. And Claire Breul, who is the director of Comptrollership, and this will certainly be Claire's first experience here, so we welcome her here.

I had an opportunity to have a discussion with the Education critic that Claude Fortier is not with us today because, unfortunately, Claude had a very serious heart attack and—[interjection]—sorry, I apologize—stroke. I should get things—that correct—and he is—he was in the hospital and he's been released, and he is recovering, and we wish him all the best, and we miss—we will miss him, but we will soldier on without him.

Mr. Chairperson: Duly noted and thank you, Minister, and full condolences and supports for a speedy recovery to your colleague.

Now, before we get to the direct question and answers, we have one other item to deal with, and that is the manner in which the committee would like to proceed. Would you like to do this chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mr. Cullen: I guess, first of all, condolences to Mr. Fortier, and I certainly hope he has a speedy recovery from his stroke and wish him and his family all the best. [interjection] I'll comment later on that.

But if we can—if we could just have a discussion in a global manner, I'd sure appreciate that. I'll try to—I'm—what I'd like to do, just for the minister's sake, is kind of stick to the Estimates booklet here

for a little while and then get into some more specific questions later.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister, is that acceptable?

Ms. Allan: Agreed. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. So it is therefore agreed that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner and all the resolutions will be passed once the questioning has concluded. Wouldn't you know it, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cullen: I had just had the opportunity to read the Estimates booklet over the Easter long weekend. Always an exciting time, Estimates, you never know when that time is going to be thrust upon us, and, of course it was kind of a—we were a late last-minute fill-in at the end of the week there, so it put us into the hurry-up offence. So, did take some time over the long weekend to refreshing on some of the information that's in the Estimates booklet.

And, certainly, there's a few changes from last year. Maybe we could start in kind of a—maybe of a global discussion in terms of where the department is and where the department wants to go and maybe some of the changes they see coming.

* (15:10)

And where I want to look here, first of all, page 4, you know, you talk about the goals of the department, and maybe just to kind of help me and maybe some of the other Manitobans that are kind of following along if the few that do actually do follow *Hansard* in this, just to get a sense of, you know, where you think the department is headed. What would you as the minister like to see changed? Is there anything, you know, in broad terms that you're looking at in terms of where you would like to see the department go?

Ms. Allan: Well, I'd like to, first of all, pay some recognition to the deputy minister in regards to the pages that you're looking at, particularly page 4 in regards to the department's mission, because when I became a minister 17 months ago, not that I'm keeping track, we—the department didn't have a mission statement, and the deputy minister came to me and said, Minister, I have to tell you that we have a mission statement and a vision statement and goals and priority action areas, and I was wondering, you know, if we could put it up on the website.

And I said, well, you know, it is my second day on the job; maybe we could talk about this a little bit, and so we started to talk about it, and I said—and I—of course, my first, you know, question to the deputy minister was whether or not there had been consultation on that—the whole mission statement and vision statement. And he said, yes, that there had been, and I said, okay, great. I said, why don't we just go out there one more time, with feeling, and have a little, you know, chat with our education partners and make sure, you know, that this is a go. And we—he did, and so we put it up on the website.

Well, lo and behold, because, you know, you never really get it perfect all the time, we did have one of the education partners talk to us once it was up and they were looking at it and, you know, getting a feeling for it. It was the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents who talked to us and said that they felt that inclusion was an important aspect of the statement, and that it wasn't in there. *[interjection]* Yes, so, it—when you look at, on page 4, the over-arching goals, No. 2, to ensure that education practice and policy in Manitoba is guided by the principle of inclusion, we put that in there after the initial mission and vision went up, and we did that because we agreed with the superintendents, that we felt that that was important, because we believed that our public education really doesn't have the luxury of saying no. Our public education has to meet the needs of all students from all across this province, urban, rural, northern, regardless of their prior learning, their background.

So we felt really strongly about that, as well as the fact that, of course, as you know, I talked about inclusion in my opening comments, and we do have a piece of legislation that supports inclusion, and, actually, the MTS just had their conference last week and their conference was about inclusion. So we feel that it really reflects where we need to go as a department, and it grounds us as we move forward in regards to some of the initiatives that we've taken in regards to education reform.

Mr. Cullen: Well, that's good. Was there any other stakeholders that had any comments in terms of where you wanted to go in terms of your vision and your goals, or is that kind of an ongoing process as we move forward? Are you always looking for feedback from the stakeholders in terms of the process moving forward?

Ms. Allan: Well, I meet with the stakeholders all the time. I'm—I meet with the Manitoba Association of

School Trustees formally three times a year, meet with the trustees, a couple of times a year, meet with the Manitoba association of school board officials a couple of times a year, meet with the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils a couple of times a year, attend meetings, attend conferences, and I know we'll—you and I will probably both be at the Parent-Manitoba Association of Parent Councils meeting in a couple of weeks, and we have an ongoing dialogue with them all the time, and we're always open to any discussions or any conversations that they want to have with us in regards to how we move forward the public education system.

I have senior management team officials that I'm very proud of in regards to the role that they play in liaising and dialoguing with the education partners. They're out in the field all the time and not just with the association representatives; they're also visiting schools and having the opportunity to have conversations with people on the front lines of education. So I feel that it's a pretty—what I would say, we're pretty grassroots or pretty low to the ground and we pretty much have a really—I believe, a really good relationship.

And, in fact, when we have done the last couple of our press conferences, we've had our education partners from—with us at press conferences and I believe that that's probably the first time, in the history of the province, that we've had all of our stakeholders represented at our press conferences.

Mr. Cullen: In looking at the, you know, the goals that you've laid out here for us. I guess the question—you know, they're relatively new to have—actually putting these things down on paper.

The thing that I'm interested in is the result side of it. Like, what—how do you measure your outcomes to these goals? Have you—do you—have you laid out specific outcomes that you want achieved over a certain period of time? Just how do you go about measuring what you're setting out to do? I know that's maybe a broad term, but is that something that you've laid out either on the website, or you have internal documentation in terms of what the programs look under these goals and where you want to be over a certain period of time?

Ms. Allan: Yes, we have quite a comprehensive way of keeping track of whether or not we're on track in regards to our mission and our vision and our goals. And, obviously, as I'm reminded by my esteemed deputy minister, the overall measure is our graduation rate and that's important to us. And we

feel pretty confident that obviously the work that is being done in the department, and how we measure and assess how we're doing, is whether or not our graduation rate is growing. And, as you know, I referenced it in my opening comments and actually in question period today.

And then, of course, when you drill down and you start to look at exactly how we're doing in the province of Manitoba, we have what we call *A Profile of Student Learning and Performance in Manitoba* and that is on our website. And it's an opportunity for us to look at the early years, the middle years, senior years and also provides an opportunity to look, as well, at the pan-Canadian, the national and international assessments and how we move forward.

One of the other areas, obviously, that we're concerned about is Aboriginal students and a lot of work has been done in the department in regards to Aboriginal students declaring. And so that—because we can't—it's difficult to measure how well students are doing if you don't have those students declaring and knowing who they are. So we've made some huge inroads in regards to that.

But the—you know, these are the kinds of structures that have been put in place in regards to how we are doing across the province in regards to assessment, and how, you know, how Manitoba can support student learning.

* (15:20)

And, also, I believe, that our new report card is going to help us with that as well because we need to be able to communicate with—we need to have a vehicle for communication between the teacher and the parent and education specialists in regards to how well that student is doing. And so that's another tool for us to use in regards to how well we're doing as a department, in regards to the direction that we're taking.

Mr. Cullen: Just to drill down a little more on the goals that are laid out here, and I know in the last year or two the sustainability issue has been brought forward. And I know it's been a big push within the school system, and I think Dr. Farthing's been at the forefront of trying to move that through.

Is that—again, it kind of comes back to me. I know there has been work done in terms of getting sustainability into the end of the curriculum. Again, do you have measurable outcomes of how you see,

you know, the success of moving the sustainability issue into the curriculum?

Ms. Allan: Well, we're very, very proud in regards to our Education for Sustainable Development initiative here in the province of Manitoba, and stakeholders that talk to me about what is happening here in this province believe that we are the leader in Canada, perhaps the world. And they're always very complimentary of the work that has been done by Dr. Farthing, and we have been—we have had an incredible—incredible—uptake across school divisions in the province of Manitoba in regards to embracing Education for Sustainable Development, and it's just remarkable what's really happening in school divisions across the province.

We also have—we have staff who work with school divisions across the province to help them in regards to projects, and a lot of these projects aren't just happening in schools. They actually go outside of the school and the school connects with the local community and there's just some amazing, amazing, incredible projects that are happening.

We also provide grants to school divisions for Education for Sustainable Development. We're also developing a grade 12 course, to complement curriculum that will be more in-depth in regards to Education for Sustainable Development, and, of course, I am pleased to announce today that Dr. Farthing was just appointed the chair of the Education for Sustainable Development committee in Geneva about 10 days ago, and he is now the chair. Manitoba—little, tiny Manitoba—is the chair, not Canada; Manitoba is the chair of this Education for Sustainable Development committee because of his work that he has done, and we've been recognized.

The country before that was Greece, so we're pretty proud of that. So we're pretty excited about the work that has been done here in the province in regards to that and, at the end of the day, the engagement with school divisions and students is just remarkable and exciting.

Mr. Cullen: My congratulations, Mr. Farthing, on that. I'm sure that'll be an interesting activity and I'm sure a lot of work associated with that, as well.

Certainly, Manitoba's been recognized, you know, as a very important stakeholder as far as the environment has been concerned for a long time, so it's—it makes sense that we're, you know, moving down this road. So I guess from your comments

there's going to be more changes, in terms of the curriculum moving forward, in terms of sustainable endeavours.

Ms. Allan: Well, we are doing some work around the curriculum, but the other pieces that are important to any kind of curriculum development that is done is the supporting documents that are provided to teachers in regards to curriculum change, and that is work that is ongoing.

Also, the other important piece to this is professional development with teachers so that they can have the opportunity to have professional development around what the latest and greatest education around sustainable development is.

And the other thing the department does to really engage school divisions in education for sustainable development is working with administrators. We all know that the principal is key to creating a culture that is dynamic and innovative in schools, and the teachers, if they're behind it, that's absolutely wonderful. But we also need our administrators within schools to be behind it, so we also work with the principals at the local level.

Mr. Cullen: The other comment is in regard to the grants that are available for these different programs. Can you give me a bit of idea of how that grant structure work? Is it something that, you know, every school has an opportunity to? Is it kind of built into the, you know, the money that flows into school boards or is there separate programs that are initiated as well?

Ms. Allan: No, the money does not flow specifically to the—through the funding formula. It's—they're grants. They apply for them. They're approved. In fact I had the pleasure of signing them all about a week ago, I believe, and sending cheques off to school divisions. So it's an opportunity for school divisions to do that above and beyond the regular funding that they receive through the formula.

Mr. Cullen: So these fundings, are they in conjunction with other departments of government or the business community or is there a line in the Estimates book that we can follow, you know, the dollar amount as well? So there's kind of—that's a three-parter, I guess. Is—other departments involved in the grants? Is the business community involved in the funding of these grants? And then, three, is there a line item in the Estimates that shows, that reflects that in that grant? Yes. Sorry. Well, they just kind of all came to me at once.

Ms. Allan: First of all, we do give—I am informed that we do give funding to school divisions, all school divisions, \$700 per school to school divisions if they want to do, you know, small Education for Sustainable Development projects. Then we provide further funding to schools through the process that I chatted about earlier where they can apply around a specific project, and we have Ducks Unlimited that does some work with us in regards to Education for Sustainable Development.

* (15:30)

And two Sundays ago I was at the Fort Whyte Centre, and we have given \$140,000 to Fort Whyte to provide funding to them in a couple of areas. We're—they're going to—they're very supportive obviously of working with us, and they're going to provide opportunities for people, for students that are from the inner city that wouldn't traditionally have the opportunity to go to a sustainable site like Fort Whyte and visit.

And they're also going to expand programming, and they're also going to work with us in regards to our curriculum. We will consult with them, and we'll work with them in regards to our curriculum around Education for Sustainable Development.

We have those kinds of partnerships in place, and we're always looking to expand those partnerships.

Mr. Cullen: And the third part of that question: Was there a budget line that we could reference in that regard, or is that kind of lumped in there somewhere?

Ms. Allan: It's not a separate line in our Estimates, but it is in the FRAME report.

Mr. Cullen: Okay, thank you.

Item 2 on your goals as in regard to the principle of inclusion, and, you know, obviously that principle comes at a cost—there's a fairly substantial cost there to school divisions.

You know, are we as a government doing enough financially and otherwise supportive of the concept of inclusion, or is there more—are you getting more requests from school boards for assistance in that regard?

Ms. Allan: Well, since, obviously, the first thing I'd just like to say in regards to this particular issue is the investment that we have made in our public education since we got into government, and, you

know, I hate to be political with my bureaucrats sitting beside me, but I do want to remind the member opposite that you froze funding for five consecutive years.

And we made a commitment to our public education system, and we have made record investments in our public education system. And we also recognize that inclusion provides us with the challenges of meeting the needs of, you know, a very dynamic demographic in our classrooms, and we have made historic investments in our level 2 and level 3 funding.

We have also made historic investments in regards to providing funding to our students that require English as an Additional Language supports, and in fact, this last budget, we increased that funding by a million dollars.

And we've also established a newcomers' support funding; it's called an Intensive Newcomer Support Grant. We have provided that grant to some school divisions, because they have actually, you know, because of the—there are some students that come from war-torn countries that can be challenging.

So these are the kinds of investments that we're making in our public education around inclusion because of the dialogue that we have with the educators and the administrators in our public education system. And it provides us with the opportunity to respond in that way through the funding formula in regards to some of the pressures that they're feeling in the system.

Mr. Cullen: Well, certainly, there's a lot of unique situations out there for sure.

I guess my question would be: Given a lot of the social issues that we're trying to deal with in education, are you partnering with other departments? Is there financial assistance from other departments coming through education for, you know, for these kind of students that require these special needs?

Ms. Allan: Well, I'm not exactly sure what you're getting at. I did reference level 2 and level 3 funding, and we have made some changes in regards to how level 2 and level 3 funding is applied.

And we have—first of all, some changes have been made in regards to how they apply for that funding. In regards to level 1 funding, they don't have to apply for it every year now. It's—and it

releases individual school divisions from doing that kind of work. And so we have—the department has continued to work with school divisions in regards to the level 2 and the level 3 funding.

I don't know exactly what you're getting at. If you'd like to be more specific about it, we'd be—I'd be more than pleased to respond.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, it's probably an issue that I may get into a little later in the week, maybe just a little more detail in terms of how things are going down. I'm certainly happy to hear that there might be some streamlining in terms of the funding going down to level 1s. I think that's always an issue. You know, if we can reduce the administrative burden on school divisions, that frees them up to do something else with those resources. So that's certainly encouraging.

But there is a lot of, you know, social issues as well that we're dealing with in schools that we need guidance from, maybe, some of the experts over in Child and Family Services in those types of situations that we're dealing with more and more all the time. And I just want to get a bit of a sense of how, you know, we have a fairly large Education Department. We've got a fairly large Child and Family Services department. How do we get the right people in the right place to deal with some of those issues that are, you know, that are challenging that the families need assistance with?

Ms. Allan: Well, we'd be more than happy to talk about inclusion any time. We can talk about it now or we can talk about it at the—further on in the week.

One of the reasons that this works is not just because of the funding that we've provided to school divisions. It is also because this is a shared value, and this is important, not just to us as a government, but it's also important to the field. And there's no more dynamic group of people that you can meet with than the education partners who have a vision for public education in this province. And they are passionate about inclusion, and so, you know, that's what really makes this work is the work that we all do together in regards to making this work. And that's important to us.

The other work that we do in regards to working intersectorally with other departments, of course, is the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. And that is—I believe we were the first jurisdiction in Canada to structure a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, and that is the Minister responsible for Family Services and Housing, regardless of whether they're

separate or together, they are on that committee; the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) is on that committee; the Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau); the Minister of Education is on that committee; the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson), obviously, is on that committee. And it's an opportunity for us, you know, to look at best practices in regards to early childhood development, and look at some of the issues that we are facing and work on those issues together, and to have a more holistic approach to vulnerable children in our society.

* (15:40)

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I'd just like to follow up on those comments. I want to get a little sense of how that process evolves, like how often the committee gets together, you know; what do they do in terms of making recommendations? And then, again, it's kind of going back, if they do make recommendations, you know, what—how do they follow the outcomes? How do they look for results in those recommendations?

Ms. Allan: Well, we would certainly welcome you, of course, to visit the Minister of Healthy Living when his Estimates are, but it also provides me with an opportunity to make a few comments.

The work that has been done at Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet is actually extraordinary. We have an individual that is there that is a research expert, Rob Santos, and he has the capacity to provide us with data that is truly remarkable and that guides a lot of the work that we do in regards to where to put resources where they are going to benefit young people.

And I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the EDI, which is the instrument that is used to identify whether or not young people are ready to start school, and it's an assessment that the kindergarten teacher takes when a young student starts into kindergarten. And it—that EDI instrument is very important to us in regards to identifying where resources should be put.

And, in fact, in this last funding announcement, we prioritized education—early development education—and put \$300,000 into the EDI and also provided extra funds where we know that those EDI results aren't where they could possibly be. We provided more funding to—we will be providing more funding to school divisions to provide programs to

strengthen the education opportunity for those young people.

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

Item 3 on your goal is to increase achievement levels of those students who have been historically less successful. I just wonder if the minister could expand on that particular goal and what you're trying to achieve.

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all—in first of all we would—it would be important to talk about our Aboriginal student population in regards to the fact that we know that they're not—everyone in this room knows that they're not succeeding the way they should be. So we've done some specific work around providing grants to school divisions. We have the Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant, and it's provided to school divisions to provide that funding to them so that they can develop programs in their school divisions.

And the other area of concern is poverty. Communities where we see pockets of poverty and a lot of low-income students, and we have a grant called the Student Services Grant, and it identifies the socio-economic status of students—*[interjection]*—or, sorry, of schools. And we provide a grant to those schools that we know are struggling in regards to the demographic in that school.

And we also have an inner-city teacher education centre, and that inner-city teacher education centre is located in Winnipeg School Division No. 1—*[interjection]*—it's a partnership with them, and it's located on Machray—*[interjection]*—Machray School. And it's an opportunity for our department to work with those teachers that are working in those classrooms with some very vulnerable children, and to provide support to them so that if there's particular situations like that, you know, they can provide support in those particular areas.

Mr. Cullen: And I'll follow up with the minister on those comments.

I just wanted to defer to my colleague the member for Minnedosa. She has an emergency issue that is certainly education related.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for that. Recognizing the honourable member for Minnedosa.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Thank you for the member for Turtle Mountain to give me a few minutes of the minister's time.

I've been just speaking to the community of Wawanesa, and their school, which is a K to 12 and also hosts a daycare in that facility, has just been told by the Public Schools Finance Board today that there should not be people in the building, that the foundation is a concern, and that the building could be a—causing a sinkhole. So there would be some serious erosion. My understanding from the administration there is that there has to be some structural engineers in place to review the school structure, the foundation specifically. So the school has been cancelled for the remainder of the week.

And I'm just wanting to know if the minister can provide me with some information. I have some other questions, but I just want to know what the minister knows to this point, and if she could give me some background on the situation and what's being done through her department to assist the community at this point.

Ms. Allan: Yes, well, we actually have been working with the Southwest Horizon School Division. They are going to have to relocate 262 students from kindergarten to grade 12. And we received that information and they will be working with the Emergency Measures Organization in regards to that relocation. They've contacted, obviously, the school division. They're going to be gathering information and discussing possible options, and let the division know which roadways, highways are currently impassable. And we will keep in touch with EMO in regards to this.

My understanding is there's a possibility that we—they will relocate those students to the Shilo military base. So they're looking into that as we speak.

Mrs. Rowat: My understanding with the process with Shilo, it's not a—just a—doesn't just happen. There is a protocol or a process to follow.

My understanding is that the municipality, the Town of Wawanesa, has to make the request to the Province; the Province then has to make the request to the feds; and then the feds then provide direction, I guess.

So I'm just wanting to hear from the minister, you know, once the municipality gets whatever paperwork or requirement is in place, that she will do

whatever she can to get her counterparts in place to make sure the feds are aware.

It would be great if Shilo would be able to provide some of that support, especially for the high school students. I know there are other venues in the community, like the fire hall and the Treesbank, and Nesbitt Hall, but I do know that it's going to be really difficult to house 262 students as well as 15 or 16 daycare students. So I'm encouraging the minister to stay on top of this and to work with EMO, as well as the Public Schools Finance Board, to ensure that we can get structural engineers in place as soon as possible into the building, and to ensure that what we want to see is the kids get back to some type of normalcy so that they can continue to learn.

* (15:50)

Ms. Allan: Yes, there's no question, officials in my department will be working on this. You know, obviously, this is an incredibly unfortunate situation, and we'll want to stay on top of it and make sure that, as you said, we have the situation stabilized and we can get them into the obvious—and the best solution definitely would be the base, and if—you know, we do have contacts and we will be making sure that we try to move this along as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Rowat: One other comment or option that was provided to me by the administration was the possibility of modular trailers that—ATCO trailers that are used to provide temporary residence for people that are working away from home, and just wanting to know if the department has anything like that that would possibly work. That was something that was thrown out by the administration as a possible option to put that—those portable trailers or modular trailers on-site, and that way you can still access, you know, the school grounds, et cetera. Or if there are any bunk rooms or—what are they called?—huts available through the Province. Those were another option until the paperwork gets done with regard to the possibility of Shilo.

Ms. Allan: Well, we don't have—as a provincial government, we don't have any ATCO trailers. But officials in my department will be working with the school division in regards to not just, you know, the facilities aspect, but also, you know, the programming aspect. You know, we take this quite seriously. So we'll be working on this file diligently in regards to trying to stabilize it.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, and I appreciate the time that was spared here for this issue. Just wanting to

say that I will be speaking to the municipality shortly; and, if there's anything that I can do to help 'expediate' their paperwork to get to the minister's office, I'll do that. So I may be touching base with the minister's office in a short period of time. But I thank you for the comments. I'll share them with the community, especially the school and the school division, and I appreciate your concern and support.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much. Recognizing, once again, the honourable member for Turtle Mountain.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and just too that, certainly, the member for Minnedosa and I are both familiar with that particular school. That's actually my old school, and we were just out there on the weekend actually looking at some flood water there. And then the school is just adjacent to the Souris River, and, apparently, they encountered some water in the—I think it's the basement or the crawl space of the facility back in 1976—and the most recent high-water situation. And, obviously, again, this is exacerbated by the high water of the Souris this year, and certainly a tough situation for that community. So we appreciate the minister's comments on that.

Moving on to or getting back to the goals we talked about, and I appreciate the minister's comments in terms of the—some of those students that, you know, obviously need some more attention. We'll maybe get back to that later in the week as well.

Item 4 in your goals is to increase the overall provincial graduation rate, and I know the minister has been quite vocal in saying that, you know, the graduation rate has increased. Certainly, we appreciate that; that's always a good thing. And we—unfortunately, we're still trailing behind most of the other provinces in terms of our graduation rate, and maybe recognizing that we do have some special issues in Manitoba. But I guess the one thing that, you know, we're pointing to graduation rates, but we're not talking about achievements in terms of, you know, levels—scholastic levels either. Like, we don't indicate that at all in our goals; like the only one goal that we're looking for and the one—what seems to be the scorecard, if you will, is our graduation rate. I'm wondering if we're missing part of the equation here when we—we're specifically just talking about graduation rates.

Ms. Allan: I'd like the member to tell me what you mean by scholastic levels.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I'm referring to the OECD report and the PISA, you know, in terms of—broad terms, that, you know, it looks like Manitoba has been falling behind over the last few years. And, obviously, it was referenced in question period today.

I would assume Manitoba families and parents would have some reservations when they see that it looks like we're falling behind other provinces in that regard. Does—what—I guess what I'm trying to get at is: What's the view of the department when they look at results like that, that are done across the world?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, in regards to the graduation rate and the comments that were made by the critic, our graduation rate in Canada—or in Manitoba is not lower than other jurisdictions in Canada. In fact, we're very proud that our graduation rate in Manitoba is higher than Ontario, and Ontario is the province that has gone through more education reform than any other jurisdiction in Canada. And, in fact, if you look at the PISA results, you will see that Ontario was fairing very, very well and that's one of the reasons why I went to the education reform conference last September, by invitation only, by Dalton McGuinty to look at some of the changes that they have made there.

I think it's very important when we talk about the PISA results that we don't overreact because the results were very good when you look at the results in the context of international results. And we are also still at the OECD average, in regards to where we stand with the other international results. And our decline is actually relatively small; it's equivalent to four percentage points on a provincial exam. And we are at the OECD average and I believe—I can't quite recall in my head the numbers, but I believe it's 62 countries participated in the PISA results. Did I get that right? Yes. And, you know, to be at the average in reading, math and science, you know, is, I think, you know, not devastating news. I think that obviously we're taking these results seriously.

We will also be receiving a report that drills down further into these particular results and I am told, particularly by the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, that once we have that report—that it is a report that looks at socio-economic status and drills down further into those results—that, traditionally, when we get those kinds of further—that further data, that actually what happens is in Manitoba does fairly, fairly—Manitoba does fairly well, in regards to other jurisdictions in Canada.

So, you know, I think that what's important for us is that we continue to work with our education partners, and we work with all of them, in regards to how we can continue to have student success in this province.

* (16:00)

And, a particular example of working a program that was announced two years ago, and was in the budget again this year, is our Student Success Initiative, where we looked at three school divisions. We got a pilot project happening in three school divisions, and we have put funding into those school divisions to provide mentors for vulnerable students that we believe are at risk of dropping out of school.

And we know that happens around age 15, around the grade 9 level, and this program is a mentorship program where teachers work one on—they identify who those students are, and they work one on one with those students to encourage them and engage them to stay in school, and also not just to stay in school, but if they're struggling with some subjects that, you know, that they feel would hold them back in regards to academic achievement, they identify that and work with them. And we have heard reports from the field that—it's a three-year pilot project, but our initial findings and information from the field is that this program is really working.

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So we'll continue to, you know—obviously, we—you know what? Other jurisdictions in Canada, some of the other jurisdictions in Canada, they had similar kinds of drops in their results. And there was also a conversation at CMEC, which is the Canadian ministers of Education of Canada—or the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada, and they're concerned about this on a national scale in regards to how Canada is doing, and we want to make sure that we continue, you know, to look at these kinds of issues in regards to making sure that students continue to succeed in school.

Mr. Cullen: The minister made reference to a study that's under way. I just wonder if you could expand a little bit on that; like, who's doing the study and when that particular study will—if it will be made public.

Ms. Allan: The study is a study that is done by the Council of Ministers of Education, by CMEC, and they work with the provincial jurisdictions across Canada because they're our national body, and it's an opportunity for them to work with the local

departments of education and all of the jurisdictions across Canada. And it's in regards to these results and an opportunity to provide—to look at that particular data and try to determine exactly what's going on with that data in regards to socio-economic status and perhaps some other indicators. And it's just—it's a further refinement of the PISA results.

Mr. Cullen: I just wonder if the minister has any indication of when that particular report might be completed.

Ms. Allan: Well, no, I don't have any initial indication as to when we will have those further results at this point.

Mr. Cullen: I do want to reference some of the results. I think they are significant, you know, when we look at it in respect to what other provinces are doing too.

You know, we look at reading where we'd ranked from—ranked fifth back in 2000; we dropped to ninth in 2009. You know, that's well below the national average and, you know, to me that—that's—that raises a red flag. And I'm not pointing fingers; I'm just saying it's all of us that should raise a flag.

And my question is how do we—first of all, we have to recognize it's an issue, and, second of all, how do we take steps to make sure we turn that around? Because if we're falling back on our reading, you know, to me reading is significant, because if we're losing on our reading ability, that translates to science and math and every other thing. So, to me, this is a very significant issue that we, I think, have to recognize as an issue, and two, we have to take steps to really figure out what's going wrong here and how we turn this ship around.

Ms. Allan: Well, I can tell you that we agree with you, that, you know, we don't take these results lightly, and either, too, the stakeholders. This is of concern to the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, to the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, to the Manitoba Teachers' Society. We have had discussions about these results, and that's one reason why working with our partners is so incredibly important because, you know, we can't, you know, change these results on an international level unless we work, as a Department of Education, with the front line. And it's one reason why we're making an announcement—we made an announcement about the reading apprenticeship

program in our funding announcement this year and, you know, because we believe that that's important.

And we are also going to be reviewing our language arts curriculum because we believe that that is probably perhaps one of the things that needs to be done. If there are some problems in regards to some drop, you know, some slippage in regards to these results, it might have something to do with our language arts curriculum. So we're in the process right now of reviewing that curriculum. And that is definitely something that we would do with our education partners—[interjection] Just a minute.

And in the *Profile of Student Learning and Performance in Manitoba*, the document that I referenced earlier in regards to assessment, and that—you know, that's not the only tool, that we—you were talking about the grad rate and, you know, what are the things that we—concerned about in regards to student success. And one of the things that was implemented by the department a couple of years ago is staff going out and having meetings and discussions with school divisions about, like, what is going on in your school division and drilling down with them and working with them in regards to their challenges and what they might need in regards to programs, services, professional development, any of those issues that would benefit—research, any of those issues that would bring a benefit to learning to the population.

And I just want to quickly get this in for the MLA who is responsible for Wawanese, that we have been informed by PSFB that a structural engineer and a mechanical engineer and a project leader will visit Wawanese tomorrow morning. So we will have people involved in that by tomorrow.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Madam Minister, for that update because I just got an email from the administration indicating that there would be nobody coming until at least tomorrow. So knowing that they'll be there tomorrow morning, they'll be waiting, I'm sure, at the doors for them. And I'll let them know through email that you've just shared that they'll be there tomorrow morning. Thank you.

Mr. Cullen: I guess it goes back to my original comments when I talked about—you know, we as our children here are in a global economy, and I think people around the world are looking at these results as well, and if they see us as Canadians and Manitobans as falling behind it doesn't paint a very good picture for us in broad terms. And I know it's great that we're increasing our graduation rates, but,

at the same time, I think we have to make sure that we keep the bar fairly high in terms of educating our students to a high degree as well. So I just hope that the minister will take that into account.

*(16:10)

And I just wonder if there—maybe why if—was there a reason that we, you know, we chose, and we looked setting up these goals and we didn't actually choose to say that we had a certain standard we want to meet, you know, outside of just graduation rates—like, a standard that's comparable to other jurisdictions or a standard comparable to other countries.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Allan: Well, once again, I just want to remind the member opposite that these—the goals, the visions, and the mission statement and our goals, we collaborated and worked with all of the education partners on this, and they're very complementary. This is not our vision and mission statement and our goals. This is the Province of Manitoba's goals, vision, and mission statement for all of our education partners, so I'm just cautioning you. You're being critical of, and if you're going to be critical—

Mr. Cullen: I'm asking a question, I'm not being critical; I'm asking a question.

Ms. Allan: Yes, well, okay. You know, I just want to caution you in regards to—you know what? Here's the thing. So who would you like to be on par with when you set that bar high? Who do you decide you're going to be on par with? Are you going to be on par with the United States of America, which is one of our biggest trading partners? Well, guess what happened. Their results tanked big time, and Obama in the United States has hired Arne Duncan to have an aggressive education reform. So what happens if you set the bar in that artificial way with another country and then their results move around?

I think the most important work that we can do is the work that we're doing here in the province with our education community and the work that we're doing in Canada with CMEC as ministers across the province, and CMEC is, you know—CMEC, you know, has had a discussion about this and they are concerned about it because five out of 10 provinces had decreases in their reading scores—not just Manitoba, five out of 10 provinces. And in math, which you were talking about, six provinces show some decreases. So, you know, I think, as well, every province in science, every province except Nova

Scotia is down slightly, slightly from 2006. So this isn't just a discussion that we're having at the local level here in Manitoba with our education partners. It's also a discussion that we're having at the national level that we believe is very important.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before recognizing the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), I'll just ask and remind all members that when making comments, they should go through the Chair as opposed to directly back and forth. Keep that in mind.

Mr. Cullen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments. I know we can go on and on about this, but I just raise it as a red flag that, you know, in my mind we're dropping back and I recognize the other provinces dropping back, we're dropping back further than other provinces. I'm not going to belabour the point but to say that we have to recognize it as an issue, and, hopefully, we'll be taking steps. And I'm glad to hear the minister is, and I certainly look forward to that report when it is released. And, hopefully, that will give us a bit of an insight into why we're not doing as well as we hoped to be doing.

Mr. Chairperson: Was there a question in that?

Mr. Cullen: The minister got a point.

Ms. Allan: I certainly appreciate the member's comments because, you know, we are interested in having a public education system that is the best. We think—in fact, when I was at the Manitoba association of school boards event on the Thursday night, and the Manitoba School Boards Association was handing out their awards—every year they give a very special award out to an educator that they feel has gone above and beyond, and this year I was very, very pleased to see the award given to Paul Cuthbert—Paul Cuthbert, who is a superintendent in the Evergreen School Division and is also the current president of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents. And he gave a beautiful speech, actually, which I've asked him for a copy of because he talked about what he believes is the incredible public education system that he has been privileged to work in here in the province of Manitoba, and referenced that he thinks it's one of the best public education systems in the world. And that's from somebody who has been involved in the front lines. And that's also somebody that we're very fortunate to have working in our public education system to help us along this journey in regards to, you know, reaching for the top, so to speak, and getting over,

you know, some of the results that we got that, you know, we weren't happy with. We have to do better and we're also looking forward to that report in—because it will help us analyze and figure out exactly where we have to go with our education partners.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Chair, and I too have a few questions of the minister regarding some of the schools and the capital projects within Garden Valley School Division. Wrong time?

Ms. Allan: I actually consulted with the critic in regards to the questions we were going to receive today, and he actually told us that we wouldn't have to have our PSFB person here today because we wouldn't have any questions on our capital budget. I'm more than happy to try to mumble through it, if you would—if you want me to, or you can wait till tomorrow. It's absolutely your preference, but Gerald, of course, is the chair of the PSFB board. So I will answer them as best I can and then we may take some for notice, and we could provide you with more details tomorrow if that works for you.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, yes, that would be fine. I just wanted some updates. I know that you, as minister, and the Deputy are aware of the ongoing construction. Prairie Dale School that is—I am told is going to be completed by September. Now, that's—that was the objective, and I'm just wondering if you can give me an update as to whether you feel that this, in fact, is on line time wise or not and, if not, I can come back and ask the questions tomorrow as well.

Ms. Allan: I am informed by the chair of the Public Schools Finance Board that the project is on time, and that the community is very, very pleased with it. Yes, it's going to be a great school. I was pleased to be there too.

Mr. Dyck: Well, I would agree with that. I actually went and took a look at it the other day but, you know, again, just in the timelines, I think, and in talking to the custodian, I guess, this morning, he indicated as well that he felt that they should be able to receive occupancy in September in time for the school year.

The other question I have regarding the high school, the new high school in Garden Valley School Division. Now that was postponed for a year, but I'm just wondering if that is on target as well. In talking to the superintendent, I was informed that the—I believe they are at the point where they can secure

the architect, but I'm just wondering if you can confirm that and if you can give me some more information on that as well.

Ms. Allan: Well, we certainly have had a great working relationship with Vern Reimer. In fact, every time I sign a little letter to Vern, I put a little Miss ya, Vern on it, because we spent a lot of quality time with Vern and Hilda during my first year as minister. And I'm—we're informed that that project is on time and will be opening in 2013, and will have the choral space in it that it didn't originally have in it when it was first designed.

* (16:20)

Mr. Dyck: Okay. Just on that and there is a concern, and this is from the City of Winkler as well regarding the high school, and that is the access to the highway that goes through, and that's a provincial highway, Highway 32. And I know that this is not the—you're not the highways minister, but I do think, though, that they do need to work together in order to be able to maintain or to retain whatever access—good highway system that leads towards the new high school that is being planned and built and that's going to be built.

So I—it's more of a comment than anything else. I think that the two departments need to work together in order to make sure that the four-laning, and it's at a very busy intersection where the new school is being built, and so they're—it has some real challenges regarding the traffic flow there. So, again, that's more of a comment than anything else.

The question I do have, though, and that is from the information that you're receiving regarding student enrolments and so on, and with the number of huts that we have in Garden Valley School Division, like, is there a plan for these huts? Are they going to be staying? Do you feel that they will be filled by the time the schools will have—will be occupied—the new schools?

Ms. Allan: Well, as these schools are built and the transition is made from huts to the schools, the department will do what it's always done, and they will continue to monitor the enrolment. You know, we also, you know, don't know—there has been some changes in the federal government's immigration levels, and we have seen—we've certainly seen some changes in the enrolment figures—a little bit of slowing down, both in your area as well as the Steinbach area. You know, it's hard to predict what that's going to look like in a couple of years.

So, you know, the department will continue to—well, the PSFB will continue to work with the department to monitor what those enrolments look like, but, you know, and, you know, we'll continue to work with the local community in regards to their demographics and what's happening there.

Mr. Dyck: And then I just want to move west of Garden Valley to Western School Division, and I think it's more for information possibly than anything else, but, you know, we're starting to see some of the same growth patterns take place within that division, with the residential developments taking place in the town of Morden.

I believe they have their first or one—I believe the first hut this year—but they're—they will be seeing increased enrolments as well, and I guess my comment would be that we not move those huts too far away, because I can see them being used in Western School Division.

I've said this a number of times and I guess time will tell, but I see the same thing happening in Western as we saw happen in Garden Valley School Division where we couldn't keep up with the growth in student enrolment that was taking place. And, consequently, you know, we just didn't have the facilities that we needed for the schools at—in Garden Valley.

So just trying to fast-forward and make you aware of some of the growth that's taking place in the neighbouring division. As I say, I see potentially some of the same things happening there.

And I know that at this point in time, the—probably your numbers would not indicate that yet with the enrolments that are out there, but I'd be interested in to see what the response is of the minister.

Ms. Allan: I can go?

Mr. Chairperson: If you're ready, Honourable Minister.

Ms. Allan: Well, actually, we have the latest enrolments from September '09 to September 30th, 2010. And, actually, there was an enrolment drop in Western, so there was a drop of 21. But, you know, whether or—you know—what schools that were—you know, we can't—you know, we don't have those particular statistics here. But it, you know, it doesn't look like the dramatic growth so far that we have seen in Garden Valley School Division. But we will certainly, you know, we appreciate, you know, the

member's comments, and appreciate, you know, the opportunity, you know, to have that conversation at any time when you're looking at those kinds of issues in your local community.

Mr. Dyck: The reason I brought this point up was I've had opportunity to meet with a number of contractors out there, and the building and the growth is still taking place. Now, whether this is going to translate into added student enrolment, I'm not sure, but just looking at it historically, I believe that there is a pattern, and so, consequently, this could take place. So, again, I'm just alerting the minister to the potential for the growth within the area, and I don't foresee, in the long run, that there will be a declining—although I realize the numbers were down somewhat this year. But in the overall looking ahead, I see the growth taking place. So I want to thank you for that, and I'll turn it over to the member for Portage.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure to have the opportunity to, once again, participate in committee of Estimates as it pertains to Education, which was the topic of discussion that brought me into provincial politics. A significant disagreement with the current Minister of Education at the time was my motivating factor.

It doesn't have any bearing towards the current minister, and—but I—so I would like to ask the current Minister of Education, as it pertains to Portage la Prairie School Division. Recently, at the March convention of the Manitoba School Boards Association, there was a resolution passed by—overwhelmingly—support of the resolution from Portage la Prairie that asked about school zones and the reduction of speed within those school zones, and I wonder whether or not the minister has had opportunity yet to discuss with her Cabinet colleagues this particular resolution.

And I may just give the background to the necessity and urgency of the request emanating from Portage la Prairie, is that we had a high school that was redesignated as a middle school, located in very close proximity to Provincial Highway 240, and we did have an incident that ended up with two students being injured in a collision with a vehicle. Even though the crosswalk is well marked, young people sometimes don't look both ways, and the speed of the traffic in the near proximity to now-middle school, Arthur-Meighen école—it's a middle school—is very much of concern, not only to the school board in

Portage la Prairie, but supported by the City of Portage la Prairie, as well.

And—but the request for a reduced speed zone was denied by the Highway Traffic Board. And so, hence, the resolution, which was overwhelmingly supported by all school boards in the—across the province, was a result of the denial by the Highway Traffic Board.

So I ask the minister her—of her progress in this regard.

* (16:30)

Ms. Allan: Well, I have actually just received in my mail a short time ago the resolutions that were passed by the School Boards Association. And we will be reviewing those resolutions in regards to exactly how to proceed.

This has been a discussion—I have had this discussion with the Manitoba School Boards Association in regards to a couple of issues that have occurred around this particular—in this particular area, and so we'll continue to have a look at that in regards to how we might proceed, and I would obviously have to consult with the minister that's responsible for highways as well.

Mr. Faurshou: Madam Minister, I cannot convey to you in words the anxious nature of the request from the Portage la Prairie school board, supported by the Manitoba School Boards Association, and the urgency to which this resolution, I believe, needs action.

It is, and has been, for quite a number of years standardized across the province, a 50-kilometre speed zone in proximity to schools. However, we're all aware of different circumstances where effectively the roadway needs to have a reduced speed zone because of the activities of children, and I will say that the middle school, right across the road, is the Republic of Manitobah Park where a number of school activities do take place. So it does mean the movement of children from one side of the very busy Manitoba highway to the other side and back again. So I convey to the minister the gravest of concerns as it pertains to this.

If the minister has any further comment, I'd appreciate it.

Ms. Allan: Well, I think that I want to, you know, convey to the MLA for Portage that, you know, this is about student safety, and we definitely take that very seriously. And, you know, we think

that it—our—you know, we have to be part of the solution here, so we'll work with the local school division, and we will work with the departments that we need to work with in regards to, you know, how these matters can be resolved.

It isn't, you know—I know that there's other—or other school divisions that are having some difficulties. The one in Garden Valley was just expressed to us.

So, you know, I think we need to, you know, look at those particular issues in regards to student safety and how we can be part of the solution.

Mr. Faurshou: The madam minister is correct; it is about student safety. This isn't where we look as to politicize the concerns that have been raised.

I will, though, leave with the minister the—what has taken place in a number of jurisdictions, not only in Canada but the United States, where effectively the school zones are very well marked by flashing lights. The time when the children are released from school during noon hour and after and before school, the signs are activated by the office so that oncoming traffic knows that the school—the speed zone is reduced for times of activity in and around the schools. And some jurisdictions, I will be so bold as to say, are enforced by cameras on these flashing signs, and it is by photo radar, and so it's something that is being done in other jurisdictions and it's all about student safety.

I will, though, carry on on the basis of activities in and around schools and ask the minister, as it pertains to early, middle and high school, the department has guidelines to the playground area in and around the schools, and I'm wondering whether or not she has done a across-the-province inventory—if I can use that word—of the school playgrounds and identified particular schools with deficiencies as they are less than the suggested guidelines for student population versus playground area. I know the minister was quite concerned and did act in this regard to Gordon Bell collegiate that is located on Broadway West, that it was very obvious there's not enough playground area for that particular school. And the minister did act in that particular situation by acquiring the additional properties of former Midway Chrysler.

Ms. Allan: Well, Gordon Bell was a very unique situation. It had zero playground, zero green space. And because of the, you know, because of the—what was happening there in regards to the space

becoming available, we thought that it was an opportunity—and, obviously, so did the students—to, you know, create something very, very exciting. And, you know, we haven't—we have not had any other school divisions that I am aware of contact us about the fact that they have absolutely no green space.

So, you know, it's, you know, we didn't feel, because of that unique situation, that we needed to do an across-the-board inventory, because we also have a process in place where schools—school divisions prioritize to the PSFB what their priorities are every year. They choose their five top priorities and, of course, that's a discussion that they have with the, you know, executive director of PSFB and with, you know, officials in my department when they're doing their visits, school visits and that kind of thing.

So, you know, it's a pretty ongoing kind of interaction, and we don't feel that we have a lot of other, you know, glaring situations like this in other school divisions.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, Madam Minister, this, I believe, is a very timely question with results from a statistical evaluation of children's activities and how a very, very small percentage of children in Canada are receiving enough physical activity each and every day. I believe that it is incumbent upon the department to show leadership in this regard to effectively provide at least guidelines and evaluations across the board so that the department—and I think this is where the public representation at the ministerial level is very, very important—and we should have across-the-board evaluation as to how many schools effectively are deficient in playground area.

And I know that I will speak from personal experience from school board days. One is very, very reluctant to make speculative—if I can use that word—acquisitions of property in light of some of the situations that have developed with various school boards acquiring property and then finding that they did not really need those properties. But it leaves with the school divisions—and, as I say, the pendulum speak—moves not from the middle, but to the right and to the left and overreacts, and I believe there currently is a true reluctance on—in all school divisions now to acquire property even though it may very well be in the best interests of future increase in student populations at some schools. And I'm wondering whether the minister will at least take it

under advisement to—from a general public concern regarding children activities.

* (16:40)

Ms. Allan: Well, I don't know if the MLA for Portage la Prairie had the opportunity to read the *Winnipeg Free Press* about two months ago when the local education reporter, Nick Martin, did a story on our mandatory phys ed program, and it was a glowing article about how our mandatory phys ed policy is the envy of every jurisdiction in Canada. And we all know that students that are physically active do better academically and you know, we can, you know, give credit where credit is due because that was one of the policies that came out of the all-party committee. Active kids—or the task force, pardon me.

And so, you know, that's been something that's been very, very important to us as a government, the mandatory phys ed program. And that's one reason why this year in our funding announcement, we announced our Active Schools Fund and it's \$50 million; \$10 million a year over five years to fund gymnasium construction and renewal construction because we have, you know, a lot of schools that were built in the '60s that are past their best-before date and they need some help. And this is one place where we believe we've actually married our public policy, we've complemented our public policy, in regards to mandatory phys ed with our PSFB budget. And you know, we're very excited about that because we all know that kids that are active do better in school.

And the other part of that that we believe is very, very important is the new funding that was in the budget, and it's a new policy area for PSFB, where when we build a school from now on, we're not just going to build the school and leave a bunch of dirt around the school in big piles. Right. It's part—or a major renovation.

What has to be a part of that renovation is what that outdoor green space looks like, because we all know, as well, how that, if there is an outdoor green space and the teachers and the educators in that school want to use that green space as an education tool, that that is a benefit to students—yes, absolutely, physically and mentally. And so, you know, we have looked at the very thing that you're talking about. This isn't new to us, you know, and I appreciate your comments and we'll absolutely take it under advisement.

Mr. Faurichou: I will heap a little credit on Portage la Prairie School Division because they did have mandatory physical education prior to this and also too, we were No. 1 or No. 2 in the province as far as school divisions go as to the amount budgeted to playground and green space in the province. So credit to those in Portage la Prairie and—that are now very much in vogue with the current standings.

I would like to move to the announcement of—regarding all-day kindergarten, and the minister's development of curriculum there round as to the level of activity that will be within that developed, all-day kindergarten curriculum.

Ms. Allan: I was wondering if you could repeat that question.

Mr. Faurichou: Well, as it pertains to the current half-day kindergarten, basically the students are within the school for half a day and then the balance of the day they develop their playground and play-type of activities away from the schools, and they are physically active, shall I say, for the most part. And I'm wondering with now an all-day kindergarten, are we going to have a curriculum that will have a significant portion of play time and—so they can develop at the—at formidably years physical activity type of mindset?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I just want to comment on the fact that we don't have an all-day kindergarten policy. Like, we are consulting right now on that and it's actually—and that's not just the only thing we're getting feedback about. We're also getting feedback about early childhood education and development, and so as you know, my esteemed deputy minister said to me, you know, we have, you know, we have all-day kindergarten in some places and not. We have half-day kindergarten in other places. We have all-day kindergarten on every second day in some places and we have half-day kindergarten in some other places. But, regardless of that, the question that you're asking is a good one, because we all know how important in early childhood education and development that, you know, social interaction and play. We all know how important that is, and we also know how important physical activity is.

So those kinds of—those two activities regardless of, you know, how we move forward in regards to what is best for children, what's critical, you know, is—as well, is the language and the cognitive and

emotional development as well, and we're looking at all of that with, you know, some very, very smart people. And that's actually one reason why we developed an early education childhood unit in our Department of Education.

I think, you know, we're really moving the goal pole. I talk about this in regards to how we're moving the goal posts in regards to education, because, you know, we really are the department that's responsible for K to 12. But we all know how important, you know, even before birth, you know, those zero to six years are. So we're really moving the goal post, and the stakeholders are moving the goal post with us as well. They're really responsive to this whole discussion, and they know how important those early childhood years are because early intervention is so important in regards to that child's academic success.

So it's exciting work that we're doing in regards to how to move, you know, the work that's been done, and how we will move forward with it.

Mr. Faurichou: I do appreciate the minister's response. The whole idea of making the school part of the community and expanding on the activities that take place, before as well as after school, is very important as well, and with the announcement in the budget of capital dollars for daycare facilities, and we have to also consider the before-and-after-school programming for 12 and under students.

* (16:50)

Just to state that I—we have the very good fortune of having a rotary exchange student from Finland stay with us, and the Finnish school system absolutely amazed me, and—as to how their public school system is, indeed, the central activity facilities in every community. And it starts before sun-up and runs till after sundown. Mind you, the northern latitudes, that may be a little bit of stretch in the summertime because the sun doesn't set till the wee hours. But it is something I think that bears a great deal of examination and potential for our students here in Manitoba.

And, I also want to ask the minister, on that point, though, it engages the accreditation—if you can use that terminology of current-day teachers versus early childhood educators, and it's a merging of the skill sets that can effectively provide the programming and supervision for our students at the various years. I knew that that's what came into play

in Portage la Prairie. We found that, you know, once we switched from your teaching time period to a before- and after-school program for individuals, well, then, it was into a different jurisdiction and a different skill set was required of the staff that were in charge of the students. We couldn't have parents oversee or teacher assistants that didn't have particular accreditation. And so it was a real challenge, if you can use that term, to see that program come into play.

And so I ask the minister, very specifically, is she working with her—in her previous portfolio, I will say, accreditations through Labour, to have almost a seamless type of skill and accreditation so that we can, indeed, implement the programs to which we just discussed in the earlier question?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, I'm going to respond to the accreditation issue later in my remarks.

But what's most important, I think, about how we're viewing the education system is, once again, back to that moving the goalposts. It's funny how for years we've been building the schools and then the daycares. Well, I got news for you. Something happened first—they were born, right? And we should have been building the daycares and then the schools, you know.

But it's starting to evolve, and, of course, I am quite sure you'll be more than thrilled to support my legislation, keeping Bill 13, where, you know, we can't build schools anymore without daycares in them because, you know, we need to have that seamless approach. And you can't have that seamless approach if you don't have the physical structure for the early childhood development.

The other thing that has—work that has been done at the early child committee of Cabinet that is very, very important, is—and it's not just the early—well, is the parent-child coalitions. Because that's really an important component of early childhood development.

There was actually a letter to the editor the other day that just knifed me in the heart because of the—when we announced the early childhood education at the Victor Mager parent resource centre and someone wrote into the *Winnipeg Free Press* and said, I have no idea why you're funding that; you know, that should be done at home.

Well, I got news for you, you know, that can't always be done at home, and there needs to be a place for, as you say, for parents and children to come together so that that socialization in a structure, with a, you know, with games and activities that stimulate that young child's mind happens. And the best place for it to happen is, you know, in a daycare, preferably in a school, so that it is seamless and so that there are before and after schools.

And it's not just us that have been doing the parent-child coalition; it's lots of school divisions have been doing it as well, and it sounds like you have a model school division. And so it's not just so much about the accreditation piece, but it's about, you know, moving that system, as you said, to a more seamless approach. And with the keeping-kids-in-school approach, we're actually looking at keeping those kids in school till they're 18, because how can they succeed if we close that door on them when they're 16 years old and don't work with them and find something, you know, that captures them?

I mean, I have a 23-year-old electrician apprentice in my house, and I got news for you. It's not a boy; it's a woman, and she's paving the way for women in the construction industry. But she figured that out on her own, and there's more options for young people now to do the kinds of things in technical-vocational apprenticeship. You know, it isn't necessarily just, you know, go to university.

So we're looking at this approach now where we really have to look at young people from zero—from birth to career, and it's exciting, you know, in regards to how to really succeed in this. And this is our vision for education in regards to how to succeed, and our stakeholders are terrific to work with, you know, but it's a change. It's going to be a sea change.

Mr. Faurschou: And I'm very pleased the minister mentioned parents as well in being engaged because—when we had all kinds of parent volunteers that were sidelined in Portage la Prairie over contractual agreement, where effectively they had provided and assisted teachers with the playground supervision, and then, through contractual demands, that ended. They can still be there, but it is—now the supervision is responsibility of the person under contract with the Portage la Prairie School Division.

And, Minister, a quick comment and then I'll get to my last question.

Ms. Allan: Oh, okay. Well, I just forgot to talk about Finland, because one of the reasons I went to the educational reform conference last September in Ontario was because of the incredible people that were going to be at that conference. It was packed, jammed.

And, of course, one of them was Arne Duncan, Obama's guy, who's doing all this education reform stuff. But there was—and I'm trying to recall—I believe it was the deputy minister from Finland. *[interjection]* Yes, and Finland has been at the top of those PISA results almost every year when they come out.

And it's interesting because—and I want to tell you right wingers this, right? I'm just teasing you. You know, you might think it's because of standardized testing. Well, it's not; they don't test. What they do is they focus on the vulnerable learners. They focus on those students that they feel are at risk, and, actually, that's something I believe that we're doing as a government, that we have to do, you know.

So Finland is a very interesting country and it was neat to hear their speaker speak.

Mr. Faurshou: But we cannot forget about the persons that have our gifted students. We have to be as conscious of providing challenges for those that are gifted as well as those that have less abilities.

And I would like to ask the minister, just in the last couple minutes, we've seen the country of South Korea take a keen interest in Manitoba curriculum, and up in Roblin. What, though, the challenges that they've experienced is that of residency for their children while they're here. They did send persons to effectively chaperone but—maybe harkening back to what we call the residential school days.

But there are countries around the world that do want to have the privilege of educating their students in Manitoba, and has the minister had made any discussions or furthered that point with her Cabinet colleague as to what the Roblin situation and whether or not government could provide more of a package deal, if you will, to foreign countries to have their students come to Manitoba for educating—education.

Ms. Allan: Well, I'm sorry, I'm chuckling to myself because—

Mr. Chairperson: With regrets, our time is done the—for today; more excitement tomorrow.

But the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates for Executive Council.

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Yes, just a clarification. Do we invite staff in now or later? *[interjection]*

Yes, I do have a brief opening statement, and I'll—first of all, the Estimates are pretty straightforward. Staffing levels are comparable to last year. Last year we decreased the budget for Exec Council salaries, operating and capital. This year we hold expenditures at the same level, about \$2.8 million. The actuals for '09-10 are not finalized, but they should indicate that the Executive Council came in slightly under budget. This is due mainly to savings from salary lines, when people moved on and we did not hire into those positions right away.

Funding for the Manitoba Council for International Co-operation is from enabling appropriations, but is administered by Exec Council. Five years ago, the annual grant was increased from \$500,000 to \$750,000, and in '09 it was increased to \$1 million. We are maintaining the core MCIC grant at that level this year.

From time to time, we have also provided special funding to MCIC to distribute to member agencies—*[interjection]*—with disasters around the—who deal with disasters around the world. For example, we made special contributions of \$200,000 to assist in the recovery from the floods in Pakistan and \$200,000 to assist Japan following the earthquake and tsunami.

There are no recent changes to report in the deputy minister ranks, but that is largely due to appointments that were made last year, including Grant Doak, Fred Meier, Doug McNeil, Joy Cramer and Jan Sanderson, and along with Milton Sussman who returned from the MH-WRHA to the Deputy Minister of Health position. Deputy ministers have generally performed well, including the new ones.

And I'd like to also take this opportunity to commend the over 700 civil servants that have been working, in many cases overtime, but full-time for sure on the flood. The flood fight isn't over yet, as the peaks haven't occurred in most of our communities, but—and the high water will likely persist well into the summer. But the investments we've made this year, along with the investments made in previous years, have been very, very helpful in protecting people and property throughout Manitoba. And local governments and volunteers have also played a very significant front-line role and—keeping their communities safe and protecting people as well as their homes and businesses all throughout Manitoba. So I'd like to take this opportunity to commend them as well.

Over a year ago, we were just coming out of—in the throes of a global recession. Most of that was triggered by events beyond our border, starting with the credit collapse in the US housing industry and then by solvency issues affecting some major financial institutions and even entire nations. Manitoba's economy in the midst of this depends and still depends heavily on exports and external investment, and we knew when the downturn began that we would not be immune from its impacts.

But, in the last two years, I can report that our producers and overall economic strategy have proved themselves. Canada, generally, has fared better than most nations throughout the global recession, and among provincial economies, Manitoba's performance in terms of employment, investment and consumer confidence and productivity improvements has been among the best.

Our government's response to the global downturn, the five-year economic plan introduced in last year's budget, dealt with the need to participate in the national stimulus program, contributing to infrastructure projects that maintained short-term demand and employment while creating long-term public assets, and protect public services in Manitoba that many of us, many Manitobans rely on, including health services, education and public safety. The plan projected a return to balance in provincial finances over a multi-year period based on annual deficit targets. I am pleased to report that we are on target with our plan, in fact, slightly ahead in terms of our deficit projections.

Budget '11 keeps on the course of sustaining economic growth in Manitoba while maintaining core services to Manitoba—to citizens. It continues to

support a high-level investment in infrastructure, including highways, schools and hospitals, and makes signature commitments in the areas of child care, economic innovation and post-secondary education. This was an alternative to other approaches that members opposite were—wanted us to take, including cutting hundreds of millions of dollars out of the budget to half a billion dollars, in fact. But the reality is, the plan we've put forward has generated good, positive outcomes. The economy continues to grow and we're on target to meet our deficit reduction targets.

And, with those brief statements, Madam Chairperson, I would like to end my opening statement, and take it from there.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the First Minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, have an opening comment?

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): And I thank the Premier for his opening statement.

We have a number of questions in connection with the—with both actuals presented from last year's budget, as well as planned expenditures and debt management in the coming year.

I just want to, at the outset, though, acknowledge—just picking up on the Premier's comment about support through ICEC, which has been a long-standing tradition in the province. We support the continuation of those efforts to provide assistance to those both within Manitoba dealing with hardship arising from natural disasters, as well as those who are suffering in other parts of the world, and in particular extend our thoughts to those in Pakistan, Japan and other places in the world dealing with hardship, and our support for Manitoba's contribution to providing some modest amount of relief for those people in other parts of the world administered through MCIC in their efficient and compassionate way.

With that, I will reserve any further comment for our question-and-answer session which will begin after staff are introduced.

Madam Chairperson: Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply.

Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff and staff from the Leader of the Official Opposition to join us in the Chamber and, once they are seated, we'll ask the minister to introduce the staff and the Leader of the Official Opposition to introduce the staff in attendance.

If I could ask the First Minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Selinger: I have with me the Clerk of the Executive Council, Paul Vogt, and one of my senior officials who looks after all these documents that we're going to discuss, Maria Garcea.

Madam Chairperson: And if the Leader of the Official Opposition could introduce his staff that he has in presence.

Mr. McFadyen: I'd like to introduce Jonathon Lyon, who is chief of staff in the office of the Leader of the Opposition, who's been on staff for just over two years now, since March of 2009. It's the first time joining us in the Chamber for Estimates.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. McFadyen: I'd like to move that we proceed in a global fashion.

Madam Chairperson: Is that acceptable? Is that agreed?

Mr. Selinger: Generally, yes, depending how global we get.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you. It is agreed that we will go in a global manner.

The Leader of the Official Opposition—the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. McFadyen: Firstly, I just want to extend to Madam Chairperson my good wishes to you as you look to the future as well beyond participation in the Manitoba Legislature. It was—we appreciate the good work that you've done in chairing this committee and in other respects.

Madam Chairperson, the—I just want to start with some questions just in connection with provincial borrowing.

Before I do that, in fact, I want to just welcome members of Executive Council staff as well too. I know how hard they work and certainly appreciate the professionalism that we see from staff throughout government departments, but that certainly includes Executive Council. So to the two of you, thank you as well.

* (15:00)

Just back to some of the questions on borrowing, and the questions arise from the third quarter report that was issued just a number of weeks ago, and the reference I'm making is to the 2010-11 quarterly financial report covering the period from April to December 2010 issued by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk).

The report makes reference to some changes in the debt level, and on page 5 there are references to provincial borrowings, guarantees and obligations, and it refers specifically to 2010 borrowing requirements of \$3.4 billion, which includes refinancing of \$1.3 billion, and new cash requirements of \$2.4 billion for the fiscal year that just ended on March the 31st, offset by a repayment of \$338 million.

The increase in the debt level that's referenced there, which is, on a net basis, roughly \$2.4 billion, can the Premier just indicate the—provide a breakdown of who the lenders are for the new borrowing, and at what rate of interest, and what sorts of borrowing terms the Province is getting in connection with those new borrowings?

Mr. Selinger: If the member wants to go into detailed debt estimates, which are usually dealt with by the Minister of Finance, I'll have to get that information and bring it back here. But, generally, the lending is made available entire—and through the entire government entity including the Crowns and including government itself for usually infrastructure spending that it performs. And, so, if the member wants a breakdown of that, I'll have to get that for him. I don't have it in my Executive Council Estimates. Those are, as the member knows, \$2.8 million and much more restricted in terms of the information that is available to me. So, if he's looking for detailed information on who will receive the capital this year that we're borrowing, I'll have to take that as notice and get it for him.

Mr. McFadyen: And just to be clear, and I wasn't necessarily expecting that you would have all the detail immediately available, but if you would undertake just to get back to us in due course with information on the new borrowing, and, in particular—we'll get into questions about how what money was spent or allocated—but, in particular, the interest is just the composition of the lending syndicate and the terms on the—the terms on which that money was lent for the purposes of the last year, that would be appreciated.

On the issue of the repayment of some of that debt, my recollection was that in last year's budget, the indication at that time was that the Fiscal Stabilization Fund would be—or sums from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund would be dedicated to making debt repayment. Can the Premier just indicate whether that approach continues to be the policy of the government?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, as part of the five-year plan, that policy continues.

Mr. McFadyen: And there is a quarter end summary of the current state of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Could the Premier just undertake to provide a—just a reconciliation of the amounts already transferred from that fund for debt repayment, plus the amounts forecast to be utilized for debt repayment in the current fiscal year and in years ahead?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: One of the other things that was—that we noted in terms of the—both the third quarter report, which projects to the end of the 2010-2011 fiscal year, was the existence of a transfer from the Fiscal Stabilization account in order to reduce the amount of the deficit that was being shown for the year, and by way of—just to be specific about that, the third quarter forecast shows a net result for the year of a \$501-million deficit, and then a transfer from the fiscal stabilization account of \$49 million in order to bring the net loss to a loss of \$452 million for 2010-11. And similarly, there appears to be a transfer budgeted in the current year from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to reduce the bottom line deficit number. And I wonder if the Premier can just try to reconcile the—what appears to be—in the absence of some detail, what appears to be a conflict between the allocation of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund debt repayment and the use of that fund to reduce deficit numbers for operating purposes.

Mr. Selinger: I don't have the third quarter statement here, but if the member—does the member have his budget for '11 with him?

Mr. McFadyen: Yes.

Mr. Selinger: Okay. I think we might be able to illustrate some of what's going on if the member would look at page B1 of the budget, and budget papers document—budget papers document, and that would be B1. Does it say budget papers in your upper right hand corner?

Mr. McFadyen: It does, yes.

Mr. Selinger: Okay, so page B1, its about, oh, a third of the way through—

Mr. McFadyen: Okay.

Mr. Selinger: —and then it has the fiscal stabilization account about a third of the way down the page—you with me?

Mr. McFadyen: Go ahead.

Mr. Selinger: So it would indicate, for example, in '11-12, the balance at the start of the year and then there's a transfer out for Health, and the member will see that, and it nets out at 8. And then there's a spring flood amount and then there's debt repayment and incremental debt-servicing costs, and then there's a draw on behalf of the ecoTrust and then the balance of health programs and general programs being about \$507 million. So that gives him some idea of how the money's been used out of the fiscal stabilization account for the coming budget. And the numbers would be—the comparable numbers would be in the column immediately to the right there, and he would see that Health drew a net \$33 million, and then there was \$11 million for the flood, and \$96 million for debt repayment and incremental debt-servicing costs for a balance at the end of the year of \$634 million from general programs, and with the balance in the Health account, a total of \$667 million. So that just gives you the broad strokes of how the Fiscal Stabilization Fund has been used for the last two years.

Mr. McFadyen: And I thank the Premier (Mr. Selinger) for that explanation. What's notable about the figures that are presented on page B1 of the budget papers document is that we see in the third quarter report for the year ended March 31, 2011, new borrowing requirements totalling \$3.4 billion; \$1.3 billion of that is representative of refinancing, \$2.4 billion of new expenditures. And then what we

see is a transfer to debt repayment of about \$96 million identified in the budget document.

Can the Premier just indicate, because a choice would have been made to finance more of the debt repayment out of the operating budget, as opposed to the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, what the rationale was for making the decision to use the sum of \$96 million for debt repayment from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and then, in essence, allowing the rest to be added to the debt or taken from operating funds?

* (15:10)

Mr. Selinger: Generally, the rationale was, was that we would use the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to pay some of the stimulus money that we're using to keep Manitoba's economy growing. And by not using it all at once, we maintained some liquidity, but using a portion of it allows us to pay down debt using that resource and, at the same time, protect front-line services.

Mr. McFadyen: And just on the, again, back to the fiscal stabilization account, there is a reference to an \$8-million figure connected to the ecoTrust. Can the Premier just provide some explanation around that \$8-million transfer?

Mr. Selinger: Just in broad brush strokes, that was a resource that we put aside for various projects to deal with climate change, and as those projects roll out, the money is drawn to finance them over the—over a period of time. So there are a number of projects that have been approved by Treasury Board and Cabinet based on an analysis of their ability to reduce greenhouse gases in Manitoba, and they're financed out of this ecoTrust resource which was put in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

Mr. McFadyen: And does that ecoTrust fund include federal money that was identified under the federal program?

Mr. Selinger: EcoTrust money was from previous federal budgets. It was one-time money, and we parked it in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to use it for appropriate programming once the programming demonstrated that it would have a value.

Mr. McFadyen: So is there a transfer into the fund from earlier reports from the federal government that connected to this? And can you just indicate the amount of that transfer into the fund, the federal dollars under the trust?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'll have to get that information for him, but, generally, that's correct. There was a one-time money made available from the federal government that was put aside for climate change projects.

Mr. McFadyen: And just on the borrowing that was done in 2010-11, again, the total being \$3.4 billion, I asked about the \$2.4 billion that was expended, and then there was \$1.3 billion that was refinanced. Can the Premier just provide, and, again, this is one of those questions that will likely require just an undertaking to follow up, but provide information on the \$1.3 billion and refinancing the terms of the—of that refinancing as well as the—an indication of a lending syndicate?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, we'll get him information on—I think if he—I'm understanding he wants to know the membership of the borrowing 'certificate'—syndicate. Yes, we'll get him the information on that, and we'll get him a rough idea or a—of what the terms are that the borrowing syndicate was able to acquire the money at on behalf of the Province.

Mr. McFadyen: And in terms of the position of provincial public-sector pensions, which, I know, is a significant issue, can the Premier just indicate the areas within those pension funds where we have unfunded liabilities and just provide an indication of what the strategy is for ensuring that assets are going to be available for future retirees?

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, broadly, the pension assets funds had not been funded since the 1960s until we came into office and decided to start putting an employer's portion of the pension obligation aside, and that money is held in permanent trust for the plans, and it has been funded through a combination of increased contributions and some borrowing to put the money aside to strengthen those pension funds. And just for information, on page B2, you'll see the '10-11 forecast for the pension assets fund and the budget for '11-12. So, for example, in '10-11, it started out at 3 billion, 8 million dollars, and it ended at \$3.236 billion as a result of \$180 million of new investment earnings—new investment, \$153 million of new investment earnings and contributions of \$139 million from departments and Crown corporations and then some transfers into the various funds, TRAF and the superannuation fund for the net balance, and then it shows the program for '11-12 in the left column.

Mr. McFadyen: The other—just back to the issue of the fiscal stabilization account, page B3. What's

notable is that there were contributions made into that account over a period of at least 10 years and no payments into the account, simply drawdowns for '09-10, '10-11, and '11-12. Are there any plan-any indications within the five-year plan for any further contributions into that fund, or is it simply going to be a matter of drawing funds out?

Mr. Selinger: The five-year plan uses the fiscal stabilization account to fund some of the health-care items, some of the ecoTrust items, and some repayments on the money used to finance the recovery program, and it's indicated there, the experience of the fund.

And over the years, as recently as '08-09, there was money put into the account as well as investment revenue being generated; and then, as we headed into the recession, the account was drawn upon to put together the five-year program of recovery.

Mr. McFadyen: On the revenue side, the budget shows transfers from the federal government being relatively stable from last year to this year. I think a slight drop from the projected year-end to the 31st of March of 2011 and what's budgeted. Can the Premier just indicate where things are in terms of discussions, recognizing that things will have stopped for the purposes of the federal election campaign, but where things were in discussions with respect to the three main sources of federal revenue, being equalization, Canada Health Transfer, and Canada Social Transfer, as of his most recent discussions?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the member will note that federal transfers are actually down about \$141 million this year from last year, which is not insignificant. A good chunk of that is stimulus money that has not been continued, and, in terms of the discussions, the council, the federation is initiated work on what happens with the transfer programs which, in most cases, expire in 2014, and there's work going on among all the provinces and opening discussions with the federal government on what will happen with those transfers. And, as the member will know, there's already been some discussion on at least some of those transfers in the federal election campaign context.

Mr. McFadyen: One of the longer-term concerns is the sustainability of those sums, and the Premier's noted a drop this year following several years of significant increases in those transfers. The concern which has been raised is the sustainability of our dependence on those transfers, and I wonder if the

Premier can indicate what planning is under way, although we will certainly support every effort to ensure Manitoba is treated fairly and that we get our fair share of support from the federal government, what strategies are being pursued to prepare in the event that under any government those transfers don't keep up with the record high levels that we've seen over the past three or four years.

* (15:20)

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, the five-year plan and all budgets manage within certain horizons, both expenditure and revenue, and there's a certain amount of change within year as the economy strengthens or weakens, depending on the circumstances. But I think all the provinces are looking—and territories—are looking for clear, predictable and reliable transfers in the future. Particularly, with key health and education programs and social service programs that are pretty vital to the well-being of Canadians across the country, and Manitoba is a part of that discussion. This year we chair the Council of the Federation, so we've initiated those discussions coming out of the Council of the Federation meetings in Winnipeg this summer, and that discussion will continue as we go forward, and the new chair comes in next summer, which, I believe, will be British Columbia next year.

Mr. McFadyen: The other revenue line that's shown in this year's budget relates to net income of Government Business Enterprises. What the budget shows is a forecast for 2010-11 of \$752 million in revenue from the Government Business Enterprises. The budget shows an increase in that number to \$781 million for 2011-12. Can the Premier just provide a rationale for that increase in the level of net income from Government Business Enterprises?

Mr. Selinger: Before I do that, can the member tell me what page he's referencing here?

Mr. McFadyen: Yes, it's page 22 of the same budget papers document, and I'm referring to the first two columns on page 22 under Budget and Forecast Revenue.

Mr. Selinger: So I take it the member is referring to the line 752 of net income from Government Business Enterprises in '10-11 going to 781 for '11-12. The short answer on that would be those are the projections provided to us by the Government Business Enterprises.

Mr. McFadyen: And, is—would MPI net revenue be included in that figure?

Mr. Selinger: I believe it is. It's not transferred to government, but I think it's part of the net income. Now, I'd have to check that, but I do believe it is part of the net income on a summary financial basis. And, as the member will note, when you look across that column, it dipped in '10-11 and it was actually down, for example, from '07-08 when it was even higher. So every year those numbers change somewhat depending on the forecast.

Mr. McFadyen: And has the government been able to identify what, if any, impacts the MPI rebate will have on projected net revenue for this year and beyond?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'll have to get the—take that as notice and get the information for the member on what the impact is of that rebate.

Mr. McFadyen: I just wonder if the Premier—just on the next line of revenue on the same page, page 22, the reference to sinking funds and other earnings—if the Premier can just describe and provide an explanation for that revenue line. What is that in reference to?

Mr. Selinger: The government holds a number of liquid assets, including pension assets, funds and other sinking funds and I—if I understand it correctly, that is the earnings that it generates on a net basis.

Mr. McFadyen: And, actually, let me just—because the last phrase is the important one—is that net or is there an offsetting expenditure line in connection with those assets—with that revenue, pardon me.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'll have to check for the member what—if there's any administrative overhead costs that are netted against that number, just to be clear for him.

Mr. McFadyen: The budget is showing a poor government revenue increase of about 2 per cent in the current year and expenditures rise by roughly 5 per cent.

Can the Premier just indicate at what point he would expect those things to match one another and what the government strategy is to bring about a match in those two areas, because we're two years now into the five-year plan and we haven't seen much movement at either of those lines, leaving only three years to try to bring the government back into a balanced-budget position.

Mr. Selinger: The member—just for points—purposes of illustration, the member can see on page 23, total revenue and how it fluctuates over time, from

6.1 per cent in '06-07 and 9.3 per cent in '07-08, 2.1 per cent in '08-09, negative of just about a per cent in '09-10, and then a forecast up of 3.8 per cent for '10-11, and then a forecast of 2 per cent this year. So, the five-year plan shows going back into balance and every year that will be adjusted according to the experience of the economy and what revenues that generates.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, the question is based on the fact that we're now, with this budget, two years into a five-year plan and the gap between expenditures and revenues last year is virtually identical to that that we see in this year's budget. And this—it also includes transfers from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to get the deficit number to where it is.

What is going to—given that nothing changed from last year to this year, what are they planning to do that's going to be different for the coming three years in order to get the budget back into balance?

Mr. Selinger: Again, as illustrated in those lines, there will be both changes in expenditure levels and revenue levels to work towards the five-year plan, and the combination of that will be sorted out as we go along. But the objective, as in the first two years, is to achieve the reduction in deficit that you've seen from last year to this year, and then to continue that trend until it's back in balance after five years.

Mr. McFadyen: The concern is that the reduction in deficit from last year to this year is relatively small, and the rate of the reduction would require 24 years to bring the budget back to balance, if they continue to close the gap on a straight-line basis. So I'm wondering if the Premier is envisioning higher revenues or lower expenditures or some combination of those two things over the coming three years to bring the budget back to balance? And if so, what is the strategy? Is it to increase focus on increased revenues, on reduced expenditures or something else?

Mr. Selinger: Again, a big part of our strategy has been to grow the economy and maintain front-line services. And, as that happens, close the gap on the summary net income basis to allow us to get back into balance, as per the five-year plan. So, that is the strategy—is to have a combination of revenue increases due to a healthy economy and expenditure management that allow us to meet these targets while protecting front-line services to Manitobans. But stimulating economic growth has been a big part of the plan and we've had pretty good results there.

* (15:30)

Mr. McFadyen: The deficits that are shown, which are in the range of—between 400 and 500 million for last year, and again for this year, does not include borrowing that's used for various other purposes. And so, at the same time as the government is showing an operating deficit of between four hundred and five hundred million dollars, there is talk of additional borrowing, last year, for example, of \$2.4 billion, which is greatly in excess of the deficit number, and this year, again, borrowings that are significantly in excess of the operating deficit number.

Can the Premier just indicate what is the strategy for repayment of that debt which now falls outside of the balanced budget calculation?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the—budgeting includes debt repayment, and as the budget goes back into surplus over five years, then within the core budgeting function there'll be resources available to cover off debt servicing costs, and that's part of the plan.

But the member will note that in our first year we exceeded our forecast for summary net income, which was a loss. We had projected \$545 million. It looks like we're coming in around \$467 million, for an improvement of \$78 million, and we might even do better than that, and we've actually revised our forecast for year 2 to be \$10 million less than our original five-year plan. So there is a consistent plan to pay that down, and then at the same time continue to, when the budget comes into balance, to have resources available to cover debt servicing costs.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier does talk about some debt repayment, but the amount of new borrowing, for example, in the year that just ended, is about \$2.4 billion, and a repayment of about \$338 million according to the third quarter report, which is similar to adding \$2,400 to your credit card and then making a payment of about \$400. In the end, you're still left with a debt of \$2,000 and, in the individual case, at the level of the Province's new debt of \$2 billion. That doesn't seem to be addressed at all in the five-year plan or in any of the government's plans, and I wonder if the Premier can indicate what his expectation is as to who is going to repay that money and how that's going to be done.

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, as I said, in the five-year plan there's a plan to capture debt servicing costs for core government programs within the return to balance over five years. The Crown corporations

who borrow money, that is part of their operating budgets, the debt-servicing costs. So, in effect, for example, on Hydro, their debt-servicing costs are self supporting through the corporation itself. They don't fall on the general taxpayer. They're paid for through their revenues generated through their earnings. And so it's part of that summary net budget, but it's self supporting through the corporation itself.

Mr. McFadyen: The concern there is that the debt of Hydro is guaranteed by the provincial government and, therefore, provincial taxpayers and the repayment ultimately comes from Hydro's customers. Two-thirds of that revenue currently is regular Manitoba domestic ratepayers. And the—what we're concerned about is just the path that the government seems to be on right now as opposed to what the immediate issues are, and the path is that there is new borrowing of, in the year that just passed, of \$2.4 billion, repayment of \$338 million and a similar pattern in this year's budget of increasing—of going out and borrowing in the range of \$2 billion or more with repayments that are a fraction of that amount. And I wonder if the Premier has any concerns himself about the sustainability of that path.

Mr. Selinger: Again, the borrowing has been used to invest in those things that will grow the economy; infrastructure assets, roads, highways, water infrastructure, schools and hospitals, and the cost of paying back the borrowing that invests in those assets is amortized over the useful life of the asset. So, if it's a building, for example, the building is paid down over the useful life of the building, which, in many cases, is 40 years. If it's a road, it has a different amortization schedule. It might be 20 years. So the structure of the debt financing has a discipline built into it to pay itself back during the useful life of that asset, so by the time the asset may not be further useable, it is paid off, and then government can make a decision whether they want to renew that asset or develop a new asset to replace it or not replace it and go on to other asset investments in the best interests of the province. So there is a discipline that's built right into each borrowing decision on the capital program that allows it to be paid off over the expected life of that asset.

Mr. McFadyen: And, again, Madam Chair, the concern is that the current experience is that the revenue coming back to government is significant, but there's a gap. It's lower than the level of expenditure. And it's not just lower than the level of

operating expenditure. It's lower than the amount of operating expenditure plus new borrowing that's taking place, so that the size of the debt increases at a rate that is not being matched by revenue growth. So—and that might not be a concern if that was a temporary situation, if that was a matter of investing to—spending to invest over a number of years, particularly when the economy is slow, in order to stimulate growth that would repay itself. That would be one thing.

But the experience over the last 11 years has been that debt has grown even when the economy was doing well, and even when revenues were growing strongly. And now that revenues are slower than they were three years ago, that level of expenditure and borrowing is accelerating rather than slowing down, and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight.

So I wonder if the Premier can provide some reassurance or indication as to what the plan is to deal with the financial situation that may be confronting the Province five or 10 years from now.

Mr. Selinger: It might help the member if he referenced page B4 in the budget. The—any money that's borrowed outside of an operating deficit is for a tangible capital asset, and those tangible capital assets add to the value and add to the economy of the province. As I illustrated earlier, they could be roads; they could be investments in clean water or sewage treatment; they could be schools or hospitals. There's other kinds of capital that are required as well, sometimes government buildings. And, as you can see here, the investment in tangible capital assets, as of March 31st, 2012, is \$15.9 billion. And \$6.4 billion of related debts have been retired through accumulated amortization.

On the core government side, it will have a total of \$6.5 billion in capital asset investments as of March 31st, 2012, and \$2.1 billion of related debt will have been retired through accumulated amortization. So the discipline that's built into capital borrowing programs is to pay off the capital pro-asset over the life of the asset, and—similar to a mortgage on a house, that you take a mortgage out on the house to allow you to have the value and benefit of using the house, and you usually structure your mortgage to pay it off during the expected time you will benefit by the house. And, if you're fortunate, you pay it off faster, and the asset continues to grow in value. The replacement value of assets in Manitoba is far greater than the debt, and I'll

try to find that reference for the member, but we have a huge number of public assets in this province, which have provided real value to Manitobans and have allowed us to grow the economy and protect people from calamities, such as the Red River Floodway. And so these investments make a real difference in the quality of life and allow the economy to grow faster than it might otherwise grow.

And, again, the discipline is built in to the amortization schedule attached to the specific asset, which requires it to be paid down during its useful life.

* (15:40)

Mr. McFadyen: And, again, not to belabour the point, but the concern is that, while we acknowledge the value of the assets, the analogy of a mortgage really doesn't work in this case because the government is doing the equivalent of taking out a \$100,000 mortgage, and then adding \$3,000 to that mortgage every year, while making payments of less than a thousand. And so, at a certain point, somebody's going to have to figure out how that growing balance gets repaid, and it's apparent that the revenue being generated currently is not sufficient.

And so can the Premier just confirm that the government's ultimate agenda is to increase the amount of revenue it's taking from taxpayers?

Mr. Selinger: I think the member has it wrong. And it might be helpful if he looked under page 15 and 16 in our financial management strategy, and in there we talk about managing debt, and on page 16 the replacement value of public assets in Manitoba is estimated at \$37 billion. It's a huge amount of assets and it breaks out in the pie charts there, sort of where that \$37 billion of value is located; 21 per cent of that's in roads; 10 and a half per cent's in buildings and equipment. So, when we make an additional investment in a school or a hospital, it adds to our total pool of assets, and then we pay it down over the useful life of that asset.

So his analogy is actually quite incorrect. We're not actually increasing the debt without increasing asset value, we're increasing asset value often in excess of the borrowing required to finance it. Sometimes those assets are growing even faster than the money that was borrowed to pay for it.

And so you can see there in that discussion the—for example, at the top of page 16, the investment in tangible capital assets has increased

steadily over the last decade, and with \$1.6-billion investment in '11 is projected to reach a total of \$15.9 billion, with \$6.4 billion of related debt retired through accumulated amortization. The net book value of these assets has tripled since '99-2000 to \$9.5 billion.

And so—and then it goes on to explain that Manitoba's communities and economies have benefited over the years from the significant investment in public capital assets, such as health facilities, universities, colleges and schools, as well as infrastructure assets such as roads, water control structures and parks.

And so this is an ongoing program of investment inside of Manitoba, and it has yielded good results. Our economy has grown faster than the Canadian average, the quality of life has improved in Manitoba and, as I've said earlier, there's a discipline built right into each asset as it's financed that pays it off over the useful life of that asset.

Mr. McFadyen: And so, if the current situation is that revenue isn't growing quickly enough to catch up with the amount that's being borrowed, then the agenda must be to sell those public assets. Can the Premier indicate which of those assets they're planning to sell in order to make debt repayments?

Mr. Selinger: Again, that would be a mischaracterization of the program. The program is to grow the assets in Manitoba. Those assets will make a contribution to a growth in the economy and quality of life, and to return the government to surplus within the five years, and to include within that returning to a balance within five years' resources to cover the amortization and debt repayment costs of those assets. And that will make us have a stronger economy.

The investments we've made during the 'townturn' have allowed the economy to recover more rapidly and provide more resources inside of Manitoba to pay for the front-line services that people are looking forward to, as well as generate employment and growth in the economy.

So, for example, in '11 the deficit in the budget was 0.8 of 1 per cent, less than 1 per cent of our gross domestic product, which was the third-lowest among provincial budgets released. So there's no need to sell off those assets.

What is needed is a continuing focus on strengthening economy and allowing it to grow, and then that will generate the resources to cover the cost

of these assets that we've invested in and retire them over their useful life.

Mr. McFadyen: And so what the Premier is saying then, is that what he is banking on is that revenue is going to increase enough to cover the borrowing. Is that a fair way to summarize?

Mr. Selinger: I would say the following, the—what we're planning in the five-year plan is to continue to protect front-line services, to grow the economy, and as that economy grows, it will generate revenues that will allow us to pay for these assets over their useful life. And these assets, in turn, will help the economy even grow more strongly than would've been the case in the absence of those investments.

Mr. McFadyen: Just coming back to the specific questions about the department, about Executive Council, can the Premier just provide just a breakdown of the 2.812—sorry, I guess it would be \$2,812,000 in projected expenditures for Executive Council, just provide a breakdown of that sum between salaries and costs related to salaries and other expenditures?

Mr. Selinger: I'm just hoping the member will take a look at the top of page 17 as well, where it indicates in this budget that we'll have 438 million which will be directed to debt-related payments—the last line in the top paragraph, and that over—since 2000 we've had revenue exceeding expenditure of—over \$300 million more revenue than expenditure during that period of time so that—and, in addition, we've put a strategy in place to deal with the unfunded pension liability.

So, over this long-term program, we've generated more revenue than expenditure. We've dealt with the pension liability, and we've put a discipline in place to deal with our assets that we've invested in which have helped us grow the economy. And that \$438 million, it's an absolute coincidence, but it's equivalent to the projected shortfall in operating revenues this year, but it shows a very significant commitment to paying down debt in Manitoba.

On the specific question, back at Executive Council—yes, it's essentially the amount on general administration for Executive Council is pretty much identical this year as it was last year.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, and the Premier was good enough last year, following Estimates, to provide just a staff list, the positions that exist within Executive Council as well as individuals who are

seconded to Executive Council from other areas in order to support the activities of Executive Council. I'm wondering if he could provide the same breakdown this year as he did last year and, if it's any easier perhaps, could just provide a document that showed any changes from last year's makeup.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'd be happy to do that.

Mr. McFadyen: In terms of government organization, in terms of Cabinet and Cabinet committee structures, can the Premier just indicate the current makeup of the Treasury Board Committee of Cabinet?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the Treasury Board composition is Minister of Finance, Rosann Wowchuk, Chair; Vice-Chair—

Madam Chairperson: Order. All ministers are named by their titles and MLAs by their—

An Honourable Member: Minister of Finance, I said.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: Honourable Rosann Wowchuk, Minister of Finance—

Madam Chairperson: Order. As a reminder to all members in the House that all ministers—

An Honourable Member: You don't like the name at all. Just the title, I see.

Madam Chairperson: Just the title. Thank you very much.

An Honourable Member: Okay—

Madam Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, well, I'm—are we sure that tight on the rules here that we can't do both?

All right, so the vice-chair would be the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers), sometimes known as—no, I won't do that. And then, of course, the Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Mackintosh) and the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), and the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross), and the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Blaikie), and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan).

* (15:50)

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just indicate, in normal circumstances, how often does Treasury Board meet?

Mr. Selinger: Usually weekly.

Mr. McFadyen: And does Treasury Board continue the practice of having its minutes delivered to Cabinet?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: And is Cabinet still in a pattern of weekly meetings?

Mr. Selinger: Generally, yes.

Mr. McFadyen: And, just back again on expenditures, the Premier was good enough—we didn't identify any concerns or issues—but was good enough just to provide a summary of travel and related expenditures last year. I'm wondering if he could provide a similar kind of a summary for us—for—to make that information current.

Mr. Selinger: We will, and I note for the Leader of the Opposition that we now post those online as well.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier also provide information on any contracts that have been entered into between Executive Council and any individual who may doing work for Executive Council?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, we'll do that, but I'm not aware of any.

Mr. McFadyen: The—does the breakdown on travel include travel that's been paid for by other departments or Crown corporations? And, by other, I mean other than Executive Council.

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: And just in terms of the composition of the compliment of deputy ministers, can the Premier just indicate whether Mr. Eliasson continues to assume responsibility as deputy minister for two different departments and whether the plan is to carry on in that regard?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, he does fulfill those dual roles.

Mr. McFadyen: And was that done for a particular policy reason or was it done because there was a vacancy that needed to be filled and Mr. Eliasson was available to do so? I guess what I'm getting at is, is he acting in one of those positions or are they both considered to be permanent responsibilities currently?

Mr. Selinger: They're both permanent responsibilities.

Mr. McFadyen: And the reason, just to be clear why the question is being asked, is that they're both significant departments in terms of responsibility, and so it is not at all a concern about the incumbent, just a comment on the fact that it seems unusual to have two such significant departments have the same deputy minister in that role, and I'm wondering if the Premier can indicate whether they have any—he has any concerns about that situation in terms of workload and level of responsibility for one individual.

Mr. Selinger: Generally, the deputy has capably performed in both of those roles and we do a—through a—do review from time to time about responsibilities for deputy ministers and if we think that there's onerous responsibilities being imposed on an individual such as this one we would review that, but so far it seems to have functioned reasonably well.

Mr. McFadyen: One of the other individuals in government who was carrying significant responsibility was Angela Mathieson. I'm just wondering if the Premier can indicate what role Angela Mathieson is playing currently within government.

Mr. Selinger: That individual is the secretary to the Community Economic Development Committee of Cabinet.

Mr. McFadyen: And is that the—can the Premier just indicate how long Ms. Mathieson has been fulfilling that role?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get the specifics on that, but for about four years, subject to verification.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just, on the same vein, in terms of senior responsibilities within government, just indicate what role Anna Rothney is currently playing within government?

Mr. Selinger: That individual is responsible for issues management.

Mr. McFadyen: Just on—and just to be clear, is issues management within Executive Council?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: Just back, moving away from those specific questions, just in terms of general civil service management, can the Premier indicate, or at

least undertake to provide information about how many retirements are expected over the—within the coming year from the civil service generally? And I'm referring to line departments as opposed to the broader public sector.

Mr. Selinger: We'll get that information for the member.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier indicate what the plan is in terms of filling those vacancies? Is it the intention of government to fill all of those vacancies, or will there be some vacancy management as they go forward?

Mr. Selinger: Usually, positions are reviewed as they become vacant and a decision is made whether it should be filled or managed empty for a period of time or is it needed at all.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just indicate who currently is fulfilling the role of chief of staff within caucus, within the government caucus?

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to have to seek clarification from the member about which position he's trying to allude to. That terminology may be a little unclear.

Mr. McFadyen: Yes, the question relates to the member of staff; it's normally political staff, a person who is the most senior staff member on the NDP caucus staff, as opposed to being within Executive Council.

Mr. Selinger: I'll take that as notice. I'll just clarify for the member later when I get that information verified who that person is. It's a caucus position, and it's not part of the Executive Council estimates. So I'll get that information for him.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier also just indicate who is in the role of Director of Cabinet Communications currently?

* (16:00)

Mr. Selinger: The acting Cabinet communications person is Nammi Poorooshasb.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just provide the names of the other individuals who are part of the Cabinet communications group within Executive Council?

An Honourable Member: Yes, we'll—

Madam Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: We'll get that for him. We'll get that for you.

Mr. McFadyen: Just in terms of intergovernmental relations, who is the most senior civil servant in charge of intergovernmental relations currently?

Mr. Selinger: Jim Eldridge.

Mr. McFadyen: And is Mr. Eldridge currently with Executive Council or is he under Industry and Trade or, sorry, the equivalent of the trade department?

Mr. Selinger: He's part of Finance. Finance, right?

Mr. McFadyen: Now, just back to—just revenue, government revenue, on equalization. The—Manitoba's received a commitment to protect equalization levels at the levels they were at as of last year.

Can the Premier just indicate whether there are any stipulations that are tied to that equalization protection and when, if ever, that protection lapses or expires?

Mr. Selinger: The—I'm going to have to get the specific information on equalization. I'm just looking for the detail here. The protection is on total transfers, federal transfers, as I understand it, and of the core transfers, equalization, health and social transfers and, as I said earlier, the total transfers are down about \$141 million, as indicated on page 22 in the budget summary financial statistics—and I'm just looking here—I don't have the breakdown there of the composition of those total federal transfers. I'll endeavour to get that for the member and that protection payment was put in place by the federal government to ensure that those core transfers were flat, no worse than flat.

Mr. McFadyen: And just to be clear, is the economic stimulus component of federal spending outside of that core transfer provision?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just provide a breakdown of just the provincial—what would be considered provincial stimulus expenditures and, both in terms of amounts, time frames and the projects that were supported under what would be classified as stimulus expenditures?

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, we'd have to get that information for the member. There's quite a bit of material there, so it would probably take a little time to compile that, but if the member wishes it through Executive Council, we can get it for him.

Mr. McFadyen: And also if the Premier could just indicate or provide just the written commitments or indications that have been provided to the Province by the federal government in connection with equalization and the other two core transfer payment streams.

Mr. Selinger: We'll have to get that information for the member.

Mr. McFadyen: And does the Premier have a sense recognizing some of the uncertainty arising from the federal election campaign, but a sense as to when the Canada Health Transfer and the Canada Social Transfer numbers will be confirmed, both for the current fiscal year and for next year?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I believe the transfers for this year were confirmed in this year's budget, presented by the federal government. Now, as we know, that budget hasn't been passed yet, and we'll have to see when they pass it. But the commitment was put in the budget.

Mr. McFadyen: Yes, and I'm sorry. I—my reference was to the timing of the commitment for subsequent years, and how far forward that commitment is, in terms of the written position of the federal government.

Mr. Selinger: Again, we'll have to see what the post-election result is, and what commitments they're prepared to make on a go forward basis.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just indicate, from his government's perspective, what the top priorities are for expenditures of new infrastructure funds within Winnipeg.

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, the budget committed to a point-of-equivalent point of PST in the budget as a transfer province wide. A good chunk of that, a majority of that, goes to the City of Winnipeg. A certain amount of that is negotiated; a certain amount of it is—leaves it up to the City to decide how they want to spend it. But generally, we're interested in improving infrastructure in Winnipeg. That's the PST I'm referring to is investments in infrastructure: streets, sidewalks, fundamental infrastructure to the city of Winnipeg, including money for water and sewer.

So the specifics of that are something that are discussed and worked out through the various departments. Local government plays a role in that, MIT plays some role in that. But the major transfers are through the Department of Local Government.

Mr. McFadyen: And does the Province have a priority list for projects within Winnipeg, or how are those priorities established?

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, that's usually established through discussion with the other levels of government, but also based on information we have that indicates where key investment needs to be made. For example, we pay about half the costs of most residential street renewal in Winnipeg, and those streets are usually identified by the City as to which specific ones need to be done each year.

Mr. McFadyen: And the—what is the amount then? You indicated that the Province pays for about half of the cost of residential street renewals.

What is the amount currently of annual expenditure on residential street renewals within Winnipeg?

Mr. Selinger: I'll undertake to get that information for the member.

Mr. McFadyen: Now there was—and we're happy to see it, there was a specific reference in the budget speech to Plessis Road. Can the Premier just indicate the reference there. Is that to the underpass that has been proposed, or what's the specific commitment there to that project?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, that's a project the City identified as a project they'd like to see funded, and we were specific in identifying that in the budget and before the budget and subsequent to the budget.

Mr. McFadyen: And the—what is the government's position with respect to funding work on an underpass at Waverley where there's frequent train traffic that interrupts that road for traffic coming to and from the south part of the city?

* (16:10)

Mr. Selinger: We'll have to get the member information on that specific project and whether or not it's one of the ones the City's identified as a priority. But, generally, we're prepared to support the City on key infrastructure projects that will make a real difference.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just indicate, because there's been some public back and forth with the City on the issue of rapid transit, what is the status of those discussions with the City of Winnipeg?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the City has its own long-term plan for rapid transportation, public rapid

transportation, and we try to work with them on bringing that plan to fruition.

Mr. McFadyen: Just as a follow-up on the rapid transit question. There's been some work done on the corridor between Union Station and Jubilee. What is the Premier's understanding of when that corridor will be operational or what is the—what are the plans going forward in light of what appears to be different indications coming from the City and the Province on that project?

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to get specific information for the member on when the first phase will be completed of that project. But I understand it's well under way, and, just from driving by it, it looks like it's made an enormous amount of progress, but I'd have to get specific information on when it's going to be completed. It's the City that's actually constructing it. We've supplied resources to help finance it, but it's under the City's purview in terms of the construction of that project.

Mr. McFadyen: And just on the issue of schools capital, the issue of the need for a new high school in the southwest part of Winnipeg, and it's one that I've raised a few times before, and I just want to ask the Premier now what the government's plans are through the PSFB to fund the construction of a new high school for southwest Winnipeg.

Mr. Selinger: Again, the Public Schools Finance Board allocates resources for schools, including new schools, based on demand and meeting certain thresholds, and when they see that there's a potential growth in demand they can do some preplanning. But in the case of southwest Winnipeg, I—as I understand it, the broad commitment is to support new facilities there for education when the demand is sufficient to justify it, and where they can see a future growth in demand they can do some preplanning to scope out where that project might occur, and, in some cases, maybe even do some preliminary work on insuring that there is land available for the project to proceed. But it really comes down to sufficient demand to justify the investment in a new facility.

Mr. McFadyen: And I would just ask the Premier to ask for a new analysis of demand for that corner of the city, and I'll just share some observations that are based on discussions, both with people active at the school board level and parents and teachers and others. The current situation is that there are elementary level schools which are full. Bonnycastle is one such school which is absolutely jammed, as

are most if not all of the other elementary level schools. There are portable classrooms being added to existing high schools, and we certainly know, and the Premier will certainly be aware of the development at Waverley West and new families moving in, many of whom have school-aged children, in terms of pressure.

One of the concerns that's repeatedly raised is the fact that the developers have an obligation to maintain land for school purposes. That obligation only exists for a certain number of years and then lapses, and some cases that land has been used for other purposes other than schools. Certainly, the concern being raised by a lot of parents, teachers and others is that the forward planning isn't taking place to the degree that people would hope, and I would ask the Premier to take another look at that issue.

There was a study that was done a couple of years ago. Some of the data that was included in that study seemed not to match up with what the reality was in the area, and so I would just simply ask the Premier, through the PSFB and through his minister, to take a fresh look at the need for capital planning in that corner of the city.

Mr. Selinger: We can certainly make that request again, to have a look at it and to work with the school division and anybody else out there that has new information to provide, to take a look at what the future demand will be, and when it needs to be addressed, and what forward planning could be put in place to ensure that a land base is available to meet that demand.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier just provide an update of the status of water and waste-water projects and provincial funding connected to those projects?

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, I'll have to get the information for the member on that. That's usually addressed through the respective department that looks after that. But, if the member wants information through Executive Council, I'll undertake to get it for him.

Mr. McFadyen: Just in terms of the floodway expansion project, can the Premier indicate whether there are further steps contemplated as part of that initiative, or whether the view is that that project is essentially complete as it now stands?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the one-in-700-year level of protection has been achieved through the federal-provincial funding arrangement. But every

year we take a look at the experience of how those assets have performed and whether there needs to be any improvements to them. And so, once we get through this flood season and see how the asset has performed, we'll take a look at whether further investments need to be made to ensure that it protects Winnipeg as it has so ably up to now.

Mr. McFadyen: We certainly acknowledge the very significant role the floodway has played in protecting Winnipeg and continues to do so.

Is the one-in-700-year level of protection something that takes into account the scenario of high waters coming in from the west?

Mr. Selinger: If I understand it correctly, the member's asking if the one-in-700-year protection includes coincident crests from the Assiniboine and the Red occurring in the city roughly at the same time?

I'll have to check on that, but broadly speaking, a one-in-700-year event, I would believe, would be inclusive of those kinds of events. But I'll check on the specifics of that to ensure that I'm giving the member accurate information.

Mr. McFadyen: I think the Premier has correctly understood the question.

And my understanding is the one-in-700-year description is based on kind of projections of potential flooding based on historic floods of the Red River, in particular. But I don't want to get overly—into an overly academic discussion about that description.

I wonder if the Premier can just provide some description on what is meant by one-in-700-year level of protection.

It's a term and the only reason that the question is being asked is that it's a term that's used frequently by experts and people in government. It's not one that's very well understood by a lot of members of the public. I think the public could benefit from a better understanding of what that means.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'll undertake to get further information for the member on what we mean by one-in-700-year protection.

But, generally, it's defined by level above sea level, normal levels above sea level versus a one-in-700-year rise in the river above sea level. Then we'll see if that's inclusive of coincident crests historically.

* (16:20)

Mr. McFadyen: In recognizing that this year, and the past couple of years, have posed quite significant challenges around the province in terms of flooding and water management, can the Premier just indicate the current thinking of the government with respect to the Shoal Lakes situation north of Winnipeg?

Mr. Selinger: Generally, the Shoal Lakes have shown a rise, and there's been some short-term measures taken to provide relief there through what's known as the hatchery drain in consultation with local elected officials. There was a recommendation to provide some immediate relief through some investment in improving the hatchery drain outlet, and those resources were made available and have been allowed that drain to, with that investment, to be more able to handle some of the flows. But there is ongoing work by the departments to take a look at what other measures could be taken in the future to relieve the pressure there.

Mr. McFadyen: And I thank the Premier for that response.

The situation at Shoal Lakes in many ways is similar to that of Devils Lake in that there are lots of drains that flow into that lake and not very much in the way of outlet that causes the lake to rise year after year even when other water levels are dropping throughout the province. It appears for that reason to be a fairly long-term situation, that the level of Shoal Lake is not likely to drop very quickly even when water recedes in other parts of the province. And so I'm wondering, in addition to the outflow issues at Shoal—at the Shoal Lakes, which is now, I think, as a result of the high levels almost down to one lake, from three to one, whether the Province is looking at finding a way to, on a reasonable, negotiated basis, buy out some of those private property owners who look like they're going to be facing chronic high water levels on their land for the coming years.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, that option's not ruled out. It's not necessarily the one that has been identified as the top approach. The immediate approach was some request to relieve some of the growth in water levels in those lakes through the hatchery drain, but all options will be considered and that one's not ruled out. But, as I've said, they're looking at other engineering solutions as well and what the cost benefit of those will be.

Mr. McFadyen: Just moving over to the Portage Diversion which, again, you know, as part of the

flood control mix in Manitoba, seems to be working well in terms of diverting a lot of water that would otherwise be flowing eastward down the Assiniboine River.

Can the Premier just indicate what the government's current thinking is on the future of the Portage Diversion, particularly given that it seems to be operating at or close to capacity now? And, obviously, you've got very high water levels on Lake Manitoba and so the downstream landowners and others who have an interest in Lake Manitoba and other properties around the province are seeing high water levels that are being contributed to by the Portage Diversion.

Can the Premier just comment on what the government's response is to that challenge which has been created by the diversion of that water northward?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the Portage Diversion, as the member correctly identifies, is playing a very important role in protecting flows of water into Winnipeg, and it is operating very effectively to divert water now. As to the impacts of a high Lake Manitoba, that is something that we'll have to be very attentive to and see what the impacts are as we go forward and how rapidly that water's able to move out of Lake Manitoba, but we expect this year to have a sustained period of high water on just about all of our waterways and lakes as well that are impacted by flooding conditions this year.

So there will be ongoing challenges on how we relieve that water pressure on places like Lake Manitoba, and we'll have to be very diligent in taking a look at that, and that will have pressures on both sides to relieve some of that pressure and, at the same time, to drain more bodies of water into that lake. So there'll be counter pressures on both sides of that equation, and we'll have to take a look at that and see what role the Portage Diversion plays in that. But the Portage Diversion has played a very valuable function.

I believe the Minister for Emergency Measures in the House today indicated in his statement that in the absence of the Shellmouth Dam and in the absence of the Portage Diversion and in the absence of the floodway, that waters in Winnipeg would be up to 10 feet higher right now, which would exceed 1950 flood levels in the city. So these investments have prevented untold damage to our major metropolis.

Mr. McFadyen: And that's—the Premier's absolutely correct about the important role of those projects in the current situation. The—and again, this is a—the questions are really directed at the fact that there are other consequences that sometimes arise, that as you look forward, should be addressed to the best of the government's ability, recognizing that it's impossible to anticipate every possible outcome.

But one of the issues that is a significant one we're hearing from a lot of people, and I know he and his ministers are as well, are just the issues of shoreline erosion and water levels on Lake Winnipeg as well and in addition to the water quality issues which we'll get to. There are issues with high water levels on the lake and significant erosion. That was really illustrated at Victoria Beach and other places in the South Basin during the so-called weather bomb in October, 2010. Can the Premier just indicate what the government's approach is to dealing with those issues moving forward, recognizing that many of them have arisen fairly recently?

Mr. Selinger: Broadly, the approach is to work very closely with the locally elected officials in the municipalities and towns and in the area that are affected by these high water levels to find solutions to protect against erosion having a negative consequence for property owners there. And the challenge, of course, is to bring people together that finds a solution that doesn't cause a negative outcome for some property owners while benefiting others.

And this is the central challenge and it requires a form of local government and—with provincial support—leadership to address those challenges in a way that any solution arrived at doesn't leave some people worse off while others are better off, and it needs the ability to bring people together and to look at solutions that will get an outcome that's beneficial to everybody and minimize damage to as many property owners as possible. And that work is going on in, for example, the Victoria Beach area. People are endeavouring to work together to find a solution. Our provincial departments are involved with local authorities to do that as well as local property owners.

And there are some ideas on technical—technologies that can be brought into play that will protect shoreline erosion and, at the same time, make beaches available for broad public use and protect individual properties as well. They're complex solutions, in some cases, that require some further

engineering work to be done and some research to be done as to what the best technologies are, but that is our broad approach is to work with local authorities to find solutions that will be in the interests of all the folks that are affected by shoreline erosion in the area being impacted.

Mr. McFadyen: The—our understanding is that there's a committee or a group, Lake Winnipeg shoreline technical erosion committee, which is looking at the situation. Do you know whether that group has produced any reports or recommendations to date?

Mr. Selinger: I'll take that as notice and get the information for the member.

Mr. McFadyen: And if that group has produced any reports or recommendations, if possible, could we be provided with a copy of such?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we'll find out the status of any work that committee's done and see what's available for public consumption.

* (16:30)

Mr. McFadyen: One of the other frequent comments relates to the potential role that the retention of water by Hydro along northern rivers plays with respect to Lake Winnipeg levels. Whether or not that is a factor, I'm wondering if the Premier can indicate whether his government would be committed to holding full public hearings when Manitoba Hydro does seek a permanent licence in relation to its use of Lake Winnipeg.

Mr. Selinger: Well, as I understand it, the outlet provided by Manitoba Hydro increases the capacity of water to flow out of Lake Winnipeg, and that has been a benefit in the last couple of high-water years. And, if I understand it correctly, that outlet is working at full capacity, has been for several months increasing the outflows from Lake Winnipeg.

On the question of public hearings and the licencing process, there are procedures in place to deal with the licencing process, including obligations to consult under constitutional requirements, section 35 requirements, to consult with First Nations that are affected by those kinds of decisions.

So all the proper procedures will be followed with opportunity for public input.

Mr. McFadyen: I think there's some dispute over whether the outlet being used in the dam by Hydro speeds up the outflow from its natural state. We know that it's adjustable in terms of the way Hydro operates the dams, but the idea behind the dams was to retain and hold back water in order to maximize the amount of generating capacity. But we certainly recognize that that is adjustable and that the outflow can be sped up or slowed down depending on the operation of the dam.

But I think, whatever the engineering conclusion is, there's a significant public interest in what happens with Hydro and on Lake Winnipeg. And I wonder if the Premier can just commit that both First Nations and private property owners, or people with an interest in property around the lake, will be given ample notice and opportunity to participate in any hearings that are held with respect to the hydro licence.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, and again, these are important questions. I think the member may have correctly stated that the hydro outflow allows the lake to be regulated, including increasing the outflow beyond normal conditions and holding back water under other conditions.

And I remember many years ago, I believe it was a professor of engineering from Queen's University indicated that the regulation of Lake Winnipeg by Hydro actually reduced some of the erosion by not letting the water go up and down as rapidly as it might be under natural conditions.

But currently my understanding is that the outflow provided by Manitoba Hydro on Lake Winnipeg has reduced the amount of water being held by the lake to the benefit of people that are on the shoreline. In the absence of that outflow the lake water would be quite a bit higher.

And on the question of licencing—yes, there should be ample opportunity for people to participate in that. I understand those procedures are under way, and there is a section 35 requirement for people affected in First Nations communities, and there will be public hearings as well.

Mr. McFadyen: And I want to thank the Premier for that indication and just ask what the expected timetable is for those hearings.

Mr. Selinger: And again, I'll have to get that information for the member. That's again, this is a global question outside my Estimates. But we'll

endeavour to provide that information to the member.

Mr. McFadyen: And just in terms of the operation of the Shellmouth—the role of the Shellmouth Dam on the Assiniboine and the role it's playing today—can the Premier just indicate what plans the government has in terms of the operation of that dam and the plans for the release of additional water into the Assiniboine over the coming days and weeks?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we take advice from our officials on the most effective operation of that facility but, I believe the Minister of Emergency Measures indicated in his statement today that Shellmouth Dam has kept water in Brandon, for example, two feet lower than what might—it would otherwise be in the absence of that regulatory structure being there.

And I know that the officials took that dam, that Shellmouth Dam down as low as they could last winter. I think it was within two feet of bottom so that there was maximum capacity available to absorb the expected flows of water into it, and it has made a big difference, as I've just indicated, up to now.

It is possible and maybe even likely that in the next coming days with the amount of flows going in there, that it might have flows coming over the top. I think that was indicated by the minister earlier today during question period. But, again, the facility will be operated to minimize damage on people and property downstream of that facility. And that's why the structure was put in place—the originally, to provide additional protection inside of Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: And upstream of Lake of the Prairies and the Shellmouth Dam, Saskatchewan has just completed a new drain or channel from Fishing Lake, which makes its way ultimately to the Assiniboine River and into Lake of the Prairies and through Manitoba.

There's been some discussion about the letters that were exchanged and the agreement made on the Fishing Lake channel. Saskatchewan is confronted with a problem similar to that of Manitoba with respect to the Shoal Lakes, with rising water levels on Fishing Lake, and that channel has been constructed.

But it seems to us that the—apart from some agreement around the operation of that channel, the existence of that channel produces higher water flows into the Assiniboine at a time which is really inconvenient for the province, to put it mildly. And

I'm wondering why the Province would have agreed to the construction of that channel in current circumstances.

Mr. Selinger: I think the agreement that was arrived at was one that was beneficial to Manitoba in that the water cannot flow into Manitoba at a time that it will add additional problems for Manitoba. That's the specific nature of the agreement.

There's a level above which Manitoba can say, that level has been achieved. You cannot flow any more water, and they have agreed that they would not. And I think that—I'm remembering a number of 1,240 feet, if I've remembered it correctly, but I'll verify that with him. And that number has been achieved early on this spring, and they have agreed not to flow any water at a time that would add additional problems to Manitoba.

So the whole objective of the Fishing Lake negotiation with Saskatchewan was—they were looking for a way to flow water at a time that would not cause problems to Manitoba and relieve some of their problems. And we were looking for a solution that would not have a catastrophic or negative—unnatural flow of water at a time that would cause more problems for us.

So the arrangement arrived at was one that protects us when we need protection and allows them some relief at a time that will not cause problems in Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: And in terms of the impacts on the province's transportation network with the closure of Highway 75, which is happening this year and has happened in past years as well at considerable cost and inconvenience to everybody who uses it—can the Premier just indicate what the government's plans are to address Highway 75 going forward to avoid the need for future closures of this important route?

Mr. Selinger: That is an important question and, as the member knows, we've invested—I think it's at least \$75 million in the roadway in recent years—*[interjection]*—and that will rise to \$100 million by this summer, I'm informed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

What's happening at Morris—which is a sensitive spot and has the Morris River in that area going under a bridge, which provides access on Highway 75 to the town is there's hydrological studies or hydraulic studies that are—hydrological studies that are being done right now to take a look at engineering solutions for that area.

It's a complicated problem because just an automatic lifting of the bridge on the roadway would pose problems for the town of Morris in terms of the town not being that available for commercial purposes. And, on the other hand, leaving it where it is creates these potential closures at a time when there's a lot of water in the Red River Valley.

* (16:40)

So they're looking at all the options, including how to strengthen the roads east and west, Highway 23, and some work is being done this year, I believe, on Highway 23 to the west of Morris. I think there's about a million to a million and a half dollars of work being done there to strengthen a bridge to the west of the town, and then they're looking at possible solutions to ensure that the water in the Morris River doesn't overtop the bridge there so the road can stay open.

And a variety of solutions will be looked at, and we think it's important to provide the resources to solve that problem once the engineers have given us what they consider to be the most cost-effective alternatives and they've had an opportunity to consult with the local people in the area about those alternatives and which ones they find the most satisfactory.

Mr. McFadyen: And I thank the Premier for that response. A concern that was raised a number of years ago in connection with the floodway project was the state of primary dikes inside the city of Winnipeg, particularly in the northern part of the city. And my understanding of it, without being an engineer, my basic understanding of the situation was a concern that, if there was enough water flowing around the city of Winnipeg through the floodway, that there was the potential, given that the water level within the city would be significantly lower than the water level north of the floodway outlet—in some scenarios there was the potential for some backup of water essentially from Lockport south down the Red River channel, and that dikes inside the city of Winnipeg might not be sufficient to deal with that scenario should that happen.

Is the Premier aware of that issue and can he comment on whether that's something that the Province is looking at together with the City as a potential issue?

Mr. Selinger: I'm aware of some questions about whether those phenomena, in fact, will occur and do occur, and so the member's proper—properly has

raised it because I think it requires a very careful response in order to not create misinformation about how the floodway functions and what its consequences are under certain conditions. And, usually, they try to operate the floodway in such a way that it's only used when conditions in Winnipeg are such that to let the water rise further would cause serious damage in the city of Winnipeg. So, when they flow the water around it under those conditions, they try to do it in such a way that it doesn't create this backwater effect, but I'm going to ask for specific information on this so that we can be sure that as we discuss this topic, we've got the best professional advice possible and we don't create any misimpressions out there in this regard, because I think some of the early questions have raised alarms and I'm not sure all the information has been accurate that's been transmitted out there. So I think what I'd like to do is get accurate information for the member on this question.

Mr. McFadyen: And the Premier's quite right that the discussion is one of speculation about what might happen, and certainly engineers are in the best position to provide some amount of—some good advice on what can happen under different scenarios and, given that the issue was raised by professional engineers at one point, appreciate the fact that the Premier is looking at that issue.

On the issue of going forward and lessons learned from this year's experience, recognizing there's still lots going on in terms of immediate response, can the Premier just indicate what he would view as the top priorities or top lessons learned for the purposes of go-forward planning for future works to manage flood waters?

Mr. Selinger: Well, again, I don't think we should be in any way comfortable that the current year's events are over. I mean, we still haven't seen peaks and crests in Winnipeg or on the Assiniboine River in Winnipeg, and there's lots of water to flow yet. But I think one of the lessons that we've learned this year that it was very valuable to start early on the planning, given the information we had in the fall and some of the potential. I think the planning for a one—an upper-decile event was very, very useful planning. Nobody wants the upper-decile event to occur, but to plan for that possibility, I think, was extremely proactive on the part of the government and our public servants.

And so that has been helpful, and part of that planning was early communication with our partners in the municipal level and their emergency operations committees and their elected officials, because one of the things I've seen this year is just a lot of people being on the ball and thinking about the potential negative impacts of the spring waters flowing at high levels and doing some anticipatory work early on and good communication along the way in doing that.

I think the experience in Manitoba has allowed us—every event that has occurred has allowed us to improve our ability to work together and strengthen our capacity for communication. So it's not just the infrastructure investments that have been made, and we've made more this year, including in strengthening dikes along the Assiniboine River and in Brandon and elsewhere in Manitoba.

But I think it's that willingness for all levels of local and provincial leadership to work together, and officials at all levels to work together. And I think I'd have to include in that this year the willingness of jurisdictions outside of Manitoba to co-operate and us to co-operate with them on sharing information.

So those will be some of the early lessons. There's others, many others that I've seen along the way, including the use of some of the new technologies and the benefits of that. And—but it's a good reflection that we'll make once we're through all of these events, and things have started to literally come down in terms of water levels.

But there's many, many days to go before this event's over, and nobody should be complacent at this stage of the game. But technology, communication, early preparation would be some of the early lessons that I think we've gained from this experience this year.

Mr. McFadyen: Just in terms of the work now under way on the east-side road project, what is the Province's current financial commitment to the construction of the east-side road?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get the amount of money allocated in the budget for it this year. But there's ongoing work being done to do some of the preparatory work for the road construction, the all-weather road to be built, in most cases along the winter road pathways or close to them with some improvements to the road structure.

But I'll get the commitment in this year's budget and last year's budget for the member.

Mr. McFadyen: And can I just ask the Premier just to elaborate on the current status of the preparatory work and construction on that project?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'll undertake to get that information for the member.

Mr. McFadyen: And the—just on the licensing process, can the Premier just indicate or provide us with a copy of the licence or indicate what the licence for that project covers in terms of the scale of the project?

Mr. Selinger: I'll inquire into what the licensing arrangements are and the status of them for the member in terms of the East Side Road Authority.

Mr. McFadyen: And just in terms of the management of the project, can the Premier just indicate what is the rationale for having the Floodway Authority oversee the development of the east-side road project?

Mr. Selinger: I think, generally, the rationale was the success that the Floodway Authority had in building the floodway and how well they did it and their ability to allow for some new contractors, Aboriginal contractors, to get involved in the process.

And that expertise was already in place with respect to the floodway, and I think there was a feeling that that expertise could be retained and applied to the East Side Road Authority challenge as well, which is a significant challenge because it's, you know, it's an area of the province where there's only been winter roads heretofore. And to build the all-weather road requires the ability to work with local stakeholders, First Nations, contractors, and many of those people in the Floodway Authority had developed that skill during the floodway project and that capacity. And it seemed like a good idea to take that and apply it to this new challenge on the east side.

* (16:50)

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just indicate in terms of cash flow, is money advanced to that authority for them to spend as they incur expenditures on the project, or is—are the funds expended directly through the department of highways?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get the specifics on how the money's administered for the member and how—what the role of the authority is in managing that money.

Mr. McFadyen: Just on the Waverley West development, can the Premier provide just an update on the progress of that development and in particular just a breakdown of expenditures on the part of the Manitoba government versus revenues?

Mr. Selinger: I'll undertake to get that information for the member.

Mr. McFadyen: With respect to MPI, as the Premier knows, there's been a lot of public discussion on MPI and in particular the PUB order of a couple of weeks ago. Just going back, the PUB has expressed on several occasions concerns about a lack of transparency at MPI and, in fact, filed a lawsuit in order to gain access to information that the PUB felt was important to do their job as a regulator. Does the Premier share any of the concerns that have been raised by the PUB with respect to transparency at MPI?

Mr. Selinger: Well, the member will know that we support the role of PUB as a public regulator and we think it's a very valuable role that it plays in the province, and we've always believed that MPI should share information with the PUB and that they should be constructive in sharing that information. And where they have a concern that some of the information being requested might in some way impair their commercial interests, that they should sit down with the PUB and see what they could do to sort that out to the mutual benefit of both parties.

Mr. McFadyen: Has there been any communication to the government's appointees to the board of MPI expressing desire on the part of government for the corporation to be more transparent and open with Manitobans and with the regulator?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the statement I've just made is on the public record and I believe that statement is one that I'm hoping board members would take notice of.

Mr. McFadyen: One of the other issues at MPI that has generated some discussion is the purchase of the offices at Cityplace. Can the Premier provide us with a breakdown of the—or with the current vacancy rate within that building and any data with respect to revenue generated from the leased space within that building?

Mr. Selinger: I'm sure it's not a surprise to the member that I'd have to get that information for him, and I'm sure the minister responsible for MPI would be happy to answer it as well. But if he would like it through Executive Council, I'll endeavour to see what we can get for him in that regard.

Mr. McFadyen: I would have been very pleasantly surprised if that information was available at the Premier's fingertips and perhaps even a little bit concerned. So I thank him for getting back to us on that one.

Just—we covered a little bit of ground on water levels on Lakes Manitoba and Winnipeg. I just want to come back to the requirement that's being placed on the city with respect to waste water, which seems to run against the advice that's being provided by scientists, some of whom fear that the provincial order may make the algae problem on Lake Winnipeg worse than it currently is. What is—can the Premier just indicate again what the province's rationale is for its current position and indicate whether they remain open to the possibility of revisiting that order as he indicated, I believe, about a year ago?

Mr. Selinger: The short answer is that we have taken advice from the Clean Environment Commission, which has reviewed these matters and sought scientific information that would support their recommendations, and we have asked them to review that again and take a look at it and see if there's been any change. There are different views among some scientists about the role of nitrogen. There does seem to be a more of a consensus around the role of phosphorus.

What is occurring at the moment is there's further research being done on prairie lakes and lakes that drain agricultural areas, and as I understand it, there's further information being compiled on what the impacts are on freshwater lakes, of agricultural areas and areas that drain into lakes on the prairies.

And so that information will have to be taken into account as it becomes available, but it's really, I think, the government trying to get the best advice possible from its Clean Environment Commission on how to best protect the future of the lake as a resource, not only for people that make a livelihood on it—and the member knows there's a pretty active fishery there—but also people that live on it and also

people that recreate on it as cottage owners and people that go to the various beaches, et cetera, there.

It is a very, very valuable natural asset in this province, and we want to make sure that we're taking those actions necessary to prevent it from nutrifying and having algae blooms which destroy the quality of the experience people have with that lake either commercially or recreationally or in terms of living there.

So we take seriously some of the challenges that the lake is experiencing in terms of its quality, and we'll be looking at the best advice we can possibly get on how to strengthen the capacity of the lake to be a healthy lake and serve all Manitobans as a healthy lake.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank the Premier for the response. I'm just moving over to another significant initiative. Can the Premier just provide an update on the CentrePort project?

Mr. Selinger: The specifics on that I'll endeavour to get for him, but clearly the CentrePort Way is going ahead as a infrastructure project.

The board of CentrePort has worked up another business plan. There's been some serious work done on acquiring land for CentrePort by the government on behalf of CentrePort. There are some issues that are being worked on in terms of servicing land within the CentrePort mandate and territory, but, as the member knows, we view CentrePort as a long-term asset that we want to develop in Manitoba for the future strength of our economy. It's a—an asset that brings together rail—three major railways—major trucking companies, the potential to ship in and out of Churchill by rail and ship. But also it just encompasses a major piece of land within Winnipeg and just outside of Winnipeg in some of the adjoining or contiguous municipalities that we believe, with the growth of our economy, will be needed for future manufacturing and industrial development in Manitoba.

So we are continuing to work very closely with CentrePort on those infrastructure investments, and there will be some legislation brought forward this spring as well to facilitate CentrePort's capacity to move quickly to provide economic opportunities in this province.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, short question.

Mr. McFadyen: Sure. Just back to Waverley West, I just wanted to make one concern back on the record more for information as part of the review related to the school issue. It was a question that I raised in question period some time ago, and I don't know whether anything has changed since the question was raised, but it was a very significant increase in the land price that was being requested by the developer,

who, in this case, was Manitoba Housing, of the school board—

Madam Chairperson: Order. The time being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: And now being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 26, 2011

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