

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 26, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 210—The Residential Tenancies
Amendment Act**

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Minto, that Bill 210, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Rondeau: This bill requires landlords to use energy-efficient appliances when they replace them in residential dwellings. Mr. Speaker, often the renter must pay high utility bills for using non-energy-efficient appliances.

Mr. Speaker, the difference in price between energy-efficient appliances and non-energy-efficient appliances has narrowed over the years to the point where the price difference is usually less than \$100. The return on investment of this type of appliance can often be recovered in less than one-year time period. It makes sense economically and environmentally.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by D. Block, A. Kreutz, A. Every and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

**Beausejour District Hospital—
Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability**

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority region.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by F. Reis, C. Reis, P. Oneschuk and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Cottage Fees and Rents— Transparency and Accountability

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government has treated Manitoba cottagers with disrespect by increasing cottage fees and rents.

Manitoba cottagers are willing to pay their fair share, but the provincial government has arbitrarily decided to raise cottage fees and rents by as much as 750 per cent without any clear indication that the money will be used for improved amenities or services for cottagers.

Under sections 18(3) and 20 of The Provincial Parks Act, the financial estimates and statements of each park district are to be prepared and maintained for a review by any owner or occupier in a park district.

The member from Flin Flon was quoted in Hansard on March 27, 2014, suggesting that cottages be removed from provincial parks and be made part of a municipality.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to honour the requirements found in The Provincial Parks Act and to consider working with Manitoba cottagers to ensure transparency and accountability when it comes to their service fees and rents.

This petition is signed by K. Taft, D. Coleman, D. Biles and many other fine Manitobans.

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route-Information Request

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating-current transmission line set to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

(2) The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 to 60 metres and be located every four, five hundred metres.

(3) The preferred route designated for the line will see the hydro towers come in close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternate route that was also considered.

(4) The alternate route would have seen the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and eventually terminate at the same spot at the US border.

(5) The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

(6) Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing represents the least

intrusive option to residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

This petition is signed by M. Giesbrecht, G. Watson, T. Plett and many more fine Manitobans.

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

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

These high occupancy rates are creating the conditions where many individuals requiring long-term care are being displaced far away from their families and their home community.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

* (13:40)

And this is signed by E. Webb, M. Bird, A. Friesen and many others.

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

And this is the background to this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

And this petition is signed by K. Walsh, K. Lylyk and S. Jersah and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And the background for this petition is as follows:

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

(2) All points—or all trends point to an increasingly aging population which will require additional personal-care-home facilities.

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

This petition's signed by W. Ross, L. Hart and G. Martin and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

These higher—high occupancy rates are creating the conditions where many individuals requiring long-term care are being displaced far away from their families and home community.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by D. Kereluik, G. Kereluik, T. Watts and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Mohinder Saran (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the supplemental information for Legislative review for the Department of Housing and Community Development for 2015-16.

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

Introduction of Guests

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

Seated in our public gallery we have with us this afternoon Lisa Carlson, a teacher at Elm Creek collegiate, and two law students, who are the guests of the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen).

And also seated in the public gallery we have with us this afternoon, from Kelvin High School we have 25 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Gerry Urbanovich. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

And also seated in the public gallery we have with us today Patrick Betz, principal of—for Sansome School, who is a guest of the honourable Minister of Health (Ms. Blady).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Former NDP Political Staff Severance Package Costs

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, last week we had asked some questions of the Premier in respect of seven former staff members who had been incented to leave by the Premier and had—many of them had

gone elsewhere to find work, at great expense to Manitoba taxpayers, approximately two thirds of a million dollars and counting.

I asked the Premier if he anticipated there would be more such backroom, sweetheart deals made using Manitoba taxpayers' money, and he said no. Yesterday we learned, however, that there were three more staff who were making their way down the Trans-Canada or Yellowhead routes to points west.

And so I have to ask the Premier at this point: We were at two thirds of a million or about \$670,000. What is the running total now on severance payments that the government is making to former friends of the Premier?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, again, we have an example of the double standard here. We have seen that during the time when the member opposite was in government, their severance payments, their 'sevence' payments, were very close in the amount for seven key staff members that our severance payments were, a situation where they made out severance payments and then they oppose them. The member himself has received nearly \$100,000 in severance payments. When a person voluntarily decides to move to another job, there is no severance involved, and that's the general policy in the case that we've talked about here.

The member is practising a double standard. He doesn't want to acknowledge that he waited 16 years to accept that there was very significant severance payments during the time that they were in office. We made that information to the public available as soon as possible.

NDP Leadership Campaign Support Staff Contracts

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier speaks of transparency and then hides. And he has not given us the information that Manitobans deserve to know in respect of the severance.

Now, if these people did not receive severance, this is abject proof that the Premier needed not incent the other seven to go and leave the province. And, in fact, I would ask the Premier, in respect of Heather Grant-Jury—Heather Grant-Jury is a person who the Premier hired from the United Food and Commercial Workers union. That's the union, you may recall, Mr. Speaker, that was jumping up and down when Gary Doer became leader, saying, the machine works, the

machine works. Well, apparently, it worked for the Premier. But it isn't working for Manitobans.

Ms. Grant-Jury was hired to a five-month contract, six figures. That coincided almost exactly with the leadership campaign that he ran out of his office.

* (13:50)

Now, isn't this an obvious case of using the office of the Premier as a campaign headquarters? And if it was such, then why did the Premier use taxpayers' money for his personal benefit and for his own leadership campaign?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite's on the record as saying, I'm not talking about individual staffers with you guys and I never will. So here we have another example of the double standard. The member doesn't want to talk about staff members that have left his employ, even if they were employed by caucus.

If we hire somebody in this office on a secondment arrangement, we've made that contract available to the public. We've disclosed it, and everybody that comes here works on the job and they also can engage in other activities in their own time, just like members opposite did.

But here's the difference. The member opposite wants to talk about individuals except when it comes to his own individuals, his own former employees. And that's just another example of what we see from the member opposite: a continuous double standard, one set of rules for him and the way he operates, a different set of rules for everybody else. That level of hypocrisy is unacceptable.

Mr. Pallister: To assuage the Premier's concerns, I assure him that no one in my office or in the PC organization on this side of the House was engaged in helping me in my leadership campaign. I'm asking him about his.

Mr. Speaker, no one held the position in his office before Heather Grant-Jury was hired by him. There was no one in that position. There is no one in that position today. So the only time that he needed Heather Grant-Jury to work in his office was when he was running, out of his office, to be the leader of the New Democratic Party. That's the only time.

Now, the MLA for Thompson did not have a taxpayer-paid assistant at his side throughout the campaign. The MLA for Seine River did not have a taxpayer-paid assistant working for her campaign.

Would the Premier admit today in this House that what he did with Ms. Heather Grant-Jury gave him an unfair advantage in the leadership race, and wasn't he cheating?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, here we have another underlined example of the double standard that the member opposite practises. He won't talk about any of his staff.

He won't talk about a staff member that blogged that they supported an inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and suddenly found themselves unemployed for having an opinion, for having an opinion in a country where freedom of expression is a constitutional right, and suddenly, then, they lose their job.

He won't talk about that, but he wants to vilify other people that offer themselves for public service at a time when there was a need for people to come in and provide stability as we move forward to do the job of serving the people of Manitoba every single day when we come to work. That's what we do.

The member opposite focuses on a double-standard approach. He doesn't deal with the big policy issues of the day. We've never had a question from him on a major policy issue of the day, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he could start by addressing what is his program for the future of Manitoba. We've never seen that.

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

Mr. Pallister: I notice the Premier asking a lot of questions, and I appreciate him using this time to prepare to do that in the future too.

Now, given the razor-thin majority that the Premier won at the NDP leadership convention, and given the fact that the bosses at UFCW were given 160 delegates to influence the outcome of the leadership race, and given the secondment of his close associate from UFCW into his office and her close connections therein, and giving the fact that that appointment period coincided exactly with his leadership campaign: Would the MLA for St. Boniface not agree that paying her from his campaign funds rather than asking the people of Manitoba to assist him in his leadership bid would have been the fair and right thing to do?

Mr. Selinger: So, Mr. Speaker, again, double-standard approach.

When the member was a Member of Parliament, he was touring Manitoba on a listening tour, while a Member of Parliament, to test the waters whether he should run for the leadership of the provincial party. And while he was doing that, he had an assistant travelling with him. And when he was challenged on this, he flatly refused to acknowledge that he was using public resources to test the waters for his own leadership.

We still haven't seen an apology from him for that abuse of public taxpayers' money, another classic example of how the member practises a double standard: one set of rules for him, a different set of rules for everybody else. If he practised what he preached, he would've resigned.

Mr. Pallister: He's losing so many spinners he has to repeat the same spin five times in a row. Mr. Speaker, he needs more spinners on his staff.

The Globe and Mail called the Premier's attempt to hang on to the leadership while remaining premier a, quote, abject farce. Elite members of his party said that the Premier had stopped listening. The rebel five said the Premier's priorities had been moved ahead of those of Manitobans, and all of them seemed to have been right in their observations.

Instead of tired talking points, maybe the Premier needs to acknowledge that not everyone else is wrong when they ask him to come clean and be honest and be straightforward about the information that Manitobans deserve to have about how their tax dollars are being wasted by him for his benefit and for no one else's.

Now, would the Premier admit that he used the taxpayers' dollars for his leadership campaign, do the right thing and let his campaign reimburse the money that Manitobans have had stolen from them for his benefit?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, a prominent local broadcaster had a quote about the Leader of the Opposition prior to taking on that role: If the member from Fort Whyte is lucky, those who vote will forget how the member from Fort Whyte manipulated voters and sponged off the taxpayers. That's a quote from a local prominent broadcaster in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, it was clearly the member opposite that was caught using his salary and the resources of an assistant to test the waters for a run at the provincial leadership just days after he was re-elected to the House of Commons, and did he ever apologize to the public for that? No, he did not. Did

he ever acknowledge that there was something wrong? No, he did not.

Double standard, Mr. Speaker, one set of rules only for him, different set of rules for everybody else, hypocrisy in action.

Mr. Pallister: Hypocrisy personified.

Obviously these questions have touched a nerve—obviously these questions have touched a nerve. The questions involved asking the Premier to come clean about the use of taxpayers' dollars to pay excessive severance to former friends who he promised would not lose their jobs. These questions centre around his use of taxpayers' dollars to employ good friends from the UFCW in his office for the precise period he was running for the leadership of his own party, and clearly these questions centre on the nature of the fairness of his treatment and use of those people in contrast to the resources that were available to his colleagues in Thompson and Seine River.

Now, if he gained an unfair advantage, Mr. Speaker, from the use of taxpayers' dollars in his office, he should address the issue head-on, and I've given him ample opportunity to do that today. His failure to do so tells me that he knows he cheated.

Will he admit today that he cheated so he could sit in that chair and pretend to be the Premier of Manitoba for a little longer?

Mr. Selinger: We canvassed all of these questions yesterday and I gave the member very thorough answers.

Now, let's talk about his behaviour, Mr. Speaker. Within days of being re-elected in 2006, he was touring the province testing the waters to run for a provincial leadership race. He was considering resigning from his Member of Parliament seat within a month of being re-elected in 2006. A by-election at the federal level can cost up to \$900,000. He was prepared to incur an expense of \$900,000 so he could run for the leader of the provincial Progressive Conservative Party just days after being elected and using government resources while he did that.

That is a classic example of the abuse of his resources and his role as a recently re-elected Member of Parliament. That is a classic example of a double standard, that he has one set of rules for himself, a different set of rules for everybody else. That is hypocrisy in action.

* (14:00)

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III Costs Application for Rate Increase

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): This morning at a breakfast speech to the members of the Manitoba chamber, the Premier again repeated an untruth about Bipole III line. The Premier said, and I quote: The Bipole III line won't cost Manitobans a dime. It will pay for—by export sales. It's like buying a house and renting it out. End of quote.

That's not what Hydro says in their rate application. They say they need higher rates because of increased borrowing requirements and other financial costs to build Keeyask and Bipole III.

I ask the Premier: Who is misleading Manitobans? Is it Hydro in their rate application or is it the Premier of this province?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, it was—I was very pleased to speak to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce this morning because the story they heard was a story they understand. The Manitoba economy is generating thousands of jobs. The Manitoba economy is one of the fastest growing economies in the country. The Manitoba economy is seeing wage increases for the working people of Manitoba, \$40 a week on average, over \$2,000 a year.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has said he would refuse to build hydro for exports. That's when the bill goes up. Hydro's export revenues over the next 30 years are expected to be in the order of \$29 billion. That will pay down the cost of new generation and new transmission.

And when export revenues come to Manitoba and lower the cost for new transmission and new generation, that keeps the rates low for Manitobans, among the lowest rates in North America, something the members opposite are in complete denial about.

Mr. Eichler: This is the same First Minister that went door to door in the last election, said that it was nonsense to raise the PST, and he has no credibility at all, absolutely none.

Mr. Speaker, on September 24th, testifying before the committee of this House, Scott Thomson, the CEO of Manitoba Hydro, said, and I quote: Manitoba ratepayers will pay for Bipole III just like they pay for all their assets that are installed to serve their needs. End of quote.

That's not what every member of the NDP said in the last election in the mail. And I'll table this report once again for the members opposite that says bipole will not cost taxpayers a single cent.

Manitobans deserve, who will be—who is misleading this House, Mr. Speaker? Is it the CEO of Manitoba Hydro or it is this government?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is neither.

The story is very clear. When new assets are brought on, Manitoba Hydro makes applications to ensure those 'ats' are properly financed. They also have contracted for export sales outside of Manitoba. They make it very clear that those export sales reduce the costs of new generation, they reduce the cost of transmission, transmission which ensures the reliability of electricity to the Manitoba economy, a \$66-billion economy. The lights go out for a week in Manitoba, that can cost over \$1 billion.

Members opposite had an opportunity to build additional reliable transmission in Manitoba, and they decided to ignore it. They were so busy privatizing the telephone system, they neglected to look after the hydroelectric system.

We know we need that additional transmission for reliability. We know that we have export sales. Those export sales will keep the cost of Manitoba Hydro among the lowest rates in North America.

Mr. Eichler: Last time I checked, Manitoba Hydro belongs to the people, not this government.

Six compound rate increases—[interjection] Maybe they should listen, Mr. Speaker. I'll give them a chance to get it right. Six compound rate increases since this First Minister has been in office, and now they're asking for a seventh.

Simple question, Mr. Speaker. The CEO of Manitoba Hydro says we'll pay for Bipole III just like they pay for all other Hydro assets. The Premier said it won't cost taxpayers a single cent.

Manitobans deserve, who is lying? Is it the CEO of Hydro or is it the member from St. Boniface? The member should maybe tell us—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

I think I've been way too lenient this question period, and I'm going to have to tighten up quite a bit here.

The honourable member from Lakeside just used the word lying in reference to a member of this Assembly, and I've been very lenient with the allowance that I have had here in this question period for the language that's been chosen, very, very, very close to the line with respect to unparliamentary language, and I'm going to tighten up right now.

I'm going to ask the honourable member for Lakeside to withdraw the word lie that he just put on the record and to make sure that that is very clear and unequivocal. So I'm going to ask the honourable member for Lakeside.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did not say lie, I said lying, but I do withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable member for Lakeside.

Now, the honourable First Minister, to proceed with the answer, please.

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the member from Lakeside asking us to remember who owns Manitoba Hydro. The people of Manitoba own Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker. The people of Manitoba own Manitoba Hydro, and I only say—and we will keep it that way, not the members opposite.

So I say to the member, I say to the Leader of the Opposition, why did he forget that when he sold off the telephone system? That was owned by the people of Manitoba. We had among the lowest rates in Canada. Now we have among the highest rates in Canada. They forget, double standard all over again. When they're in government they think they can do what they want and pull the wool over the eyes of Manitobans.

We will protect Manitoba Hydro. We will keep the lowest rates in North America, and the member opposite is waiting for his chance to privatize it and we know that.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

The honourable member for Charleswood has the floor.

Paramedic Self-Regulation Release of Advisory Council Report

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, self-regulation is about better patient care and improved patient safety.

Yesterday the Minister of Health seemed to agree when she said, and I quote, "self-regulation can provide a wonderful place for the—ensuring the safety for all Manitobans." End quote. Her actions speak otherwise.

Can the Minister of Health tell us: Why, then, did she sit on the advisory council report on paramedic self-regulation for three months before making it public?

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I'd like to thank the member for the question.

And, as we all know, that this report is public. It was made public not too long ago.

And I can assure all members of this Chamber that when it was received on December 30th, the very—the letter itself mentions that the council looks forward to meeting with me, as the minister, to discuss the report and its recommendations. The scheduling of both a very busy council and myself, and the questions that we both had, meant that the meeting happened as soon as possible in March and the report was released right afterwards.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health received the report in December. She sat on it until March. Perhaps she was too busy securing support for this Premier (Mr. Selinger) who is trying to hang on to his job instead of having laser-like focus on doing her own job, and that is improving patient care and patient safety.

So I'll ask the Minister of Health again: Why did she sit on this report for three months? She had an option. She could have made the report public much sooner. She chose not to. Why did she sit on that report? It's about patient safety and better patient care. Why did she sit on it for three months?

Ms. Blady: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to again thank the member for the question and reiterate that this is the first report ever to be drafted by the health professions advisory committee, and it is important that we get it right. The process, I admit, has been quite long, but we do not want to rush it without a full understanding of the council's recommendation. I wanted to make sure that I was able to discuss, as they had desired to discuss, with them all of the recommendations and the implications. So when they submitted their report, they asked to meet with me. That meeting took place as soon as everyone's schedules aligned and, again, as we committed to MGEU and to PAM, the report has now been made public.

And I'd like to remind folks that HPAC is an independent body. The report they submitted has not changed in any way, and we respect the work that they and the paramedics do in making that application and the work that they do in the front lines of health care.

Consultation Process

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health had plenty of time to make that report public. She chose not to.

Yesterday the minister refused to answer the question as to when further consultations will begin regarding self-regulation of paramedics.

We'd like to ask today if she will commit that these consultations will start before the summer months, that she will not stall and sit on this issue any longer. Will she commit to that today?

Ms. Blady: As usual, a day late and a dollar short.

HPAC is already working with PAM, and I understand PAM's position and why they have asked HPAC and PAM to work together in the public interest.

What I can't understand is why the Opposition Leader and members opposite would seek to involve themselves in what should be a non-partisan, non-political process. Members opposite have always treated this as a political football, and that is inappropriate and it also raises real concerns as to how they would treat any number of issues that require the government to act in public interest.

*(14:10)

Flooding Case Concern Gypsumville Businesses

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, last August the Minister of Agriculture wrote to Mr. Chris Rawluk from Gypsumville and advised him that the NDP government would provide a low-interest loan to the Rawluk store which would help get them through the ongoing impact resulting from the removal of flood victims on Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba. Then the minister changed his mind and decided no assistance was available.

Mr. Speaker, why would the Minister of Agriculture send this letter to the Rawluks when he had no intention of providing assistance in the first place?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): We understand the challenges that Mr. Rawluk faced during the flood events, and actually when the 2011, 2012 continued to hamper all people associated in the whole watershed that started from the Alberta boundaries and carries into the province of Manitoba. We know the importance of working together with the federal government. And when we talked about the DFA programs and emergency, we continue to continue to talk about the opportunities to work with individuals.

We've made some successes with individuals about Lake Manitoba. The agriculture industry definitely suffered. So did the Aboriginals' areas also suffered because of the flood.

And we continue to work with individuals of the importance that historical events have provided. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Pedersen: This is just more mismanagement and false statements from this NDP government, Mr. Speaker.

Rawluk fine foods and True Value Hardware in Gypsumville is—has suffered tremendous financial losses since 2011 through no fault of their own. With three of the four First Nations still not back in their home communities, it has now come to the point where the Rawluks may have to close their store, which has been in operation since 1953.

Why would the Minister of Agriculture send a letter offering assistance and then turn around and tell the Rawluks no assistance is available?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me repeat the answer to the previous question as well. We continue to work with the federal government when we have unusual flood events that continue to work with.

We continue to work with the—Mr. Rawluk. We had offered opportunities of—through—in—loan opportunities through various organizations. But I also respect the privacy of the member that's being discussed, that we need to consider of his due diligence, and we will continue to work with the individual. We have offered some choices, but unfortunately, at this point in time, no further discussion takes place.

I also respect Mr. Rawluk's privacy, and I respect that from the member opposite as well.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Pedersen: The only thing continuing is the stalling of this government. Four years after the flood event, 2,000 people still out of their homes, Rawluk fine foods' customer base destroyed due to NDP mismanagement.

Mr. Chris Rawluk is up in the gallery today. Will the Minister of Agriculture agree to meet with the Rawluks today?

Mr. Kostyshyn: To the last question, yes, I would gladly meet with Mr. Rawluk and whoever it is.

But I also want to also emphasize what the Province has done since we have been faced with the challenge, the 2011 flood, and these are strictly provincial dollars, Mr. Speaker, that we've been involved in for a lot of years: the Lake Manitoba emergency flood protection program; the Lake Manitoba flood assistance program for cottage owners; for the Lake Manitoba Pasture Flooding Assistance program; also the Greenfeed Assistance Program; the 2011 spring blizzard livestock mortality program; the Shoal Lakes Agricultural Flooding Assistance Program; excess moisture program; and also the Dauphin River Flood Assistance Program.

And also, let's be respectable that the federal minister said, we do not pay for flood events beyond one year—

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

Lake Manitoba Flood Victims Housing Recovery Timeline

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): And people are still out of their homes.

Four years ago Slave Lake had a devastating fire; 374 homes and many businesses were lost. There was over \$1 billion in damages. Today Slave Lake is 90 per cent recovered. Mitigation's in place. People are back in their homes and businesses.

Four years ago, Lake Manitoba and St. Martin were artificially flooded. Today 2,000 people remain homeless.

Why has this NDP government broke its promises and failed so miserably at addressing the victims left homeless by the 2011 flood?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, not a day goes by in which work isn't put in place to provide a long-term historical resettlement for the communities involved.

I want to note, Mr. Speaker, it's very important to put on the record the work that our Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) has done in working with the chiefs in that area, working with the federal government.

And let's understand why people are still away from home, and that is because they literally had nowhere to go back home to, and not just because of impacts of 2011 and 2014 but because of chronic problems, Mr. Speaker, because of housing conditions, high water tables that go back decades, and that's because there never was an outlet from Lake St. Martin.

And by the way, Mr. Speaker, this government built the emergency outlet and we're going to build the permanent outlet. That is the comprehensive plan for the people around that area. We'll get people back home and get the flood protection they need.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, in 2013 the city of Calgary had a devastating flood. Seventy-five thousand people were displaced. Damages were over \$5 billion. Today they are totally recovered. Businesses are open. People are back in their homes.

Mr. Speaker, four years after the 2011 flood, 2,000 Manitobans remain homeless.

Why has this NDP government so badly mismanaged the 2011 flood file?

Mr. Ashton: I'm very surprised that the member opposite would use Calgary as a comparison to Manitoba. *[interjection]* Well, why not? Because Calgary has one-in-25-year flood protection. In our capital city, our main city, in Winnipeg, we have one-in-700-year flood protection.

Mr. Speaker, they had flooding in 2005. They commissioned a report. They didn't even release it publicly until just a couple of years ago, and they have not yet acted on that.

We have put in place \$1 billion in investment in flood protection. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to pick on Calgary, because I get the feeling over the next few years things are going to get better there too, probably because they're going to follow the Manitoba model.

Mr. Briese: I would remind the minister that the people around Lake Manitoba apparently have two- and four-year flood protection.

In 2013 High River suffered major flooding, total evacuation, hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. Today they are close to full recovery. People are back in their community.

In Manitoba 2,000 people remain homeless four years after the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin flood.

My question is simple: When can the 2011 flood victims expect to be back in their homes?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I think the member's missed the point. He says, when are they going to be back in their homes. We're building new homes in co-operation with the First Nations in higher ground in a flood-protected area, again, under the leadership of the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson). We're also building not just the emergency protection with Lake St. Martin but also permanent flood protection.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite, we're following the Manitoba model, which is after a major flood what you do is you sit down and you work in partnership, in this case, with the First Nations and with the federal government. The reality is over the next period of time on Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, our flood protection won't be in-one-in-25-years like it is in Calgary. It's going to be up to one-in-200-year flood protection, one of the highest standards in the country. That's the Manitoba model.

Air Ambulance Service Request for Proposals

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, it was obvious in the Premier's answers to my questions yesterday that he's not up to date on what's happening in the emergency medical system in Manitoba.

I asked about the basic air ambulance service, a fixed-wing system which involves numerous companies licensed to provide this service, including Perimeter Aviation, Keewatin Air, Sky North Air, Mississippi Airways, Fast Air and SkyMedical. In order to ensure a more accountable, standardized quality service, the EMS report recommended immediate action to include a request for proposals

to be issued for the delivery of basic air ambulance services.

It's now been more than two years. Why has there yet been no request for proposals put out?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the EMS review was a very important process that we went through to improve emergency services in Manitoba, and the member will recall yesterday that many of those recommendations have already been implemented.

We have advanced paramedic training in place now. We're moving forward on that. We've made very significant investments in communications equipment and dispatching facilities in Manitoba. We've made very significant investments in additional paramedics, quite frankly, 1,500 in the province of Manitoba, 290 when we came into office, an increase of over 500 per cent.

* (14:20)

We've got the STARS air helicopter system that's available since 2009 in Manitoba, and the fixed-wing service is an important service and it needs to be in place. We have some of our own internal capacity for fixed-wing service for ambulance, including a couple of refurbished jets that are available in Manitoba.

All of these resources are part of our total package of providing services to people, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to find ways to improve services to Manitobans regardless of where they live in the province.

Rural Paramedic Services Wages and Working Conditions

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): In fact, relatively few of the recommendations have been implemented; at best, very few.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is not fully aware of the extreme rural-urban divide that he and the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) have created within the paramedics' pay and working conditions. Rural paramedics have an average of 25 per cent lower wages than those in the city of Winnipeg.

The result of this large difference in pay scale is that there are 116 advanced-care paramedics in Winnipeg and only six in rural Manitoba, as very few advanced-care paramedics will work for the low and inequitable wages in rural areas.

Why has the Premier allowed such a large rural-urban divide to happen on his watch?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we've made dramatic improvements in paramedic service in rural Manitoba. When we first came into office, 80 per cent—80 per cent—of the service was done by volunteers. Many excellent people volunteered their time to do that. There are now—it has now gone the reverse. The overwhelming amount of service is provided by full-time, professionally trained paramedics in Manitoba, with modern equipment, modern ambulances, GPS technology and a modern dispatch system that operates out of Brandon, and they are supported by air helicopter service as well as air service.

So we will move forward on all these recommendations that have been put forward. *[interjection]* We are moving on it right now, to answer the question for the member from Charleswood. We are making progress every single day.

And I can only remind all the members opposite, including the member from River Heights, every time we've put money on the table to make investments in technology and equipment and staffing and budgets that will increase these services in Manitoba, the members opposite vote against it.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the rural-urban divide is not just about wages. Indeed, for paramedics working in rural Manitoba, the working conditions are often severe and have been labelled dangerous, with shifts sometimes lasting up to 36 hours or even days at a time without a rest.

Under these stressful working conditions, it has been identified that 73 per cent of paramedics are in need of psychological support and 38 per cent of paramedics are aware of a paramedic who has contemplated suicide. This says something horrible about the working conditions, and yet this Premier doesn't seem to care how severe it has gotten.

When will the Premier act and provide fair and safe working conditions for paramedics in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Because we do care about front-line service deliverers in Manitoba, last year we increased the number of rural paramedic positions by an additional 25 positions in Manitoba. We have announced the 16-seat advanced-care paramedic program and we are going to make sure

that we continue to provide supports and services and technology and all the necessary tools for them to be able to do a good job.

And I only remind the member opposite and the members of the opposition that we are bringing forward legislation in this session for post-traumatic stress disorder presumptive coverage, which means that front-line service workers will be able to get that coverage more rapidly because it will be assumed that it's a part of their employment that caused that post-traumatic stress disorder. That program will come forward in legislation and it will have a strong prevention component to that as well, to make sure that people can avoid having to contract PTSD, Mr. Speaker, and get and have that symptoms upon them by having safe working conditions.

We will have very significant improvements in legislation. I look forward to all the members opposite passing that as rapidly as possible when it's introduced in the Legislature very soon.

River East Transcona School Division Trades and Technology Forum for Girls

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Our—yesterday our government announced a first-of-its-kind forum in Canada to focus on encouraging girls to consider careers in science, technology, engineering, math and the skilled trades.

I am particularly excited about this announcement as a mother. I want my daughters to have a—have strong female role models and encourage them to pursue and expand their interests. This event for young girls complements the excellent initiatives already being offered for older girls and women in Manitoba.

Can the Minister of Family Services please tell us about this new forum for young girls?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Yesterday Sparking Interest brought together 70–72 girls from grades 5 and 6 to Dr. Bernie Wolfe school at River East Transcona School Division where they participated on hands-on activities led by women in the trades themselves.

They had interesting workshops; I'll explain a few to you. The PEX work workshop allowed them to make hula hoops. They laid bricks. They were involved in flood protection. They built frames in the construction workshop, as well as—and they also were involved in geology, IT, as well as pipefitting.

While they were working in their workshops, the teachers also were working on finding out ways to ensure that they are inspiring young women to take on non-traditional jobs.

I'm very excited about this. This is another action we're taking to support jobs and our economy.

Emergency Medical Services Review Implementation of Recommendations

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the EMS review was conducted and many recommendations were brought forward, and to date there's only been one that's been implemented.

There are many recommendations written within the review that would benefit directly the residents, both permanent and seasonal, of the Lac du Bonnet constituency, Mr. Speaker.

Why is this Health Minister dragging her feet, or is it because she was preoccupied from the months of December to March?

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question. There is no question that EMS service is critically important for Manitoba families. The care provided by our dedicated first responders saves lives daily.

And prior to 1997, EMS was a municipal responsibility and the staff were largely part-time volunteers with limited training and there was little to no provincial co-ordination of services.

And I can say that the EMS system of today looks much different. We have a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre co-ordinating fast and efficient dispatch, a provincial ambulance fleet, as well as highly trained professional workforce integrated into our health-care system.

I'm very proud of the work that's been done, and I know more work will be going forward under this EMS review and the hard-working team behind it.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Women Entrepreneur of the Year Awards

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month I had the great pleasure of attending the 2015 Manitoba Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, an evening that recognizes some

of the most promising and successful women entrepreneurs across the province. Since 1992, this event has honoured the dedication, tenacity, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of professional women in Manitoba, and it recognize—and in recognizing today's leaders also creates inspiration for the emerging women business leaders of tomorrow.

The entrepreneur of the year awards is hosted annually by the Women Business Owners of Manitoba, a non-profit organization that has proudly been providing support and recognition for women professionals for nearly 30 years. By connecting professional women and providing them with opportunities to network and share each other's experiences, the Women Business Owners of Manitoba helps to nurture and further inspire the many remarkable professionals in our province.

This year's awards and winners were as follows: Excellence in Service, Kelly-Lee Smith of Smith personal–Personnel; Emerging Business, Majda Ficko of Olen Cosmetics Corporation; Home Enterprise, Heather Hinam of Second Nature: Adventures in Discovery; Contribution to Community, Diana Wiesenthal of Corporate People Responsibility Ltd.; Young Entrepreneur, Madison Zyluk of Verda Design; Lifetime Achievement Award goes to Barbara Bowes of Legacy Bowes Group; and Building Business and the Overall Excellence and winner of the entrepreneur of the year award overall was Shannon Putter of Exhale Dance Studio.

These winners are only a sample of the impressive women who attended this event, and the variety of experience of all the finalists exemplifies the breadth of leadership that exists in Manitoba and the potential that dedicated young women can realize. The Women Business Owners of Manitoba are a true example of leadership for women in our province and especially for young women as they prove that no matter the field, women make significant contribution to our community and to our province.

* (14:30)

It was an honour to have attended the evening along with my colleagues, Mr. Speaker.

Sansome School

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): In May, Sansome School celebrated a very important

milestone for many students, families and teachers in Kirkfield Park.

Sansome School has now been serving the Westwood community for 50 years and it is near and dear to many people in the area. The school was built in 1965 as a junior high school and named after Joseph H. Sansome, a member of the Kirkfield Park school board and municipal official of Assiniboia from 1947 to 1959.

The school has seen many changes over the years. Today Sansome is an early years school and is home to almost 300 students. Despite the changes throughout the years, however, one thing has remained the same: Its dedicated teachers, educational assistants and principals go above and beyond to provide the students with a creative learning environment. They also provide the children with many extracurricular opportunities such as public speaking, drama and a marathon club. The students and staff also find ways to give back to their community. Every year they put together food hampers to deliver to families across the city. They also collect donations for Winnipeg Harvest and Koats for Kids.

Sansome School remains an important part of the community. And it was my pleasure to join everyone at the school's 50th anniversary. At the event they unveiled a beautiful mosaic made by the students, staff and people from the community that is now on display at the school. They also put together a time capsule that included pictures of the school over the years that were donated by alumni and faculty.

This school will continue its long-standing tradition of excellence and continue to touch the hearts of everyone in the community.

Congratulations to Sansome School on 50 years as a safe and supportive place to learn.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Stan Davis

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, October 1st is South Korea's Armed Forces Day. Armed Forces Day recognizes veterans and honours our military personnel from the Korean War which ended in 1953.

This horrific war took the lives of nearly 180,000 people. Canada sent 26,000 individuals to

aid in the war effort and unfortunately lost over 500 Canadian lives.

One of the Canadians who fought in this war was Stonewall resident Stan Davis. Stan is a Korean War veteran who served on the Royal Canadian Navy. Originally from Fisher Branch, Stan trained as a signalman radio operator. He eventually ended up on the HMCS Cayuga, the navy destroyer ship headed for South Korea. While aboard the destroyer, Stan witnessed first-hand the deception of an individual who would eventually be the inspiration for a 1961 movie, *The Great Impostor*.

After briefly returning home due to a sick family member, Stan returned to Asia on the HMCS Crusader destroyer and was a member of the renowned Trainbusters Club. The Trainbusters Club was a group of military personnel responsible for destroying the enemy trains as they entered or exited tunnels. The Crusader was also the first Canadian ship to ever work with the US Navy impressive Seventh Fleet patrolling the eastern side of Korea.

After the war ended in 1953, Stan returned home to become a radio operator for the federal department of transportation. He eventually retired from his position in 1985.

Stan and many other brave Canadian militants represent the Canadian values of peace and freedom. I would like to thank Stan for his many years of service on behalf of all Manitobans.

Juniper School

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Tomorrow I'll be happy to welcome the class of 2015 from Juniper elementary school in Thompson to the Legislature.

Accompanied by Superintendent Lorie Henderson, Principal Lucy Mayor and a team of teachers, these 33 students are capping off their junior high experience with a busy program of activities.

For many students, this is a first visit to our provincial capital. Today they are joining students from Hugh John MacDonald School in a cycling and storytelling tour that bring the city's history to life through stories about heroes like Louis Riel and famous events like the 1919 General Strike.

Mr. Speaker, students from northern Manitoba biking along students from downtown Winnipeg, getting to know each other, learning about our

province, setting an example of healthy active living, it doesn't get much more Manitoba than that.

The Juniper students will also be visiting Winnipeg Art Gallery's Olympus exhibition tomorrow. Thursday they'll visit the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the national centre for truth and reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, which I'm sure will be tremendous experiences.

These students, Mr. Speaker, are participating in a unique project that is meant to support them all the way through to their future graduation from R.D. Parker Collegiate in Thompson.

These students are role models. They're making connections in our community and building bridges with students and students from many different backgrounds. At the same time, they're also exploring future career paths.

There may even be some budding filmmakers amongst them. Part of the project involves learning how to tell stories, northern stories, through digital media. In fact, their upcoming short film about human rights, Rights, Camera, Action!, will premiere in Thompson on June 17th. All are invited to attend.

I'm sure I speak for all MLAs, Mr. Speaker, in welcoming the Juniper School students tomorrow and wishing them all the best in the future.

Susydka Ukrainian Dance Club

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Mr. Speaker, the Ukrainian culture has a rich history in Manitoba. Some of the first Ukrainians in Manitoba settled in the eastern region where my constituency is located today. Growing up in eastern rural Manitoba, a large number of people in my community were Ukrainian. As eastern Manitoba grew and continued to expand both geographically and culturally, more people of the various races and ethnicities came to the area and have embraced the Ukrainian heritage positively and with open arms. Nearly 15 per cent of Manitobans claim that their ethnic origin is Ukrainian, and Ukrainian is the sixth most frequently spoken language in the province.

A large component of Ukrainian culture is dance. The Susydko Ukrainian dance group is located in my constituency and is known for its high level of talent. Last Saturday, I had the pleasure of attending the Susydko Ukrainian dancers' 35th anniversary. Several dances were performed,

including the Pryvit or welcome dance, by dozens of dancers ranging in age and talent.

It is because of the dance group that the Ukrainian culture continues to be shared with individuals of various races and ethnicities in my constituency. The group is in high demand for its performances and dances at yearly events including the Ukrainian Kyiv Folklorama pavilion, Gardenton festival, Carrick Days and at the Vita daycare fall supper.

Since Valentyna Dmytrenko of the Valery Dance Academy of Winnipeg joined the group as an instructor seven years ago, the group has won several medals when taking part in dance competitions. Last year, the Susydko senior girls won best overall performance by a Manitoba dance group at the Manitoba Ukrainian Dance Festival, and the junior girls all won gold medals at the same competition this last March. The club is committed to improving each year and accommodating as many requests to perform as possible.

I would like to ask all members to join me in congratulating the Susydko Ukrainian Dance Club on its 35th anniversary and would ask to have the names of the dance group for the 2005th year included in Hansard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to include the names that the honourable member for La Verendrye referenced and include the names in today's Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Erin Adolphe, Kayla Adolphe, Nicole Adolphe, Alexandra Bednar, Dayle Bially, Jonathan Bially, Taylor Bially, Logan Bodz, Tyra Bodz, Jeannine Brandt, Emmalee Chubaty, Caitlyn Cure, Cassandra Cure, Cheyenne Cure, Abigayle Dueck, Isabella Friesen, Richard Friesen, Sophia Friesen, Jocelyn Grant, Sydney Ludtke, Tristan Ludtke, Megan Nickel, Nicole Peeters, Riley Shewchuk, Seaira Shewchuk, Kianna Stubbart, Ethan Thibodeau, Genevieve Thibodeau, Michael Thibodeau, Michelle Thibodeau, Rebecca Thibodeau, Samantha Tymofichuk

Mr. Speaker: That—I believe that include—concludes members' statements.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY*(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

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

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on House business, would you please canvass the House to see if there's unanimous consent to change the Estimates sequence in the Chamber for tomorrow, May 27th, so that Estimates for the Department of Education and Advanced Learning will be considered in place of the Executive Council Estimates? This change is for tomorrow only.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House, and which requires unanimous consent, to change the Estimates sequence in the Chamber for tomorrow, May 27th, 2015, so that the Estimates for the Department of Education and Advanced Learning will be considered in place of the Executive Council Estimates? And this is for tomorrow only. *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Chomiak: I wonder if we might move the House into Committee of Supply with Executive Council in the Chamber and Estimates in room 254 and 255.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker, will you please take the Chair, and the various committee Chairs to the committee rooms.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**(Concurrent Sections)****FAMILY SERVICES**

* (14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Family Services. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, and the minister's going to lead us off same as she did yesterday.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Chairman, I'd like to table the following document in response to questions posed in an earlier Estimates. It is first the general position description for job description of the vacant FTEs in the department. They are all general authority program specialists. The job descriptions for the 75 new employees hired since April 1st, they are all child-care support workers and the job postings for these same new employees.

There was a question that was posed on an earlier date: What proportion of kids in care are receiving counselling services? Approximately 10 per cent of children in care that are financially the responsibility of the Province receive therapy. This represents children in foster home placements but does not include children placed in treatment centres and 'growp'—group homes where therapy is part of the program. This also does not include children in care who receive free therapy from organizations such as MATC and Child Guidance Clinic. Some examples of providers of the therapy are speech therapists, occupational therapists, play therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists.

There was a question regarding the frequent change of workers and continuity with the EIA program, and the question was: Do new workers need to request new records or information? As I said yesterday, all records and decisions are maintained in the SAMIN and hard copy files, so that information is readily available when workers change. If recipients feel they aren't being treated fairly, they can contact the Fair Practices Office, which provides confidential and impartial assistance to Manitobans applying for or receiving services under the EIA. The Fair Practices Office investigates complaints, mediates disputes and makes recommendations on individual cases to program staff based on investigation outcomes. And, as usual, I encourage all members of the Legislature to bring individual cases forward to myself or the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Mr. Chief). We work very hard to ensure clients get all the benefits they are entitled to receive.

The next question was how many people have entered the marketAbilities program. There are an estimated 672 marketAbilities program files opened in 2014-2015; 554 were new openings, 118 were reopenings. Of the 672 files opened, 299 individuals were reported to be on EIA, so approximately 44 per cent.

The next question was when someone who's a single parent and signs up for marketAbilities, are they still on EIA?

While there are clients receiving services from both EIA and marketAbilities, there's no duplication of service or financial supports. EIA staff refer or defer to marketAbilities in the development and support of employment and training plans for persons living with disability. Further, people on EIA and in receipt of marketAbilities services are counted in the EIA caseload as well.

What specific training programs are targeted to specific populations like single parents? The parents of young children information sessions connected staff with 776 work- or training-ready parents on EIA since initiated in the fall of 2013. Building on this success, the division is creating an ongoing program called Empowered to Change to continue working with the client base and providing active offers for employment planning. These sessions are being offered as a supplement to employment planning activity that is occurring as part of case management with parents of young children. Since January 2015, sessions have been held in three communities—Winnipeg, Winkler and Portage—with a total of 31 clients attending.

How is Rent Assist integrated with EIA? How do people find out about it and what is the application process?

When people apply for EIA, their eligibility for Rent Assist is also assessed. EIA recipients receive their Rent Assist benefits together with the EIA benefits in a single payment by direct deposit or by cheque. When Rent Assist benefits increase, EIA clients who are entitled to an increase will automatically receive it. To apply for non-EIA Rent Assist, individuals can get the application form on the Internet, or application forms are also available at Family Services offices or by phoning the provincial services. Information about Rent Assist is available on the jobs and economy website and through informational materials available in Family Services offices and other community agencies.

I think that concludes the EIA. So I want to thank jobs and economy for working with us to find some comprehensive answers for the questions from yesterday.

So, now we have some outstanding questions around—on CFS, and it was around who gets CPR

training and who does not. Staff in residential care facilities need their CPR and first aid certification prior to employment. If they are working with infants, they would need infant CPR as well. They would need to keep up with recertification.

We had a lengthy conversation yesterday around adoption records, and the member opposite asked a very important question about will there be a tracking process and what kind of data will be collected. This is, again, an answer, fulsome answer, from Janice Knight again. So just bear with me. We appreciate all of her information.

We process the applications for accessing birth records separately, and we have made this service request a priority in responding to the applications. The data we require to process the applications to access birth records for birth parents is the name of the child they placed for adoption, their name at the time of the child's birth and the child's birthdate and birthplace. The data we require to process the application to access birth records for adult adoptees is their current name, birthdate, birthplace and the names of their adoptive parents. The applications require that the individuals—that's both the birth parents and adult adoptees—provide two pieces of valid, government-issued identification, one of which is a photo ID which have been certified as a true copy of the original, signed and dated by a witness who is a designated person.

* (14:50)

The data collected, i.e., applications and identifying documentation, are kept confidential and protected as per the adoption legislation and regulations. The application and identity validation process is similar to the processes used for the Child Abuse Registry check. The same processes and data are collected for those individuals who are filing disclosure vetoes, contact vetoes, and once proclamations contact preferences.

So I think that concludes the questions that were outstanding. Thank you for your time.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I thank the minister for so promptly answering the questions from yesterday, and, as with some of the other items she put on record yesterday, we'll probably come back to touch on them a little bit again when we have a chance to refer them back to the original question to see if all the issues were covered.

But I wanted to ask a few questions around the after-hours notification or process that ANCR is

responsible with, and first off, I guess, I'd like to know exactly how this responsibility is handled in the ANCR situation as it sits today.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just for clarification, please, when you're speaking about ANCR, you're speaking about it as a designated intake agency? Is that what you're inquiring about? What are the services that they provide, or their responsibilities?

An Honourable Member: That's right.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Okay. Just one moment, please. So ANCR provides a number of services as a designated intake agency. It operates 24-7, and I think you were specifically inquiring about the after-hours service. So, if there is a complaint or a referral into the intake line around a child in danger, they would be the ones that would go out and they would make the assessment and make the plan with the family and with the child.

There are other duties that they're also responsible for. They are involved within our emergency placement program, as well as will provide supports to the front-line workers that do not work in the evenings. So they could—example of some of the work that they might do is they might relieve a worker that's at the hospital and provide support to them. They also, if a placement is broken down, they may be the people that go out and pick up the child and find a new placement. Their responsibility—they have the legislative responsibility under The Child and Family Services Act and are permitted to make apprehensions. They, too, are driven by the safety of the child is paramount, and that's our priority.

There is—they do work closely with agencies. They'll send the information to the agencies if they've been involved with the case. So it's really what we provide in the daytime as far as referrals and assessments and an intervention, is also happening in the evening with the staff that are present.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that answer. So the science of—I mean, basically they're covering a significant portion of the day.

The size of this agency, near as I can tell from the Estimates book, looks like about 20 staff positions. Is that correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will get you the exact number of the staff that are hired, that are employed at ANCR. But I'm pretty confident that in all of their different

divisions that they would have—they'd have an administration division, they have their child abuse division, they also have their intake, as well as their after-hours—that there would be more than 20 employees. But I will get the—take it upon myself to get the exact number for you as soon as possible.

I should, before I hand the mic back over to the member opposite, I should welcome Rhonda Warren to the table. She has joined us today. She is the director of funding and business analytics for the CFS division.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that, and I look forward to the number. It is somewhere in the 20 or 22, near as we can tell, but that's all the way through the weekends and holidays too?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, it is.

If I may add that we—they are the designated intake agency for Winnipeg. We also have a designated intake agency through the Metis authority which is housed in Dauphin.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that, and actually the—their own report says Winnipeg and, I think, Headingley, East and West St. Paul, so that would be the—correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Wishart: Are there times when all of the staff in this area are occupied and someone calls in? What happens to the calls then? Is there always someone there?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As any child-welfare agency, it is extremely busy; there's lots of things that are happening. I'm—they'd prioritize the calls as they come in and they make their best judgment. Intake calls are received and assessed, and decisions are made about when they need to go out and provide the service or the intervention. So I can tell you that they are extremely busy, but I also can tell you that they are professionals that are able to sort of balance their time and the requirements that they need.

We ensure that we have—there's always a voice on the other side of the phone, that there is a call answering service that we have that will send the information to the ANCR after-hours staff, as well as our staff that are working after hours also carry cellphones so we're able to reach them as well if there's an issue that has happened immediately and we need their intervention.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the minister for that answer. So, when they can't reach a social worker or someone filling that position with ANCR, then the call would be referred to an answering service? Is that where it would go?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes. If everyone is out of the office taking care of business and supporting families and children, the call would be received by an answering service, and when the answering service gets the information it is shared to the staff immediately.

Mr. Wishart: Is the minister familiar with the answering service in any regard?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I am familiar that it is a service that ANCR uses to support the work that they do. Have I called the answering service myself? No, I have had no need to report any child that is in need of protection; that's how that line should be used.

So, if you have a particular story to tell or a casework that you'd like to share, I invite the member opposite to present that to me and we can have a conversation if there is a specific concern that you have.

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank the minister for that. And, yes, I do have a concern, in particular that the use of the after-hours service has increased dramatically in the last three years and yet extra staff have been put in place and now the minister's, in particular, making fairly dramatic changes to try and reduce the number of children that are in hotels, which I assume would be tied in indirectly to this service.

* (15:00)

So I guess I'm wondering if the service that—it's just an answering service and now has a major role in terms of co-ordination here. Do we have enough resources in this area and are we making the best use of these resources?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I'd like to make sure that the member understands is that the answering service is just that; it is answering the phone. It's getting the information. It's not making any judgments or assessing the case or the circumstances. What it does is as soon as it gets that information, that it is relaying that information directly to the workers that are the professionals in the field that will provide that assessment, that intervention that needs to happen.

I'm not sure what the—where the member is going about we're changing business. I would hope that he would support a new direction in which we are working towards and have accomplished in

some ways around no children in hotels. We have the opportunity and have been supported by the authorities and many of the agencies collaboratively working together to address that issue and working on a plan of developing more resources, as we've spoken on earlier days, and will continue to do that. And, yes, we are working with the EPR placement desk with ANCR after-hour services with all of our resources to ensure that we are doing what is in the best interest of children. That the child is in the centre and that we are working to support them, and I am very proud of the work that has been accomplished.

We have a lot more work to do, and I think that the member will acknowledge that as well. But we're committed to making those significant changes to better support children and family.

Mr. Wishart: I want to thank the minister for that answer.

The name of the service that is currently in use is called TigerTel, and in 11-12 year it was used on the average of 152 minutes per month with an almost straight-line increase from there to 14-15 of 1,162 minutes per month, which is a 600—almost 700 per cent increase in four years. And we're very concerned that this indicates a problem in terms of access to the after-hour service, which I think the minister knows is a very essential service, and we're concerned that there's really nothing—you'll continue using the service or some service in the future because really nothing in the system has changed to eliminate the after-hours need, though, hopefully, it is somewhat different in nature with the hotels not being a part of that service.

So I guess I'm looking for a response from the minister in regards to why we had such a dramatic increase in the use of this after-hour service, and is it symptomatic of a problem that we may have to deal with?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I, of course, would reframe it differently. I would reframe it that families are aware of the services that we are provided, community members are aware of the needs of families. I will not apologize about having a service that runs 24-7. I think families operate 24-7 and there needs to be support made available to them.

When you operate an intake line, and I've had the privilege in my past life to answer those intake calls, and you can get everything from a child down the street isn't attending school, to you notice that

there were bruises on a child, or you suspect that a child is being sexually abused, or to the point where it's a parent-child conflict where parents are struggling with the child. So what this tells me is that people are aware of their responsibilities, their legislative responsibilities to report if they suspect that there's a child in danger and in need.

I do not want to discourage that at all. We need to make sure that we have the professionals within the system on the front lines providing the necessary supports to families as well as children, making sure that we're focusing on that. So the work that ANCR does is vitally important, because many of the agencies—they're not working after—in the evenings and we need to have that resource available, and they provide good quality service as far as assessments, interventions, developing plans. They represent agencies within families. Sometimes they are tasked with ensuring that if a placement has broken down, involving themselves in that placement and finding a safe place for that child and resolving the conflict if possible.

So I think that, yes, I see the marked increase of 700 per cent, but I think that I can frame it differently.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for that. Certainly, it does increase—does indicate—sorry—a significant increase in the use of the system. A little more analysis would be necessary to determine whether the use of the system was well intentioned, whether—that the contacts that are being put through that would become caseloads, if you want to put it that way, become issues under the CFS system. And there is some information around that. It seems to support the fact that a little more than half of the phone calls do turn into case files, which would suggest that there's clearly a significant need. Are the people in the system TigerTel, are they trained in any regards related to CFS or they are simply answering the phone?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will tend to ask—I will ask that question with the department and provide that information when I have it. But I—as I've said earlier to the member opposite, it is a answering service that we have working with our system. What they do is they take the information and immediately refer it to the field staff, who are the professionals, who are trained within Child and Family Services and provide the necessary supports and assessment.

And you're—the member is correct. When that intake call comes in, there is different routes that can

happen. Sometimes it's—can be on that first contact; sometimes it's a—in a brief intervention with a professional and we're able to avoid any further contact. Maybe it's a referral to a counselling agency if it's a parent-child conflict. If it is more involved, of—a situation of allegations of child abuse of any sort, it may take some medical intervention or involvement with Winnipeg Police Service. So—or sometimes what happens is that it is a file is opened and family supports are provided or the Family Enhancement Program provides that support.

So there is a range of services that we're able to provide Manitobans, and ANCR is the—often the entry point of that conversation, and it is a important entry point. And in the evening we do have professionals that are on-call, that are working in the ANCR office, that do go out into the community and provide a variety of services to support children and adults or parents.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that. And as the minister probably has guessed by now, what drew our attention to this, of course, is someone who called us with an issue related to how things were handled, and their claim was—and they were ex-foster parents to this youngster who had been removed and was in the care of ANCR and was in a hotel at that time, who had called the foster parent, not the most recent foster parent but one some time back in the child's history, who, clearly, the child still had some connection to—and reported that the—the child reported to this foster parent that they had taken some pills in a possible suicide attempt. From what we were able to determine, it turned out well, which we're all very happy for. However, the—and it went on to the answering service; there was no one available, which does happen. I understand that. However, no response was received for six hours. What happened in the system during that period of time that no one acted on this tip or information for six hours?

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Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I've explained to the member previously, we cannot discuss specific cases because of privacy and confidentiality. If you'd like to bring it to my attention off record, I will certainly ask the department to investigate. The scenario that you have described, I agree that that is not acceptable, but we need to do the—our due diligence and have the conversation with the individuals that were involved.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the minister for that. I know that she does not ever want to discuss case

files, and, as you noted, I didn't put any names in around this. I fear that it may be a symptom, however, of a system that is overstressed and is not functioning as it should with the efficiency that is necessary to 'prevect'—prevent—or protect, sorry, the children.

So I'm looking for an—some assurance from the minister that she'll do more than just look at the particular case, that she'll review the process and the system of after-hours to make sure that we have in place the safeguards to make sure that things happen in a timely manner.

This will only get busier with the use of the hotels reduced, I suspect, because there'll certainly be a greater co-ordination role necessary to make use of the foster placements that we all hope are being developed. So I'm looking for an assurance from the minister that she will take more than a passing look at this.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'd like to assure the member opposite that this department is consistently evaluating what services it provides, the policies, the standards that are in place, reviewing what is best practice across the country and working with the authorities and the agencies to constantly renew and develop policies that are in the best interest of the child, and we will continue to do that.

What we will also continue to do, as we're providing intervention and support to families in crisis, this government has made a strong commitment to ensuring that prevention services are also available to families. We know that one of the indicators is poverty, and the ALL Aboard strategy and poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy is one of those examples of commitments. Over \$1.2 billion is being spent on reducing poverty from everything from providing housing to jobs and employment opportunities to training and education and to child care. But also we have the prenatal benefits that are provided to families, as well as our Families First program. Our parent-child coalitions across this province provide a venue for parents to come together and share information, share the challenges but also the successes that they feel, and work on nutrition, on physical activity, on literacy, and just having fun and some stress relief to happen for families too.

So we will—as we have in the past, will continue to work with all of our partners to address the needs of Manitoba families. Child and Family Services is only one part of that solution. It goes to Education,

children and youth and opportunities, Health. We will—and Jobs and the Economy plays a key role in that with the work that they've done in partnership with Family Services around Rent Assist. We'll continue to do that, and we are very aware of the commitment that we made, the expectations of the province of Manitoba and the citizens of Manitoba. And we are working with the authorities and the agencies, as I've said earlier, to work on a plan that ensures that there will be no children in hotels, while ensuring the safety and protection of Manitoba children.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for that answer, and I'd like to ask a few more questions.

And she did supply us with some information around the IT area with Cúram and the project there. And we had touched on, briefly, some of the information that has yet to be collected, things like the attendance in schools. And I know the minister made reference to the fact that school divisions do collect attendance records. And we looked into that, and most of the time the school division cannot tell you whether the child is in care of CFS or not. So that side of the equation in terms of getting attendance records is not very productive.

So I'm wondering if the new system will contain any way of tracking the attendance of school—of children, sorry, that are in the care of CFS that should be attending school.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, when I was sharing the information previously, what I was able to state is that education system is one of our partners. When we have a child in care, they are part of the solution. They are part of looking at how do we provide some continuity for the child, as well as providing us information about what their academics are, socially how they are in the community. But also Cúram, we are looking at our project scoping that we've been working on for the last year and we are confident that we will be able to have an ability to track educational outcomes for the children and youth that are within our system.

Mr. Wishart: Well, then, I appreciate that. I think it's very important that we are able to do that. We keep hearing stories about children who are in the care of CFS who—not regularly attending school. So I think it's important that we be in a position to track what is happening and also graduation rates.

So has the minister approached, then, the Education Department to see who will do the

tracking on this? Is it going to be your responsibility or their responsibility?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Education tracks every student that's registered within the school system in Manitoba, so they're going to continue to do that. What we're saying is that we are going to scope into Cúram an ability to track the education, the students, and if they're attending school or not. So this Cúram has a potential to link into other departments, other interface—I'm going way above my Peg Rater technology. But interface, I think, is the right word, with other departments such as Justice and Education and Health.

Our primary goal right now, though, is to focus on ensuring that we have a system that meets the needs of child welfare, and we understand the information and the importance of an education. We know that that is going to equalize and provide stronger and better outcomes for our young people, and that has to be our commitment.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I certainly appreciate that.

When did you begin working with this system? Is this just in the last year, because it does appear in the budget in the last year, and how long an agreement do you have?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: On—I'm going to shock you—on November 20th, 2008, it was in the Speech from the Throne. It was mentioned that we were going to enhance the safety and protection of children through an advanced case-management system.

At that time it wasn't identified as Cúram, but, after that, time was spent working with the folks in the department and with the authorities, but also looking in other jurisdictions around how their IT systems have been working. And, after much deliberation, we have decided that we will work with Cúram as the enterprise level platform, which means we've agreed to that one because it is able to interface with multiple programs. So that's why we've landed on that.

But it is a huge commitment. Any IT changes is a huge, huge commitment and we are working through it right now with all of our partners. We have a committee at the department that is looking at the project scope, but also there are regular contacts with authorities—with CEOs of the authorities—around how we need to move forward.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for those answers.

So, clearly, you haven't been working with this particular company for the last seven years. It wasn't part of the Throne Speech. Could you narrow that down a little bit in terms of when you actually entered into an agreement with this particular company, after doing your research as to which company, or which services, or which IT services would meet the need?

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Ms. Irvin-Ross: A tender went out in November of 2013 asking for a project charter, really looking at—for a group that would help us to develop our IT. That's what happened in November of 2013. We were working long before 2013, anywhere between two years and 18 months of looking at what platform did we want to use. And that was speaking with the other jurisdictions and having many conversations about how we wanted to proceed.

Mr. Wishart: So, just so I understand it, in November of 2013, you did a call for proposal or asked for a specific proposal from this company?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It isn't a proposal from this specific company. Cúram is the platform and what we were wanting is we were looking for, in the 2013, it was the scoping phase of the technology, so what we wanted to do is we wanted to find a service provider that would help us case manage this initiative. And there are a number of groups in the community that has information or has expertise in the development of IT, so that's what we were looking for. We were looking for a lead. We do not have the IT expertise within this department. We needed a consultant to help give us that information and support the implementation, as well as scoping out what is—what are our needs and what platform will best meet our needs.

Mr. Wishart: So just so I get this right, and I think all of us want to get it right, Cúram is actually the software platform. *[interjection]* Yes, okay, software platform. So you were looking for someone to supply the hardware with this and the expertise. Is that what you were looking for?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, just for the record, IBM owns the Cúram licence, so IBM is the owner. What we were looking for is we were looking for a group of individuals that help lead us to the implementation of an IT strategy. So that's really what—it was about project scoping. So meeting with the front-line staff, meeting with the authorities and with the agencies and having a conversation about this is what CFIS

does. Now what do you like about it, what do you want to—what you don't like about it, and what would you like in a new system? And looking at what are some of the indicators that we want to track, and education is one of those examples that you have raised previously. And how does it work with our—within our system with our assessment tools that we use. How does it work with SDM? How does it work with information about foster parents? How does it all—how do all the programs talk to each other within our system so we can have a better, stronger co-ordination, because we know if we have better and stronger co-ordination that we're able to provide more, better support for our families and the children.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for answering that question. So you acquired the rights to use the software that IBM has developed. Is there a period of time on that agreement or is it an annual agreement?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We have not finalized the agreement with IBM. I'm not—we—what we are doing is we are still scoping it out with the consultants that we're working with. With the co-operation with the authorities and with the agencies and the front-line staff, we are developing a project plan looking at organizational change, management, looking at gaps. So there might be gaps that Cúram can't do for us, and so we may have to look at how do we ask IBM to include it into their program and how do we ensure that we're able to transfer our data from CFIS to Cúram in a smooth way that we're not losing information because the legacy of that data is vitally important. And then, also, it would include the pricing of the implementation. And, as we spoke about earlier, that this is a significant change when you're changing IT, and it has impact for our staffing and our training, and so there has to be a lot of co-ordination that happens throughout the province.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I appreciate the answers. I gather this will be a very long process, and, certainly, we don't want to lose the existing data. This has been quite a while in development. I am—in your process of deciding on the Cúram software approach, did you check with other jurisdictions to see how many were using that software platform? Is this a common platform to be put to this purpose?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Cúram is being used as a case-management system for child welfare in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and several US states, for

income assistance in Saskatchewan, for workers' compensation in BC and for newcomers and seniors' services in Alberta; and, in Manitoba, Cúram could support programs as well as probation, education, training, public health and other case-managed support. So it really is about case management. It's—and it can be adapted to the needs of child welfare.

And, you know, you questioned the length of time. And IT is very complicated, and you need to be very strategic of how you are planning the implementation and ensuring that when you have this system that is ready to run and operate—because we cannot afford to have a system that will not meet the needs of the front-line staff and will not gather and ensure that it continues to gather the important information that what—that we need. We did extensive consulting with Saskatchewan and Alberta about what they did, what went right, what went wrong. And so I believe that we will build on their experience and anticipate having a better experience here in Manitoba.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the Chairman and the minister for answering that question. Certainly, it is important that we get this right. As the minister knows, however, the recommendations involving the existent system, CFIS, go back to, I think, 2006 when the recommendation first appeared that we needed to have an alternative system. So it's been a long time coming, and I do encourage us—the minister to get it right because we don't want a system that will not meet our needs going on into the future. And, in fact, it is important to tie in others. And you mentioned that we do have some departments here in Manitoba that are already using it. Justice was not one? Which—you made reference to—which departments in Manitoba are using it to some degree?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are no departments in Manitoba that are using it. What I was saying is that it could be used by any department that case-manages. So Health, and public health is a good example, or Justice. It's really a case-management tool. While I have the floor, may I put on the information around, from ANCR?

An Honourable Member: I'm not going to stop you.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Its staff total is 163 FTEs. After-hours unit, we have 18.8 FTEs. There are two supervisor positions and a half of an admin position, which means that there are 16.3 front-line positions. *[interjection]* Sixteen point three front-line positions.

And that is—I want to make it very clear that that is the after-hours program for ANCR.

* (15:30)

Mr. Wishart: Just to clear that up, then, are there any vacancies in that area, because we did talk about vacancy rates earlier?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We'll take that upon ourselves to find out whether there is, but we'll report back as soon as possible.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister. She's been very prompt with her answers and I appreciate that. It makes doing our job a little bit easier when we can get the information during the Estimates process.

I did want to touch on one or two other items that had been entered into the record earlier. You mentioned the job description, and that was a discussion from a few days ago. And was that the job description for those employees that are being hired or in the process of being hired now? And you have, I believe the number was 50 or so already hired that are temporary employees to help deal with the issue of children in hotels and work with them in foster placement. So is that that job description?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes. The one job description that I handed to you was the one for the 75 new employees hired since April 1st, and they are child-care support workers. And also included in that package is the job posting that goes along with the job description.

Mr. Wishart: This may be an odd question, but you hired them and now we're getting a job description? Was the job description not out there beforehand?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: This will sound like an odd answer; you just asked for the job description and so we had given it to you. It was around, yes, it was around; I just, I hadn't tabled it yesterday. I just needed to have the copies made in order to table it for you. So, yes, prior to hiring these positions, it is an expectation that a job description is submitted to the Civil Service Commission.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I appreciate that. It was actually a question that my colleague from River East had asked about the job description, and reading back in the Hansard record, it did seem a little odd that we were having to get the job description when we were already hiring.

Now yesterday you read into the record a little bit of the training that went towards the 75 new positions that you are—you have created, and talked

about some of the training that is being done and ANCR is doing that training. Is that correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The training is happening at the ANCR offices. We are—the training is happening by EPR staff that are facilitating the five-day workshops.

Mr. Wishart: The acronym that you just used, APR?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: My apologies, EPR, the emergency placement program. The staff from there are helping with the training.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the minister for that. And emergency placements is clearly, we'll have to find the need. The training here is all done within a week?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There is five days of training and I did list out all of the different components of that training yesterday. There is—that's the classroom training and then there is also support that happens directly within the supervision of the youth or the children that they're responsible for. So it's ongoing.

We will ensure that we provide those services to the staff that we hire. We know the importance of good-quality trained staff; it can avoid a lot of conflicts within our, within the facilities, and we want to make sure that we're making that investment in the people.

So this is really the preliminary training that's happening, and then there will be ongoing training that will be a part of their employment.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I appreciate that. I think it is very important that these people be very well trained. That was at least part of the problem that was recognized with the care in hotels and the contractual arrangements, so we don't want to get in a position where we have people responsible for kids in care that do not have good training, and I'd certainly recognize the need for ongoing. But these are high-risk kids, in many cases, not all. How would that compare to, say, the training that goes into a group home that has high-risk kids into it? You referenced that a little earlier, too, some of the training, and it sounded much more extensive.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We are constantly assessing the youth that are in our care and ensuring that we are providing the right staffing ratio to the youth dependent on their needs. I think what you have to consider is that—that there are—we have hired a

number of new people, but there are also a number of people within the system that have decades of experience. I've met some of them that have worked in the EPR system for over 30 years. So we have some strong mentors that we'll be working with them and providing them with the support they need.

We know the importance, and I think the member opposite does as well, of providing the right support for the youth to ensure that we can avoid any conflict with them and make sure that we are able to help support them. The EPR system is one where we provide support, but then, while we're doing that, within that system we're looking for what is the—what's the plan for the child? Is it a plan of one returning the child back to the family home, and what kind of supports need to happen in order to support that child, or is it we need to have this child in care for a longer term, and what kind of foster home placement or agency placement do we need to look at?

And so that—really, what we need to do is make sure that we're providing them with the adequate support and we also, in November, when we announced that we were creating more beds and hiring more staff, we also talked about ensuring that there are, if necessary, counselling or psychological services that are available in our EPR system to provide assessment so we know exactly what are the needs of the child to better plan for them.

So it's a combination, and I think you also have to be very aware that attached with each one of these children is also the case manager, or the social worker that is assigned to them that will oversee the implementation of the plan while they're working with all of the other collateral agencies and, most importantly, with the family, of coming up with a plan.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I appreciate that. So, in terms of the EPR and the workers that we're talking about here now, the 75, their responsibility will be, in many cases, short term with the children, with the newly created group home and foster placements as the children transition to a longer term more stable?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The emergency placement program or resource is exactly what it states. It is supposed to be emergency placement. It is to be that time where a child is apprehended and we need a safe place to have that child have a roof over their head and provide them with the supports that they need, but while they're there, the goal is is that we're working on a plan that is in co-operation with the other

collateral agencies, as well as the parents and working on implementing that plan with the professionals that are involved.

So, sometimes, as I said earlier, that it could be a plan that the child is returned home, that it was a short-term crisis and there was an intervention that could be put in place to alleviate the risk of the child. The second one is that if a child is in need of protection and we need more time to support the child and support the family before we can work towards reunification, we will do that, and, as it says, emergency placement. So the options after the emergency placement for some could be residential treatment, could be a group home, could be a foster placement, could be a kinship program within the family and within the community. There are different streams which can happen, and always it is imperative that the needs of the child are what directs us in making good decisions for them, and with them is also key.

* (15:40)

Mr. Wishart: I want to thank the minister for those questions.

I just wanted to go back briefly to the telephone answering service that we referred to earlier in our discussions, and the dramatic increase that we saw in usage, and pretty much a sevenfold increase of people using the line, whether those be children or whether those be foster parents or whoever it was.

I'm still uncomfortable why that number increased so much and why does—and the minister offered some explanation as to, well, it's a good thing. I can't see how that that can be interpreted as a good thing. It means that there is, obviously, a lot more people using it, which is more crisis situations, and it also means that the regular after-hours service is not, in terms of the staff and you did give us staff numbers which was actually less than I thought it was why—that they're not able to handle it, and it's quite a dramatic increase.

Can the minister offer a little bit more insight into why she thinks that's a good thing?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I think that if anyone in this province knows that there's a child at risk, a child in need of protection that they must call. So I will not apologize for that. And I think that that is reflected in this number; we're sharing the information. We have families that are in crisis and we have families that have had generational issues that have impacted

them, such as residential school, colonization, the '60s scoop and racism. That has impacted them.

We need to ensure that when a family needs support that we're available to them and we are able to provide 24-7 support. We have our agencies that provide that support throughout the day, and I am very grateful that we do have an after-hours program that is in the front lines providing that support not only to families in the community but also for foster parents themselves and to youth and children.

I have some more information I'd like to put on the record around the answering service is called TigerTel. They have been used by ANCR since its inception, and prior to that by Winnipeg Child and Family Services. There are other CFS agencies that use them as well. It is used by the after-hours program only when all the front-line staff are occupied out in the field or with urgent matters in the office such as arranging of placement of children. There are shifts where it has been used a lot and others where it's not used at all. It is considered a backup.

The after-hours program will forward the phones to TigerTel if we're unable to take the call. TigerTel faxes us all the messages when they take them directly to ANCR. If the matter is urgent, they will call 911, and they ensure that they also get that message to the front-line staff immediately.

Mr. Wishart: Well, given the minister's statement, that makes the example that came forward to me even more incredulous, because six hours is not prompt in anyone's book, especially when the individual may have been at risk for suicide and had reached out to a foster parent who clearly knew about the system and made the call. And, yes, I appreciate that all the staff might be busy at the moment of the call and that the answering service, which has increased demand by quite substantial, would have to take that. But how did the call go astray and that no one from—no one called 911, then?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I have stated earlier and I will restate, that if the member would like to talk about a particular situation, if he'd like to share it with the office, we will certainly follow up with it. We will find out what happened in that particular situation. I will not debate service delivery or jeopardize sharing the private information of a child or a family on this record. I know that this frustrates the member. I welcome his casework. I have managed a number of his—I have managed many of his casework files and

will continue to do that when he raises a concern, and we work very promptly to address them efficiently and effectively.

So, please, off record, share us the facts and we will follow up.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, and I appreciate the minister's frustration with this, you know, and we are frustrated with this, because it should have worked and didn't in this case. Maybe it's a one-off, who knows. It's certainly the only one that we're aware of, and I will certainly share what we have for information in regards to this with the minister in the future on a casework basis.

But, as the minister knows, and I certainly have come to know and appreciate, casework very often points out problems in the system. And that's what I'm trying to share with the minister here, is that we may have a problem in the system that needs to be resolved. And, during the process here when we're making significant changes to how children at risk are being handled and where they're being placed, I think it's important that we try and deal with this problem along with any other. So that is my concern. I'm sure the minister appreciates that, and I hope that she will take my concern under advisement and follow up to make sure that this cannot happen again, because we do not want to see anyone put at risk, whether it becomes an individual piece of casework, or whether it becomes a policy issue into the future.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I have stated earlier, that we constantly are evaluating the service that we provide to Manitobans, working towards improving it, while we're ensuring that the protection of the children is No. 1, and we will continue to do that.

We are always, always looking to evaluate our policies and our standards in the way that we work. And I think that you can just look at what's happened over the last number of years of how the system has been strengthened, and there's lots of examples. And it goes not only by the policies and standards and the relationships we have forged with the agencies and the authorities, but also with the amount of funding, how we have more than tripled the funding to Child and Family Services to support children. I think that that is—needs to be noted, that that is a commitment of this government, and has continually been a priority. And we will continue to do that.

We will also make record investments in prevention programs to support families, so children

do not have to come into care. So we can support families within their communities.

We have the opportunity to work with the Hughes inquiry and the 62 recommendations from Commissioner Hughes, and we continue to implement them, with our partners, and we will continue to do that. And I also look to that as a way of strengthening our system. And, prior to that, it was the recommendations for Changes for Children in which we implemented.

So there has been a lot of reorganization and redevelopment around standards and policies and also investments into supporting families. So, yes, we will continue to evaluate our practice and improve it.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, moving on from that, and I know the minister will appreciate that.

My colleague the other day from River East said—began to ask the question regarding the young lady, the 11-year-old lady—child, rather—from Garden Hill, Teresa Cassandra Robinson and wondered if there was any history with CFS with this particular child.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The answer has not changed from five minutes ago; we will not discuss any specific cases on this record. I'm not sure what the member is expecting. We need to protect the privacy of children and families and we're committed to do that.

I think that when we are working within the system, with families, we are given the privilege to walk into their homes, and to provide them with support and with information, and they share many, many private moments. And we're going to continue to do that, and they need to know when they reach out to us, that their information is confidential, and that is confidential to protect that family but also to protect that child. And I will not apologize for that.

Mr. Wishart: Well I appreciate that. That's a very specific question and so I will leave that. And, sometime in the future, should anyone be charged with that, I suspect that that information will come forward at that time, because that's usually when we tend to find out what has actually been going on.

* (15:50)

Talking about information, we've had a fairly rocky history, I guess, with the Department of Family Services when it comes to FIPPA requests.

We have a number outstanding. And we are very frustrated with the quality of the answers that we have been getting. And I have a long list here of the types of answers we've been getting.

In particular, and I can get into some of the questions and answers, but what they come down to is, besides the long delays, we're often being told that no information exists, when we've actually previously gotten answers to these questions.

So I guess I'm struggling to try and do my job as a critic, and I think Manitobans are struggling to understand what is going on in the department, when we can't get information that we have gone through the proper process to get.

So I wonder if the minister would offer some explanation as to what is going on here and why we seem to be not getting answers where we got answers a year ago.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We take our responsibility for timely release of information very, very important. But I think what really needs to be put on the record is the number of requests that we have recently been bombarded by. There have been over 360 requests for access of information in 2013, for example, and that's in our annual report. That is twice as many requests of information than Health receives. And it's also 10 times more than—we have requests that have been given—that have been requested to Family Services since 2000.

We know that there is a frustration across the way. We have staff working on developing a process so the information is released in a timely way. We do have limited resources when it comes to providing this information. Our priority is to use our resources and our time to protect children. But we do have people that are dedicated to provide you with this information.

And sometimes the information isn't available. We're not hiding anything. It just doesn't exist. And you may want to debate that. But it—we're not—we are extremely providing—we're being transparent. We were the ones, the government, that changed the legislation, that made sure that it was going to—we would open the Cabinet books after a certain amount of time. We made sure that we expanded the FIPPA legislation to include 350 municipal governments, school divisions, university and health regions. And in the previous government, they excluded them.

So we have been taking all of the steps. We are managing the volume of FIPPA requests to the best

of our ability. And we will continue to do that and working on a process to streamline it.

Mr. Wishart: Well, perhaps the volume certainly increased, and we did review a number of them to drop them off the list because they had, frankly, aged out of relevancy. But information is an important part of doing our job. And basic things like the number of foster-care spaces in Manitoba per agency, so that we know if there's any agencies that are struggling to find placements for the number of children, because we can track the number of children roughly, and being told that the information is available on the public service website, and go to the website, and it's not there. It's never been there. Agencies, in terms of their reports, don't track that and certainly don't publish it in terms of their reports; perhaps they do track it.

But it is very difficult for anyone to do their jobs, or for even the minister, I suspect, to know whether everything is working as intended if no one's tracking these numbers. And, if they're not being tracked, they should be. And, if they're being tracked, why cannot that information be shared?

And I can give you the whole list here of ones that we recently received that were really non-answers. But I can also tell you that none of them came in less than seven months, which is well beyond the mandate.

So there's two levels of frustration here. We're not getting the answers, and we're taking forever to not get the answers. And I don't see, in many cases, there are specific examples, where we've asked this question in the previous year or two years previous and gotten an answer. Why can that—how can that happen, Madam Minister?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I said earlier, that we take FIPPA requests very seriously. We are a government that has been known to be transparent and to share information, and we will continue to do that. We made some important changes to the act, and I had the privilege of, when I was newly elected, of travelling the province and doing the FIPPA review and the PHIA review and hearing from Manitobans first-hand about how valuable it is to access this information.

So what we're telling the member opposite is we have been bombarded by requests, we are managing them to the best of our ability, we are streamlining them. I know that there have been some

improvements made recently, and I'm confident that those improvements will provide an ability for us to have a speedier response.

But, if a record doesn't exist, we will tell you it doesn't exist. If a record is on the World Wide Web, on the department website or the web page, we will tell you that. The number of foster homes is on the website.

What you need to know is that, and you're very familiar with this, is that our system is devolved and we are extremely proud of the devolution, and that we have First Nation and Metis organizations, authorities that are managing the agencies, a part of the 22 agencies, that they are devolved. And they have standards that they need to adhere to. There are policies that they need to adhere to. But they are ran by a board that works with them to ensure that they're delivering the necessary programs to their community. There are boards at the agency level as well. So we continue to celebrate the devolution. We know that the vast majority of children that are in care are indigenous children, and it is important that there are indigenous-led organizations, authorities and agencies that are providing the supports to them.

You will see that as we move forward with our centralized placement program, that we will be asking for all agencies to share their resources as far as foster homes that they have made—that they have available, and we will be co-ordinating that. And, because of that co-ordination, we will be able to provide a better service to Manitoba children.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for that answer. We agree on one thing: The information is valuable. We do not feel we are getting the access that the minister is obliged to provide.

Minister made reference to the Family Services website data which is—most current is 2013—is hardly valuable data in terms of active to ongoing trends.

I can give you a specific example where you provided the almost identical information to the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) in terms of number of children that were under one month of age that CFS had taken into care. We asked for three months of age. You would not provide us with that information, said the information did not currently exist.

I cannot help but feel that we are being targeted in terms of misinformation or lack of information, and feel that we must have—we will have to take

other steps to make sure that the department fulfills its obligation. So, Minister, I think you can expect an Ombudsman complaint in regards to this. *[interjection]* Yes, I know you're really worried about that. And, in particular, for someone like yourself that was involved in setting it up and making sure it working, to be involved in making sure it doesn't work must be a conflicting situation.

Going on from that—want to answer that? Sure.

* (16:00)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I just want to put on the record that we have extremely professional staff that work in this department, and the allegation that you are making about their professionalism and about the—your concern about what they're not sharing with you, I want you to know that if there is a record available, that it would be shared with you. If they say there's no record available, there is no record available.

You cannot deny the impact to a system that is constantly working to protect children and support families and is getting all of these requests—360 requests were delivered in 2013. And I am sure in 2014 we will see another hundreds of requests. When you make the allegation about the information on the web is only 2013, I would like for the record to show that that is our annual report. That is the report that is filed in the fall that gives—reports to Manitobans, reports—reports to the Legislature about what we've accomplished. So, in fall, this fall, you will have 2014, which will have all of the information.

So, I hear your frustration. I am assuring the member that there is no conspiracy against you, that we are working to address the issue of the backlog of FIPPAs. I know that there has been significant progress made. I understand why you maybe don't want to acknowledge that, but there has been progress made. We are going to continue to follow the legislation, we will continue to provide the information if we have it and we'll commit to doing it in a timely way. But, when a system is used to—gets almost three times as many or twice as many referrals, it takes a while to catch up. Our priority is kids, supporting kids and their families, and the staff that we have in the department dedicate themselves to that every day. And I guess I'll just leave it at that, that we will—that this is a government that takes transparency very, very—think that it is very important, and we will continue to provide the information when it is available. And we will

continue to support Manitoba families as our priority.

Mr. Wishart: Well, we'll have to agree to disagree on that particular point because we certainly have lots of evidence that points to lack of co-operation. But we will work with the department to try and deal with answering our inquiries because we do value the information and I think it's important not only to us to do our jobs, but I think for Manitobans to understand what is going on inside a department that has had some issues in the last few years. And the public seems to want to know what is going on in terms of fixing those issues, so it is important to have the information.

Moving on from there, I wanted to explore with the minister a little bit about how financial obligations with First Nations CFS agencies actually works, especially in relationship to the federal government where there is an obligation from the federal government to look after First Nations people in the province. So, when a child comes into the care of the CFS agency in question, a First Nations agency, and they are placed in a foster-home facility somewhere in the province, whether it would be on the—on that First Nation or elsewhere, I would like to know if there's a formula in terms of the funding that shares some of that cost with the federal government and how that is determined.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, for the core operating funding, it's a 60-40 split: 60 for the province and 40 for the federal government. The operating is broken down into small, medium and large agencies; that's how it's defined, and that would be based on the number of cases that they have.

Then, on the program side, the federal government has a formula in which they apply. In the province, we also have a formula, and it is based on the number of cases. So, really, it's driven by the number of children that are in care. And the federal government's funding formula is based on how many members are on the—in the community; that's how they do it.

And then I'm not sure if you were asking this question, but I will put it on the record. Around when a child comes into care, how is that funding managed? So the funding is based on the normal residence of the parents at the time that the child comes into care, plus the treaty status of the child.

So that will give you, I think, some of the information that you were asking for.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that. It is a complicated arrangement, I appreciate.

The formulas that you talk about: they vary depending on the size of the agency or the size of the tribal group? Which one is it?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The small, medium, large is based on the population in which it serves.

Mr. Wishart: That would mean the size of the tribal group or that particular band, or which one is it?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Either-or.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, thank you. Going to have to chew on that one for a while to try and figure out exactly how these funding formulas work.

The minister mentioned that core was 60-40, provincial-federal. Could she define for me a little bit about what's considered core?

*(16:10)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The core funding includes the executive core, which is executive director, the chief financial officer, quality assurance, the child abuse co-ordinators and the finance. And there'll be some clerks and administrative support that also is included in that.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I appreciate that. That does help me a little bit. And just to make sure I understand operations, and that would be the cost and the services that the children would receive while they're in the care of that particular agency?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the service operations include the social work staff, administration—could be Child Protection staff as well—supervisor, program manager, family support worker fund, as well as any prevention services that they provide through the Family Enhancement, as well as protection services and children in care, which would be the child maintenance budget line.

Mr. Wishart: And just to be clear on that, when you—I believe you increased Family Enhancement, was it a year ago? Would that include the federal government participated in that increase as well?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That—when we announced in November of 2014 that we were going to increase it by 60 per cent, that was the portion that the Province allocates to families that was increased.

Mr. Wishart: So clearly the feds didn't participate in that. The ratios and the formulas that you mentioned, you have one, they have one,

depending on the agency size. Are those—that information available in any form?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Wishart: So that would be something we would have to FIPPA for?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll need to confirm, but I think that that information is provided in our annual report, that it is broken down. I'll pull it out and I'll see if it is provided. It outlines what agencies are small, medium and large.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Lac du Bonnet—[interjection] or Arthur-Virden, my apologies.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virden): I got a few questions about daycares and how they determine who gets allocated for a daycare.

Okay, Mr. Chair, I just want to ask the minister about—for the years that I've been in Virden, Manitoba, our daycare situation has been to a point where we had 56 spots, and those same 56 spots have been the same for many years. We were fortunate, my wife and I, to get my daughter in that daycare, but there's many, many ones that have to find other private daycares or they can't—some of them have to stay at home to work.

We've noticing in Arthur-Virden we've been fortunate to have some daycares in places like Reston, which was really short of having a daycare; Kenton has just got their daycare in Oak Lake. Now we're waiting for—it could be many years yet for until Virden gets a daycare, that we require, I believe, 144 spots to go forward here in order for us to have the numbers that we really—that we need to—for the—it's the waiting list.

So I just want to know if the minister—how does it determine who gets the—like, the funding goes to these individual communities?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will answer that question, but I just wanted to share with you about what we've done since we've formed government, that we have created more than 14,000 licensed child-care spaces, and I thank you for mentioning the child-care spaces in which we've opened up in your region. It was—Oak Lake was one that was recently opened, and we've also developed nearly 100 facilities.

So there are two streams that happen within the Child Care branch. So one is the community stream, which is approximately, I'm going to say, around

\$2.8 million that is used, and that's in a yearly intake that happens, and it is—it happens every year. And then we have what we—the \$25 million that we, in our five-year plan—child-care plan, that we developed with the Public Schools Finance Board. So we think with that \$25 million that we'll be able to either expand or build up to another 20 child-care facilities.

So we welcome community groups, volunteer groups, directors of child-care agencies to submit plans. We have some phenomenal staff that work directly in the different regions and provide that support and identify what the need is and help people through that process. Because of our previous five years, we've been able to see some growth in the development. We have what's considered the second best child-care plan in Canada, Quebec being No. 1. We have some of the—we are second as far as lowest fees in the subsidies that we provide, but we also—it's much more than more spaces when you're talking about the development or redevelopment of child care. It's making sure that we are providing necessary training and also looking at retention and recruitment for the workforce.

So we've been able to see some operating increases which have developed in wage improvements in the sector, as well as we have training programs. We have one that I'm very excited about, is the program with, if you are working in a centre now and you'd like to further your education and become an ECE II or III, that we will help you acquire that. And so I think that that needs to be recognized as well.

So I thank you for raising your concern in your home community about the need, and there's lots of pressures across this province. And I could spend the next 45 minutes listing all of the facilities that we've either built new or we've enhanced or developed and spaces we've opened, but I know that you probably have many more questions, but just know that the pressures are great and we do our best to manage it based on the specific criteria that I had put on earlier on the record.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Chair, the question I have is, which is the priority for the government? Is it to do it into the school systems, or is to do it like volunteer, like, say, organizations that are non-profit who are asking for funding? What is the priorities of this government?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: This government, our priority is not-for-profit child-care centres, and we are very

fortunate that we're able to provide two streams and we have legislation that makes sure that if a brand new school is being built, that there's a child-care facility attached to it. So that really has made a great difference as far as providing other alternatives.

So we have the two streams. We have the \$2.8 million that provides for community-based centres to apply, but we also have the Public Schools Finance Board that's also able to develop it. So we want to see child-care facilities growing and flourishing, and I think that our commitment through both of those streams allows for that to happen.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): To the minister, I just have a couple quick questions. In the 2011 election, your government promised and committed to eliminate the wait times for ABA therapy. In April 10, 2014, there were 64 kids on the wait-list. I'd like to know what's the status as of today. How many kids are on the wait-list for ABA therapy?

* (16:20)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What we have in Manitoba is autism support services that happen across the province. ABA is just one of those initiatives that provides a service for a child and for a family, so we have increased the autism outreach workers and they are doing some incredible work out in the community, and we've been able to expand them. We have been able to, since this government has come in, since 1999, we've increased our funding to autism services by 800 per cent. And we invest, also, within—it's not just Family Services when we provide the service—also, within the education system. So there's around \$22 million is invested in the education system.

In 2012, we launched our five-year strategy called Thrive!, and when we announced that, we were also—made a investment around ABA, also looking at the rural and northern outreach as well as initiatives to bring parents together in a support group and also to have behavioural consultation within the school and with the ABA program. We have been working very diligently with a number of community groups to look at accommodating eligible children within the ABA program. We have seen record numbers of diagnosis as far as ABA and are feeling that pressure. One of the other pressures we also have in the system is around the hiring of the specialists.

And there's also the ongoing debate around the services for children. We know that the ABA program is extremely—it's a family commitment. And many families prescribe to it and find that it is a very valuable service, but there are also families that aren't able, because of employment responsibilities and other barriers that are presented, that struggle to be able to be successful in ABA. So we're looking at, and we have implemented, in partnership with the St. Amant Centre, a family intake process where we're working with parents and giving them information so that they're able to work with their child at home, along with the support from the autism outreach program as well.

So, and we work very closely with the MFEAT, Manitoba—MFEAT—work very closely with MFEAT and Guy Mercier and—sits at the table as we look at redeveloping the program, trying to make the changes that need to happen so we can support Manitobans. There has been a long and lengthy conversation that has been happening with parents that have children that are—well, they're young adults that now are saying we need to look at a lifespan strategy and come to me and talk to me about their stories of 20—some years ago when their son or daughter was diagnosed and how the doctor approached the diagnosis and how we need to change that. We need to start right at the beginning about sharing that information and that news with that family and being able to give families a sense of hope but also to provide them with the support they need, as well as the intervention that they need, but making sure that there is a continuum of services that are available. That's why I'm extremely excited about how we are talking about autism spectrum disorder and the varying different programs. There's programs such as Floortime. There are informal support groups that happen among parents; I've met with those—call—parents. Their group is called PACE, and the work that they do.

What we've been able to—what we did in the last budget year is we were able to fund a program called Building Independence, and Building Independence is in partnership with Red River College and takes approximately 20 young adults into Red River College and looks at how do we support them and how do we find what they're most interested in and give them that opportunity to participate in a post-secondary education with the supports that they need. So, when I think about autism support services and the diagnosis of ASD, I think of a continuum that needs

to happen across this province. And we have made some inroads. We have lots of work to do but I am very confident with the professionals that we work with in the department, as well as the number of community-led groups, that we are going to be able to address the needs of children with the diagnosis of ABA.

Mr. Ewasko: The—we know that when students or children are diagnosed with autism, we know that they age out at the age of five for ABA therapy. How many people are diagnosed or how many children are diagnosed with autism per year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, there has been—the Child Development Clinic reported that 190 preschool children were diagnosed with ASD in 2014. That's an increase of 27 per cent over 2013 and an incredible 90 per cent over 2012. So the pressure is great.

But I did want to put on the record for the member from Lac du Bonnet that there is programming that happens for children that are in the school system. We call it the consult—there's 39 youth that are a part of a consultative follow-up support in school at the school-age program.

So it can happen in a variety of ways, depending on what the need of that child is. These are children that are integrated into the school system and they may need some support temporarily in the classroom. That classroom support happens through the special-needs funding, but we also have the experts that are able to go into the school and provide the information they need to ensure that they're able to provide the right amount of support.

We also have—I had mentioned the parent-support program that provides the educational information. And so those are some examples of what we are doing to meet the demand and ensure that we're able to provide the necessary service and information. An early diagnosis is crucial, as well as an intervention, and that's why we were proud to implement the autism outreach program, which is delivered by departmental staff and provides families with play-based, child-led flexible model of supports for their preschool children with ASD. The Autism Outreach provides families and caregivers with training and consultation on a variety of evidence-based autism intervention approaches.

And, since the fall of 2012, we have hired five autism early intervention specialists, and they have expanded into the rural area, which I know would be

important for the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) to know, and that is happening.

Mr. Ewasko: Since the minister brought up the parent-support program, how much was spent last year on the parent-support program, and how much is estimated to be spent this coming year?

* (16:30)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: In '14-15 the parent-support model, the funding was \$622,000, and it was to provide education, assessment, consultation and training services up to 100 Manitoba families, so that these families can begin working with their children, using an evidence-based strategy.

Mr. Ewasko: Part B to that question, what's the estimate for 2015-16?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Chair, \$622,000, the same as last year.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for the answers.

So you mentioned 190 students—pre-school students—children, were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. How many students are allowed into the ABA program per year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'd like to make sure that I—I've—the member heard me clearly when I said that ABA is only one example of a service that we provide, that there are a variety of services that we provide through Autism Outreach. There are programs called Floortime that are happening. There are also informal working groups, informal parent support groups that happen, and that you also—you have to also realize that there are supports that happen within the Family Services branch, but there's also supports that happen within Health and Education as well.

The program, the applied behaviour analysis program, which is part of our continuum of serving children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, it served in '13—oh, that's '14—in 2014, it served approximately 225 children. In the pre-school program, there were 115, and in the school-aged ABA program, 110, respectively.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister, for the words on the record.

When we're talking about kids diagnosed—children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, and we talk about the fact that some of them, in one of the programs that you're talking about, the ABA therapy, back in 2011, the election promise was that

your government was going to eliminate the wait times and the wait-list for applied behavioral analysis. And back then, in 2011, which is, you know, four years ago, there was 64 children on the wait-list. Now, my very first question was asking, where are we with the wait-list now? And so, it's a fairly direct question, so it's not something that needs the extended answer. Where are we at now for the amount of kids that are on the wait-list for ABA therapy today?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll have to take that under advisement so I can gather the right information, the correct information from the department and from the agency. But, again, I need to stress the fact that ABA is one service of a menu that we provide to children and youth in this province, and that it cannot—I cannot say it enough that we have invested more than 800 per cent funding for ASD services in this province since 1999. And that is within Family Services as well as within Education, the work that we've done.

So I'm not sure if anybody could have predicted the spike in diagnosis at all, but what we are doing is we are providing service to parents and to children; pre-school as well as school-aged, and now into adulthood. We are working with the community organizations, we are funding many of the organizations that provide support to families and to the children in the program.

The one that's coming to mind right now is the work that happens with GROW, and how they are able to provide support to adults, and it's around recreation as well as employment opportunities. And I think that those are all very valuable services that we do provide.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Minister. So, with the \$1.25 million being spent on parent support—when you're talking about parent support, are you talking about appealing them and keeping them relatively quiet so that they don't throw a major fit within this province? Fact being, we are probably one of the leaders in ABA therapy, where people actually move to the province for this therapy. And, you know, over the last four, five, six years, we've dropped considerably. And not only are we having kids age out, we're having wait-lists for this program and other programs. And you're spending \$1.25 million, where I'm pretty sure that some of the parents that are receiving some of that support would maybe sooner see that money go to try to maybe hold up one of your promises that you've made in the

last election, which was to eliminate the wait times for ABA therapy.

I know the minister—well, you know what, I'll leave it at that for that question and just, we'll just keep it at that for now.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As I have stated earlier, that we have worked with MFEAT, Manitoba Families for Effective Autism Treatment, with Guy Mercier, very, very closely. And this is one of the recommendations that we spoke about as a way to support families and to share them—share that information.

As I said, the commitment to ABA is one of a family commitment. And a person needs to truly understand what does it mean, not only for you as the parents of this child, but for the rest of your children, your—the rest of your family, and also for that individual child. So the parent support model is one about sharing information and education, doing some assessments with the family and with the child, providing consultation and training services about how to deal with a particular behaviour that may be occurring with the child. How do I identify what are the strengths and abilities of this child, and how to further develop them, and how to, again, provide that necessary support.

*(16:40)

I've heard from many families that talk about how isolated they can feel after the diagnosis of ASD. And I will never underestimate the importance of providing the parents with that forum. And this is a professionally led group. And these professions have dedicated their life to supporting families and children with the diagnosis of ASD. And I know that the information that is received is extremely valuable and not only supports that parent but supports that child and helps them to understand what their options are in the future.

Mr. Ewasko: So 190 preschool children were diagnosed in 2014 for autism. We've got a wait-list of many, many kids that we're going to eventually get that answer from the minister. I'm hoping, you know, as quickly as her department can get that answer to us as far as what the wait-list actually is.

We have kids that are aging out. I hear the minister being fairly excited about the fact that the kids are being diagnosed, but the fact is that the resources aren't there for those families. So they

know that their child has autism, but the fact is that they're then stuck. They can talk with other families that are experiencing similar difficulties or challenges with their kids, but the fact is that your government went door to door promising to end these wait-lists. So promise to give that hope for these families back in 2011 that there would not be any more wait times when, in fact, it's actually getting worse. So I'm not quite sure if I want you to work any harder because it's getting worse.

So what do you say to those families, those 190 preschool children—that's preschool children; we're not even talking any other kids or adults that are diagnosed with autism—that here you go, here's a diagnosis and we've got nothing else for you, resources, et cetera? What do you say to those families?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll say to the families that we have made record commitments to individuals, children diagnosed with ASD. We have portions of a lifespan initiative that we have developed. We can tell you that the total budget for Children's disABILITY Services is nearing \$30 million, and that includes a number of programs, some of them that would support autism—children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, and we're going to keep working to support families.

What I would tell them is that it was this government that brought in this program. It was this government that has increased it by 800 per cent and, you know, when the previous government or the Leader of the Opposition was sitting at the table, he cut funding. He talked about last year about recklessly cutting \$550 million for the budget. What would you suggest that that would do for ABA programs and ASD programs? I'd suggest that it would wipe out all children disability services and that is not okay.

This is a government that has made the initial investment, continues to make the investment that works with the professionals, that works with our partners at St. Amant, but also recognizes that there are various services that families are asking for, that there are services such as Floortime which are being asked for. There are services such as the Autism Outreach program where parents are getting the information in their home. There are parents that are asking for the parent support program. We're going to continue to work with the advocates, continue to work with the professions, continue to build on our

program and make the investments that we have, and we will not apologize for that.

We recognize that we have seen an increase, a marked increase, of 90 per cent in the last two years of the number of children that are diagnosed. We are working with the professionals to evaluate that number, but in the meantime we are working to provide the services for families.

Mr. Ewasko: And since the minister likes to throw out percentages, I'll give her a quick math problem so that she can maybe figure one additional one out, since she's increased the 800 per cent that she chatted about and then the 90 per cent diagnoses increase.

So, back in 2012, even though there was a promise in 2011 to not raise taxes, not raise the PST, in 2012—her government, including herself, went door to door in 2011 promising not to raise those taxes—2012, she went—part of her government—and broadened the scope of the PST. So if you have something that doesn't have any PST on it and you increase it to 8 per cent—I'll leave this question for her—what is that percentage increase, Minister?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will say that our commitment to create jobs, to build infrastructure, has made a remarkable difference in this province. We are the No. 1 economy. We have created 60,000 jobs. We will continue to do that. We will not apologize for that. We did not suggest that we would recklessly cut \$550 million out of our budget so we could continue to protect front-line services.

And we have done that. We have protected front-line services around children's disabilities, we have seen increases within them and we've also expanded it. We have also taken the Thrive! document and have worked together with the community partners to look at not only supporting the diagnosis and intervention and an implementation of a plan, but also looking about how do we move that from preschool to school age to post-secondary.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before recognizing the next question and the answer, I'll just remind all members that questions can be on any topic. This particular section of Estimates is on the Department of Family Services. So, you know, if the minister wants to answer a question that is outside of that scope, I'm fine as Chair with allowing that to happen. That's at the minister's discretion. But, just to be clear, there's no obligation for any minister to reply to something

that is outside the scope of their department or this particular section. So just FYI.

Recognizing now the honourable member for Riding Mountain.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I've been listening to the debate, and I would like to just get back to the grassroots concern with regard to services that are provided for families who have family members suffering from autism spectrum disorder.

My understanding is that—based on the minister's own comments, that no one expected the spike in the number of individuals being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. So, when you talk about a previous government not funding it, well, you've also just indicated that no one identified these unexpected spikes.

So let's get back to, you know, the real issue here is that there are a number of families that are suffering, a number of families that are feeling in isolation with regard to no services being identified for their child or for their family member, either when they age out or when they, you know, leave the school system. So the biggest concern I hear from whether it's individuals using ABA or Floortime or other services is that there doesn't appear to be any type of co-ordination of what is available for families.

And in that aspect of it, I want to know, does the—can the minister identify for me who in her department or in the Department of Health or in one of the other departments within government who may have a role, who actually co-ordinates the supports and services? So if a family is feeling frustrated and can't identify the supports that they would like for their child, because needs are diverse within this—and the ASP—or ASD illness, so is there a co-ordinator that a family can go to within the government who would then assist them—and the minister's talked about assessment, consultation, identification, treatment—is there somebody specific within her department that can be identified as the co-ordinator?

* (16:50)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are co-ordinators throughout the province around Children's disABILITY Services that are available to have those conversations. In the branch, we have folks that work around the policy and the program development, but every region has

children's special services available that they can access that will help them sort of navigate the system. And I know that every region is different and that the services vary between regions. So that's—the autism outreach worker is just one of those initiatives that is available to provide that support.

So there is support in the—on the front lines. If there is a particular case that you have, that a family is having difficulty reaching someone, I will certainly, off the record, take that information down and try and help get them in touch with the correct person.

Mrs. Rowat: So I'll take it one step further. You're saying that there're outreach workers within different areas of the province. Who do those outreach workers then report to? Is there somebody higher up within the system that would then be overseeing the outreach workers to ensure that there's some co-ordination? Because we're hearing that there is no co-ordination that—we're hearing schools, depending on what division you're in, will receive supports and services whether you're—you know, what—if you're not in school yet, if you're preschool, it's what—in the health-care system you—some outreach workers provide different types of services, good or bad.

So who above the outreach workers is the contact within the department?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So we have area directors and there's Community Service Delivery—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So in the region, there are those people that are on the front lines that know the communities, know the services that are available, know the family, will work with them to find out where they want to be. There's the Community Service Delivery executive director that is available for that information within the region.

I also think that it's very important that we talk about the Children's Therapy Initiative and how we have co-ordinated a co-ordinated approach to therapy services across the province, and that is amongst departments such as Family Services, Education and Advanced Learning, as well as Health. Family Services is the lead of that. We have been recognized by the work that we've been able to do about improving the service co-ordination. We know that we are looking at the improved service co-ordination through the development of regionally based central

intake systems that enhance the delivery of therapy services for children and youth from birth to age 21.

So we're going to continue to work and to provide a co-ordinated service. If there is a particular case that's needing attention, I welcome you to share it with me and we will certainly follow up.

Mrs. Rowat: So, obviously, what the minister's telling me, there is no co-ordinator. There's nobody that is actually in charge of or leads this outreach or this type of programming. We're hearing the minister talk about 800 per cent funding being in—put into this issue, and we are not denying that autism spectrum disorder is increasing and the numbers are increasing. You know, I look forward to hearing what the minister has with regard to wait-time lists.

But what we're hearing in the community over and over again is that there is not a co-ordinated effort. She's—you know, the minister's talking about different types of programs and services out there: assessment, consultation. But what we're hearing is families are looking for some type of uniform system or a uniform body that would be available to them to address concerns, some type of a co-ordinator, some type of group or an organization.

I know that Thrive! is out there, but Thrive! I understand, based on the committee, have been told, bring forward ideas but don't include a dollar, a fee—a dollar attachment to that because we have no money. So, you know, Thrive! is out there, but it's being told don't bring any ideas forward that cost any money because we don't have any more money. You know, that is stifling an organization. That's not, you know, supporting it and encouraging it.

So I'm going to ask the minister again. You speak about all these different things that are being offered for the community, for the families that have an individual that is suffering from autism spectrum disorder, but there is no real co-ordination of those types of services, so that if somebody is struggling to find a specific program or specific support, it's just not there.

So, again, I'm going to ask the minister if she can indicate to me who in her department is responsible for the assessment, the co-ordination and identification of programming and supports for families that have somebody suffering from ASD.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll put it back on the record that we have a system within Manitoba that we have regional services that are provided, and as a rural member,

you will know the value of making sure that we have services that are available across the province. There are professionals that provide those services within each region that are the front-line workers that work with the rest of their colleagues within government but also outside of government to work at developing resources.

So we have the front-line worker. We then have the director of the region that also provides those services. In the branch, we have a director of Children's disABILITY Services and the Family Violence Prevention Program. That can be a resource for families if they choose to go that route.

There are a variety of services that are provided, and they are different. Our ability to hire the new five autism outreach workers was important to ensure that we did have services, was an opportunity to co-ordinate the services. The Children's Therapy Initiative is also one of those means which co-ordinates the services between different departments and different sectors, and we have seen some ability to provide a better service, but we have more work to do.

Mrs. Rowat: Yes, a lot of work to do within that area, because that's a continual—that's a concern that's coming up continually from families who come forward with concerns with regard to supports available to them within the autism spectrum disorder community is that there doesn't seem to be a co-ordinated effort.

Can the minister indicate to me how often Thrive! currently meets, and can she also indicate to me who sits on that committee?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We'll get that information for you tomorrow.

I want it made very clear that I've had the opportunity to meet with a number of stakeholders on an ongoing basis over the last year and a bit, and I will continue to have that open door and hear their voices, and they will continue to challenge us to do a better job, and we will continue to work with them.

I have seen an interesting relationship on this file like I've never seen in any other file, how the advocates have the opportunity to sit at a table with us and define and redefine the programming in which we're doing and are full partners. It is extremely valuable for all members as we work together to provide the necessary services for families and individuals.

Mrs. Rowat: And I agree with the minister; this is a very strong-willed community, but they're fighting for their children's lives, so it's a no-brainer. I—any of us would put every effort forward to make sure that their child is given every opportunity to survive. So, you know, they may be strong-willed, but for a very good cause and a very good reason, so.

Very disappointed, I guess, with the government's, you know, action on this file. It's something that I've been passionate about for several years, and when I hear from individuals who are connected with Thrive! who are told, you know, bring your ideas forward, but don't bring anything forward that's going to cost money because we're just not, you know, able to provide that type of commitment. So, when the minister speaks about investment, commitment, I think that that's encouraging, but when you hear from people that are involved in—

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

FINANCE

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Jim Maloway): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Welcome to the minister.

I'd like to ask some questions about appropriations that have been moved from MIT into Finance, and so I can try to get a better idea of what's moved and what hasn't and what it indeed this entails.

So, when I look on page 8 of the reconciliation stage statement for the Estimates book for Finance, just a little down from the top there's a transfer of functions from Infrastructure and Transportation of \$93,995,000. And when I go back into last year's Estimates books for MIT, I can find a number of \$68,386,000 that looks like it coincides with the similar function.

And I'm wanting to know where I look in last year's MIT books to find out the information or the money in the—that's been transferred across, and how I compare this from year to year?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): All right. So, we—the decision was made to transfer all of Accommodation Services from MIT to Finance. That included three positions in the admin and finance division from Accommodation Services, but the protective and the government Air Services stayed with MIT. So what was transferred was Accommodation Services and three additional staff. But the protective and the Air Services stayed where they were with the MIT.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. So, then, when I look at the number of \$93,995,000, where do I look in the books to compare that to coming from MIT? I can't come up from that, with that number.

Mr. Dewar: So the member would like the origins or the—he wants to know the—what was transferred to accommodate the—to add up to the 93 million? Well, we'll find that for him.

Mr. Helwer: I know full well from past years if I go to ask these questions in MIT, they'll tell me to come back here. So we'll do it here first, and then we'll go there.

Mr. Dewar: I want to, as well, update the House, or the committee, that the Lieutenant Governor's office function was also transferred to the—from MIT to Finance. And the member would have to go, and he has the—I believe he has the—this is last year's budget, the 2014 Estimates of Expenditure, on page 100, and you would need to—

An Honourable Member: MIT last year.

Mr. Dewar: Oh. Well, you would need to—I'll ask the member to go to government services programs, when he would then add them up, subtract protective services, which stayed in MIT, subtract the government air services, which stayed in MIT, and add back the accommodation cost recovery. Now, that seems very simple.

Mr. Helwer: Well, we'll work on that. And so the individuals that were responsible for these activities in MIT, have they physically been moved to Finance or are they still operating in the MIT environment and just working for Finance?

* (15:00)

Mr. Dewar: Yes, they're still working in MIT. They're still reporting to MIT. It won't be until the appropriation act is passed that they become part of the Department of Finance.

Mr. Helwer: So will they have to physically move at that point or they will stay in their current location, and how does that work with the government's plan to change and reduce the workforce?

Mr. Dewar: I ask the member to repeat that last—did he say workforce or the footprint?

Mr. Helwer: The minister has spoken about reducing the civil service in—when I reread Hansard, so that is one of the areas that is under discussion. The footprint might be a follow-up question, but he can wish to—choose to answer that at this point as well.

Mr. Dewar: As the member will know, the government made a commitment, I think it was in 2012, to reduce the size of the civil service by 600, and we've accomplished that. So there is no plans, any plans by the government, to reduce the size of the civil service beyond what we've already committed and accomplished.

Mr. Helwer: So, then, going back, will these individuals physically move from their location of MIT to Finance?

Mr. Dewar: There are no plans to physically move them from where they are currently, but they'll be, of course—their expenditure for that department will now be coming from the Department of Finance as opposed to the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. There are no plans to physically move the current staff complement.

Mr. Helwer: So, in fact, Central Services will be decentralized. Is that what I'm hearing here, then? This is not Central Services; this is only central financing.

Mr. Dewar: This initiative is designed to centralize the management and the program responsibility. As I said, there will be no reduction in terms of the number of employees. There's no plans to physically move them from their current location. It really is—try to find some efficiencies there, and we already have, as I mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. We wanted to reduce the footprint of the government in terms of office space by 100,000 square feet. We, in fact, have exceeded that by 40 per cent. So I'm not sure if—hopefully, that will respond and answer the member's question.

Mr. Helwer: So just to clarify, this is Central Services, and the staff of Central Services are employed, are paid—are responsible to Central Services, but they are working throughout the departments throughout Manitoba and may not, in fact, be dealing directly on a day-to-day basis with everybody else in Central Services. So I'm a little mystified on how you can have economies of scale with people spread out throughout the civil service if—where's the savings in all this if you have a Central Services that is decentralized throughout Manitoba?

Mr. Dewar: I will state again that when the appropriation act is passed, the staff will be transferred from MIT to Finance and with the—with a goal of centralizing the management function. There are no plans to reduce the staff. There are no plans to physically alter their workspace. The intention, again, is once the appropriation act is passed, the staff and their functions will be transferred to Finance from MIT and the management component will be centralized.

Mr. Helwer: Okay, well, given that answer, I guess we'll try to move on to something else.

So, when I go down further on page 8, I see allocation of funds from a variety of departments, and we have from Infrastructure and Transportation \$6,774,000. Can the minister tell us what that fund is for?

Mr. Dewar: The number the member refers to was the budget for the Infrastructure Transportation accommodation costs. That has all been now transferred to Finance and with the goal of centralizing those costs within the Department of Finance.

Mr. Helwer: So continuing on down the page, we have printed estimates of capital investment. So these, I would assume, are actual capital assets transfer and functions from Infrastructure and Transportation of \$80 million. Can the minister tell us what capital assets are involved in that transfer?

*(15:10)

Mr. Dewar: We were able to, I think, deal with this a couple of days ago, but we're prepared to do it yet again. That \$80 million that is referenced on page 117 of this year's Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, and the member will see that that is the Accommodation Services Capital Projects and—they're capital projects from the expenditures from the Department of MIT.

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister tell us what those capital projects are?

Mr. Dewar: Well, that, of course, is the '14-15 expenditures, and when the Public Accounts is released at the end of September, the detail will be provided to the member.

Mr. Helwer: Does the minister have the detail available now?

Mr. Dewar: Well, the short answer is, no, we haven't finalized the information. So the member will have to wait—like all members will have to wait until the Public Accounts is published in September.

Mr. Helwer: Can the minister give me an example of what capital projects would have been similar in previous years?

Mr. Dewar: Well, as the member knows, we have a very aggressive capital campaign, both in terms of infrastructure, health care, education, and similar with accommodation services, so there's over 100 projects, but, for example, it would be the work that was done at Milner Ridge, or that was done—and this would be of interest to my colleague from The Pas—work that was done on the University College of the North, for example. There's—I said there's over 100 projects that we initiated over the years, and so I would, again, give you a couple of examples, as I said, some of the work that we've done on Corrections, some of the work that we've done on some of our post-secondary educational institutions.

Mr. Helwer: Well, seeing as now we have a number, would it be possible for the minister to provide us with the dates and the details of those projects when they were done, when they started, and are those some of the things that have been moved in this type of a transfer? I understand that he will not be able to do so today, but is that something that the minister would be willing to provide, seeing as we now have a number of 100 projects, well, approximately?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I can report to the member that this year there'll be close to 150 projects initiated by Accommodation Services. For example, we're doing an upgrade to the Manitoba Museum, an expansion. We're upgrading the fire alarm system at the Manitoba Centennial Centre. And if the member were to join me on a walk around the Legislative Building, he would find that we're doing work on this grand old building as well. As you'd probably guessed, it needs some upgrades, and so that's part of the—part of our strategy, part of our capital upgrades.

And just for a couple—I said a couple of examples, Manitoba Museum, the fire alarm—*[interjection]* I know the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) wants us to put an air conditioner in here, but I think at this point, we'll rely upon the fans to cool our building. But just to give you a couple of examples, the Manitoba Museum, as I said, the fire alarm upgrades to the Manitoba Centennial Centre and some work we're doing here on the Legislative Building.

Mr. Helwer: So, I'll ask again. Will the minister be able to provide us with the details of those projects: the dollar amounts, the dates when they're going to start, the dates when they're going to finish?

* (15:20)

Mr. Dewar: Well, one of the challenges we face, and I'm sure the member would be aware, is that when you put something out to tender, you don't want the number to be public. You want that to be a competitive process in terms of the costs of that particular project, and as you said we have close to a hundred and—as I've said, we have close to 150 projects planned in this particular fiscal year.

So it's—and it's things—cash flow at different times, so it's—we couldn't provide you with an up-to-date list immediately. We could provide you with categories and their amount. Maybe that'll satisfy the member.

Mr. Helwer: Well, I keep reducing the number of requests, so can he actually give me a list of the 150-odd projects of what these are?

Mr. Dewar: Again, I'll just inform the member that, of course, these—there's changes in terms of how these things are flowed, there are issues regarding, again, the tender. We could provide the member with categories and, as the year proceeds, we can be more than happy to provide the member with more detail.

Mr. Helwer: Well, apparently that's all I'm going to get for the minister, so we'll have to depend on that.

So going back to the minister did refer me to page 117, and the number that we talked about doesn't quite match there. So I'm looking at a number of 63 million one twenty-five, and there seems to be a small discrepancy of some \$20 million. Can the minister tell me what the differences are and where I would find them in the book?

Mr. Chairperson: Would the honourable member repeat the question, please.

Mr. Helwer: All right, well, the minister did refer me to page 117, Details of Appropriation from Finance for Capital Investment, and a total there is some six hundred and—\$63,125,000, and when we look at page 8, we see Printed Estimates of Capital Investment transfer of functions of some \$80 million. Where do I find the difference, on what page?

Mr. Dewar: Well, the 84 million four hundred and eighty-eight, as you would note, is—would match—that's a 2014-2015 year, and the 2015-2016 year is \$63,125,000.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you to the minister for that clarification. So there's a reduction in capital projects of some \$20 million. Is that how I read that?

Mr. Dewar: I'm told that it's not only a—it's a cash flow requirement. Some of the projects, of course, are in various stages, like the UCN, for example. And it really has to do with the type of projects as opposed to simply the cost of each project.

But the member is right when he does note that there is a reduction in the budget authority under that line.

Mr. Helwer: So, in terms of actual physical assets, can the minister tell me what type of physical asset would have been transferred from MIT to Finance, or is it just the project? Would it be an asset? Are there any assets, for instance, on the Red River campus that have been transferred to Finance from MIT?

* (15:30)

Mr. Dewar: Well, the answer is all assets that are currently with the Accommodation Services will transfer to Finance and will be owned by Finance. So all the assets from Accommodation Services that's currently housed in MIT will be transferred to the Department of Finance.

Mr. Helwer: So would one of those assets be the Red River community college campus?

Mr. Dewar: Well, as the member knows there are two campuses that Red River community college has. The Princess one is owned by the community college. The Notre Dame campus is currently owned by the Accommodation Services.

Mr. Helwer: As clear—as unclear as the minister's answer was, I'll have to take it at that.

Are there any plans for future transfers from MIT to Finance?

Mr. Dewar: That'll be a discussion for future years' budgets.

Mr. Helwer: Did this transfer include either of the Assiniboine Community College campuses?

Mr. Dewar: The ACC is owned by Accommodation Services and will be transferred to Department of Finance.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): I just am also looking at the reconciliation statement too, and with my critic role, I have—there's a few categories I want to discuss with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), the first one being the tourism, culture after—under the transfer of functions from Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection, there was a portion of \$1.3 million. What would that be accounted for? Is that jobs?

Mr. Dewar: Well, as the member would know, the—there is—not only was the MIT transferred to—or Accommodation Services part of MIT transferred to the Finance, there was a decision made by the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to transfer the Public Utilities Board—transferred to Finance on November the 14th, and that function now is under the—under our—in our office. And the—there was also the transfer of eight employees from Culture, Heritage, Tourism, Sport as well, so there was—not only the function was transferred and the responsibility was transferred, but the eight employees were—eight positions were transferred on November the—excuse me—November the 14th.

Mr. Piwniuk: So those jobs, those eight jobs, were they basically working with precisely with Tourism and Culture, and now are they the same jobs, the same amount of jobs are going to be with Finance now?

Mr. Dewar: Yes, they are exactly the same. And just to remind the member, that was November 2014 that the transfer was made.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Chair, I just want to go down to the allocation of funds again, looking at both—I'll start with—when it comes to the second on the list there, Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection, there was \$3,785,000 that were allocated of funds to the—on this reconciliation part to the Minister of Finance here. So what does that represent?

Mr. Dewar: The answer to the member is that those are all the office Accommodation Services that were

provided in—by those separate departments. You'll see the listing there. We're now—those are now the responsibility of the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Piwniuk: When it comes to the multicultural and literacy, again, it's the same explanation for those too, for that item? And there's 68,000?

Mr. Dewar: The member is correct.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Continuing on my line of questioning that I had begun at the end of yesterday's Estimates, I wanted to just return briefly to the idea of Manitoba's credit rating and credit outlook and ask, again, ask the minister if he feels that because of his failure to make—failure of the government to make progress on the four specific areas where Moody's Investors Service said they needed to see forward motion, if he feels that right now Manitoba is more at risk of a credit downgrade because of the failure to make progress on—and I'll just quickly repeat them: the fact that they will not be in balance by 2016-17, by a reduced commitment to stabilize the debt burden, a loss of fiscal discipline, as indicated by Moody's, and a contained—a continued and sustained increase in debt and debt service ratios.

Does the minister believe that they've moved closer, as a result of their failure to make progress on these important indicators, to a credit downgrade?

* (15:40)

Mr. Dewar: I'll—the—I think this has been an area of debate both in the Chamber and in this committee over the past while, and as I said to the member, and I know the Premier has stated this, and that, you know, we take any outlook, any upgrades or downgrades by any of the bond rating agencies seriously. We, you know, as I said, we—the two of them, both Dominion Bond Rating agency and Standard & Poor's have affirmed our credit rating as one that's A-high and the other is AA. Both of them have recognized that we have a very strong economy and we have a strong budgetary flexibility. They recognize that we have a—we're a good credit risk, that we have a very stable economy.

Members will know that we have an economy that will, by most indicators, will lead the nation in economic growth in the next couple of years. Just reading before I came to the committee, the Conference Board of Canada report on—both on Canada and on Manitoba, and you'd see that our picture here is fairly rosy compared to both the national government and other provincial

governments, and the member should take some time. I know, I did provide him with a copy of the Conference Board of Canada's report. If he would like, I can give him this copy as well. It would show that Manitoba is expected to be one of the leaders when it comes to economic growth. And then they talk about the fact that we have, again, a stable, diverse economy.

And we know the other economies in Canada, you just have to look at what's happened in Alberta with—and Newfoundland. As I mentioned before, I—when I went to the Finance ministers' meeting, I had shared a taxicab ride with the Minister of Finance from Saskatchewan and the new Minister of Finance from Newfoundland who, over the course of the day, he told me that his deficit in Newfoundland was going from \$300 million to \$900-million deficit. Regrettably, it ended up being a \$1.1-billion deficit. So what they had to do there is they're faced with a deficit almost, I believe, a quarter of the size of their health-care budget. And some of the action that they've taken there was to raise their HST by 2 percentage points—Progressive Conservative government in Newfoundland raised their HST from 13 to 15 per cent, one of the highest in the nation. And they had to do that because, well, I guess they had all choices, but they felt it was necessary to do that because of the effect of a \$50-a-barrel oil, and they built all their assumptions on much higher, closer to \$75, \$100, and the—so, but that's regrettable.

But our situation here in Manitoba is somewhat different in that we have a diverse economy. We don't rely upon one particular sector in terms of our revenues. We have a strong manufacturing base. We have a strong construction base. Our agriculture base has had a record year in 2013 but you only have one record year, Mr. Chair, and so it was a slight rebound last year but expectation is that they'll have a good—I think all of us would hope that there'll be another good year this year.

Just reading the Free Press on Saturday, back in, I think, B7 of the—a small, little article but it was, I think, an important one. It talked about the retail sales in Manitoba had an increase, the highest increase in Canada, highest increase in Canada in retail sales. And that tells us that Manitobans, consumers, have confidence in their own fiscal health and they have confidence in their own province and they believe that it's a good time to go out and purchase a new item. I'm sure all of us can relate to that.

So when you base it—when you look at that, and they look at—these firms will look at all these things, you know, when you have a strong economy, that's a decision that we made. Members opposite probably have a different decision, would have made a different decision and, you know, we're eager to hear that. People have asked me and they've commented on the action that we've taken, and—but we're waiting for the opposition to come forward with what they would do. And we've noticed that they were purposefully vague in their amendment to the budget. They didn't make any reference as to when they would return to surplus.

But I remind the member—I will remind the member that in the last election campaign, they went and knocked on every door—knocked on every door—across the province, and they said, you know, our goal is to return to surplus in 2018. And, you know, Hugh McFadyen and his team and every one of the members, except for the member for Arthur-Virden—I can't fault him because he wasn't an MLA or wasn't the candidate at that time—but every other one went and knocked on every door and they said, you know, our goal is to return to surplus in 2018.

And so I don't know what the bond rating agencies would think about their approach. I don't know. Maybe the member could speculate that, or could speculate about that, when he asks his next question. But we know as important is that we have—they'll look at the whole economic situation here in the province. They know that Manitoba will—is forecast to lead the nation, the Conference Board of Canada. Winnipeg will be the fastest growing city in western Canada, and faster than Regina, faster than Saskatoon. You know the members opposite have this great love of Saskatchewan, but you note that—you know our economy is growing.

Again, if the member is interested, I can provide him with a copy of this Conference Board report, which shows that Saskatchewan will have here a growth rate of 1.3 per cent, no, excuse me, 0.8 per cent, and 0.1-0.2 per cent next year, whereas Manitoba will see a growth rate of 2.9 per cent, the highest in the nation.

They're also predicting that our unemployment rate in Manitoba will fall below 5 per cent, and soon it'll be they're predicting—I know the members don't like predictions because they don't like good news. They don't like good news; they don't believe—they just generally don't believe any of these reports. But, you know, what's the facts? The facts are we created

20,000 jobs last year. The facts are we lead the nation in that. The facts are we have the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada. The facts are we have retail sales that are up. These are all facts. The members may want to wish to ignore those facts, but those are the facts, Mr. Chair.

And, as I said, you know, we will take, if and when Moody's or any of the others will pass judgment upon us, we'll take it seriously. But we also acknowledge that when they do look at our fiscal situation, that they look at it with, you know, a broader lens and they will have to, and they will see, that we're on, you know, where we may have decided to push the balance back a little bit—well, actually meeting the commitment made by the members opposite, you know. And so I'm kind of wondering why he seems to be on this line of questioning.

But, again, we do take their comments seriously, and—but we're confident. Again, we're confident that we're moving in the right direction. When you're leading the nation, there's only one No. 1, and that's Manitoba.

Mr. Friesen: I'm starting to think that the minister will actually ask—he's unsure why we'd be asking the question. I would remind the minister we asked the question because under this government Manitobans now pay \$840 million each year just to service the debt that has grown to \$36.3 billion under this NDP government. It may not matter to him, but I assure the minister this matters to Manitobans, money that goes to pay interest payments and debt servicing costs is money that cannot go to provide good front-line services.

So let's make it clear this is the reason we asked. If there is nothing more endemic to the discussions this afternoon than discussions about the risk to Manitoba's credit rating; as Finance Minister, I would believe he would recognize that.

My next question for the minister would be with respect to Dominion Bond Rating agency, because he actually referenced that particular rating service as well.

Now on October 17th, 2014, Dominion Bond Rating Service confirmed their A rating. They didn't increase it, but they confirmed it with a stable rating. However, what they noted in that rationale that accompanied that renewal of a stable rating was the fact that they said, while debt has increased, it appears to be stabilizing, and they also indicated after experiencing a delay last year Manitoba's target

to restore fiscal balance by 2016-17 remains intact in the current budget.

Now the Minister of Finance knows two things have changed, two things have been updated since DBRS issued that renewal of an A rating. The two things are the debt did not stabilize, as DBRS anticipated; instead it is up sharply to 20—\$36.3 billion, and Manitoba will now not make their target to eliminate the deficit by 2016-17. As a matter of fact, this Finance Minister now declines to actually indicate a date by which the deficit will be eliminated. Even in his answer, he simply indicated, we'll push that date back.

So my question to him is simple. DBRS issued a stable rating based on data that does not—now not exist. Debt is higher, deficit's not gone. Does the minister believe that the economic performance of his government has created the conditions in which DBRS may lower their rating for the province of Manitoba?

* (15:50)

Mr. Dewar: Well, I just want to correct the record. The—first of all, the \$36 billion is gross borrowing; it's not net debt. So I just want to make sure the member, when he's speaking to the issue, has the facts.

I'll inform the member that most provinces have seen an increase in their net debt in the last year. I'll also remind the member that last year our net-debt-to-GDP ratio was the fifth lowest. This year it's the fourth lowest.

So I remind the member again that when they, Dominion Bond—my answer is quite similar to the one I gave about Moody's. They will look at the whole picture and they will see that Manitoba will be one of the highest performers.

And, you know, the federal government that his party supports nationally—you know, and I was reading the Conference Board of Canada report and I think it's very instructive. I think the member should read this. And it starts off and just talks about Canada, which the—which his party is the—leads the nation and, you know, they're running the federal government. And it said here, I quote: The overall result will be another year of unimpressive economic growth. Indeed, the economy is to expand by just—just—1.9 per cent this year, the fourth straight year of growth below 2.5 per cent. That is the legacy of the Conservative Party in Ottawa.

And it said, again, as a result—again, I quote, job growth is expected to remain fairly tepid. And I remind the member that our unemployment rate nationally is about 6.8 per cent and they—6.9 per cent, and they're expecting it to go—to make this dramatic, you know, drop to 6.8 per cent, where the United States is at 5.5 per cent. And they're suggesting that the Canadian growth will be just over 2 per cent over—for the next number of years. And, again, as I've said, they're expecting job growth at the national level to be fairly tepid. And unimpressive are the words they used to describe the Conservative government in Ottawa when it comes to economic policy, unimpressive and tepid.

Whereas our, as I'll again—I'll remind the member he can go to page 45 and you'll see. It says here: Manitoba's economy is expected to expand briskly, led by construction and transport and warehousing industries. Healthy output will experience—excuse me—construction output will experience healthy 8.5 per cent growth. Industry gains will be supported by both public and private investments.

So, yes, tepid, and then you have healthy gains. And it says the provincial government is also investing \$5.5 billion in infrastructure throughout the province between 2014 and 2018. The province's real domestic product growth will grow 2.9 per cent. And as I told the member, this is a three-year high, and nearly a full percentage point from 2014. Again, I'll quote, the economy will lift unemployment 1.7 per cent in 2015, the most since 2002—the largest gain among the provinces.

So you have—when they refer to Manitoba, Mr. Chair, they use the terms of the largest gain, expanding briskly, and when you look at the members opposite, unimpressive economic growth nationally and tepid job—that's got to hurt. And that is why we're confident that when all these agencies will look at our situation, that they'll realize that Manitoba's doing well, leading the nation.

And, you know, the member, like I said, he doesn't believe the Conference Board of Canada. Maybe he could read—believe the Bank of Montreal that came out. It said the job growth in Manitoba last year was the best in 13 years—job growth, best in 13 years. Again, maybe he doesn't have to believe them; he doesn't have to believe the Conference Board of Canada. But, you know, he has to recognize we have created 20,000 jobs last year, a record—that is a

record, you know. And not only that, those people are—individuals are getting paid more. Again, that is the best in the nation.

We've doubled the size of our GDP. We have the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada. Those are the facts, Mr. Chair. Retail sales are up last month, a record amount. Wholesale records—wholesale sales are up. These are the facts. And we're confident when these agencies will look at Manitoba's economy, that they'll take all these issues into effect—or into—when they'll consider it, they'll be more confident that they'll see Manitoba performing very well relative to both the other provinces and to the nation.

Mr. Friesen: I tend to forget what the question actually was by the time the minister has finished giving his rambling response. I know I was asking him to comment on the real risk of DBRS issuing a credit downgrade. He seems to have gone out on gravel roads again.

But, if he does want to look for third-party responses to his budget, I would tell him to look no further than responses like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that says that, unless the Manitoba government gets serious and actually addresses these issues, the province will continue to lose business, employees and private investment. If he doesn't like that quote, he could take the quote from the executive VP for the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, who called this a fiscal fallacy that produces massive deficits, poor results and limited options. This is the story of the budget.

If he doesn't like that he could refer to Chuck Davidson of the Manitoba Chamber who said, Manitoba has become an island. When you take measures that make us uncompetitive, business takes action. Business has the ability to move. And he also says this was a great opportunity to at least get us on a path to get our economic house in order. They missed the mark. Wayne Simpson, professor of economics at University of Manitoba, said the pattern since the last recession has been to sustain program spending growth at a rate that exceeds total revenue growth. And total revenues have grown by an average of 3 per cent; spending growth has grown by 3.6.

The real message, the real legacy of this government, as the minister knows, is their legacy of overspending, of increased taxation, of a ballooning debt, and deficits that go in the wrong direction. He

knows that this is his legacy. So now all he has left is forecasts.

And, to be completely accurate, the Conference Board of Canada was very clear in their estimation that Manitoba's fortune is brought on in large part by the fact that the other provinces have got shot in the foot—their words—by declining oil prices. The minister knows all this.

So he cherry-picks. He picks and chooses. He looks for anything that looks rosy on the horizon. And forecasts are great; economic record of this government, not so great.

* (16:00)

I'm looking at page 10 of the budget for 2015, and I would invite the minister to comment on this shift, from reporting—from a focus on summary reporting to core reporting.

Now, in last year's budget, the minister will know that the summary forecast showed a budget in the black by 2016-17. Now, of course, we know that's not the case anymore. But the fundamental change in the reporting in his budget is that in this year's budget, 2015, only the core balance—core government balanced financial strategy is indicated.

Now, it shows a surplus taking place in a projection in the future but not a summary budget. Now, does the minister understand that bond rating agencies don't look at core government expenditures and surplus deficit numbers? They're looking for summary numbers. And does he have a target? Is there a date by which the summary budget will be in the black?

Mr. Dewar: Thank you. I just want to—I have to respond to some of the information the member put on the record regarding the forecasts of our economic situation, Mr. Chair. And he quoted a number of individuals in—from the business community, and that's fine. I don't have any problem with that. I met with them. I met—I remember there was a—the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, they survey their members. They survey their members and they talk about whether or not they have confidence in the provincial economies. They came out the other day, or just before the budget—it might have been just post budget where there has been an increase in business confidence in Manitoba as reported by the Canadian Federation of

Independent Business. The member didn't put that on the record.

I'll remind the member I did meet with all these. I met with the chamber of commerce, the Winnipeg; I met with the Manitoba chamber. In fact, this morning, I was at a breakfast with the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and had a great time there, and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) spoke at it, and he received a very positive result. I know the people at my particular table were very, very pleased with the Premier's comments, very pleased with the direction of our government. And, when I met with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, we had a very good dialogue regarding Manitoba's current and future fiscal situation, and we talked about what would make—what would help, from their perspective, to grow the economy. Well, one of the things they said was to see a lowering of the taxes that businesses pay. Well, and that's what we did.

And members will know we were at one time paying the highest corporate tax rate in Canada, 17 per cent—17 per cent.

You know, and I know the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook); he's a businessman, and I don't know what he thinks about the fact that his party used to support the highest corporate tax rate in Canada. We came in and we lowered that to 12, one of the lowest. And then we came into power, the small-business tax—now, I don't know if the member is a corporation or maybe he might be a small-business person. I think he might be. That was at 8 per cent—8 per cent. And now, that's at zero. That is the lowest in Canada—the lowest in Canada. And not only did we lower it to zero, we've now expanded the—we've increased the threshold so that 2,000 more small-business men and women won't have to pay any taxes to the provincial government. They won't have to go and write a cheque out to the Minister of Finance when it comes to the end of the year when they see their accountant in terms of whether or not they have to pay any taxes to us because they don't. Another 2,000 small businesses in Manitoba will not have to pay taxes to—well, I guess, to me.

And, you know, I'm happy for that. I'm happy for them because you know what they'll do? They will go, and they will take that, and they've told me that what they'll do is they will take that 2,000—those 2,000 small businesses, they'll take that money; they will go and they'll invest in their businesses. They will invest in research and development and, ultimately, Mr. Chair, ultimately,

those 2,000 businesses who don't have to pay income tax to the provincial government will create jobs, and that is what we're all about here, you know.

And members opposite, I don't know why they're so opposed to this. I have no idea why they're so opposed to the small-business sector. And he quoted a number of them. He quoted the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; he quoted the chamber of commerce; he quoted the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. I have no idea why he's so opposed. Why he's so opposed to the small-business community. Why is he so opposed to the corporate sector that he—him and his colleagues, every step along the way, they tried and they regrettably—or fortunately, they—we were able to get those tax cuts through despite their best efforts to stop us.

I have no idea why they're opposed to the small-business community, why they're opposed to the corporate sector here in Manitoba, but we're on their side. We're on their side, and that is why not only did we lower the corporate tax rate, not only did we eliminate the small-business tax—I'll remind the member of his party in Ottawa, they made an announcement to lower the small-business tax rate from 11 to 9 per cent in one-quarter increments, a quarter of a per cent over the next four years. We've completely eliminated it, Mr. Chair.

So, if he wants to quote, you know, individuals from the business community, that's great. And I know that when we met them—I met with them; I look forward to meeting with them again. I'll look forward to letting them know that we listen to them; we listen to their advice. Their advice to us was to make Manitoba more competitive, and you look at Winnipeg and Brandon, you'll see there are independent studies done that both Winnipeg and Brandon are some of the most competitive cities in North America to do business.

And it's—again, it's not just simply a factor of taxes, although we have cut the corporate taxes for business close to \$450 million every year. It adds up to, I think, about—I have to be careful, but certainly it's in the billions that we have reduced taxes to corporations. And this is money that these businesses have taken and they've reinvested in the economy, and that is why we have the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada and that is why the Conference Board of Canada has predicted our unemployment rate will fall below 5 per cent. They're predicting that we'll have unemployment rates in 2016-2017, 4.9; in 2017, 4.7 per cent.

These are impressive numbers, and that is because we worked with the business community, we work with the educational community, we work with labour to build an economy that's growing. We have one of the fastest growing economies in Canada, and we're proud of that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, let the record show that the minister has again taken probably 10 minutes to answer a simple question—a simple question that would show some recognition of fundamental government reporting practices. This point is too important to not get across.

I will ask the minister again. The government has made a systemic change. They have made a fundamental change in the way they report on government performance. In the previous budget, in the 2014 budget, you could find, I believe on page 10, a chart that showed for the summary budget an indication of the progress the government would—made year by year and the date by which the summary budget would be in the black, the budget would be in balance.

Budget 2015 is absent of such a report. The minister himself admitted that the government is now favouring a focus on core reporting, and on page 10 of this year's budget is a core-government-balanced financial strategy that shows that they will not make it into balance this year; they will not make it into balance next year. They show a core government projection in the year 2019, but there is no indication at which time—at what point the summary budget would be in balance.

My question to the minister is, why is that chart not in the budget? Does he have a plan for the summary budget to be in balance, and does he understand that bond-rating agencies do not look at his core-government-balanced financial strategy, they are looking for a summary budget document?

* (16:10)

Mr. Dewar: I'll remind the member—I think we've discussed this at another—one of our earlier sittings, and that we are still reporting on summary. That has not changed. And the member talks about the A rating agencies, they look at core as well.

And, you know, when you look at the summary, there's over a hundred and odd, 120, I think, entities that are included in the summary budget and some of them we have no control over. You can't control the weather, you know; you have a bad winter and you

have a number of collisions. Manitoba Public Insurance has a large number of claims; that affects their bottom line. You have a situation where you may have a drought scenario in the summer, and water does not flow and electricity is not produced, and you may have a situation where Manitoba Hydro loses money, and it affects their bottom line.

So we don't think that it's fair for Manitobans when you have weather conditions that are unpredictable, unpredictable weather conditions could impact our ability as a government to provide services to Manitobans that they count on. You know, members of this Chamber, some certain members are—would like a personal care home to come to their community. Now if you have a situation of a bad winter, that may jeopardize the government's ability to provide a personal care home to one's constituency. You never know.

You know, members ask for a number of things, I don't think a day goes by, a day does not go by in that Manitoba Legislature when one or two or six members of the opposition stand up and demand more. Not a day goes by. And that's well documented. They are no doubt the largest draw on the public purse, the largest pressure on the public purse comes from the members in the opposition.

So we don't think it's fair that if you have unpredictable weather as I said; a bad winter could impact Manitoba Public Insurance profits, drought could impact upon Manitoba Hydro—that's just two out of the over 120 or 130 entities that are reported under summary.

But I remind the member that we're focusing, as I said, we're focusing this year on core, the strategy focuses primarily on core activities that are under direct control, revenue and expenditures of the government departments, that are under direct control of the Legislative Assembly. And that is where the day to 'zay', excuse me, day-to-day decisions are made, that ultimately determine a success of a government's strategy, plans and programs.

But I'll remind the member that we continue to report on summary. In fact, summary is simply core plus those 120 entities. And so we have not abandoned reporting on summary at all. But as I said, core is something that we have control over and that is why we've done this, that's why we're making the—our projections that we will turn to surplus position in 2018 on core.

Again, this is the same commitment made by members opposite when they were in opposition, when they went throughout the province and knocked on doors, said that, vote for us, we'll return to surplus in 2018, and now I don't know, they seem to—I'm not sure as I was saying earlier, they seem to be rather coy these days as to what their position is.

Manitobans have said to us, well, we know where you stand, we know where the government members stand, but we're not sure where the opposition stand. Maybe the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook) knows where, what their plan is to return to balance because they've been keeping that a secret, but Manitobans want to know. They know where we stand on that, but they're not sure what members opposite. We know their plan is to cut \$550 million out of the budget. We know that that would have a serious impact upon the delivery of health care or education.

We know that, as I said earlier, that the members opposite continuously demand more of the public treasury, but people are—they're skeptical. They're wondering. They know where we stand. They know that we're committed to return to balance in 2018. You're seeing every single year a smaller deficit. What you're seeing is a growing economy and smaller deficits. That's what's important. You're seeing last year, for example, the deficit was 0.7 of a percentage point of the GDP of the province. This year you're seeing, because the deficit is going down, but, more importantly, the economy growing, that this year it will be 0.6 of a percentage point of the GDP.

I remind the members that the United States, for example, that 2 and a half per cent, their deficit to their GDP, and they're claiming victory. They're claiming victory over their deficit. So our situation, as I remind the member again, it's—we have one of the lowest—our net-debt-to-GDP ratio is within one of the lowest in Canada. Ontario is at close to 40 per cent net-debt-to-GDP ratio. Quebec is close to 50 per cent net-debt-to-GDP ratio. You'll see a large increase in net-debt-to-GDP ratio in Progressive Conservative Newfoundland, which recently had to post a \$1.1-billion deficit. They raised their HST by two percentage points—two percentage points—and he brought a surtax in on the wealthy. So they increased taxes in Newfoundland, raised their HST by two percentage points, and they're still running a billion-dollar deficit.

So our economy is—we're well placed in Canada. We're well placed in North America. And so I want to tell the member again that we—our commitment is there. What Manitobans are asking is what is their commitment.

Mr. Friesen: Let the record show I have now asked the minister a number of times. I will ask him one more time, so it's clear on the 'reford'-record. If I look at last year's budget, last year's budget indicates a definite date by which the summary budget will be in balance. This year's budget does not have a table that shows when the summary budget will be in balance.

Will the minister indicate: Does he have a plan? Is there a date by which the summary budget will be balanced or does he have no date by which the summary budget will be balanced?

* (16:20)

Mr. Dewar: I could just—yes, I'll remind the member that we're still reporting on our summary budget; that has not changed. We made a decision to report under core as well because we have the ability to control the core budget. The summary budget contains over 120 entities. I don't—if the members like, I'd—certainly could go over that again, but it has to do with, you know, the operations of certain Crown corporations, for example, and, you know, you could have—unusual weather would impact the bottom line of one of the Crown corporations, and that would have an impact on the summary budget.

We decided that that shouldn't impact our ability to deliver the services to Manitobans, so we're focusing on core because we know that's what we're able to control. Those are decisions that are made by the Legislative Assembly collectively; we make those decisions. And we felt that it's—better represents the finances of the Province. When you add in a number of—120 entities or more that are outside of government control, you know, it's—makes it difficult and we want to be able to provide a budget that's transparent, and that's why we're working on core. Again, but we are—we will still report on summary; that has not changed. It really is—it gives Manitobans a clearer picture of how the Province is managing the revenues and expenditures, and we're committed to that.

We're not going to sacrifice these services as we return to balance. And, again, the Manitobans know that we're—made the commitment to return

to balance in 2018. Member's a bit skeptical there about the plans of the opposition. Someone suggested they have a hidden agenda, and I'm not going to dispute that. We'll have to wait and see.

But they know that we have a commitment to return to balance every single year, as I said. Every single year, you'll see the deficit shrink as the economy grows. Every single year you'll see the deficit be a smaller share of the economy—was 0.7 per cent last year. It'll be 0.6 per cent—the deficit in terms of the GDP. That is how you will eliminate the deficit, by growing the economy. We're doing that here in the province.

We're managing our expenditures, but, as I said earlier, you know, the demands from the opposition are endless—absolutely endless. And I will review Hansard tonight and tally up all the questions and all the demands for more services that the opposition—*[interjection]* I'm just reminding the member that I think we're going to be debating a resolution in the House on Thursday which calls for more personal-care-home beds in the province. Well, you know, they don't come cheap—they don't come cheap, and the member knows, because we're building one in his own constituency. He knows that. He knows that these are important things that we do, but he knows that they come at a price tag, and you can't build more personal-care homes if you don't have the resources.

And I don't think a drought in Manitoba Hydro, a drought which would cause the profit loss at Manitoba Hydro, should impact our ability to provide more personal-care-home beds to the fine people of Morden-Winkler, to the fine people of Lac du Bonnet or to the fine people who live in the city. And I said, they're bringing in a resolution which demands that we spend more money—spend, spend, spend, Mr. Chair—but we can't—we won't be able to do those things if we're held, you know, to—because of the vagaries of the climate change and the fact that we're having more and more unusual weather which impacts the bottom line. We don't think we should. We don't think a summary budget reflects accurately the revenues and the expenditures of the provincial government.

But, that being said, we're still going to be reporting on summary. But as the member noted, we are, as well, making predictions to return to surplus under the—under core in the fiscal year 2018.

Mr. Friesen: Let the record reflect that I have asked the minister four times to indicate a date by which

the summary budget will be balanced. He has declined to do so.

And I think I would just make this comment about his answer, that his rationale flies in the face of a previous Finance minister, that previous Finance minister being the now-First Minister, who, on April the 30th, 2008, issued a press release to say that the government would be moving to keep one comprehensive set of books and audited financial statements for Manitobans that are consistent with generally accepted accounting principles. And what he said at the time is that they were acting on the long-standing recommendation of the Auditor General that they commit to summary budgets in law. Because, he said—and I think this is the main point of the issue—because, he said, the old law did not require summary reporting—that means it's talking about the focus on core reporting that the Finance Minister's talking about—and as a result—and I'm reading right from the press release, April 30th, 2008—"some government entities were left off the books. The new law will ensure government uses one set of books that will provide Manitobans with the most comprehensive budget presentation in Manitoba history." End quote.

So the problem is that everything that the Finance Minister says today flies in the face of what the current First Minister says. See, every Finance minister is faced with the same challenge, and this—the challenge is this: being able to provide good projections. Now, every Finance minister before this Finance Minister saw the challenge and said, well, I guess we have to work at that challenge. This minister says it's too hard. It's too hard because there's fluctuations. I would remind this first—this Finance Minister, there were fluctuations in 2008. There was fluctuations in 2003. Every Finance minister before him reported—well, since 20—2008, reported in this format with summary. Why? Because bond rating agencies and others are looking for the total operation of government.

Otherwise, there exists—and the minister knows this—too many opportunities for the government to tweak the reports, much the same as the former Finance minister did when she looked at the third-quarter result two years ago and said, we're ahead of schedule, but didn't happen to indicate at that time that the reason she was ahead of schedule is because she was looking at an unanticipated \$100 million of government business enterprise revenue because of high water levels and a cold winter. Now, that was the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard). And I

understand the concern. We raised the concern at the time. Government can't say they're ahead of schedule and use an opportunity created by GBE revenue at the end of the year, then report that they're behind schedule.

But I want to make it clear. I've asked four times. The minister has failed to provide an answer. We can only assume that this minister has no commitment to summary budget reporting of when he will be in balance.

My question to follow for the minister then becomes this. Looking at a rates scenario sheet provided by BMO Capital Markets, author being Michael Gregory, CFA, deputy chief economist, I asked yesterday about the possibility of interest rate increases, and I note on this rates scenario that the Canadian yield curve for bonds is indicated, the average, on a one-year bond at 0.64. I noticed that the Q3 projection for 2016 shows the same one-year Canadian yield curve bond at 1.28. So this is getting close to a whole percentage point increase.

My question to the Finance Minister is: What is the Finance Department's own modelling saying about the likelihood of a 1 per cent interest-rate hike?

*(16:30)

Mr. Dewar: Well, while we get him that detailed answer, I'll just want to respond again to the member. We talked about the summary budget. Well, we have tabled the summary budget that provides the financial overview of the government reporting entity, GRE, which includes core government and Crown organizations, government business entities and public sector organizations such as a regional health authority, school divisions, universities and colleges. Manitoba's summary budget aligns with the accounting standards set out by the Public Sector Accounting Board and fully reflects generally accepted accounting principles, so-called GAAP.

Since 2008 we have implemented summary budgeting and reporting, and we've implemented summary quarterly financial reporting consistent with the GAAP as of 2009-2010, Mr. Chair, and so, as we've said, we're—continue to report on summary. The decision was made as well—as was mentioned, the summary budget is core plus over 120 or more entities, and I've named a couple of them such as health authorities, school divisions—and there's a number of school divisions—universities, there's three, four, because University College of the North,

there's now four—colleges; there's several colleges in the province. I'm proud of that.

These are also included in when you decide to report under summary, and, you know, we don't have control over, as I said, such things as weather. But, again, as I mentioned, you know, this—our budget aligns with the accounting standards set out by the Public Sector Accounting Board and fully reflects the generally accepted accounting principles.

Mr. Friesen: I believe, now having heard a repeat of the same answer given, that I understand the carefully chosen line that the Finance Minister is using when he says, we continue to report on summary. Okay, I see that. He says he's continuing to report on summary.

Here is what I want to make very clear, that what the minister is not doing is indicating about a summary budget forecast. He's not providing a summary budget forecast. His documents do not include a summary forecast for when the summary budget will be in balance. That's why I've asked him again and again. It's the information he will not provide this afternoon in the context of these Estimates.

Mr. Chair, I—my next question for the Finance Minister has to do with the cumulative overspending of this government. Manitoba has the unfortunate position of being the only province to overspend planned budget each year since 2003. Only Manitoba falls into that category. Every year spending is exceeding planned budget.

My question for the Finance Minister: What measures are being taken to improve the accuracy in budgetary expenditure forecasts? How reliable will this year's forecast be?

Mr. Dewar: I'm eager to get into a discussion with the member regarding the spending priorities of our government, and we're not ashamed to admit that we value health care; we're not ashamed to admit that we fund education at the rate and many years beyond the rate of economic growth for 16 consecutive years, which is a record; we're not ashamed of the fact that we've provided a 2 and a half per cent grant to the universities, a 2 per cent grant to colleges.

I remind the member that in Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Party, because there is no Progressive Conservative Party—there is no longer a Progressive Conservative Party in Saskatchewan, but

they made a decision to cut their major university by \$15 million. That's not what we're doing here.

I can—if the member would like, I could bring comments and I can bring back, you know, the—what some of the actions taken by other provinces when it comes to providing services. You know, British Columbia decided to go to war with their teachers. Quebec decided to download their deficit to their municipal governments. New Brunswick—Conservative New Brunswick decided to fire 250 teachers—250 teachers. We've hired 300 more teachers here in Manitoba.

We've—we're not ashamed to admit that we're funding health care. We're not ashamed at all to admit that we're spending 5 and half billion dollars over the next five years to grow the economy, which will produce over 60,000 new jobs in Manitoba, 12,000 jobs this year, \$6.3-billion increase to our GDP. We're not ashamed of that.

We're not ashamed of the fact that, you know, we value these services that Manitobans count on and rely on. And we're not going to let them down, so we're not ashamed that we find it—that we're lucky, in a way. We have a growing economy, and we know that's not a matter of luck, actually. It's a matter of a—our government's plan—a plan that we're working with management of the economy, working with the business sector, working with universities and colleges and other educational institutions, working with labour to come up with a—the—one of the fastest growing economies in Canada, Mr. Chair. And we've discussed that in many—in great detail in past sessions here.

* (16:40)

But, ultimately, we manage the best we can. Members—I don't need to remind members that we've had to deal with some fairly large and unpredictable flooding over the last number of years, the flood of the century, and we talked about this yesterday and the impact that had on our bottom line. Well, we, you know, we couldn't say no to those Manitobans when they needed the Province to be there. There was floods, 2011, I believe; there's been a number of floods, and we're there to help Manitobans. Those aren't—those incredibly expensive natural disasters that we were there, and the Manitobans rely upon us and count on us to be there, and we were.

Remind the member that the—we're—I hope not but this is regrettably the time of forest fires and, you know, we purchased a number of new water bombers

from de Havilland in—oh, Bombardier from—in Quebec a number of years ago, and they're state-of-the-art machines. But, you know, we're not—if there's a fire, you can't worry about what's going to cost because you know the cost of doing nothing and letting our northern—or any area be devastated by a fire, it's unacceptable, and that's not what we're going to do. If there's a flood, we'll, you know, we'll have to respond and if there is a forest fire, we'll be there. And it's like—we've had here in Manitoba some natural disasters that we had to deal with last number of years. And it had an impact on our bottom line, absolutely. As we discussed the other day, that the—it's because you're in the 2009 flood or the flood of the century—flood of the century—and it only happens once a century, Mr. Chair, and we've had to deal with it, but it had an impact on our bottom line, and that's one of the reasons why the member noted that there may be some overexpenditure.

But we're not, you know, we'll still be there to support our educational institutions, not like what they've done in Saskatchewan, not like what they've done in, you know, Conservative New Brunswick, where they fired 250 teachers. That could be a sign of things to come here in Manitoba if there's a change in government. We don't know what they're going to do in terms of how they're going to balance their budget because they've been very coy, you know. And the member from Tuxedo was a critic; she went out and said—she brought forward an amendment to the budget, saying we're going to balance immediately and, you know, you don't see that now. They realize that was a mistake on their part—they realize that was a mistake on their part.

So they're very coy. You know, you read their pronouncements, they haven't really stated, they haven't stated when they plan on returning to surplus. We know when they knocked on doors, the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) said, we will balance the budget in 2018. That's what she said then.

And we're still waiting to hear what she has to say now, but she hasn't made any public pronouncements recently, or nor has her leader, other than they've said that they plan on cutting \$550 million out of the budget.

But, you know, we're—as I said to the member, some of the things we have are beyond our control; forest fires and flooding, they do impact our bottom line.

Mr. Friesen: In that considerable verbiage that the minister offered in place of an answer, I think that

the biggest takeaway was when he said that we manage the best we can.

Now, what I would point to for the minister, because that really wasn't an answer in my question, is the fact that, according to the C.D. Howe Institute, in a report released on April the 23rd, his best is the country's worst. And that is because, according to the report, for the period of time measured, 10 years, Manitoba's total revenue was \$2.5 billion higher than forecast. Now, that's \$2.5 billion that this minister and his predecessors did not anticipate. But, in the same period of time, Manitoba's total spending overrun, in the same 10-year period, was \$3.251 billion. And this is why I ask the minister again, when it comes to the way they overspend, what measures are being taken to improve accuracy in budgetary expenditure forecasts? How reliable are this year's forecasts?

And, of course, when we look at the minister's—just last year's performance, they estimated a deficit of \$357 million. They offered a Q1 report, a Q2 report, Q3 report, and in the budget the minister now says, oops, we missed it by that much. And the—he anticipates now that the Public Accounts will report something around a \$424-million deficit. This is not accurate reporting. This is—despite revenues accruing to this government—and, actually, in the same report, I believe there was allusion made to the fact that even though things like the federal transfer payments and—they say are close to actual, it is the other areas that are not close to actual.

So my question to this minister—again, it's not good at reporting and getting to targets. Why should Manitobans, why should bond-rating agencies, why should creditors believe the minister now when he says this year's Estimates will be more accurate than the last and the previous and the previous?

Mr. Dewar: I'll provide the information—following information to the member. In, for example, year 2011-2012, the member is correct; we were 8 per cent over, and that was an outlier year, and it had impact on the average but that was the government's response to severe overland flooding. And, as I said earlier, and—you're—I would imagine that would include '09, which was the flood of the century.

And the member will have to acknowledge that if we, for example, encounter a fire this year, forest fire, that we'll—you know, we'll respond. I remind the

member we just opened up a new forest fire suppression unit in Lac du Bonnet, \$9 million that I'm waiting for the member to—I'm waiting for the member for Lac du Bonnet to get up one day and congratulate the government for making this investment in his community, but I guess I may have to wait a long time because he seems reluctant to get up and to support measures in his own community, but that's fine. But that's one of the reasons why there is—as I said it, for example, one particular year there was 8 per cent overexpenditure, and it had to deal with the government's response to flooding.

*(16:50)

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I'm just reading in Hansard from the first day of Estimates, and the member from Morden-Winkler had asked a question in regards to Procurement Services and on Business Transformation and Technology, and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) mentioned that MERLIN is going to—is being transferred or going to be transferred into the Department of Finance. And I just want to know, what are you going to do with that, Minister?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I can tell the member what I plan on doing with MERLIN is that when the appropriations act is passed later on this session, it will become part of the Department of Finance.

Mr. Ewasko: And I think, thank you, Minister, for the answer.

I'm not quite sure what you're going to be doing with MERLIN in the Department of Finance, but it's going to be interesting to see how that shakes out, and I guess I'll get my Christmas tie ready for that legislation to be brought forward.

Page 8 of the Estimates booklet, you have allocation of funds from Education and Advanced Learning 2.592, or almost \$2.6 million, being transferred into the Finance Department from Education and Advanced Learning. Why are you doing that?

Mr. Dewar: This is, I think, the third time that we had a chance to respond to this particular page. It seems to be of great interest to members of the opposition and this member is no exception that.

But there's no great secret. These are accommodation costs that were formally within the department of education and transportation—or education, that are now being transferred the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Ewasko: So what was the reason for the transfer of \$2.6 million?

Mr. Dewar: This is part of the government's strategy to centralize services, all of the departments that had these accommodation services, and I believe the member has pinpointed one but there's others. There's Aboriginal and Northern Affairs; Agriculture, Food; Children and Youth Opportunities; Civil Service Commission; Conservation and Water Stewardship; Education and Advanced Learning; Family Services; Health, Healthy Living and Seniors; Housing and Community Development; Infrastructure and Transportation; Jobs and the Economy; Justice; Labour and Immigration; Mineral Resources; Multiculturalism and Literacy; Municipal Government; Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection; Internal Service Adjustments have all been transferred to Finance with the ultimate goal of centralizing services and finding efficiencies.

Mr. Ewasko: So \$2.6 million is being transferred from Education and Advanced Learning over to the Minister of Finance department? So the Minister of Finance feels that \$2.6 million is better spent by his department than the faculty or the Department of Education and Advanced Learning: \$2.6 million that could have been going to educate our kids, to help our students throughout this great province of ours. What are you doing with the money?

Mr. Dewar: I hate to inform the member, there's no conspiracy here, there's no, you know, great underlying plan. There's no, you know—this is just, it's office space that's been transferred over. This is not money that's directed to the classroom. These are—and it's the same with every department. There's no great conspiracy here, there's no grassy knoll that the member might be referring to. These are simply functions that were provided within that department that are now—will be centralized in the Ministry of Finance, under the direction of the Treasury Board Secretariat, with the ultimate goal of providing more efficiency. It has nothing to do with providing services to the—to our education system.

As the member knows, we provided money to our education system at the growth—the rate of the economy for 16 consecutive years. Many times we've actually exceeded that in terms of our commitment to the public education system. So I'm afraid to disappoint the member, but he's—there's no conspiracy here at all.

Mr. Ewasko: Actually, the only point that I'm disappointed in, Mr. Minister, is the fact that you're taking \$2.6 million from the Department of Education and Advanced Learning, and you're putting into the Finance Department, where we know very, very well, on your money management skills over the last few years, as far as running the deficits and increasing our debt, so I would see that that \$2.6 million would be better saved in the Education and Advanced Learning Department to go towards educating our kids.

So back to the original question—my very first question. MERLIN is being transferred over into your department. The minister so nicely reconfirmed the fact that my question was correct, that it's gone into the Finance Department. How is that going to be—how is MERLIN going to actually be working in the Finance Department as opposed to staying in the Education and Advanced Learning Department?

Mr. Dewar: The member is incorrect. MERLIN was part of the Jobs and the Economy. It wasn't in Education and Advanced Learning. And, again, you know, the member is completely wrong in his previous assumptions.

But I do, before we end today, Mr. Chair, I made a commitment yesterday to provide a copy to the member, the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2014-2015 Revenue Estimates, to the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), and I'd like to provide him with a copy of that now please.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I just want to ask the minister on the same line of questioning, in the Finance Estimates books, it has a line obviously on Jobs and the Economy as well, when it comes to the allocation of funds as well. And I'd like to ask what the specifics are of that, but also there's another area that asks—there's a transfer of functions from Jobs and the Economy for almost \$4 million. I wonder if the minister can indicate what the details are of that.

Mr. Dewar: Before we get to—I just want, like the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) was incorrect when he said that the MERLIN was from Education and Advanced Learning. It, of course, is a department that was part of the Jobs and the Economy. There's no—again, there's no great conspiracy here. This is a decision made by the government to centralize—

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson (Jennifer Howard): Order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now continue consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council.

Would the minister—would the First Minister's staff and opposition staff please enter the Chamber.

We're here to consider the Estimates for Executive Council. As previously agreed, questioning will proceed in a global manner, and the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Just some questions for the Premier about this—the exercise of trying to bring some unity back to the party following his victory in the leadership campaign.

And I wanted to reference specifically this—and just he could update us on this pledge of solidarity effort that was put forward, I believe it was by the members for St. Norbert and Wolseley. And it said—I'll just read into the record what it says. Big stylish type on the top, and it says pledge of solidarity. And then it says: I believe the time has come for all Manitoba New Democrats to unite behind our Premier and our caucus in the fight for social, economic and environmental justice for the people of Manitoba. I believe that leaking confidential information to the media is a betrayal of our party, our caucus and the causes we fight for. I have not been the source of any such leaked information nor will I be in the days to come. I believe that our caucus, political staff and party members should share the goal of reconciliation. I am committed to that process personally and will strive to remain respectful of others' views on how and when this should happen. Signed, and then there's blanks on the form.

Could the Premier—I know there was a genuine effort by these two members to try to bring people in the caucus back together and get them to function more as a team, as a more effective team in government, and I just wonder if the Premier could update us on the progress of the pledge drive so far.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I have to get the member information on that. My understanding was is that that was an entirely voluntary exercise and

some people may or may not have wished to participate in it. But caucus meets on a regular basis and that's where we're at these days. Everybody's meeting in caucus.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier is not aware if there are more than two signatures to this particular pledge document. But I understand the contact that was given was for the Premier's Office. Was the Premier's Office involved in this or not involved in it?

Mr. Selinger: I do not believe the Premier's Office was involved in it. I'm not aware of that.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, so the Premier's understanding is it's just this was an initiative of some of his caucus members to endeavour to get their colleagues to commit to working together. It wasn't the Premier's initiative or the Premier's Office that initiated it in any way.

Mr. Selinger: Correct. *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. Sorry to interrupt.

This particular initiative—the form itself isn't dated, but if I recall the initiative was about the 1st of April, and it wasn't done as an April Fool's thing. It was done in coincidence with that date, which is three weeks or more after the leadership race. So was—do you think the Premier would agree this was done in an effort to fill the sort of the void of—as far as sort of a lack of apparent or at least outward effort being made by others in caucus to achieve some form of—a better form of unification during that post-leadership convention date. There's three weeks and not a lot had happened, at least to the outward eye. Was this the reason for the motivation of these two members to initiate this solidarity drive? Would the Premier concur or disagree?

Mr. Selinger: I could only speculate on the motives of the members opposite. I think that those questions would be best addressed to them.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, fair enough. So what, perhaps, the Premier could share, because he understands very well, as I think many do, that disharmony within—on any team, whether it's political or sports or business or whatever is not a helpful thing, that many were concerned within his party and outside as well, that there was a lack of, sort of unity, to say the least, within the organization.

What initiatives did he take in that, say that three-week period following the leadership determination, to build his team or to bring his team back together?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, actually, I think the press has already reported on this. Many people, including myself, met with other members of caucus and had fruitful dialogues about the way forward and that happened not just between myself and members of caucus, but among caucus members themselves. There was just an effort on the part of many people to reach out and connect with each other.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it would seem strange if there was all this initiative going on to team build, why these two caucus members would feel so desperate as to go out and put out a document, basically a sort of a pledge of allegiance, to force members to admit their wrongdoing from the past. I think the Premier would agree, would he not?

Mr. Selinger: I actually would not agree with the way he characterized that at all.

Mr. Pallister: Well, what would the Premier attribute the motivation to, then, if—surely if all this outreach was going on, these members would be aware of it, would they not, or are they in some kind of cone of silence when it comes to issues like this?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member's asking me to attribute motives to other individuals who are members of the Legislature, and I don't think I'm in a position to attribute motives to them.

Mr. Pallister: Well, perhaps the Premier could attribute his own motives, then, to this next answer. How is he motivated and how did he specifically reach out to try to bring his team together over the three weeks after the leadership contest?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I just answered that question. I met with many of the, if not all of, the caucus members. Many of the caucus members met with each other. People tried to conduct themselves through dialogue and conversations about how they can move forward.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that seemed relatively quiet. Certainly, there was a kind of a secret process, wasn't it, during that three-week period? Business community, small-business community, record levels of concern, exasperated as a consequence, exacerbated as a consequence of the dysfunction, evidenced by the rebellion within the party. Business leaders poll—it showed only 13 per cent of small

business—Manitoba small businesses who responded felt confident in the government's ability to run their affairs.

Wouldn't it have been a timely thing for the Premier to have demonstrated to the public as well, rather than in secret, that he was attempting to reach out and build the unity back into his team that so badly was missing in the weeks and months prior to the leadership contest, culminating in his victory?

Mr. Selinger: I believe I answered it in an earlier response to a similar question that the press had already reported on these activities.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's suggesting that side conversation's enough and that no statement was necessary from him to assure the people of Manitoba that he was actually personally involved in building a stronger team. Other than the pre-stated conversations that he says he had with caucus colleagues, that no other initiative was required. Is that what he is suggesting, or were there other initiatives he has yet to address in his comments?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've answered the question for the member. The press was knowledgeable about the fact that we were meeting and discussing things with each other, and in the meantime we were continuing to function as a government with a Cabinet that was active and decisions were being made and public announcements were being put out with respect to activities we were undertaking on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

* (15:00)

Mr. Pallister: The Premier had answered a question the other day, but I wasn't just sure if it was quite as revealing as I would have liked. I asked him in respect of the severance payments that had been made that the government had decided not to respond to in detail. They responded with a global number to—I believe it was six staffers that were departed by some form of agreement, and I asked when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) might release the information and he said that he wouldn't. But he said that the public could get it from the Public Accounts and it would be reported in the Public Accounts, and his answer was September 30th, 2015, or if it's after April 1st, September 30th, '16.

So I just wanted to clarify when—is that the correct date that the information would be released and made available to the public, the amounts of severance that were paid to those staffers? Would that be released at which of those two dates?

Mr. Selinger: Subject to verification, I believe that is the accurate information.

Mr. Pallister: Well, no, I was just—I wasn't clear enough there, I guess. I was asking the Premier which it was, September 30th, 2015, or September 30th, 2016.

Mr. Selinger: Again, both dates are relevant depending on when people arrived at mutually agreeable settlements.

Mr. Pallister: Well, which date applies then?

Mr. Selinger: As I indicated, both dates apply.

Mr. Pallister: Which dates apply to the six member—six former staffers in the agreements they signed?

Mr. Selinger: Some people settled before March 31st, some people settled after that, therefore both dates apply for reporting requirements.

Mr. Pallister: Without revealing any names, would the Premier tell me how many settled before the 30th—31st of March and how many settled after?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the facts.

Mr. Pallister: What the Premier is saying, then, is that the public won't know the details on all the severance packages that the Premier's negotiated or through other surrogate people involved in the negotiations negotiated until potentially September 30th of 2016. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: I believe it is correct, yes. That's why we put the global number out earlier, and I do have to remind the member that it took 16 years before we found out what the severance payments were for members that left the government—the seven members that left the government in '98-99 period.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I don't think the Premier should use his own lack of research capabilities as an excuse to not come clean with the information today, Madam Speaker. I think that's pretty pale.

But let me ask him this. In respect of the PST some comments were made, and I'm just going to read them into the record: I don't think you risk anything—this is a quote now—I don't think you risk anything if you tell people the truth. That was a comment made by the Premier (Mr. Selinger) in 1992, yet in the last election campaign, 2011, he ran on a promise not to hike the PST.

So would he agree that he failed to live up to the creed that he had stated, was one that he held dear in

1992, a few years later in 2011 when he ran on a promise not to hike the PST?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member will recall that in 2011 we had probably the worst flood in terms of total impact on costs in the history of Manitoba, over 1 and a quarter billion dollars. The member will—might remember that after that flood we commissioned independent reports as to the impacts on the flood, particularly in the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin area, both—two reports, one I think that looked at regulatory recommendations and how we should regulate these bodies of water going forward, and another one that recommended mitigation works that should be considered to ensure that this kind of very serious flooding and dislocation of communities did not occur again.

And in the run-up to the budget this report was leased—released with respect to the financial recommendations and—up to \$1 billion, if not more, that might be required going forward. And those recommendations had a very significant impact on what government would be required to do to protect these communities from future incidents like that.

So, at the same time, we were also seeing a continuing softness in the Canadian economy as well as the global economy. And so there were many challenges that had to be addressed going forward, and one of the things we had to consider doing was having sufficient revenues to invest in these flood mitigation requirements as well as broader infrastructure requirements in terms of ensuring the economy maintained buoyant in Manitoba and moved forward, and when we consulted Manitobans they were identifying infrastructure as one of their top priorities. And, based on all of that information and all those requirements, we made a decision as a government that we needed to dedicate an additional 1 per cent of the PST to be available to support infrastructure investments in the province of Manitoba that would help the economy, protect communities from floods over the long haul and also support investments in municipal infrastructure as we go forward.

So those were some of the major factors that went into the decision making around that.

Mr. Pallister: So the reports the Premier (Mr. Selinger) referred to, the study that he referred to, was that—when was that undertaken, approximately? This—the one that he referenced in his comments that made the recommendations about

water issues and so on, when was that commissioned?

Mr. Selinger: After the 2011 flood, one of the things we've consistently done in Manitoba is when we have major flood events like that, we take a look at what happened and what needs to be done to prevent those kinds of situations occurring again.

The member will recall that after the '97 flood there was a report that came out. I believe a prominent engineer was involved, and consultant, Mr. Farlinger, and he recommended certain courses of action be followed.

When we came into government, we initiated a major upgrade to the floodway around the city, the Red River Floodway that goes around the city of Winnipeg, to improve the level of protection for the city from one-in-99-years to one-in-700-years, which means that there's great—a far greater level of security for the city, and also additional works in southern Manitoba around communities, ring dikes and support for individual flood protection, initiatives for homes which rebuilt themselves on higher ground.

And similarly, after the 2011 flood we initiated reviews subsequent to those—that flood event. And those reports were commissioned to, again, look at what regulatory requirements would be in place for, particularly, Lake Manitoba and also what flood mitigation measures should be considered, including additional channels out of Lake Manitoba and also out of Lake St. Martin, and also what needed to be done for individual flood protection long-term for homes and also what needed to be done to protect communities along the coastline of Lake Manitoba in terms of diking, et cetera.

It also addressed some of the issues that needed to be looked at with respect to the Assiniboine valley and protection for the city of Brandon and communities that flow—that are close to or contiguous to the Assiniboine River system but also the Souris River system and the Qu'Appelle River system, all of which come together and create, if the timing's wrong and the conditions are not favourable in terms of the amount of precipitation that's been received during a period of time, can create serious risk to some of the communities down there.

So that report came out, I believe, spring of '13, as I recall, and I'll have—I'll try to verify the dates for the member; I don't have them in front of me, but I'll—we'll see if we can get that specific information for the member. And those reports were very

informative and something we needed to pay attention to in future budgeting decisions.

Mr. Pallister: So is it fair to say, then, that when the Premier and his party were designing their pre-election strategies and their strategy of running on no tax hikes that they didn't take into account the possible ramifications of this report or the additional cost that would be inherent in doing this flood proofing and that instead they chose to run on a promise which was, had they considered, in hindsight, the facts that might have been contained in the recommendations of the report, a promise which was clearly going to be broken by a subsequent government decision?

*(15:10)

Mr. Selinger: Again, we did not have any prior knowledge of what those reports might recommend, nor the order of magnitude of investments they would suggest. So it was impossible to know what order of magnitude of cost would be required or recommended. We had no specific knowledge of how the economy would perform in Canada and globally, as well.

Governments work on projections and what they think will eventuate with the economy. Economic forecasts are always subject to revision, as we know, and we're seeing that all around the world right now.

Nobody, for example, predicted the dramatic changes in the costs of oil and gas in—globally, in the recent six months. So all of these factors do have impacts and go-forward forecasts. People make reasonable assumptions based on the forecasts that are made available. Usually, there's at least six or seven forecasts that are considered in the projections, but it's also the case that there had been some other changes in terms of transfer payments, which were having an impact, and some population, as the member—members might recall, that had not been fully considered in terms of transfer payments.

So these factors all accumulate. But one of the major driving factors was the recommendations around future requirements for flood mitigation in Manitoba, combined with the economy, which was still soft, and some would argue, still soft around the world today. It's not as fully recovered. I think I recalled for the member that as recently as a week ago there was a report that employment on a global basis has not recovered from the '08-09 recession, that people—the—we as a global community have still

not recovered all the jobs that were lost during that period of time, and there are many parts of the world where there's a serious difficulty in generating employment for people and very high levels of unemployment, particularly among young people and often older workers as well.

We're fortunate in Manitoba in that the program we put in place to build infrastructure has had a positive influence on our economy. It has allowed us to generate economic activity for infrastructure in the short term, but also provide infrastructure which will strengthen our economy and protect our communities in the long term.

And we commissioned a report through the Conference Board of Canada which identified: that five-year infrastructure program as being able to generate over 5 and a half billion dollars of economic activity, somewhere in the order of just shy of 60,000 jobs; a greater export capacity for the province; stronger protection for communities on flooding, but also stronger infrastructure in a strategic way that will allow us to grow the economy; as well as resources available for municipalities, additional resources to be made available to municipalities, which would allow them to do many of the things which their citizens are looking for in terms of residential streets, sewer and water projects.

So all of these things were identified as important priorities in Manitoba, and I'm pleased the program we put in place is showing results in terms of key investments being made in all of these areas, employment being created, and we're combining that with a skill strategy in Manitoba with our employers and post-secondary institutions, as well as our high schools, which is putting a greater emphasis on people not just getting any formal academic education, but access to learning opportunities that'll allow them to enter the labour market successfully as well.

Mr. Pallister: Well, what the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has essentially just admitted to is a lack of foresight in his development of his election platform because he ran on a promise not to raise taxes, despite the fact that he now states that there was a soft global economy, Mother Nature acted up, and there was bound to be some recommendations to invest additional money in flood protection following the 2011 flood and the commissioning of a report. So he failed to take into account any of those factors in making a promise.

So I repeat the quote from him, which said: I don't think you risk anything if you tell people the truth.

He went on to say: I mean, if you have to get elected by misleading people or giving them an inaccurate picture of what is going on, why would you want to run in the first place? What we need in politics is more people who are willing to be honest with the public and tell them the facts of life.

Well, the facts of life as—according to the Premier, were that the PST was never going to be raised, that it was nonsense and ridiculous to even consider that, back in the election campaign of '11, but now he states that it was a absolutely necessary and essential action by his government to first broaden it to include a number of basic items Manitobans depend upon, and then to deepen it thereafter.

So what happened to the belief in these statements—I don't think you risk anything if you tell people the truth—the election campaign was run on a promise there wouldn't be tax hikes, and they were the biggest tax hikes in a quarter of a century or more.

Does the Premier actually believe that the case can be made that he had the right to raise the taxes, broaden them, increase the fees by—to the tune of about \$500 million of annual revenue from his own budget documents after running on a promise not to do it because he failed to take into account the impact of a study being done on infrastructure?

Mr. Selinger: I've put on the record the conditions that we confronted after the 2011 election, and I've made it clear that we saw some changing conditions going forward and some greater demands for investments in key infrastructure that would mitigate flooding in Manitoba that we were not privy to prior to that report being released. And we did see a softer global economy, and we saw a softer economy in Canada which none of the governments were able to predict going forward.

So the member asked when the report came out. It came out April 10th, 2013, was the press release that was put out with respect to that report, so it came out in the spring of 2013, to clarify that. And the review had taken place subsequent to the 2011 flood event. And so a flood review task force was convened right after that '11 flood, as well as a regulatory review, and those reports were informative in terms of where we needed to go

forward in the future in terms of making resources available to address the issues that were coming out of that.

The member should also know that normally coming out of these events there is a disaster financial assistance formula which generates a certain amount of resources. Depending on the size of the event, the cost-sharing can be up to 90-10 from the federal government, and there was also a commitment by the federal government in the 2011 election—spring, I believe, of 2011—to move forward on a mitigation program, 50-50 cost-shared. And those were realities that we were aware of, and we had to make sure that those resources were deployed to protect these communities going forward.

But, in addition to that, it had become clear with the report that came out in April 10th, 2013, that very significant investment would have to be made going forward that may take us beyond what was made available subsequent to the 2000 federal election for 50-50 flood mitigation and in addition to the disaster financial assistance resources which were made available to Manitoba as a result of the 2011 flood.

So it is important to give citizens the most accurate information you can at the time you're asked about it, and it's also important to continue to have a commitment to the principles of serving the public interest, and that includes protecting communities when recommendations come forward to do that and ensuring that they do not get dislocated and flooded out in the future, and also to ensure that you can continue to grow your economy in Manitoba at a time when economic fragility has persisted longer than most forecasters had anticipated, not only in Canada, not only in North America, but globally as well.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) didn't equivocate during the last campaign. He was asked about the possibility of his raising the PST and replied, ridiculous idea we're going to raise the sales tax, that's total nonsense, everybody knows that. He didn't equivocate at all.

Now why—you know, now we know that most certainly his Cabinet was looking at the data around raising the PST prior to the election, not just to 8 but potentially to 9 per cent, that they were looking at those numbers. So why would the Premier make that comment when he knew it was both inaccurate and misleading?

* (15:20)

Mr. Selinger: Again, I reject the assumptions that the member has put into the—his question—his implicit assumptions that somehow there was something untoward that was—in terms of the statements we made.

Finance always looks at various revenue scenarios every year, and that's just a consistent set of options they always bring forward. Same as Treasury Board always looks at different ways to manage expenditure and looks at different alternatives on that. That's—those are standard operating procedures.

That does not in any way suggest that something was in any way ignored, but it does say that the belief at the time was—is that the revenues we had would be sufficient along with the federal programs and federal commitments to address some of these major issues. But subsequent information suggested to us that we needed more resources than that, and that the economic recovery was not as robust as people had hoped for. And we had to take action to make sure we protected the public interest, and that started with ensuring that we had programs in place to mitigate natural disasters in our community as well as continue to address major infrastructure requirements in the province of Manitoba and continue to make sure the economy had a strong growth trajectory going forward. And we followed up and have done that and we're seeing the results now in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's difficult to believe the Premier on this aspect of his commentary, because he's using a report that was issued on April 10th of 2013 as an excuse for hiking the PST which he did earlier. Now, he broadened the PST within weeks of promising he would not and calling it ridiculous, so some analysis must've been done to precede that. He wouldn't have acted arbitrarily, I'm sure.

So when he—in the spring budget right after the federal election, he broadened the PST and raised fees—he—on everything from haircuts to benefits—workplace benefits, Madam Chair, insurance on property, residences—house insurance, insurance for small businesses to use, various and sundry other fees generating for his government an additional estimated over \$200 million.

Now, he did that by taking money from the very people who he assured he would not take money from just a few weeks prior. And I—surely he can't try

to hide behind a report that was commissioned which wasn't presented until a full year and a half thereafter.

So what studies did he undertake in the intervening weeks that caused him to change his mind about broadening the PST and hiking fees to this enormous degree? And it should not be understated. This is the biggest tax and fee hike since Howard Pawley's day, so this is not just a small departure from an election commitment which was clearly made. It's a massive departure and it had a significant impact on many Manitobans who, to varying degrees certainly, were struggling to make ends meet, some of them well before these promises were made, but certainly struggling more to make ends meet thereafter as a result of this broken promise.

What other studies did the Premier (Mr. Selinger) do to ascertain what the impact would be, not only on his treasury, but on Manitobans, of this massive tax grab right after he promised not to do it?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I think the member needs to remember that this government has reduced taxes more than any other government in modern times for families. A family today—average family today is paying \$4,200 less in taxes than when the member opposite was in the government. A small business, when the member opposite was in government, was paying 9 per cent taxes; now they're paying zero. A larger business was paying 17 per cent to corporate tax rate; they're now paying a 12 per cent tax rate. A capital tax was levied on businesses in Manitoba; it's no longer there. The capital tax is gone. There was an education support levy that was raised by the provincial government; that has been eliminated from residential properties in Manitoba. So there has been well over a billion dollars on an annual basis—billion and a quarter, I believe—and I'll check the facts on that; we'll get our information on that—of tax relief offered.

This morning I smoke—spoke at the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, and I indicated that the annual tax difference in this budget compared to when the member opposite was in government—it's about over \$400 million for business alone, and on a cumulative basis, that's worth about \$3.8 billion of savings to business.

So there has been very significant efforts made to reduce taxes on Manitoba families and businesses while ensuring we have adequate resources to invest

in things like health care and education. And when recessions come along, and major flood events come along, and they come along at the same time, that creates some challenges for all governments.

The member opposite might recall that he was a member of a federal government that said they would never run a deficit, ever. It was against their ideological commitments to do that. But, in fact, when they were confronted with the great recession of 2008, they decided that it was necessary to run a deficit to ensure that the Canadian economy didn't collapse. And governments around the world followed a similar approach, and provincial governments joined with the federal government to ensure that we kept the Canadian economy going at a time when credit was not available for businesses or for individuals. And that was a very serious period of our economic and political history not only in Canada, but around the world, and governments had to put aside some of their previous commitments and make a decision that was in the public interest, and we all joined together to do that. And that was important in terms of making sure that we served the public interest, and the public interest in this case was keeping the economy going, keeping people working. And that certainly applied here in Manitoba, and we were a part of that process.

And in addition to that, we saw a flood like we've never seen before in the Assiniboine River Valley and in the Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin areas at a level of intensity and cost unprecedented in the history of Manitoba. And as the follow-up reports were done and tabled in spring of 2013, that required some additional resources to deal with that. So we felt that it was necessary to do that, knowing full well that not everybody would be happy with that, but that we had an obligation to show that there was going to be a need for that and that we would show results for the investments that were made.

Mr. Pallister: So, essentially, what the Premier is saying is there was no study done, that because he had lowered taxes like every jurisdiction across the country had in some categories in previous years, that gave him the right to break his word to Manitobans and raise them, even though he had absolutely promised he would not. In fact, during the campaign, he said, our plan is a five-year plan to ensure we have future prosperity without any tax increases, and we'll deliver on that. That's what he ran on. Now he's saying there's—he's offering up no

evidence whatsoever, apart from a flood which happened several months prior to him making this promise, which gave him ample time to ascertain the degree of damage and the degree of cost consequence to his government, that he failed to do that, and that seems to be his admission today as a surprise and a disappointment.

Why, then, would it be the case that he's now talking about us and we a lot, and yet sources within his own government have said to the media that the PS 'tike' was—PST hike was his idea and it was his alone. They are saying—and in one article I read, it was a Mr. Lett, I believe, who wrote it, unbeknownst to all but one or two Cabinet ministers, the Premier decided on his own to raise the PST by one point. And then it goes on to say in this same column that facing Cabinet later that week, the Premier explained his rationale and then asked for complete unity in endorsing the decision. Many of the Cabinet ministers were too shocked to say anything, sources said.

Now, if this is accurate, then the breaking of the promise that the Premier—that I'm asking the Premier about wasn't a team idea at all. Rather, it was his idea. So could he clarify which it was and help people understand and get, you know, get—give the credit where credit's due here or place the responsibility where the responsibility should be placed. Whose decision was this? Was it the Premier's decision alone to break this election promise which all members were part and parcel of making?

* (15:30)

Mr. Selinger: You know, the member's asking for Cabinet confidentiality to be breached; again, another example of a classic double standard on his part. That has something that he would not do and same as what he talks about when it comes to individuals in terms of severance packages. He won't talk about any individuals with—in his purview, but likes to discuss the specific details with other individuals.

Proper procedures were followed in Cabinet decision making, with respect to any budget, and, once those decisions are made, a budget is delivered and debated in the Legislature. And that's what occurred here, just like every other budget prior to that and subsequent to that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I'm—recognize, in the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) insistence on repeating his

one remaining talking point, that he—there is—there seems to be a growing shortage of spinners over there to prepare him for these discussions. He seems to be resorting to that double-standard comment virtually every time I ask him a question he doesn't like. And the actual double standard doesn't exist, because, of course, we haven't paid severance to any of our departing staff and have been totally transparent about that, whereas the Premier has and refuses to be transparent about that.

Now, on this question of Cabinet solidarity, I'm not asking him to reveal secrets, except to the extent that I'd like him to be open with Manitobans about his role in this decision to break his promise. It is the same sources that Mr. Lett quotes in his piece—are further cited as saying that several ministers objected to the Premier's request that the decision be recorded as unanimous, and they have all—they also say that a certain experienced member of the caucus who happened to be House leader at the time, was deeply concerned about the ability to get legislation enacting the tax increase and by—and the bypassing of the need for a referendum through the Legislature.

Would the Premier at least confirm that there was legitimate concern within his ranks whether in Cabinet or in caucus? He does not need to specify as to the nature of his tax hike and the nature of his ignoring the provisions, which were in law at the time, which said that there should be a referendum offered to Manitobans in order to enact that proposed tax increase.

Mr. Selinger: The member knows full well that Cabinet confidence should not be breached. That's a practice that I even hope he would follow when he was in government. And that's certainly one that is understood to be part of the Westminster model of governance and one that should be respected by everybody. And I think the member understands that.

With respect to the legislation, the member, himself, initiated a lawsuit on the legislation in the courts of Manitoba. And the legislation was deemed by the judge in the court case to be ineffective and unenforceable, in other words, illegal. And the member knows full well that he lost that court case.

Mr. Pallister: Well, there's losing and there's losing, Mr. Speaker—Madam Chair—I'm sorry—and what was struck down there by the judge was a piece of government legislation that was enacted in 2006, which took the teeth out of the balanced budget law, which took the penalties away from Cabinet

ministers so they wouldn't be responsible for failing to balance the budget and which the government proposed. And the government also proposed to leave in the piece about the referendum.

So what was struck down in the court through that court case was the government's own legislation. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) knows that full well. So, if it was ineffective and if it was illegal, it was the government's own legislation that was ineffective and illegal at protecting Manitobans. But that's not the question here. The question I'm asking the Premier is: Was there unanimity around the decision? Is every member of his Cabinet and caucus responsible equally for his decision to break his promise and enact the PST hike, which he promised he would not enact?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I just have to remind the member that Cabinet decisions are confidential decisions. The member knows that full well.

With respect to his comments about the court case, the items that were struck down were legislative provisions put in place by the member opposite when he was in office on the referendum requirement; that what was considered ineffective and unenforceable. The member may have read the court case. If not, I'd be happy to get him a copy of it.

Mr. Pallister: Perhaps the Premier can have the anonymous lawyer he refused to identify, who gave him the advice to pay severance to people and stay quiet about it. He can consult that same lawyer, who will read him the new title on the legislation he cites, which he put on, the new clauses which he enacted, and also cite for him the teeth which he took out of the legislation, it's government legislation which amended the previous balanced budget, taxpayer protection and debt elimination act, changed the title, change the clauses, and retained the referendum right. It was the government's own legislation that was struck down in court that day.

Now, the reality is, of course, that the Premier is refusing to answer any questions about the PST because he doesn't want to acknowledge his role in it and he wants to share the blame with all his caucus members. But, according to Mr. Lett, and other high-level New Democratic Party supporters, this—there was nothing mentioned by the Premier when he briefed caucus on this and nothing mentioned about this tax hike when he briefed caucus. In fact, NDP

MLAs only found out about it a few hours before the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), who was then the Finance minister, rose in the Legislature to read the budget speech.

So I assert that not only were Manitobans not informed correctly by the Premier, but, in fact, were misinformed by this Premier about his intention to hike the PST. But perhaps so, too, were a number of his caucus colleagues blindsided by this. The Premier has refused to acknowledge that his decision to raise the tax was his alone. He will not admit that he imposed the decision rather than suggested it, as he has said many times.

I'm going to cite a former Cabinet minister, a person who sat in the Gary Doer Cabinet, and prior to that time spent a good deal of time in this Legislative Assembly, who is—I'll quote as follows: I'm concerned that in the last 18 months, the issues have been largely due to the PST, and that we haven't been able to get beyond the concerns raised by Manitobans about their lack of trust in the leader and they're feeling that they were betrayed by him when he went back on his word not to raise the tax.

So, again, this is an issue which I raise which is not just an issue for the New Democratic Party or its members, but an issue for all Manitobans. And Manitobans deserve to know, was breaking that promise to Manitobans and hiking the PST the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) idea or not?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've indicated very clearly that all the standard procedures in developing a decision for budgets were followed with Cabinet, and in terms of how that connected to our overall government's position, that was followed. It was—I've also made it clear that I think and believe that we needed some additional resources to address these major challenges that we were facing in Manitoba, including flood mitigation protection of communities, including a softer economy. But we made the decision in the proper way, as a Cabinet and as a government, and worked that through in the way we always work through a budget. And those procedures were followed as we moved forward on that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier goes now to procedures as an answer, but that's an inadequate answer. I've asked him if it was his idea, if he initiated it, and he speaks about procedures. What procedures were utilized by the Premier in advance of his making the promise, when he was doing the

election campaign planning, that no doubt he played a central role in, what research was done by him or his team that would encourage him that he should ignore the very real possibility he'd be raising the PST, discount it, deny it was even in consideration—nonsense, I believe was the word—ridiculous, another word. Did his entire campaign team decide to ignore the possibilities that the Premier's outlined here so clearly today, that he might need additional revenue to do flood reparation? I mean, the flood didn't occur after the election, the flood occurred before the election. And the global economic crisis he keeps referring to, as if it was an excuse for misleading Manitobans, didn't just occur weeks before but, rather, years before.

So did the entire campaign team around the Premier decide to just ignore the realities that he's outlined very clearly here today?

* (15:40)

Mr. Selinger: Again, the way—the words that the member uses in making in his statements and questions, are themselves misleading, because they assume that there was somehow a desire to not fully disclose our position on what we were going to do subsequently with respect to revenues.

We made the best decisions we were aware of with the best information we had at the time. There was a view that we could cope with the challenges ahead of us with a—with an economy that was going to recover. Subsequently, it—the Canadian economy, and including Manitoba, did not recover as rapidly as people anticipated, and we still see that today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We also did not—even though the flood had occurred before the election, the independent reports on mitigation measures and recommendations on that did not get tabled in public by the independent review committee until the spring of 2013. And that information was very influential in determining what course of action we needed to take to serve the public interest. And that is the first commitment of any elected official, is to serve the public interest even when conditions are changing, whether they're economic conditions or natural disaster decisions or reports that recommend what you do to prevent these events from occurring in the future and putting communities at risk like we've seen in 2011.

And, quite frankly, nobody anticipated that we would have the big challenge that we saw last

summer with respect to summer flooding. That's a new experience in Manitoba, to have summer flooding after the normal spring runoff has occurred and that season has concluded. To have major weather events occurring very rapidly and very close to each other that put at risk communities again last summer in July, late June and July, was unprecedented, an event that was—cost over \$200 million but required military support and huge number of volunteers and a very dramatic reallocation of human resources in the provincial government to cope with that event. These are new experiences that are occurring in Manitoba for the first time ever, not able to be anticipated in terms of their intensity, their scope and their impact on the fiscal situation of the Province, but, more importantly, on terms of their impact on communities and peoples' lives.

And so it is crucially important that we have a program in place that proceeds to provide mitigation and protection for communities from these unforeseen and, quite frankly, unforeseeable events. And when we get the order of magnitude of what's required there, we have an obligation as public servants that have said we will serve the public interest to respond to that and not to ignore that.

The member seems to be taking a course of action to say that no matter when the conditions change or how severe they are, that there should never be any change in a policy perspective or a policy commitment because that's somehow breaking a promise. The promise and the commitment was made based on what we considered normal circumstances and economic forecasts. When those circumstances change, you have to be able to take that into account in future decision making. That's not to be misleading. That's not to deliberately try to break a promise. That's not to in any way try to mislead the public. That's to deal with the realities in front of you and to do that in an appropriate way that serves the public interest.

That's very different than what the member opposite engaged in when he said there would be no privatization of the Manitoba Telephone System and then promptly, right after that election, fully engaged as a government in the privatization process of that utility, which was owned by the people of Manitoba, with among the lowest rates in Canada. There were no mitigating decisions that occurred subsequent to that that anybody is aware of. There were no requirements to change public policy in the public

interest that anybody was aware of, and so that's a very different situation.

And there was no public benefit necessarily that came out of that. As a matter of fact, there were years of litigation by the former employees of the Manitoba Telephone System to regain their pension benefits which had been taken away from them.

So that's a very useful contrast. One decision was made to serve private interests, another decision was made to serve the public interest. And the—we're demonstrating the results for that in investments we're making in protection and in infrastructure and growing the economy. And we've seen the results on the other side of it in terms of the loss of control of that Crown corporation and who owns that Crown corporation, and no longer a Crown corporation, now a private business, who owns it.

So that's by way of a response to the member.

Mr. Pallister: Just to back up for a second, just for clarification, to remind the Premier (Mr. Selinger) when he speaks about legislation struck down by a judge as a result of a court challenge which his government initiated, the actual legislation that was struck down was written in 2008. I believe he'll recall he was the Finance minister at the time.

And the legislation was rewritten. The requirements to balance the budget in respect of any consequence to Cabinet ministers were removed from the legislation by the government at that time. The title was changed. The reference to debt repayment was removed from the title itself, but what remained was the referendum requirement. The referendum requirement remained in the bill which the government rewrote. It became the government's bill at that point in time and the requirement to allow Manitobans the right to vote on a proposed tax hike in the three categories of personal tax, business tax or sales tax also remained in the legislation which the government rewrote at that time.

I'm curious as to why the Premier would choose to proceed in the enactment of a PST hike in tandem with the elimination of that right which his own legislation gave Manitobans being removed. Why take away the right of Manitobans to have an opportunity to vote on a tax hike which the Premier has decided against all previous commitments and promises he made to enact?

Mr. Selinger: I've explained some of the key circumstances that led to us to make that decision which we believe to be in the public interest,

Mr. Speaker or Deputy Speaker. And I can go over that again if he wishes. The provisions in the legislation that were struck down by the courts were provisions brought in by the member opposite when he was last in government, and he's specifically referring to the referendum requirement. There was a timely need to invest in infrastructure to protect communities, to keep the economy going and to provide strategic infrastructure for the future as well as municipal infrastructure. And we proceeded on the basis of what we thought would best serve the public interest.

We're starting to see some very good results from that in terms of one of the stronger performing economies in the country at a time of continuing economic fragility and uncertainty. We're seeing a very strong record of job creation, wage improvements and more people working in Manitoba than ever in the history of the province. So these were difficult decisions, no question about it, and we recognize that they had an impact on Manitobans and we also have listened to Manitobans in terms of what their priorities were and tried to respond accordingly with a program that will address their concerns and make sure that they see the benefits of the decisions we've made as their elected representatives. And we do that with great respect for the views of Manitobans and we'll continue to do that as we go forward.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, now the Premier (Mr. Selinger) who made such great proclamations about Cabinet solidarity a moment ago is now not in solidarity, apparently, with the bill which his government brought forward, the balanced budget and taxpayer accountability legislation of 2008, and wants to disagree with parts of it. That's an interesting departure of principle. I want to ask him again: If he wants to give blame or credit to a previous administration, that's his choice, but it was his administration that brought this bill forward, amended it, altered it, changed the title, changed the components, removed the penalties to Cabinet ministers, but left the referendum requirement in, and my question for him was really pretty straightforward. Why did he feel it necessary to remove the right which was in the legislation his government did redraft and submit, altered and modified? Why did he decide that—or he and his Cabinet, if he'd like to attribute responsibility elsewhere, that Manitobans should no longer have a right to vote, which was enshrined in his own legislation of 2008?

Mr. Selinger: I believe I've answered that question in terms of the need to move on these important measures to protect Manitoba communities and to serve the public interest, and I do remind the member that the clause that was struck down by the courts with respect to the referendum was the clause that he had a hand in crafting when he was in government, and it was that clause that was struck down as being unenforceable and ineffective.

* (15:50)

Mr. Pallister: Well, that's a wonderful response but it's irrelevant to my question. What right did the Premier feel he had to proceed without respecting the right of Manitobans to vote on a measure which this legislation protected and which his own government had modified and left the clause in in 2008, which protected Manitobans' interests? Does he disagree that Manitobans should have a right to vote on such measures as tax increases like this? Does he disagree that that should be a protection offered to Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: And, again, I've explained twice already why we made the decision we did, to serve the public interest. We saw very significant requirements to invest in keeping communities safer from natural disasters. We saw very significant demand and priority on infrastructure that would continue to improve the quality of life and the ability to grow the economy in Manitoba, and Manitobans were telling us that was their priority and we saw a timely need to move on these things. And the member knows full well that the clause that was struck down by the court was a clause that he had a hand in crafting in legislation, and that clause, if you read the court case carefully, as I recall, and I'm going to get a copy of it here as soon as we can, suggested that that clause was unenforceable and ineffective.

And so it's very important that we listen to what needs to be done to serve the broader public interests of Manitoba, and keeping communities safe from natural disasters is a top priority, one which we had taken action on earlier and were able to accommodate it within our budgets when we spent the billion dollars on improving the protection for communities and homes in the Red River Valley, and then the floodway around the city of Winnipeg, we were able to accommodate that within our growth of the economy in Manitoba, and that gave us some

measure of confidence that future requirements could be met in a similar fashion.

Turned out that that wasn't the case; conditions had changed. The economy was not as robust and had not recovered as rapidly, and the costs of the mitigation in addition to the one-and-a-quarter-billion dollar cost of the flood itself were projected to be at least an additional billion dollars going forward, and those costs were very significant. It required early decision making to get them in place because, as the member also knows, under normal regulatory procedures, approvals are required by government for things like additional channels to make them permanent and for new channels to come out of Lake Manitoba, and those regulatory procedures take a great deal of time plus the engineering work plus the work that's required to consult with First Nations' communities under Supreme Court jurisprudence with respect to how we interpret section 35 of the Constitution, and all of that requires rapid and early decision making to be able to get flood protection and protection for communities in place as quickly as possible because there's a long lead times required for that, and so we proceeded with dispatch to try and put those resources in place and those procedures and processes in place to be able to move forward.

And, as we were doing that, we could still continue with major programs of individual flood protection financed 100 per cent by ourselves in the province of Manitoba to allow Manitobans that were at risk in these communities to do things that could protect their own homes and their own properties, whether they were homes or cottages. These were all measures that we were taking. We proceeded with additional resources for the city of Brandon, to put in place a permanent dike in a location along the 18th Street Bridge where, during the 2011 flood, there were two layers of super sandbags that were built up that were extremely vulnerable to sudden changes and put the entire part of that city of Brandon at risk. We proceeded with—quickly to make resources available to the city of Brandon to put that permanent dike in place to protect those properties, and then we're still working with them to bring additional protection there. I believe it's to a one in 300-year level of protection.

So all of these measures are long-term investments in future safety and security for Manitobans, future ability to have a stronger economy, short-term ability to have more jobs and make sure that we train people for the future. So all

of these decisions were in the long-term public interest of Manitoba, and we acted on them in good faith with the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Pompous and arrogant answer. I asked him a question about respecting Manitobans' right to vote and why he took it away, and I get a lecture on procedure. Not one Manitoban—he speaks of listening. Not one Manitoban told him to raise the PST and break his promise to them. Not one Manitoban, I suggest—if he could provide evidence of one I'd appreciate it—wanted the right to vote on this issue taken away from them. The Premier proceeded to do both prior to this court case being resolved. So don't use the court case as a screen. That would be unfair and unjust. The fact is the Premier proceeded to arbitrarily remove the right of Manitobans to vote on a measure which he had promised he wouldn't even introduce, and now he's trying to say he wanted to get 'er done. It was a big hurry.

Is that his argument, that it was a big hurry; he had to get 'er done; he had to do these initiatives and Manitobans' civil rights as promised to them, the right to vote on the measure, should just be thrown in the garbage by him because it didn't matter enough to him to listen to them? Really? Is that his argument today?

Madam Chairperson: Before recognizing the honourable First Minister, I just want to offer a caution to all honourable members to choose your words very carefully. We've been proceeding, I think, in a very good way in these Estimates and having a good, solid policy debate. I want that to continue. So, if we can please endeavour to choose our words carefully so that we can keep the tone civil and respectful.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, for your comments as well.

The member clearly didn't hear my response, and—or if he did hear it, he didn't understand it, or if he did understand it, he clearly is uncomfortable with it because we did say that we were operating in the public interest to what we thought Manitobans valued. And one of the things we know Manitobans valued, based on previous experience, was ensuring that communities were protected from natural disasters. Other things that we knew Manitobans valued were investments in infrastructure, and they also put a priority on keeping the economy going. We still see that as a priority among Manitobans. And, at the same time, they want to ensure that we have—they have access to essential services such as

health care and make sure that young people get opportunities to have training and jobs. And so that's the rights of—and the views of Manitobans that we are respecting.

And we moved forward on that based on the circumstances that were placed in front of us by Mother Nature and by the global recovery which was more—slower and more fragile than had been anticipated by all the forecasters. So we had to deal with those realities as we moved forward, and I've explained that to the member on—at least two or three times now. And I just ask that he try to understand that perspective.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, a notable member of the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) own caucus said in, I believe, late last year, November, that for some time now it's been increasingly difficult to do our job because the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has stopped listening to our advice. And I'm simply asking him to show some respect for Manitobans. He speaks about acting in the public interest as if Manitobans don't have any understanding of what the public interest may be themselves, as if he's the one who understands that and they don't have any concept of it. And I've asked him to address what possible consideration he could have given to the rights of Manitobans or to their public interest when he took away their right to vote on a measure enshrined in legislation. Regardless of who initiated it, it was government legislation modified by the government opposite and totally disrespected by the member opposite when he took away, arbitrarily, the right of Manitobans to vote on his PST hike.

So, you know, he's skirting the issue, at best, and worse than that, simply diverting attention away from that decision. I'm asking him why he refused to listen to Manitobans who wanted the right to vote on this issue and had it taken away from them.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, and I've answered that question a couple times now, if not three times. And the member knows that what I said was is that we carefully listened to Manitobans in terms of what they valued, and one of the things that they clearly had a high priority on was flood protection and mitigation for their communities. We had seen that experience in the previous work we'd done to protect the city of Winnipeg and the communities in southern Manitoba with ring dikes as well as individual flood protection for their homes. And that program had made a gigantic difference in the risk factors that those communities faced; they were

dramatically reduced. And we've seen that subsequent since those projects have been completed, that there's much less hardship for those communities and those families and those individuals and much less negative impact on the economy as well.

That experience informed our decision about what we needed to do after the worst ever flood of—in Manitoba's modern history, for sure, of the century, of 2011. And we've since seen, since then, that there are other unpredictable and unforeseeable but very intense and dangerous as well as expensive events which occurred as recently as last summer.

* (16:00)

All of these experiences, based on past experience—what worked—based on the independent flood review committee's recommendations to make very significant investments in flood mitigation, which came out in the spring of 2013, led us to believe that we needed to take necessary action to protect our communities, to ensure that our economy continued to grow and protect core services for Manitobans. Those are the messages we received from Manitobans, and we subscribed to those priorities and tried to address those priorities in a respectful way and put in place measures that would show a real difference in the quality life in those communities and the risk factors they faced and the ability not only to protect those communities but grow the Manitoba economy and have good opportunities for people to live and work in this province.

And so we proceeded on that course and we are starting to see some very good results in Manitoba. We are starting to see that Manitoba's considered one of the economic leaders for growth in the country, for employment creation with good results in terms of increasing wages and more people living and working in Manitoba than ever in the history of the province.

So we're fortunate and those results are occurring, but we also are very cognizant of the fact that since the recession the overall growth of the Canadian economy is less than it was before. So there's still a long way to go to get full recovery, but we're trying to proceed along that path by doing our part to strengthen our capacity both in terms of infrastructure and job creation and training and opportunities for people to live and work in this province.

Mr. Pallister: Again, the Premier refuses to address the question I've asked him, and he appears to believe that the values of Manitobans place ring dikes ahead of the right to vote, and I would strongly disagree with that, and I am disappointed in his lack of willingness to respond to the issue I've raised repeatedly with him.

This arbitrary taking away of the right to vote concerns me and concerns many who have communicated with my office as well. Is the Premier now saying that he will proceed, may well proceed in the absence of any opportunity for Manitobans to vote in the future on an income tax, sales tax or business tax hike? Is he suggesting that he doesn't agree that Manitobans should have a right to participate in a referendum at any point in the future as well if he decides again to place his personal priorities ahead of those of Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: I'm just reviewing the judgment that was brought forward by the judge in the case of—in the matter of The Retail Sales Tax Act and The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act and Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act that was dated 2014, July 18th, last summer.

And the Supreme Court of Canada says on page 10 that as a matter of constitutional principle, neither Parliament nor the legislatures can by ordinary legislation fetter themselves against future legislative action.

And it goes on to say that the Constitution Act, in each province the Legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to matters coming within the classes of subject next in hereafter enumerated, that is to say direct taxation within the province in order to the raising of revenue for provincial purposes.

And so when I review this judgment—so in the conclusion of the judgment it says, in conclusion, as I am satisfied the PC Party has no legal capacity to bring this application and as the member from Fort Whyte—but it uses his actual name—has failed to persuade me there is any basis for the court to grant the relief he is seeking, I am dismissing this application.

So the court judgment reviewed the Constitution, it reviewed Supreme Court jurisprudence and rendered a judgment. And what I'm saying is that we have a great honour and privilege to serve the

people of Manitoba when we get elected to this Legislature and we have a duty to identify the significant issues that Manitobans face, and find ways to constructively respond to those issues that ensures that communities can be safe and prosperous as they go forward, and that is no easy task for any government, particularly in situations of rapidly changing circumstances, as we're seeing.

And these occurred in many governments. The member was—opposite was around during the '97 flood or at least a portion of it, the run up to it, and knows how difficult that situation was and some of the recommendations that flowed out of that. Many of those recommendations we were in a position to act on as we moved forward and we put them in place and made very significant fiscal commitments to do that, and we saw very good results from that.

The investments in the Red River Floodway have saved billions of dollars of damages to Manitobans. But, more importantly, have allowed communities to be stable and have allowed the economy to be stable and have allowed people to live in a greater sense of security. And it was that experience which informed our decision to move forward with these commitments and resources to protect communities that had experienced the worst flood in modern times in the Assiniboine Valley, all the way through and up through Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

So we are in a position where we have to make decisions based on the priorities of Manitobans and the major threats that they are—and threats to their security and well-being that they face, and we have an obligation to try to do that with all the capacity that we have and to put the resources in place to do that in a way that will make not only a short-term difference but a long-term difference.

And I just remind the member that the cost of that flood in 2011 was one and a quarter billion dollars, just the immediate requirements, and then the report came out in the spring of 2013 which recommended additional long-term investments to protect those communities, and we've moved on those commitments in a timely fashion. They take longer to implement because the regulatory requirements, other than in an emergency situation, are much more onerous and require much more consultation and much more work to be done to ensure that these projects can be put in place. And so we moved on that in a timely fashion to provide

protection to communities as rapidly as possible while at the same time providing support to grow the economy in terms of infrastructure for municipalities and strategic infrastructure as well.

Mr. Pallister: And I remind the Premier (Mr. Selinger) that he knew full well the extent of the expenses to a great degree of the flood in the spring of '11 when he made the promise that he would not raise the PST in the election campaign. And I also appreciate him putting on the record that he will not extend any right to vote to Manitobans in a future administration under his leadership if he chooses, in fact, to continue to hike the PST as an example.

I appreciate him putting that on the record today, but he's going to have some disparate voices within his caucus apparently. During the leadership campaign the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) said, if I'm elected Premier one of the first moves I'll make is to allow Manitobans to have their voice through a referendum on the PST. I believe it's the right thing to do to allow Manitobans to have their say. And I would agree with the member for Thompson on that.

And I'd again ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to be clear in his position. Does he agree with that position by the colleague from Thompson or does he disagree with it?

Mr. Selinger: And I just have to put on the record that the member's characterization of my position is, of course, inaccurate. No surprise, he's been doing that over and over again during this round of Estimates. He likes to interpret things to support his views of how the world works. That's unfortunate because often it misses the points that have been made and some of the facts are ignored as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've said that we made a decision based on the major threats that Manitobans were experiencing, particularly in the area where the 2011 flood had occurred and, more broadly, based on the slower-than-anticipated recovery of the economy, and the need to protect core services in Manitoba, and we did that knowing that it wouldn't necessarily be popular, but believing that it was necessary to serve the public interest. And those are not easy decisions that are made, but that's the nature of our work is to find the best possible way to move forward to ensure Manitobans have a decent and secure quality of life and opportunities for the future.

* (16:10)

So the 1-cent-on-the-dollar decision was made and a commitment was made to invest that in the priorities that Manitobans identified for us: infrastructure, flood protection, strategic investments in infrastructure that would grow the economy. And we've gone ahead and done that and we're starting to see some very good results on that.

That's very different than the decision that the member opposite participated in when he campaigned on the doorstep not to privatize the telephone system and then promptly, right after the election—didn't wait until the second budget—waited—moved promptly to, quite frankly, privatize the telephone 'syfter' after saying he wouldn't do that, not in the public interest but in the private interest. There's a very significant difference there. One promise was broken to serve the private interest; another commitment was changed to serve the public interest. And therein lies the tale of two different views of why we serve in the Legislature.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I've given the Premier ample opportunity to listen to the question and to offer the clarity that he claims he wants to put out there. The member for Thompson's quite clear in his support for a referendum right for Manitobans. I've been. I believe the Chair also has, and I think the Premier is in the minority when it comes to the issue of being clear on the issue itself. So, you know, I would encourage him, rather than attacking the question, to answer it instead.

The member for Thompson was eminently clear that he supported the idea of Manitobans having a chance to have their say. The member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) was quoted as saying, you don't increase—she's—oh, I'm sorry. She's quoting the former Premier Gary Doer, saying he had a saying: You don't increase beer prices and you don't hike the PST. I believe the Premier actually did both, one in the 2012 spring budget and the other in '13.

But, most importantly, Madam Chair, the Premier is refusing to offer any clarity on—and I'm not asking him to rationalize why he made the decision. I'm asking him to give clarity around why he removed the right of Manitobans to have a say in the issue. Why is it that he felt that his right to make the decision should supersede the right of a million Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I've spent quite a bit of time explaining to him the rationale for why we made the public policy decisions we made, including budget decisions, and that rationale was rooted in what

Manitobans told us was their priorities and prior experience on why it was so valuable to invest in public works that protect communities from floods.

And we saw that, out of the '97 flood experience, which was at that time the worst on record, particularly in modern times, particularly in the Red River Valley, that there was a very significant requirement to invest in protection for those communities. And when we came into office, we saw no plan to do that in a significant way with respect to the floodway around the city of Winnipeg, which had one-in-99-year protection which was almost breached in the 2007 flood experience. So we moved forward with the engineering studies required and put the necessary resources in place, along with support from the federal government, to ensure that that flood protection was there and took it from a one-in-99-year level to a one-in-700-year level, which has completely modernized our capacity to protect the major population in Winnipeg, as well as rebuilding dikes and offering individual flood protection for the people of the Red River Valley.

That experience not only turned out very well, but it informed our decisions to offer protection in the Assiniboine valley and to the people of Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba. We'd already started with individual flood protection resources and support for cottagers. We'd already started with work that needed to be done on dikes, but we saw a report that came out in the spring of 2013—April 10th, I believe the press release indicated—that recommended at least another billion dollars of investment. We knew that that was going to be a major challenge, given the fragile economic recovery, and that there needed to be action taken on that because of the long timelines required to get all the regulatory approvals and proper consultation processes done with communities to rebuild those communities and to put in place the necessary protections.

And we're continuing to work on that, because we think it's fundamentally important that, for example, the peoples in the First Nations around Lake St. Martin not be at the bottom of a situation where, when additional water is put through the Portage Diversion, that it leads to them being at risk. And we'd seen many years prior to that, that those communities were subject to flooding.

When the original diversion channel was built, there was no provision to protect those communities. Lake St. Martin is a lake that's lower than Lake

Manitoba. And so, when the water flows through the northern diversion channel, it's going to raise the water dramatically in a lake that's already lower than Lake Manitoba and put those communities at risk. And we'd seen that they had experienced flooding before, and in the case of the 2011 experience, entire communities had to relocate because of the—just how high the water occurred in that—in their communities.

And we are now working on solutions that will ensure that in future events of the intensity and level of water that occurred in 2011, that those communities will be much safer and much less at risk and will be protected from having to be dislocated. That's a major effort.

In order to support that effort, we put aside \$100 million, in the spring of 2014, as I recall, to help rebuild those communities. And that's a very significant amount of resources that was put aside to do that, but also to match federal resources, which are going to be required as well. And it is our belief that putting those resources in place will help those communities through a variety of initiatives: higher-building on higher ground, having individual flood protection, having dikes, proceeding with making the emergency channel permanent, proceeding with an additional outlet out of Lake Manitoba into Lake St. Martin to manage the total water in both of those systems in a more efficacious way, that we can put in place the kinds of infrastructure that will allow those communities to live in safety and security, just like the communities are able to do in the Red River Valley and the city of Winnipeg now.

So it's—and in Brandon we're doing similar investments, some of which are still being completed, but they've made a huge progress in protecting the safety and security of that community. And we've done dikes in other parts of Manitoba too, in southwestern Manitoba. And we're rebuilding bridges and roads down there, as a result not just of the 2011 flood, but also of the events of 2014, the summer flooding that occurred.

So all of these are very major and significant multi-million-dollar investments that need to be proceeded with in order to ensure those communities can have adequate protection from future events.

We also know that with the fragile global economy recovery that there was a real need to have a program, a proactive program, to build infrastructure in Manitoba, which is why we announced in the budget of 2014, a very—

that was, yes, 2014—a very significant five-year infrastructure program of 5 and a half billion dollars. And that program is anticipated, according to independent analysis by the Conference Board of Canada, to not only lift the economy by 5 and a half billion dollars, to increase exports, to build infrastructure, to increase the amount of private equipment and capital that businesses have in Manitoba, but to generate up to 60,000 employment opportunities.

So these are all very significant commitments that we made going forward as a result of listening to Manitobans and them telling us what their priorities are.

Mr. Pallister: I just encourage the Premier to be careful with his references to the Conference Board of Canada report in the sense that, when he speaks about 60,000 jobs, the report actually doesn't say that, it says person years of employment.

And I remember in the recent Ontario election, the PC leader there took a lot of heat for referencing jobs when he should have been talking about person years of employment.

If the Premier equates the two, he should not, because the fact he's been here for 16 years or so, doesn't mean he had 16 jobs, and it's a dangerous thing to get into a habit of misrepresenting statistics from a report like the Conference Board did. So I just encourage the Premier to make sure that when he talks about jobs, he doesn't confuse it with person-years of employment; they're not really the same thing at all.

* (16:20)

Now, that being said, the Conference Board of Canada report was commissioned by the government for the government to use. I recognize that, and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has been, you know, quite liberal in his use, well, liberal, that's not perhaps the appropriate word, but regularly using the report to cite potential benefit.

I'm curious as to why the government commissioned a report that only asked the Conference Board to look at the gross benefits of the proposed theoretical investment in infrastructure, rather than the net consequence. In other words, why did the government not ask the Conference Board to do an analysis of what happens when you take \$300 million away from Manitobans and they no longer are able to spend it? Wouldn't the worth of a report like that be considerably more?

Wouldn't it actually show Manitobans what the potential true benefits were to them, and had the Premier chosen to do that, or perhaps he's considering doing that now, wouldn't it have been a more convincing vehicle for the Premier to use in making the case to Manitobans that the PST hike was actually something that Manitobans should be happy about?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the report was commissioned to show the value of infrastructure investments, which was identified by Manitobans as their priority, and what the amount of employment that would be created out of that. And I did hear the member's cautionary note. I'm going to get a copy of the Conference Board report, and it looks like it may be coming very quickly, and we can see what they said.

But, yes, I mean, we do have statistics that are coming forward that show that Manitoba has a very strong economy right now, relative to its peers across the country. And that's very promising, and we appreciate that, and that's—the report was intended to let us know that a dollar spent on infrastructure—and I don't have the report here, but I—soon as I get it—a dollar spent on infrastructure generates more than that in terms of benefits back to the economy. So once I get the actual number—I think it's like \$1.13 for every dollar spent on infrastructure comes back in terms of economic growth. So it does have a net benefit to the economy of Manitoba—boost the economy by \$6.3 billion, increase retail sales by \$1.4 billion and housing starts by 2,100, and boost exports by \$5.4 billion.

And the—so I'll just—yes, I mean, this year the Conference Board is saying that Manitoba's construction industry is forecast to gain 8.5 per cent in 2015 and 10.7 per cent in 2016 due to many of these major infrastructure projects.

So—and the definition of a job is the same one used by the federal government and other provincial governments, and so—including statements made by members opposite when they were in office; they talked about jobs, not person-years of employment. But, you know, person-years of employment, jobs, it's an important understanding to have, but it's common practice, including by members opposite when they were in office, when, for example, the previous premier, in 1995, and I believe the member may—yes, he was with him when they announced a bridge in the—I believe in the constituency represented by the opposition leader at that time, that will create approximately 265 direct and indirect construction

jobs, which I know they meant was person-years of employment, but they used the term jobs; that's the commonly used term. So I thank the member for the caution. So—but he also used the same terminology when he was in a position to make announcements with respect to projects that would generate employment in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I thank the Premier for acknowledging his error in referencing person-years as being jobs because, of course, we both know that's not a legitimate comparative regardless of what happened 20 years ago someplace.

But it—my question didn't centre on that so much as it did centre on the reason that the government would bother to commission a report which looks only at the plus side of taking \$300 million approximately away from Manitobans in PST hike, but doesn't look at the net effect. Granted, a strategic infrastructure investment's something that I believe in and that many of us believe in and many of us hope generates economic activity for our province and country. That's an agreed point. But, that being said, to do a study which makes the statement that \$1.13 of benefit generates from a dollar of investment without examining the net impact it has when you take money away from Manitobans' pocketbooks by raising their taxes, to me, is very unconvincing.

I'd like the Premier to comment as to why the government would spend—first of all, could he tell us what the cost of the study was, and, secondly, could he tell us why the government—did they just want to do a cheaper study so they wanted to lower the cost by not having the Conference Board look at the real impact on Manitobans of raising the PST by a point and taking \$300 million away from Manitobans that they would no longer have to spend and the government would have it to spend instead? Is that the reason?

How much did the study cost and why do a study on the cheap that only looks at the gross benefit but does not consider the net effect of such a tax hike.

Mr. Selinger: The methodology looks at the impact of infrastructure investment and makes the case that will create many, many employment opportunities in Manitoba, thousands of them, as a matter of fact, as was quoted here. And the notion of jobs is the same notion that the member opposite used when he was in office and which—commonly used across the country. So, if the member wants to dispute that, he

should acknowledge that he somehow used an incorrect methodology himself.

But it's not a question of that. It's a question of speaking in a language that Manitobans understand: the benefits of infrastructure investment and increased employment, increased jobs is a clearly understandable benefit that Manitobans have told us they wanted. And that's why we're doing it, to make sure that we do create those good jobs. And so that's important as we go forward.

Now, the member opposite has said he would cancel the PST hike, which would put those jobs at risk. He's also said he would never build hydro for export, which would put additional jobs at risk. There's tens of thousands of jobs there that would be put at risk. He wants to call them person-years of employment, he can do that. The reality is there would be less opportunities for Manitobans to have good work in Manitoba, and that's a very significant risk to the—Manitoba's economy and to the quality of life in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Urge the Premier not to put false information on the record. He knows what he's saying is, you know, it's a stranger to Truthtown.

And I'll ask the Premier again: Why commission the study on the gross benefit and not the net? How much did it cost—and, for heaven's sakes, I mean, you hiked the tax in April of '13 and you do a study on how it's going to benefit Manitobans nine months later. Now, was that—was—to all appearances, this is a case of trying to do a sell job on Manitobans to try to explain that the PST hike is something good for them nine months later rather than doing a study prior to hiking it.

Does—could the Premier table any study done by the government prior to the decision being made to hike the PST of—that demonstrates an economic advantage to the province of Manitoba or the people of Manitoba?

* (16:30)

Mr. Selinger: We've talked earlier about the standard procedures that are gone through when a budget is prepared. It looks at different scenarios.

I do note that the report brought out by the Conference Board of Canada in March of 2014 says the core infrastructure investment will add \$1,100 annually to the average real income of working-age Manitobans over the next five years—that's \$1,100 annually every year for five years—generate \$1.4

billion in retail sales and add over 2,000 housing units to the economy. It will also boost exports by \$5.4 billion over 2014 to 2018.

Mr. Pallister: That's nice information, except it's absent the net, it's absent the impact on Manitoba households. Creating wealth for Manitoba households with money taken from Manitoba households, that's an easy concept to advance here when one only talks about the gross benefit.

But what I'm asking the Premier is what studies were done prior to the decision to raise the PST that demonstrated that the Premier and his colleagues were actually thinking about the impact on Manitobans directly prior to initiating the tax hike. Could the Premier table any study, any evidence of any forethought in respect of that today?

Mr. Selinger: I've spent quite a bit of time explaining to the member the independent report we got based on the 2011 flood, and the recommendations that came out of that and how expensive they were going to be. I also explained to him that the economy was more fragile and recovering more slowly than people had anticipated, and that there was a very strong desire to see improvements in infrastructure in Manitoba and to prepare ourselves for not only short-term economic growth but also long-term economic prosperity through these infrastructure investments. And I put that on the record for him on several occasions.

I don't have a copy of that 2013 flood report, but we'll try to get a copy, a couple copies in the room for the members so that we can have a look at what it said if the member wishes.

Mr. Pallister: Let the record show that the Premier's provided no evidence whatsoever of any forethought in respect to the economic—net economic impact on the province of Manitoba and on Manitobans of his decision, which many in the NDP advances an arbitrary one to hike the PST. No study whatsoever. Now the only study he cites is one that was commissioned nine months later, and clearly was an attempt at that time to sell Manitobans on the benefits on the PST, but it too totally ignored any net impact analysis on the economy in Manitoba.

So, again, this supports the thesis advanced by many of his own colleagues that he refuses to listen, that he refuses to consult and that he frankly, that he acts arbitrarily in respect to the actions he takes.

Now, if one adds to these facts the reality that he chose, then, to remove the right of Manitobans to even vote on the issue, this, I think, is pretty compelling support of information for the actions taken by some of his colleagues in respect to their frustration as to his leadership.

Now I've asked him before and I continue to ask, I'm not asking for a flood analysis, which was released in the spring of '13, I'm asking him: What study did his government undertake, if any, and if they did not simply say so, simply admit it, before choosing to hike the PST. What study was done, or was it simply arbitrarily done in the absence of any consideration of the impacts it would have on the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Then, again, I just have to say the member, you know, the statements he makes are not facts, they're assertions and judgments made on his part. And I must say that those judgments show a very narrow perspective.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that we're seeing an economy that's performing among the best in Canada right now as a result of these investments. We're seeing job growth that leads the country right now as a result of these investments. We're seeing growth in earnings and wages in Manitoba that are among the best in the country. So there is very strong evidence today about the results of these strategic investments that we've made.

And we've ensured that we've made reforms of our institutions to support growth in the economy as well, including reforms to our educational institutions to allow them to be more collaborative, provide more opportunities for young people to get an academic education as well as an opportunity to get a skill set that will allow them to enter the labour market and earn good wages; programs like first year now, programs like a dramatic increase in apprenticeships in Manitoba. All of those things are strong indicators of what has resulted from these investments that we have made.

And I indicated to him before that we did have a report from the independent committee looking at flood mitigation measures just weeks before the budget that we brought down in 2013, and that was a very—one very compelling argument about why we needed to put resources in place to not only protect communities in the short term but in the long term. We'd already spent one and a quarter billion dollars

in Manitoba as a result of the 2011 flood, and we had to make decisions on the public interest. And I've explained that to the member. He may not accept my explanation, but I have put it on the record more than once today.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I would submit to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) when he accuses me of having a narrow perspective that my perspective is shared by the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), the Chair, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) and numerous others who have chosen not to express their views publicly. And my perspective is based on his absence of providing a single shred of evidence that he gave any real thought to the well-being of Manitobans before he arbitrarily broke his promise, raised the PST and, in fact, took away the right of Manitobans to vote on the measure.

Now, when he takes credit for the economic performance of our province, I'd appreciate it, and I know many across our province would, too, if he'd throw a little bit of credit towards Manitobans. We have a vibrant economy. We have a diverse economy. And I think he'd agree that Manitobans deserve the lion's share of the credit when the economy performs as it has in recent weeks. That being said, his record on economic performance as a Premier is ninth, closer to 10th than to eighth. He knows that. Now, if he changes the analytical start point and wants to move back into Gary Doer's time, he can, of course, improve the look of his statistics. But, when he quotes one-month data and tries to claim economic management acumen, he is revealing the frailty of his own record on economic management as a Premier.

So I would encourage him to place less reliance on short-term stats and forecasts than he does, because, quite frankly, after these many years of being subaverage in his performance—in terms of average weekly wage growth, economic job creation numbers and the like—to try to claim credit for a blip in economic performance of such a short-term duration based on tax-hike funding, deficit financing and raiding the rainy day fund smacks rather well of desperation, and I think the Premier would agree.

Mr. Selinger: Actually, once again, I don't agree. It's just another attempt by the member opposite to put his own perspective on facts that don't actually support what he's saying. The Manitoba economy

over the last 10 years has been one of the top performing economies in the country. It's in the top three and has done very well and has pulled away from other economies that it used to have parallel results with respect to. And we know that, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the member's not interested in hearing the answer, but we'll have it in Hansard for him for the future.

It's also the case, Mr. Speaker, that the jobs record in Manitoba has been consistent year over year for many years now, but has accelerated recently with some of the investments we've made at a time when jobs are being lost quite dramatically in other jurisdictions. So the member opposite continues to find ways to misconstrue the facts and mislead the House, and that's unfortunate, because Manitobans are benefiting by the new jobs that we have in the province. They're 'beddingfitting' from the infrastructure investments we're making that grow the economy, and they are benefiting from the infrastructure investments we make that protect communities from flooding. And those are all important outcomes today and durable outcomes in terms of future protection for those communities and future ability to use that strategic infrastructure to grow the economy not only in the short term but the long term.

And so those facts the member chooses to ignore as he continues his narrow focus, but that's not surprising, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, because it shows a consistent pattern. And that consistent pattern routes back into this notion of a double standard that the member has followed. During his time when he was in government, when they raised additional revenues, including raising the gas tax, they didn't put it back into infrastructure; they actually reduced the highways budget. So that's just another example of the double standard that the member practices.

* (16:40)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, thank you. Now, I have some additional questions, follow-up from yesterday on the communities which were flooded in the Interlake, but I want to start with a clarification on a response that the Premier had provided with regard to the Energy East Pipeline. The Premier had said, and I quote, it's the intention of the government to ensure there is no subsidy of any energy pipeline in Manitoba.

And my question to the Premier is: Does this mean that the Premier would expect Manitoba Hydro to charge the usual, or the normal commercial rates, in the same way as any other commercial customers?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we—if there's going to be that project approved to go through Manitoba by the National Energy Board, and we don't know whether it will be approved because, first and foremost, we want to put on the record, our very serious concerns about the potential risks to water in Manitoba, the safety and security of our water supplies in Manitoba. We want to put on the record and our concerns to ensure the communities are safe and that the environment is protected as well. And so we'll be doing that with our application for full intervenor status to the National Energy Board.

And when I indicated to the member that—in my previous answers—that I wanted to ensure that we didn't subsidize it, we will take a look at what that requires. But that's something that we said, as a matter of course, that we do not want to be subsidizing that pipeline if and when it is approved by the National Energy Board. So we will be making that case as we go forward.

Mr. Gerrard: If the Premier is not planning to use normal—the usual commercial rates in the same way as other commercial customers, then would the Premier be planning to negotiate a separate deal—or from Manitoba Hydro to negotiate a separate deal, with separate rates, either up or down, compared to the normal commercial rates, with the Energy East Pipeline?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we have to examine carefully their application to see what they're proposing and what their energy requirements are and make sure that we're not subsidizing it, and that's something that we'll do. So we need to see all of that material and to do our analysis on that.

Mr. Gerrard: Well, I look forward to the presentation of the Premier to the National Energy Board—or from the government. In the meanwhile, I still believe that there's a significant reason to have a made-in-Manitoba review, probably through the Clean Environment Commission to look at aspects of that.

Let me go back to the flood-affected people in the Interlake. I mentioned to the Premier yesterday, that the information I have that there may be six or seven families who have been in homes at

the radar base from the very beginning, when the houses were first put up, and that these families may have some desire to stay in these homes. Will these individuals, if they choose, be able to stay in these homes?

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to have to get further information about what commitments have been made with those housing units. I do understand that there's—they're very good housing and that they're needed for communities. I understand the member is informing me that there may be some people that wish to stay there. I'd have to find out what the commitments have been made with respect to the specific housing units.

Mr. Gerrard: Dauphin River—in talking to an individual from Dauphin River today, I understand that there may be about 15 homes which have been moved from the radar base to Dauphin River, but, of course, there is work hooking up the homes to electricity, water, et cetera, that needs to be done before the individuals or families can move in. I think that, yes, from what I understand, that in Dauphin River today, there is only one or two families actually living there. The rest of the community remains evacuated from Dauphin River First Nation, and the individuals who are there are primarily for security purposes to look after and keep an eye on the community.

I think there remains a concern, as I raised yesterday, that the individuals in Dauphin River and in the other communities would have access to the jobs and opportunities for learning trades, et cetera, and I think that this clearly needs some significant attention, because there has been a tendency in the past, and it may be happening again, for the work to be contracted out to people who are from outside the community and for the people outside the community who have contracts to not, you know, to hire people primarily from outside the community. So I think this is something that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) should look into.

I raised yesterday the issue of the 806 water level, which is proposed for Lake St. Martin, and I wonder if the Premier has anything further in this respect to the 806 water level that's being proposed for Lake St. Martin.

Mr. Selinger: I did get some additional information on that. What I've been told that the easement, for example, and it's—Little Saskatchewan was the

concern? *[interjection]* Yes, Little Saskatchewan, the proposed easement is based on an elevation of 806 feet, based on a static water level of 803 feet, plus a three-foot allowance for wave setup and wind uprush. There are approximately 2,450 acres of land on Little Saskatchewan's reserve, which is located below 806 feet and which an easement would be based on.

So I think the thinking there is, is that they've tried to pick an easement level that would allow additional protection for wave setup and wind uprush, and my understanding is that's a similar rationale for the easement of the 806 feet at Lake St. Martin. And Dauphin River First Nation—that's different measurements there, so.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I thank the Premier (Mr. Selinger) for that clarification. Just two issues related that I think the Premier's said the number of acres that that would cover in Little Saskatchewan. What proportion of the community would that involve and, second, I would comment on Dauphin River which, in essence, which really is at the mouth of the Dauphin River and on Lake Winnipeg, so it would be quite a different situation in terms of the circumstances there.

Mr. Selinger: My information has that that's a—the land that I mentioned would represent about 71 per cent of the existing reserve land base.

*(16:50)

Mr. Gerrard: That—you know, that's a pretty significant proportion of the existing reserve land base, and the word easement has been used, but usually you have an easement for a small proportion of the land that you're dealing with, and in this case, you're almost as if you're dealing with giving the community an easement to put houses on a third of—30 per cent of their land base.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, and I thank the member for raising the point, and this is an important part of the discussion and, I think, some of the concerns, because we're trying to ensure that the communities are rebuilt in such a way that they won't be flooded again, and they're seeking easements, I think, that will protect that from happening. And that does represent a significant portion of the community's reserved lands, and that's part of the discussion as to how to ensure that additional resources could be made available, including land. And, in some cases,

there has been additional land that has been made available.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, and I thank the Premier for engaging in this assessment of the situation.

The other day, the—or yesterday, the Premier mentioned a band council resolution. That was, in fact, a band council resolution which I had tabled earlier on when I asked the initial question in question period, and that band council resolution was actually approved in March. And, anyway, it is there and that shouldn't be holding up anything at this point.

I mentioned yesterday concern over the requirement for communities like Little Saskatchewan and Lake St. Martin to forgo further claims. Now, I don't—not privy to exactly what the language is in the agreement, but I had mentioned yesterday just as we were winding up that the—from my perspective, the smartest thing would be to get people back home and happy as quickly as possible, and then, you know, deal with the issue of whether or not there are further claims. But to have to prejudge beforehand, before people are back home, before a lot is settled, whether or not there is meaning for further claims would be a mistake and it would be a mistake, in part, because, as the Premier well knows, claims in the past have often taken years and years to settle, and it seems to me that we should be getting on with the work of getting people home expeditiously.

I wonder if the Premier would comment.

Mr. Selinger: I—first of all, I'd—you know, when easements are requested or being negotiated for, it's on the understanding that there will be additional land made available—higher land on safer ground—for these communities, and I'll get the specifics of how much that is. I do believe more land is being offered than being asked for in terms of easement protection so that there's a net benefit to the community. And I did have some ratios in the past, but I want to confirm what they are in terms of what's available in these communities.

So, I mean, the whole idea is to expand the reserve in such a way that they have more land on higher ground that is safer for the people that want to live there, and the land that's at risk have an easement on it to protect people from being in a situation where they're going to be at risk in the future of flooding, so that's the whole exercise there.

And we have Crown land in the area that we can make available, and we have also purchased additional lands there from other private interests to make available to the First Nation. So the whole idea is for the community to be better off with more land that is in a position that is less at risk of flooding.

In terms of moving ahead with one particular community, Little Saskatchewan, I did—and I don't have that note in front of me again today—but I did understand yesterday that there was a willingness to consider moving ahead without all final agreements being worked out and getting a road built and the first 60 homes positioned there so the people could occupy those homes. And I think that's an important element of trying to move forward in good faith.

Yes, a verbal understanding has been reached with the First Nation to proceed with 60 new houses. To get basic elements of community redevelopment under way, the federal government's Department of Aboriginal–AANDC as it's called, has offered to initiate two project components: a new access road and 60 new houses, absent an agreement in principle.

And now I think the member is indicating to me that a band council resolution has already been passed to support that. Well, hopefully, AANDC would be aware of that and be ready to move, and we'll find out what the situation is now to see if there's any other barriers or encumbrances that would stop action from going forward, because I think the member and I would both agree that we'd like to get people home on—in safe housing on higher land as soon as possible.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, the one concern which appears to be delaying things at the moment is the community plan and to what extent that has to be a complete plan or not.

And, you know, as I pointed out yesterday, the concern that this was delayed and that, you know, as has happened often in the past, that it was contracted out even though the community was given a little bit of opportunity to voice their opinion and concern and they did, and they didn't agree with the contractor who was chosen, but they were forced to accept that and—but that particular contractor has not been able to deliver as quickly as it should've been delivered and, apparently, has recently been making excuses.

So I think that, you know, to some extent, if there was agreement that the 60 houses and the road would be certain to be a part of that final plan, then one could move forward. But, you know, hopefully, this will move forward soon. I think, you know, we only have so many summer months to build houses and so on and that this is really imperative that it move as quickly as possible.

I have a question on the Emergency Medical Services report. I was rather surprised to learn that Reg Toews had been removed from his being involved with the implementation of the emergency measures report, and I wonder if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) could tell me why Mr. Toews was removed.

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to seek information on that. I don't know if he was removed or if he decided he did not want to continue. We'd have to check the facts on that.

Mr. Gerrard: Well, I look forward to the Premier getting back to me on that issue, and thank you.

One more issue which has come up with regard to, I believe it was Lake St. Martin and proceeding, is that in the discussions, they wanted to make sure that members of their community had the opportunity to participate in rebuilding the homes and in building the homes and repairing many which are mouldy. Actually, there's not very many which are left which could even be repaired on Lake St. Martin. But the issue that I heard was that the chief and council were being told that any salary would not be the normal construction salary but would be lower than that. And I don't know the specific details, but it would seem to me important that people in the community should not only have employment and be involved in building the communities, rebuilding them but also be treated fairly when it came to salaries.

And I would ask the Premier to comment.

Mr. Selinger: The member raised that question with me yesterday, and I'm seeking information on that about why the salaries are different, if they are different, and what the rationale would be for that.

But I understand the member's point; he would like to see opportunities for employment and training and participation in the rebuild of those communities, and, in principle, I agree with that. The specifics of how they're making salary

determinations, I'll get further information on that for the member.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I appreciate the Premier's efforts and I—as I said, I think it is important to try and move this as quickly as possible because, you know, we only have so much time in the construction season and it's already getting toward the end of May, and so, you know, I would hope that the Premier (Mr. Selinger)—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 26, 2015

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