

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

Monday, June 8, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege. With a matter of privilege, it's important that the matter be raised at the earliest possible opportunity and that the matter represents a prima facie case of privilege.

The matter I'm concerned about arises from the statements made by the MLA for Thompson on Thursday afternoon when he said in the Legislature, and I quote, "we're probably the most dysfunctional Legislature in Canada, probably one of the most dysfunctional legislatures in the Commonwealth, I probably would say, probably the most dysfunctional legislatures in the world." End of quote.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to review Hansard to be sure of exactly what was said before raising this. This is a common practice with matters of privilege because we're dealing with a very serious issue and it's very important that the facts on which the matter of privilege are raised are accurate.

As regards to the issue of whether this is a prima facie case of privilege, Mr. Speaker, when a member of this Legislature stands in this Chamber and uses some of the most derogatory language possible to describe our Manitoba Legislature, then I believe this is the case, where the member in question is impugning all members of the Chamber, indeed, putting the blame not only on all MLAs in this Chamber, including the Speaker, but also misrepresenting the high quality of work done by employees of the Legislature and the staff of the MLAs, as well as the MLAs.

I shall go into more detail, Mr. Speaker, because this is a very serious matter. In reviewing the words from the MLA for Thompson, I understand that to make such statements on record he must have meant what he said. My reading of what his words are is that they represent a very serious slur on the reputation of our Assembly. The member's statements were and are derogatory toward our Assembly and toward those who are employed here, toward our caucus and all caucuses, MLA staff and toward all MLAs. These remarks by the MLA for Thompson were and are a very serious slur on our—the reputation of our Legislature, and I believe they must be taken very seriously.

The comments of the MLA for Thompson were directed in particular at the Legislature session calendar. Mr. Speaker, I was involved in discussions which led to the agreement of the rules for the sessional calendar, which were voted on and approved December 4th, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, the problem lays not with the rules themselves but in the way that today's NDP have completely disregarded the intent of the rules. The intent of the rules was to provide an organized way to wind up debate in the Legislature by the middle of June to facilitate an organized session which would not drag on into July and August. The intent was to provide the government with an end date for the session so that the government could plan the session appropriately by starting earlier in the year. The intent was to ensure that the work of the Legislature would either be completed by mid-June or if not completed could be recommenced and completed starting in early September to be completed in the fall.

The problem is not the rules, Mr. Speaker. The problem has been today's NDP misused the rules by starting later and later instead of following the intent to start session earlier in the year.

The current year is an excellent example of this, for today's NDP government did not start the session until April 30th. The result of their inattention to the business of the House is that it's impossible to complete the proper business of the House by mid-June, and today's NDP finds itself in a most disorganized state.

I want to make clear that when the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) spoke about Manitoba being one of the most dysfunctional legislatures in the world, I would hope that he was not referring to the character and the nature of all members. I would hope that he was not referring to the character and nature of the Clerk and the staff of the Clerk's office. I would hope that he was not referring to the Speaker and the Speaker's office. I would also hope he was not referring to any of the opposition members who were all kept waiting for this sitting to begin while today's NDP were internally focused on their own caucus instead of the business of Manitoba. The MLA for Thompson should've been only referring to the complete and full dysfunction of the present Premier (Mr. Selinger) and his Cabinet, and he should've made this explicit in the statement instead of implying that others were disorganized.

Mr. Speaker, I will explain my last statement. The rules have worked well in the past when the government has been ready to talk to members of the opposition parties and involve opposition parties in determining some aspects of the timing of the legislative session. This has hardly happened under the present Premier, and this last year is an example. The first time there was a proposal put forward by the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) for this session, a session which started with barely enough sitting days to debate only the Throne Speech this last December, was on Thursday, June the 4th. This is strange, to say the least, for a House leader to wait until almost the very end of the sitting days planned for this spring, in fact, for this entire short session, to even start talking about plans for the whole session schedule.

It appears that today's NDP has grown old, tired, arrogant and will not listen to talk—or talk to others about planning for sessional timing, which involves all MLAs and all those who work for and on behalf of the Legislature and, in a broader sense, many who work in a variety of different capacities for the government of our province. It's no wonder that the MLA for Thompson talked about dysfunction, but, Mr. Speaker, the dysfunction is not the dysfunction of the members of the opposition parties nor the dysfunction of the valued staff of our Legislative Assembly; it is the dysfunction of today's NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, in rising on this matter of privilege, I would ask that the member for Thompson withdraw his remarks as they pertain to our Legislature and

have his remarks as they were said restricted to the actions of his own NDP government.

Without such a withdrawal by the MLA for Thompson, I would move, seconded by the MLA for Portage, that the matter be referred to a legislative committee for further action.

Thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I wish to put a few brief comments on the record regarding the member for River Heights' (Mr. Gerrard) matter of privilege, and I think I heard most of it, and what I didn't hear I think I get the gist of where he's coming from.

I again state my reluctance to be speaking about House matters and such on the record. I don't think it's the appropriate place for those kinds of discussions.

* (13:40)

We continue, as we always are, ready to do the work of the people here in the Legislature. We've been raising many important issues, of course, in the brief time that we've been sitting, and we continue ready and willing to raise those issues that Manitobans have sent us here to do on their behalf. We consider it a great privilege each and every day that we can come out and hear and, with our voices, representing our individual constituents and those who aren't in our constituencies as well, Mr. Speaker, speak on their behalf for the many concerns that they have regarding the budgeting that's happening under this government, the things that are hidden under this government, the secrecy, the mismanagement, that are costing hard-working Manitoba families each and every day.

Specifically to the point of the matter of privilege, Mr. Speaker, we also have concerns that this session began so late, at the end of April. I repeat what I said last week, members of our caucus and our leader have been calling for the recall of this House for many months prior to April, and the government ignored that while it went through its own internal family feud. And so any concerns and problems that exist are of the making of the government itself. They have no one to blame but themselves.

But I also repeat the comments that I put on the record last week in a similar vein that members of our caucus and our leader have spoken about the need for mandatory minimum number of sitting days

here in the Legislature. We have expressed concern in the past. We continue to express concern that this government does not call the Legislature back for a reasonable amount of time so that the work of the people can be done, so the bills can be debated properly, so that people have an opportunity to hear about the bills, so they can come and make presentations and perhaps amendments to those bills. And that continues to be a concern for us because this is the seat of democracy for Manitoba and it needs to function in a way, Mr. Speaker, that is respectable and respectful. And so we continue to be—raise concerns about the lack of mandatory number of minimum sitting days here in Manitoba. And, unfortunately, that has been deemed necessary by this government.

To the specific point that the member raises about comments that the Minister of Infrastructure put on the record, I understood that last week when the member for Thompson was talking about this being similar to Monty Python and the flying circus, when he indicated there was great dysfunction, I took him at his word that he was talking about the government; however, if he wasn't, I'm willing to hear this go to committee and hear otherwise, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): First of all, in terms of this matter, it's not a matter of privilege. While it may have been raised at the first opportunity, it clearly does not establish the prima facie case of privilege.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear, you know, and I'm not going to quote Jim Prentice here, but when it comes to the rules of the House, we as MLAs can look in the mirror, because we are masters of our own destiny. And I do believe that, actually, our staff in this Legislature are often on the receiving end of that. They don't know when they can plan holidays, when they can plan their work schedules, et cetera, and there was nothing that I said on Thursday that was any way, shape or form critical of our staff, the many other people that are very much dependent on our sessional calendar. And I make it very clear, too, I have one big luxury: I actually have been in government, I've been in opposition, and this is a long-standing issue that we perhaps thought at times we had resolved, but it didn't. And I do note that there will be further discussion over the next few days, both in terms of a motion that's on the floor and, I'm sure, as we always do, the kind of discussions take place between House leaders.

My comments were very clear. I do think at some point in time, it should be something we should all consider having an achievable goal to have greater certainty, regardless of what role we play, government or opposition, because virtually every other Legislature in Canada, virtually every other Legislature in the Commonwealth, is able to do that. My city council, my school board, they actually have a calendar each year.

So, you know, I appreciate it's been kind of one of those unique things about the Manitoba process that we, in times like this, are not quite sure what the sessional calendar is ahead. That was the spirit in which I raised it. I suspect, Mr. Speaker, if you were to separate out some of the comments here back and forth, I don't think there's any one of the 57 MLAs that are here, including you, Mr. Speaker, that want anything other than to try and move to a more rational system. So that was the spirit in which I put forward what was a point of order. I suspect that on reflection, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) may, you know, may determine, even reading—re-reading Hansard, that there was no criticism of anyone else other than ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, as someone that's been in this Legislature longer than anyone, I suppose that I probably share more of the blame, but I—you know, sharing the blame isn't the issue here. *[interjection]* Well, I'm glad I've got the opposition agreeing on something.

But I got to tell you, sharing the blame isn't the real issue here; coming up with a solution is. I think there are ways. I think we all know there are ways. Other jurisdictions have done it, and maybe out of the last—events of the last few days, maybe we can rededicate ourselves to coming up with a more sane set of rules that reflect the practice in virtually every other Legislature across Canada, across the pond.

Mr. Speaker: On the matter of privilege raised by the honourable member for River Heights, I thank all honourable members for their advice in dealing with this matter of privilege.

As all members know, I take matters of privilege very seriously, and I'm going to take this matter under advisement and I'm going to review and reflect upon the comments that were made in Hansard that have been referenced in the advice to the Chair, and then I'm going to bring back a ruling for the House.

I thank honourable members for their advice in this matter.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to introduction of bills.

**Bill 35—The Workers Compensation
Amendment Act (Presumption re Post-Traumatic
Stress Disorder and Other Amendments)**

Hon. Erna Braun (Minister charged with the administration of The Workers Compensation Act): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady), that Bill 35, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act (Presumption re Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Other Amendments); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les accidents du travail (présomption relative au trouble de stress post-traumatique et autres modifications), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Braun: The proposed amendments provide that post-traumatic disorder, PTSD, is presumed to be a work-related occupational disease unless the contrary is proven. The presumption applies to all workers covered by workers' compensation who are exposed to the specific traumatic event or events that trigger PTSD and then are diagnosed with PTSD by a physician or psychologist.

This bill also adds a penalty for failure to post notices required by the WCB and extends the filing dates for annual reports of the WCB and the appeal commission from March 31st to April 30th.

We have the presidents of the Manitoba firefighters and—unions across Manitoba with us in the gallery today, and I would like to thank you for having joined us here today.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

Bill 31—The Registered Professional Planners Act

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 31, The Registered Professional Planners Act; Loi sur les urbanistes professionnels, now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation will protect the public interest by ensuring that

qualified professionals practising planning are identifiable by the designation registered professional planner. The bill proposes to establish registered professional planner as the formal professional planning designation in Manitoba and to reserve this title for use by members of the Manitoba Professional Planners Institute.

Thank you.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

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

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) There are currently 125 licensed personal-care homes 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.

* (13:50)

(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 illness who will require personal-care-home services are steadily increasing and are threatening to double within the current generation.

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

(6) Average occupancy rates for personal-care homes across the province are exceeding 97 per cent, with some regions, such as 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 of Manitoba 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 (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 J. Foster, W. Markle, J. Hawrychuk and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of 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 L. Shirliff, D. Speer, K. McGraw and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 (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 T. Remillard, G. Peit, G. Chouinard and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

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

And this is the background for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

This petition is signed by M. Macsymic, S. Mashtoler, J. Innes and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by S. Sveinson, D. Grolette, A. Meade and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us this afternoon from HBNI-ITV system out of Fairholme school, we have 21 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Evelyn Maendel. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart).

And also seated in the public gallery this afternoon, we have with us from Carberry Collegiate, we have 49 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Raegan Dyck. And this group is located in the constituencies of the honourable members for Agassiz and Spruce Woods.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro Fiscal Forecast

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the Premier's caught in a bit of a cover-up, Mr. Speaker, just as he was with respect to the PST hike he intended to invoke on Manitobans when he denied such in the last election.

He is now covering things up in respect to Manitoba Hydro forecasts for the coming year, and we believe it to be cowardly.

So I want to ask the Premier: What are the projected losses of Manitoba Hydro for the coming fiscal year?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. One moment.

I want to caution the House right at the start here. There was a word that's coming very close to the line with respect to parliamentary language that was used by the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I want to make sure that this House conducts itself in a respectful manner, so I'm going to caution all honourable members right at the start of question period.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the summary budget for next year has been reported on in the budget and that's—that includes the Hydro revenues, and I'll refer the member to the budget for the information.

* (14:00)

Mr. Pallister: Deceptive, Mr. Speaker. After almost a decade of reporting on forecasts for our Crown corporations, such as Manitoba Hydro, the Premier departs from past practice and he's hiding the forecasts, which we know—which we know—if they were good would be advertised by the government and self-promoted with. So they must be bad.

So I'll ask the Premier again: What is the forecasted loss under the NDP at Hydro for the coming fiscal year?

Mr. Selinger: It's very clear to me that the Leader of the Opposition has not read the budget. If he refers to page 4 of the summary revenue estimates of the 2015 budget, it 'recorts' on the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016, and reports that Manitoba Hydro will have \$125-million surplus.

Mr. Pallister: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's a sham.

Bipole, the Premier said, would not cost—would not cost Manitobans a single penny. It appears now that bipole will cost Manitobans 100 billion pennies, and that's a pretty far departure from truth telling.

So I want to ask the Premier again, because he is avoiding answering: How many dollars are projected to be lost under the NDP at Manitoba Hydro in the coming fiscal year?

Mr. Selinger: I know it's hard for the member to move off his prepared text even when he gets a straight-up answer: \$125-million surplus projected in next year's budget reported on page 4 of the budget.

I only wish the member would used all this time since we delivered the budget to actually read the budget. Clearly, he hasn't read the budget. If he would have read the budget, he would have seen the \$125 million there reported in this year's budget on page 4.

Would he like the opportunity to correct the record and apologize to the Legislature for misleading them and saying that there is no information? It has been presented; it's in the budget. We voted on the budget in terms of the first round of discussion on it—I only hope he supports it going forward—has many important investments in job creation in Manitoba: 60,000 jobs over the next five years under the infrastructure program, 10,000 jobs on building hydro, Mr. Speaker, over the next several years.

The Leader of the Opposition has said he does not believe hydro should be built for export. That will guarantee higher rates for Manitobans and less employment right here in Manitoba for Manitobans.

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

Mr. Pallister: Gross mismanagement under the NDP does guarantee Manitobans higher rates, Mr. Speaker. It certainly does.

Now, to make it even clearer for the Premier, who is obviously trying to avoid giving the information to Manitobans, who are the real owners of Manitoba Hydro, which does not belong to the NDP, I will ask him again: How many dollars are projected to be lost at Manitoba Hydro? It's page 11 of the budget if he'd like to read the budget, and it's left out this year for the first time in eight years.

Two thousand sixteen-seventeen, as I said three times already, in the coming fiscal year, how many dollars under the NDP will be lost at Manitoba Hydro due to gross incompetence?

Mr. Selinger: The gross incompetence we're seeing is from the member opposite who hasn't read page 4 of the budget where it projects \$125-million surplus, March 31st, 2016. That's what Hydro is projecting.

I put that on the record four times now, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the member would like to pull out a copy of the budget, read that page. He will see it's there. I know his speaking notes refer to another page. If he actually read the budget, he would see the \$125-million profit.

That's incompetence when you haven't even read the budget after it's been in front of the public this many weeks.

Mr. Pallister: I want the children in the gallery to take notice this is how the Premier (Mr. Selinger) does not respond to questions that he does not like, and I want the kids to notice this because this is what's going on here and it's been going on for quite a while.

His own colleagues, close to half of them are tired of him. His own colleagues have said he is not listening. At a press conference last November, they said he stopped listening. So I want to encourage him to stop proving it time after time and start to listen.

I'm asking him what the forecasted losses are at Hydro for fiscal 2016 and '17.

Mr. Selinger: The fiscal report, March 31st, 2016: \$125-million surplus. That's reported on page 4 of the budget. The member's trying to skate away from that.

Mr. Speaker, he's wrong on the facts. I've regiven him a straight-up answer five times. He sticks to his prepared speaking notes.

I can tell him what we're not going to do. We're not going to do what he said he wouldn't do with the telephone system. When he ran in the '95 election, he said to every Manitoban, we won't privatize the Manitoba Telephone System. They got re-elected, what's the first thing they did? Privatize the Manitoba Telephone System. What happened to the rates? They went from among the lowest in Canada to among the highest in Canada. What happened to jobs? They were cut and disappeared. What happened to pensions? They were taken away, and they had to go to the Supreme Court to get their pensions back.

We won't follow his course on the telephone system, and we won't follow his course of action on daycare.

Mr. Pallister: And this is a Premier who ran on a promise, a solemn vow that he made at every door, promise we won't raise the PST, and then he went ahead and did it anyway, Mr. Speaker.

So the Premier says he's—the Premier also promised he'd balance the books by last year, but he's not going to, he says now, until 2018-19. But he's going to do it by leaving out Hydro.

So I'm going to ask him again: How many dollars will the NDP lose at Manitoba Hydro in fiscal year 2016-17?

Mr. Selinger: Mr.—the Speaker can—the Leader of the Opposition can skate as far as away he wants from the original question. He got a straight-up answer.

He obviously didn't read the budget. He didn't see the \$125-million projected surplus in this year's budget. That's on him, Mr. Speaker. He should take responsibility for that.

Said he wouldn't privatize the telephone system, then he did, Mr. Speaker. We saw the consequences.

Now he's promising to privatize daycare in Manitoba. It's considered one of the best programs in the country. We've doubled the number of spaces up to 30,000. We've increased wages by 60 per cent. We're one of only two provinces that provides a pension program for daycare workers. Greater accessibility, better wages, greater quality of daycare with early childhood learning curriculum, pension 'plogram' and new facilities; over half of daycares now, approximately, are in public schools. Members opposite want to wash that all away with their obsession with privatization.

Now we see where they're really coming from, Mr. Speaker. More privatization, the same stories we saw in the '90s. There's nothing new here except blatant incompetence.

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

Mr. Pallister: That's how—so, kids, that's how it works. The worse the answer, the more they yell and applaud. That's how it works here.

So the Premier keeps repeating his talking points, and those talking points say what the profit is projected to be for this year.

And I'll keep asking him: What's the projected loss for next year?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member asked what the profits would be in 2015-16. He got the answer: \$125 million. He's wrong on the facts.

We also know now that he's pulled back the veil. He wants to privatize daycare in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. It's considered by everybody one of the best systems in the country. Now, he thinks he knows better. He thinks he knows better than one of the best daycare systems in the country.

He tried the same thing on home care when he was in office. Forty years, we're celebrating the creation of the first universal home-care system in Manitoba, right now we're celebrating that. And what does the member want to do when he was in office? He wanted to privatize it.

He's not changing one iota of his obsession with privatization, Mr. Speaker, first the telephone system, then the hydro system, now the daycare system. And he tried and failed on the home-care system.

There's nothing new here, except incompetence from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: I have cautioned the House at the start of question period here today with respect to the choice of language and how we refer to other members of this House. We have a lot of children who have joined us here from the various schools around Manitoba and other guests. And I want to make sure that we conduct ourselves in a respectful manner. And we want to leave a good impression with the folks that are visiting us here.

So I'm going to ask the two leaders who are asking questions and engaging in the answers to the questions to please conduct themselves in a manner that we would want to leave a good impression with the folks that are visiting us here this afternoon and others. So I'm asking for that co-operation, please.

Now, we're at the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) to ask the next question.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Speaker, the cost of the NDP plan to Americanize Manitoba Hydro is enormous, but the Premier (Mr. Selinger) doesn't want to talk about it. So I'll ask him again. I'm not asking him about any of the things he's been talking about for the last five or seven minutes. I'm simply asking him a straightforward question.

* (14:10)

For years now in this province—and the Premier, by press release, said in 2008 that it's important to have these projections because it increases transparency and openness and accountability. So why he runs away from transparency, accountability and openness is a matter for him to defend.

I simply want to know, on behalf of Manitobans, who are the real owners of Manitoba Hydro, what are their projected losses—not for this year, not for this fiscal year; that's not what I'm asking him. I'm not asking him about '15-16; I'm asking him what the projected losses are for '16-17.

Mr. Selinger: The member asked what the projection would be for '15-16, then he skated away from that, Mr. Speaker, not a surprise. A hundred and twenty-five million dollars. It's reported on page 4 in the budget. I pointed that out to him several times.

We also know last week that they announced that they wanted to privatize daycare in Manitoba. We know the results of that: less wages for people that work in daycare, less accessibility for families, less ability to have a private—to have a pension plan, less quality. Mr. Speaker, that is not a way forward when it comes to serving the families of Manitoba.

The same with Hydro, Mr. Speaker, the—Manitoba Hydro indicated in one of their releases that the export contracts now total over \$9 billion, new contracts that have been signed. Those new contracts the member opposite would cancel. He said he would not build hydro for export. That kisses off \$9 billion in export revenues which'll keep Manitoba rates low, lowest—among the lowest in North America, and keep Manitoba hydro affordable for all families in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier's at odds with the management at Manitoba Hydro, which says they need massive rate hikes in order to cover off their debt obligations, Mr. Speaker. So it's no wonder he's covering up, I suppose, because it demonstrates the gross mismanagement of himself as the Premier.

Now, he's not answering my questions, and this is what the members for Seine River, Fort Rouge, Dauphin, Southdale, Minto all said: he's stopped listening. He only cares about his re-election opportunities, doesn't care about being accountable any more. So I'm going to give him another chance to be accountable today.

I want to ask him again: What are the projected losses at Manitoba Hydro for fiscal '16-17?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member could skate away from his question when I gave him a straight-up answer of \$125 billion, indicated on page 4 of the budget.

Manitoba Hydro is building new generation capacity in Manitoba called Keeyask. It's building new transmission capacity to secure the reliability and safety of the energy supply in the province of Manitoba.

We have a \$66-billion economy now. Members opposite had the opportunity to build the additional reliability when they were in office. Instead of doing that, they broke their promise and they focused on privatizing health care.

We're building additional transmission and generation capacity for increased reliability in Manitoba, to grow the Manitoba economy. Thousands of people are currently working on Manitoba hydro building those new assets in Manitoba now, Mr. Speaker. Those new assets will serve us to decades to come.

The member opposite said he wouldn't do that; he wouldn't build hydro for exports. He will—that will result in the loss of thousands of jobs, and when hydro is needed for Manitoba the price will be higher and the rates will be higher under his approach to building Manitoba hydro, which right now is: no build, no jobs, no future for Manitobans.

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

Mr. Pallister: Well, there's truly no future for Manitobans if they have a Premier (Mr. Selinger) who dodges questions like this.

Hydro says it expects to lose 1 and a half billion dollars over the next five fiscals, starting in 2018 and going to '23, just due to the bipole boondoggle that the Premier has foisted on them.

So I have to ask the Premier again: For fiscal 2016-17, what has he projected, just in that one year, the losses will be at Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, all of that information is before the Public Utilities Board as part of a rate application. The member asked about '15-16; we gave him the answer on that. All the other information is before the Public Utilities Board where they're making a decision on what the rate application should be.

Mr. Speaker, the hydro rates remain the lowest—among the lowest in North America. The bundle of home heating, hydroelectricity rates and auto insurance rates has been independently verified as the lowest cost package of services to Manitobans, the lowest cost package compared to any jurisdiction in Canada.

What does the member want to do? He wants to destroy that. He wants to change how we do that by not building for export purposes, Mr. Speaker, and then he wants to privatize the daycare system in Manitoba just like he tried to privatize the home-care system and how he went ahead and privatized another Crown corporation called the telephone system. We used to have among the lowest rates, now we have among the highest rates. That is not a way forward: less jobs, more costs to Manitobans.

Mr. Pallister: Well, under this Premier hydro rates have gone up by double the rate of inflation. But the projections look even worse, and that's why I'm asking what the projections actually are. They were always included in the budget. For the last number of years they've always been included. This year the government decided to hide them from Manitobans.

Now the Premier is hiding them from Manitobans again today. He's caught in a cover-up, he won't admit it, and this is exactly why a number of his caucus left in frustration.

And so I ask him again: What are the anticipated losses at Manitoba Hydro in '16-17 fiscal year?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I've indicated to the member opposite, all that information is presently in front of the Public Utilities Board as part of a rate application review. The member knows that. He also knows that the projected surplus for this year is \$125 million. He actually didn't know that when he got up to ask his original question or he wouldn't have asked the question the way he did. All the information is before the Public Utilities Board.

Our hydro rates remain among the lowest in Canada, among the lowest in North America, Mr. Speaker. He's in denial on that as well.

Canada is building about \$350 billion of electricity infrastructure all across this country. Many of the assets were built 40 to 50 years ago. They're now at the stage of renewal. We are fortunate in Manitoba; we plan ahead with Manitoba Hydro; we're building those assets ahead of when they're needed by Manitobans. That has resulted in an additional approximate \$9 billion of export

contract sales, which will keep the costs low for Manitobans. It'll pay down the cost of those new assets and allow Manitoba to keep among the lowest rates in North America.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) lays claim to planning ahead but won't give us the forecasts on Manitoba Hydro; that's kind of a gross contradiction.

And I appreciate his coaching me on team building, but I don't think it's really working for him. I don't think it's working for him. I really do.

Now, Hydro expects zero increases in export sales. Hydro expects no gross increase in export sales to cover off the cost of the bipole bungle, Mr. Speaker. So because of that, we expect that the losses are going to be quite great. If they were good forecasts, we know—everyone here knows, everyone in the province knows—the Premier would be promoting himself as a prudent manager. But they aren't good forecasts and that's why he's covering up again today.

So I'll ask him again: What are the anticipated losses at Manitoba Hydro in 2016-17 fiscal year?

Mr. Selinger: All of that information is in front of the Public Utilities Board. The member knows that. The member knows that Manitoba Hydro's applied for a rate application increase. What their outcome—what the outcome of that will be will be determined by the Public Utilities Board. Then we'll know what the future projections of Manitoba Hydro are, Mr. Speaker, once the rate application has been heard.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro rates remain among the lowest in North America. And Manitoba Hydro rates, along with electricity rates, along with home heating costs, along with auto insurance costs, remain the lowest in Canada, on average \$2,000 lower, very different from what the members opposite are projecting for Manitoba.

They already privatized the telephone system. That took the rates from being among the lowest in North America to among the highest. The Leader of the Opposition was a member of the government who went door to door and said they would not privatize the telephone system. They broke that promise. They privatized the telephone system. The profits now flow out of the province. Less jobs, pensions were made worse.

That is not the vision for the future of Manitoba. We will not privatize Hydro, nor will we privatize the daycare system in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Pallister: So what we have here is a clear case of deception, Mr. Speaker. We have secret losses—the Premier doesn't want them public—sneaky bookkeeping, the use of the freedom of information rules to block access to the information from the media and from the opposition parties.

He's hiding, Mr. Speaker, he's hiding the truth from the real owners of Manitoba Hydro. The real owners of Manitoba Hydro aren't over there. The real owners are here. They're in the gallery and they're around the province of Manitoba and they deserve to have answers on what's going on with their public utility.

So I ask the Premier again: Why is he hiding? Will he make public today the projected losses at Manitoba Hydro for the upcoming fiscal year, 2016-17?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, not only is all the information about Hydro's forecast available at the Public Utilities Board, it's also available on their website. They're fully transparent about what they project.

* (14:20)

They are also applying for a rate increase. The results of that rate increase will determine their future forecasts. All that information is publicly available. That is fully transparent, as it was in the budget for this year's summary forecast, which the member clearly did not read.

We won't be buffaloes by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Speaker, we'll just have to check Hansard for the validity and veracity of that statement about it being public. If it was public, kids, wouldn't he have answered one of the last twelve questions? Wouldn't he? Oh, but he didn't. No, he didn't.

And let's go for another one. If it's so public, if it's so available, why doesn't he tell the House right now: What are the projected losses at Hydro for the coming fiscal year?

Mr. Selinger: Clearly the member hasn't done any of his homework. He didn't read page 4 of the budget,

this, Mr. Speaker, where it projects a \$125-million surplus. He wants to know what the surplus will be or losses in '16-17. I can inform him they're projecting a \$66-million surplus.

The member is not being accurate with his projections. The rates are on the public website. They're in front of the Public Utilities Board. A \$125-million surplus this year, a \$66-million surplus next year and retained earnings—in case he's interested—the highest retained earnings in the history of the corporation at \$2.96 billion.

Will the member get up and apologize for not being accurate in his information?

Mr. Pallister: You know, it's tough, I know, for the Premier to be accountable. I know he doesn't like to do it, but the reality is it would help him if he would accept the challenge of coming clean on the projected numbers for Manitoba Hydro. He could live with himself. But tonight he'll go home and regret his lack of response today in quiet reflection alone at home, and he should reflect on it and he should regret it, because with this deception is a lack of transparency and that lack of transparency is the very reason that he had a caucus rebellion, that self-serving behaviour, that unwillingness to listen.

Now I'll ask him again. Will he listen? Will he tell Manitobans: What is the projected loss at Manitoba Hydro '16-17 fiscal year?

Mr. Selinger: It's very apparent that the Leader of the Opposition isn't listening. He's just following his prepared speaking notes.

Mr. Speaker, the projected surplus in '16-17 for Manitoba Hydro is \$66 million. He's switched his question. He originally asked about '15-16, not having read the budget—\$125 million, \$125-million surplus in '15-16, a \$66 million in '16-17.

I wonder if the leader opposite will try to buffalo us again with another question.

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

Mr. Pallister: Well, I wonder if the leader of half the NDP caucus would like to answer this question.

Now, the NDP dropped their promise to balance the books of our province. They made that promise in the last election and the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) claimed that he was ahead of schedule. He was ahead of schedule, he said. But he dropped the promise and now he says he's on

schedule to balance the books, but only if he leaves out Manitoba Hydro.

Of course, he's going to charge Manitoba Hydro ratepayers 1 per cent on every dollar they have to borrow, transfer the money in and try to make it look like he's balancing the books when he really isn't. In fact, he won't be balancing the books for at least another seven years because he can't unless he takes money from Manitoba Hydro.

So let me ask him again: How much are the projected losses at Manitoba Hydro that he is trying to cover up over the next five years in total?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member originally asked for the situation with Manitoba Hydro in '15-16. I gave him the answer: \$125-million projected surplus. He then tried to ask what was the projected loss for '16-17. I gave him the information. It's on the public website: \$66 million. Now the member's trying to shift again.

Manitoba Hydro has a rate application before the Public Utilities Board. Manitoba Hydro's building additional transmission to secure the Manitoba economy for greater reliability. They're also building additional generation capacity for the future needs of a growing economy in Manitoba, a growing economy where we have the best job creation record over the last 12 months in the country, where we have a growing population, where we have growing wages.

The member opposite doesn't want to debate the real issues. He wants to keep changing his position every time he stands up.

We know that his objective is to privatize the hydro system. How do we know? He said he wouldn't privatize the telephone system and then he promptly went ahead and did it. Now he—now we know he wants to privatize the daycare system. Why doesn't he just come clean and say he wants to privatize Manitoba Hydro?

Manitoba Hydro Forecasts Manitoba's Credit Rating

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): His objective is to bankrupt Manitoba Hydro.

And now, after failing to answer a straightforward question 15 consecutive times, he attacks me for asking a new question, Mr. Speaker, please.

You know, I've got to ask the Premier this question. You know, he doesn't plan on balancing the books at any foreseeable time unless he takes money from Manitoba Hydro and charges their ratepayers so that he can appear to be balancing the books.

The Moody's international rating was the first negative outlook in Manitoba in 28 years. The member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) says he stopped listening. The member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) says the same. Now Moody's is going to think that he's not listening either.

So I've got to ask him: Will Moody's get to see the forecast we're not getting to see here in Manitoba?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, all that information is available to everybody who wants to see it, including the Leader of the Opposition if he would only read the material. He clearly didn't read the material; he just went off his prepared speaking notes. He would have read page 4 in the budget, he would've answered—he would've had the answer to his first five or six questions. If he would've gone to the publicly available website, he would've had the answer to his remaining questions.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has said that he will not build Manitoba Hydro for export purposes. That's what he has said. He would then be forgoing \$9 billion in export revenues, which would pay down the costs of the new Keeyask dam and the cost of new transmission in Manitoba. Then you will see rates grow to being among the highest in North America.

That's exactly what happened when he privatized the telephone system. Now he wants to perpetrate the same approach on the daycare system. That will not make Manitoba more affordable. That'll not increase wages and jobs in Manitoba. That will not help Manitoba grow as an economy, Mr. Speaker. Those approaches have failed in the past and they will fail in the future.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I take that as a good observation from someone who's been using almost exclusively failed approaches for the last six years in this province.

Now, I take it from the last whatever number of non-answers that the Premier has no intentions whatsoever of sharing with Manitobans what he must share with the bond rating agencies who evaluate our creditworthiness.

So on what grounds does he propose to continue this deception? How does he propose to continue to defend his lack of forthrightness and transparency in providing Manitobans with the information they deserve on the one hand, while on the other hand making it freely available to moneylenders in New York City?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, all the information is available to the members opposite, but they don't read it. It's available to any other member of the public that wishes to receive it as well. That's how we've conducted business in Manitoba for many years, and that's how we will continue to conduct business in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, what the member doesn't want to deal with is the fact that his program will not allow the Manitoba economy to grow. When you cancel the infrastructure program, there goes thousands of jobs in infrastructure that will increase the economic capacity of the province today and in the future. When you cancel building hydro exports for the future, you defer investment that will cost more in the future and, as a matter of fact, will result in loss of jobs and employment in Manitoba and revenues coming from export markets, all of those things the Leader of the Opposition has on the record as saying he supports.

Now we know, based on him coming clean, a little bit pulling back the veil, he wants to privatize the daycare system in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, when will he reveal the rest of his agenda for the future of Manitoba? Less jobs in hydro, less jobs in infrastructure, less well-paying jobs in the daycare system, less accessibility in the daycare system. What will he announce next?

Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Implementation of Recommendations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the approach of today's NDP to climate change has been very poor since the very beginning of their government in 1999.

* (14:30)

In 2000 and many times since, I have raised the issue of agricultural emissions, but today's NDP failed to take it seriously and address it. Agricultural emissions kept on rising and they never even came close to meeting their legislated greenhouse gas emissions targets for 2012.

Just last week, the Auditor General released a report showing that only two of 15 recommendations from December 2010, four years ago, have been completed.

I ask the Premier: Why has today's NDP fallen flat on its face when it comes to addressing climate change?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the economy between the periods of 2000 and 2012 grew by over 37 per cent, 31 to 37 per cent, and emissions were flat in Manitoba. That's a tremendous record. There were more jobs, more people working and a larger economy, and flat emissions on greenhouse gas emissions.

Why did that happen, Mr. Speaker? First of all, we put an ethanol mandate in place which reduced the amount of carbons being used by automobiles. We put a biodiesel mandate in place. We brought forward a Green Building Policy so all the new buildings that are supported with government money are now built to a higher standard to reduce—increase their energy efficiency and use less consumption of carbon fuels. We put in a geothermal program which is widely credited with reducing the bills for Manitobans and reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. We've worked on active transportation initiatives across this province. We brought in a peat moratorium. We brought in the largest landscape of boreal forest being protected anywhere in the world, called Pimachiowin Aki, the land that gives life; 33,000 square kilometres are being protected.

And we've taken initial—additional initiatives to reduce the use of coal in Manitoba—

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, another response which fell flat.

Mr. Speaker, December 6, 2011, was a black day in Manitoba history as the Premier announced he was breaking his legislated commitment to reach Kyoto targets by 2012. Today's NDP never set out an adequate plan to address climate change or to mitigate it. Greenhouse gas production is at 4.1 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalence above the Kyoto targets. That's 22 per cent above target in the latest report.

When will today's NDP complete all 15 recommendations from the 2010 report and quit

ignoring their own promises to reduce greenhouse gases?

Mr. Selinger: We continue to take initiatives that will not only reduce and maintain our ability to protect the environment in Manitoba—and I'll just enunciate some more of them.

Mr. Speaker, we have put more land into protection in terms of the boreal forest. I mentioned Pimachiowin Aki. We've done additional land in other parts of Manitoba as well. We're protecting water with the save Lake Winnipeg plan. We're—we put a moratorium on peat and we're bringing in new legislation to be proclaimed on that. I mentioned the ethanol mandate. I mentioned the biodiesel mandate. We're investing in infrastructure that reduces greenhouse gases by reducing idling.

We've encouraged active transportation around this province and we're seeing a tremendous boon in active transportation. We're the only province in Canada that provides 50 per cent of the operating costs for the City of Winnipeg over and above the fares which allows public transportation to flourish in Manitoba, and we built phase 1 of rapid transit.

And I say to the member opposite, every initiative we took in that regard, he voted against it.

Climate Change Mitigation Surface Water Management Strategy

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, you know, the Premier falls short and flat every time.

The Canadian Prairies are said to be a hot spot for climate change impact with high levels of flooding in the last two decades and the potential for severe droughts. Mitigating climate change impacts is crucial, yet when Manitoba can be so severely impacted, today's NDP government has still yet not delivered a surface water management plan to mitigate climate change, a plan that I called for in 2000.

The trail of broken climate change promises continues for nearly 16 years.

How many more years does today's NDP government need to finally deliver a surface water management plan to address climate change and its impact?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I think the member may have missed it, but the minister of 'conservation' and water stewardship did release a Surface Water Management Strategy in Manitoba.

That was released and that is part of an overall plan to manage water in Manitoba.

And the member also knows that he voted against mitigation measures for flooding in Manitoba. We spent over \$1 billion protecting the Red River Valley and the city of Winnipeg from flooding. That is climate change mitigation, because the biggest threat from climate change in Manitoba is flooding. We spent millions more, 1 and a quarter billion, in the 2011 flood, and we've rebuilt flood protection in the cities of Brandon, along the Assiniboine valley, in southwestern Manitoba.

In this budget we have an Individual Flood Protection Initiative worth \$25 million, and the member has so far voted against it. When it comes to actually putting your vote where it counts for climate change, the member from River Heights has consistently voted against every single measure in the province of Manitoba which will address climate change, protect Manitoba communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That is not a proud record.

Universally Accessible Child Care Funding Commitment

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we know when the Leader of the Opposition was in government, they—he tried to privatize home care. Then they privatized the telephone system, and a few years ago, on CJOB, he said that we need a two-tier, American-style health-care system. And just this week we saw the Leader of the Opposition pull back the curtain on yet another attempt to privatize, now the child-care system.

Abandoning investments in our public, universal child-care system will surely mean higher fees for parents, cancelled construction projects in all of our public facilities and lower wages for our child-care workers.

Can the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors please inform the House about what their kind of slashing and burning would mean and what our record investments in child care have done for our province?

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

Child care is crucial to many Manitoba families to help them be successful and to contribute to our

economy by working—or—on furthering their education.

Our government is committed to a high-quality, universally accessible child care that is affordable for all families. Since we've formed government, we've created over 14,000 spaces, built 100 new facilities and improved wages and training, and we won't stop there. We have committed to creating another 5,000 new spaces over five years. We're proud to have the lowest child-care fees outside of Quebec.

The Leader of the Opposition's plan to privatize child care is another example of his double standard. He supports a system that only benefits those at the top while all other Manitoba families will see their fees more than double.

We will defend a public system that is universally accessible and affordable to all, especially helpful for those who don't have seven-car garages. We will fight his plan for cuts and—

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

Manitoba Hydro Shoal Lake Office

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I didn't know I was going to get this round of applause that the government seems to want to have. Maybe it's because we know more about hydro than they do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government is forcing doubling rates on hard-working Manitobans. The closed office in Shoal Lake recently had two Hydro workers for two days hang around and watch Manitoba telephone workers upgrade a closed office. Who knows how much that cost Manitobans? I will table for the minister photos recently taking—taken, for his records.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister: Is this why you want to double the hydro rates for Manitoba ratepayers?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Mr. Speaker, the information that the member brings forward could be perceived as constituency business, so I would ask him to provide me with further details.

Mr. Eichler: Maybe he should not—learn where Shoal Lake, Manitoba, is. It's not very far from him on Highway 16. That's not constituency business; that's his own department that he should know better.

So I'll ask the minister again: Is this what Manitoba Hydro plans on doing, sending workers to a closed office that has nobody in it, a closed building? Is this the way they're going to run their department and double hydro rates for Manitobans?

Mr. Robinson: I know exactly where Shoal Lake is, Mr. Speaker, and I will ask the member to provide me with more information and more details about the issue, and I'll gladly look into it.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

Saul Henteleff

Hon. Mohinder Saran (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Mr. Speaker, joining us in the gallery today is Saul Henteleff, the organizer of the Seven Oaks Student Film Festival.

Having festivals like this are great because they promote arts and culture which are important elements for diverse and rich communities.

* (14:40)

Saul has worked as a filmmaker and educator in Winnipeg for over 25 years, working in many of Winnipeg's school divisions. During this time, he realized students did not have a way to showcase their films to the public which is why he started the Seven Oaks Student Film Festival.

Last year was the festival's first year and received 20 submissions. Students and staff worked hard to put together this event that gives young people a chance to use cinema as a medium to express their ideas and to communicate issues important to them. It also allows students of all ages from Seven Oaks School Division to present their films to people from the community.

This year, the festival has really grown. They received 70 submissions and they have partnered with Daniel McIntyre school and REEL CANADA to showcase more films. The festival took place April 27th to May, with all of this year's screening was to a packed theatre of 200 people. It's clear that the students, staff and people from the neighbourhood really enjoyed this event.

The festival has been such a success that next year they are planning on screening films during the

day as well as in the evenings, and is looking to partner with other school divisions in Winnipeg.

Thank you, Saul, for giving students the opportunity to showcase their work, and for giving people the opportunity to enjoy these wonderful films.

Helen Bially

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, volunteerism in Manitoba is as strong as ever, and there is certainly no shortage of dedicated volunteers in southern Manitoba, specifically, the constituency of Emerson, which benefits insurmountably from the selfless pursuits of many residents giving back to the community.

Helen Bially is just that, a dedicated volunteer who gives countless hours of her own time ensuring that those around her have the supports and services they require to live a better life. This commitment has been unwavering, and it is my pleasure to formally recognize Mrs. Bially's accomplishments here today in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

For the past many years, Helen has served as the president of the Tolstoi and District Senior Centre. As the critic for Healthy Living and Seniors, I am privileged on a daily basis to meet this community—these community leaders advocating for seniors, and Helen is no exception. In addition, Helen has also volunteered at the Vita personal care home, where she's been instrumental in raising funds for the chapel, a park, and helped to secure a means of transportation.

If that wasn't enough, Helen has also been extremely active with many faith-based organizations in the community, serving as president of the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada, secretary of the Tolstoi Ukrainian Catholic Church Sacred Heart of Jesus Society and as secretary of the Tolstoi Ukrainian Catholic cemetery committee.

Given the aforementioned list, Helen has also served as the correspondent reporter for the Tolstoi column of The Carillon news since 1954, which is a testament to her energy and drive throughout the years.

It takes a community to raise a child, and it takes amazing people like Helen to sustain a community. Helen, for all that you do for the residents of Tolstoi, constituents of Emerson and everyone in Manitoba benefits from your effort.

I would ask all honourable members to join me in congratulating Helen Bially for everything that she has done and, undoubtedly, for everything that she has yet to offer to this great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Athletics in Fort Garry-Riverview

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Like all MLAs in this Chamber, I am very proud of the students and teachers in my constituency, and every once in a while individuals in our schools really set themselves apart by demonstrating leadership, dedication and spirit.

Athletics is one of the places that we really get to see people shine. Coaches and athletes contribute so much to our schools. They give students teams to rally around, they build up school spirit and they often showcase amazing feats of human ability.

Today, we are joined by several such individuals from Fort Garry-Riverview. Mike Harris has been coaching the Churchill Bulldogs hockey team for the past 10 years. In fact, he started the hockey program at Collège Churchill High School, whose team won the championship in 2010. This year, Mike was named—was Winnipeg—the Winnipeg High School Hockey League coach of the year. Mr. Speaker, when Mike coaches, I know that he sets the team up for success while also demonstrating that he cares for each individual player, including my own son Donovan who played for that championship team in 2010.

Also from the Collège Churchill High School, there are several other players—earned themselves accolades from the Winnipeg High School Hockey League. Cam Schneider was named rookie of the year, Dustin Jackson received the award for top defenseman, Liam Waugh was the league scoring champion and Dustin Jackson and Branden Spado together took home the Travis spirit award, which recognizes the hard work, leadership, honesty and supportiveness.

At Vincent Massey Collegiate, there is one individual who has stood out amongst all of his peers. This year grade 12 student Justin Wong was recognized by the Manitoba High School Athletics Association with their Great-West Life Outstanding Youth Volunteer Award. Justin volunteered with the Trojan boys varsity volleyball team, managed the varsity boys basketball team and helped out with every intramural sporting event. According to one of

his teachers, Justin is, and I quote, a role model to his teammates and his peers and is a respected citizen in our building.

Mr. Speaker, this is the year of sport in Manitoba, but it's also been the year of sport in Fort Garry-Riverview. I know that all MLAs in this House will join me in congratulating these outstanding individuals.

Manitoba Community Foundations

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak about Manitoba community foundations.

The Canadian community foundation movement began in Manitoba with The Winnipeg Foundation in 1921. Today there are currently 51 community foundations in our province, which represents one quarter of all foundations in the country.

A foundation is a charitable organization that provides financial support to groups and individuals thanks to gifts from donors. Each gift made is pooled and invested, the interest earned is distributed as support to the community, and the capital is never spent. Foundations strive to build stronger communities through philanthropic leadership. Donors support foundations to ensure their legacy remains in the local community, to support a specific charity, to have their gift well-managed and working within their community for the greater good.

On April 17th, 2015, I had the distinct honour of attending a Killarney Foundation event entitled Celebrating 35 Years of Giving. The Killarney Foundation was the vision of a local lawyer, Keith Heming, who, at the time, was advised to give up the idea, as Killarney was too small. However, Killarney is now the largest per capita foundation in all of Canada with more than \$5 million in its reserve fund. Distributions to the community have totalled over \$1 million. This evening was a gala affair with steak and lobster and keynote speaker, Sami Jo Small.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the community of Killarney and Keith Heming on their foresight in starting this legacy 35 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize all those who support their local communities through their generous donations of time and money. Manitobans are clearly the most giving of all Canadians.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

D-Day 71st Anniversary

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Speaker, on the morning of June 6th, 1944, more than 14,000 Canadian soldiers landed on the shores of Normandy, France, as part of the largest seaborne invasions in history. By the end of this important offensive, the Allied forces had secured a foothold in France that allowed them to begin the long fight to liberate Europe.

On Saturday, Manitobans observed the 71st anniversary of this historic event.

Three Manitoba units took part in the D-Day mission: the Fort Garry Horse, the Royal Winnipeg Rifles and the 402 City of Winnipeg Squadron. The Rifles were among the first to land on Juno Beach while the 402 flew overhead, covering those below. They were amongst some of the units who faced strong opposition before even landing on the beach. All of these units played a vital role throughout the Second World War.

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles were and still are based out of Minto Armories on St. Matthews Avenue in the West End. The Rifles are western Canada's oldest infantry regiment.

Victory came at a heavy cost on the dangerous beaches of northern France that early morning in June. By the end of that day, Canadian Forces had suffered 1,074 casualties. We must never forget those who fought for our country and to liberate Europe from fascism.

* (14:50)

I've had the honour of visiting Juno Beach and the nearby city of Caen whose citizens always remember their liberation by Canadian Forces. Even today, the links between Manitoba and Basse-Normandie continue and are growing stronger yet.

I would ask all members of this House to take a moment and reflect on the events of D-Day and the momentous sacrifice that our veterans made and continue to make today.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, orders of the day, government business.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to call for extended hours, but I believe we have a very significant event at 5 o'clock today with the Lieutenant Governor. It's also difficult to speak about normal orders of the day when we've heard about such sacrifice made by Canadian soldiers.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Tuesday, June 9th, 2015, at noon to consider the report and the recommendations of the Judicial Compensation Committee dated November 20th, 2014.

And I'd like to announce that tomorrow afternoon the House will sit to hear the opposition day motion.

And I'd like to announce that following those—I'd like to announce that after that we resolve ourselves into Committee of Supply in three locations.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Tuesday, June the 9th, at—2015, at noon to consider the report and recommendations of the Judicial Compensation Committee dated November 20th, 2014.

And it has also been announced that the opposition day motion will be considered tomorrow afternoon, and also, now, that we'll resolve into the Committee of Supply.

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

* (15:00)

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

I want to welcome everyone back for another exciting instalment in this section of the Committee of Supply where we will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors. As previously agreed,

questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner.

And wouldn't you know it, the floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): A few quick questions on QuickCare clinics. And I wonder if the minister could indicate why people are having to make appointments there. I understand that there was a person that had been to a hospital ER, was told to go to a QuickCare clinic, went to the QuickCare clinic and was told they needed an appointment, so he left.

Is it the standard expectation that QuickCare clinics all need to have appointments made?

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

Now, I don't know if this is a specific casework situation or a specific example where if you'd like to connect with my office with additional details—but I can say that in terms of how QuickCare clinics operate is that they do have a mix of both people being able to walk in, but also sometimes appointments are booked, especially if someone does come in, walk in, receives care and then needs to come back for a follow-up; they can book an appointment. So, again, it is intended to be for walk in, so if there is a specific case or a specific example where someone received that kind of response or the—again, it's something that I would rather not see. Please feel free to contact my office and pass on that information so that we can look into it, because the purpose of a QuickCare clinic is, in fact, to take pressure off the ERs, to make things accessible, and so we do expect people to be able to walk in and get the care that they need in a prompt fashion.

I mean, QuickCare clinics have been amazing. I know I've heard—excuse me—many wonderful things about them, so if someone is getting treatment that requires them to make an appointment—again, as I said, some appointments are made by RNs there as follow-up. But, again, we're expecting folks to come in and to be able to walk in. So please pass on any additional information about a specific case, so we can follow up with the individual and with yourself.

Mrs. Driedger: Actually, it's beyond just a specific case. This has happened on a number of occasions and, I believe, if I'm correct, that either there's signage at some of the clinics or on the website, but it does indicate that appointments are expected. So the minister's right; it does seem to be something that

is sort of contradictory to what is happening in ERs. So perhaps the minister would like to just connect with the QuickCare clinics and, you know, do a follow-up there. I can't speak to all of them. I've heard only of a couple of situations, but in those situations people have indicated to me that it's by appointment only. And she's right that that's not the intent, but I would think that a follow-up by the minister is much more appropriate than me bringing forward isolated cases because I think this speaks to a bigger issue than that.

The next question I have is related to what I guess I would call executive support under her office. And it was interesting because when we go back to 1999—and I can remember how Gary Doer had had a viscerally negative response to the amount of money that he felt was being spent on executive support and corporate services and finance and administration and he indicated that he was going to be slashing that, you know, those budgets for those areas. He wasn't a very happy person about the amount of money that he felt was being spent to run the minister's office.

What I now find intriguing is that after him railing against it in 1999, since that time the executive support in the Minister of Health's office has escalated—not quite doubled, but not far from that in terms of the number of staff and in terms of the amount of money that is being spent. It looks like under Executive Support now we have one manager, and I understand that that would be the deputy minister.

And I would like to ask the minister in terms of professional/technical staff, it's gone from three to seven. Can she explain who those people are in those positions and give us a bit of background about each of them?

*(15:10)

Ms. Blady: I'd like to thank the member for the question. Yes, the one managerial position there is the deputy minister.

Now, you mentioned the growth in numbers, but this is—in fact, includes both my office as Minister of Health and also those positions also include the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Crothers). And so, again, the numbers that are there are for, in fact, two ministers' offices as well as the deputy minister's office. So, in fact, there's three offices within those numbers, and also includes a long-standing vacant position within my own office.

So, just to clarify, so while she talks about it going up to double, it's—in fact, the numbers have actually gone down in that now this is divided over three offices.

And, again, it is one thing to notice—you know, to remember that, again, in terms of the staff that I have, they—we receive hundreds, if not thousands, of inquiries into the office from patients and families about obtaining health coverage, navigating the system, looking for options on diagnostics and treatments and so forth. So, again, I believe it's very important to respond quickly and offer support and assistance for Manitoba citizens.

And so, just to give her the breakdown that way, that it is, in fact, again, divided over the deputy minister's office as well as Minister Crothers's office and my own office.

Mrs. Driedger: While it may reflect staffing from two offices, it still is an increase from what was happening in 2001-2002. In that particular year, there was one minister of Health that also handled all of the Healthy Living component. So, for some reason, this government felt it needed to expand all of that. And I'm not sure that having two ministers like that is very reflective of improved outcomes, because I don't think it is. And also, certainly, I don't sense that you get a seamless approach to health care when you've divided things up. You know, I know that mental health and addictions is supposedly under Healthy Living, and yet if there's anything failing out there right now, it is that particular area in health care. And I'm sure we're going to have more questions about that as we go down the road.

But I'm not sure that having those two separate ministries—and, in fact, I—they were separate, then they were brought back into place, and it really did look like what the government was doing was window dressing when they put in a—you know, a Minister for Healthy Living and then put all the staff behind that, because I don't think you're getting the improved health outcomes with what you've done, but you've put window dressing on there. And I suspect what's happening is, you know, some ineffective, inefficient approach to health care that's occurring, because you're not getting the—you know, the seamless approach to health care.

So even if it's two ministries now that have come into one, it's still quite a bit larger than what Gary Doer was railing about and the NDP were railing about in 1999. They didn't think that all that amount of money should be spent on executive support. And

so while, you know, the minister may feel that, well, we've got two departments, I guess I would argue the effectiveness of that and ask why we would have to see the FTEs go from 11 to 19 just in executive support. Again, I remind her Gary Doer railed against that absolutely. I can still recall his comments.

So I would ask the minister to explain and identify who are now the seven people in professional/technical roles.

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

Again, as mentioned earlier, there's two ministers and we share one deputy minister, and one of the things that did happen in bringing these two positions and one department together is, in fact, realization of efficiencies in terms of the fact that there's now one Administration and Finance area. And, actually, in terms of the results and the efficiencies, I have to say having been both the minister of Healthy Living and Seniors and now the Minister of Health, I can assure the member that, in fact, we get a lot of great partnership and what it in fact does is it allows us to focus a great deal on prevention.

The Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Crothers) is able to do a lot of very targeted work in the prevention aspect, and what it does mean is that we have a lot of partnership. So sometimes when there's a particular issue we discuss it together. It brings folks together and we're able to come at it from both sides, both the prevention aspect of it, but also the treatments.

So, in fact, what it has meant is that the fact that we have all of these, whether it's a provincial policy and programs, whether it's public health and primary health care, again, working with Healthy Living and Seniors, it actually means that in terms of things like mental health and mental health prevention, that we've been able to come up with a much more unified approach and it also makes it easier for us to work with other departments.

So bringing together these things—and I believe this came up in Estimates last year—where there was the recognition by yourself—I wish I had the transcripts here with me—regarding the coming together under one umbrella, so to speak, was, in fact, a recognition of efficiency. So I find it interesting a different line of questioning with a different minister, all in the course of 12 months.

So, again, it's been a wonderful thing having a deputy minister that is able to move back and forth between the two ministers to bring things together. And, again, I find it really wonderful to be able to work with a colleague this closely on shared files, and that's the other thing, too, is that there are shared files and that we take a very collaborative approach. So I think it actually brings together efficiencies in terms of, again, only having one deputy minister, one central administration, but it also allows us to work together and, again, with a general focus leaning towards healthy living and seniors tending to be on the, again, the preventative end of the spectrum, whereas Health tends to focus on the diagnostic and treatment end of the spectrum.

So I, again, find it to be something that's both efficient and, I think in a day and age where we're realizing that so much of the work that needs to be done related to health is really about the social determinants of health and about prevention. The ability to have one minister focusing on that and collaborating means that more energy can be placed into that and we're seeing results in a number of places, whether that is working with kids, whether that's on tobacco reduction and cessation, again, in terms of mental health just today, for example, thinking about the PTSD legislation and the fact that that legislation, one of the key aspects of it is looking at prevention. So it's not just about treating folks who have gone through a circumstance that has resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder or also post traumatic injury, but, in fact, it helps to establish means by which we can prevent that, and that's the most important thing.

And especially, too, when we look at mental health, one of the best things that can be done is to have conversations around stigma, because if we can reduce stigma, for example, we can have people discussing what they need before they're in crisis. We can have people aware of what might be triggering particular emotions, what might be causing certain kinds of behaviours and they're more likely to seek out care or, again, being able to take on things like cognitive behavioural therapy, other kinds of healthy coping mechanisms.

* (15:20)

So the creation of and the long-standing role of a minister of Healthy Living and Seniors is really about investing in prevention. How I've said it is that I would prefer to see more money invested upfront in prevention and that would help bring down the

budget lines on my side of things. The more of us that can have a healthy, well-rounded approach to life, have the supports that we need that mean we're healthy in mind, body and spirit, those are the kinds of things that will ultimately lead to not just a higher quality of life, but also, again, reduced need for intervention and treatment.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister's arguments would be stronger if outcomes were better. Certainly, spending on prevention is important, but this government is not getting the bang for the buck in that particular area, and, in fact, in some instances in prevention, things are getting far, far worse.

So, certainly, by beefing up the executive support in her office and spending on administration within her office, I would suggest that that money might be better spent if it was put into prevention and if it was put into front-line care. Instead, I will remind the minister how Gary Doer railed against executive support. And yet, when I look at the total subappropriation, this government actually has doubled the amount of money spent on executive support to help this minister run her office. And, in fact, it is doubled, and, in fact, transportation itself as an item is tripled. So—and the staffing has gone from, you know, 11 FTEs to 19.

So what the government has actually done is taken money that would be better spent on front-line care and on prevention. There's where you might get your efficiencies. What she's talking about right now, finding efficiencies, her actions belie what is actually really happening here because we've gone from 11 staff in 2001-02 to 19, just to run the offices for two ministers. We could probably save, you know, a couple hundred thousand dollars by having one minister and therefore one SA, because it certainly could be done. Other provinces do it, and if you want to look at efficiency, there's \$200,000 right there.

Why transportation would triple is something perhaps the minister could explain to me, but why they have doubled the spending on administrative support for her office when that money could indeed be better spent on front-line health care, I think, is something that the minister does owe explanations.

We know that when we were in government, we had three political staff. This government had—and I would ask the minister, out of all these numbers, how many political staff are there? I know previously there were six, whether they were special advisers or special assistants or now project managers. We had three in 1999; they doubled it to six. So I'm asking

the minister because when you double the amount of spending in executive support, that is spending that comes directly towards the running of the offices of the ministers of Health and Healthy Living, and I don't think we're seeing the bang for the buck that we would—you know, we could be seeing in front-line health care. And, you know, I think we could take \$750,000–\$800,000 of this, actually, and better use it on front-line health care instead of padding the bureaucracy within her office.

So I would ask the minister to explain why she has seen fit to double the amount of spending on her office bureaucracy and to breakdown for us who are these—well, we know one is the deputy minister, but then there are 18 others. Who are those 18 other people that this minister says she needs to run her office?

Ms. Blady: Well, again, I'd like to remind the member that she keeps talking about this as if it's one office, when in fact it is a budget for three offices. So it is the budget and a staffing count that includes my office, the Office of the Minister for Healthy Living and Seniors as well as the deputy minister's office. So this is not for one office nor is it all, as she would refer to it, as political staff. So this is, in fact, a division of 18 people—sorry, 19 people over three offices.

And so, again, in terms of efficiencies, again, thinking of my own office alone we know that we have patients, families, a variety of folks whether they're from First Nations, municipalities, community groups, advocacy organizations such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Cancer Society, as well as the business community that all have good ideas and advice, and these groups want to bring their advice forward to the—you know, to my office, to the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors office and we want to be able to listen to them. And we've offered advice and support to them and we need folks to be able to take those calls, book those appointments, do those kinds of things.

And what I have to say is that ability to organize those things, to be able to meet with them means that we've had some really wonderful developments whether it's been, again, The Personal Health Information Amendment Act, again, to protect patient records from snooping, The Health Services Insurance Amendment and Hospitals Amendment Act, The Defibrillator Public Access Act, all of these different kinds of things came together, you know, from folks coming to us. And that is one thing that I

have to say that I really appreciate, is the partnership and the work that staff do whether it is in my office, whether it's in the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors office or whether it's in the deputy minister's office, each of those being a place, a point of contact where folks can go to bring those ideas forward.

And in terms of the reference to results of investment, the one thing that I have to say that I'm really happy to talk about is the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and the work that they do in partnership with government. Because they've actually been studying the investments in a variety of areas that indicate that the kinds of investments that are being made are, in fact, having a difference; they're making a difference in Manitoba health and, again, in terms of the social determinants of health. It's allowed us to help us target investments and to, again, ensure that those results are there.

Is there more work to do? Absolutely, but that's what I appreciate is the fact that they are able to do wonderful analysis of metadata as well as other research and they're able to bring things together. And the kinds of deliverables that they give to us, for example, they recently came to us this year regarding the cost of smoking and what it costs to smoke, what it does in terms of health-care costs and how our smoking-cessation programs, what the impact is that—had been in dollar—in terms of dollars and cents. And knowing that we had smoking rates going down for young people tells us that we are going to be saving money. There's other things that come up in there we—that in terms of prevention we know that, for example, skin cancer and the use of tanning beds, if that occurs before a particular age range the risk of cancer does go up exponentially.

And so, again, we are making investments that do have tangible results, and I would encourage the member to take a look at the MCHP's research in a variety of areas that indicates that since 1999 the kinds of investments that we have been making have, in fact, made tangible results and allowed us to reinvest money in the front lines.

* (15:30)

Mrs. Driedger: The—I'm going to compare two charts in the supplementary information, and one is from 2001-2002 on page 16, and it's a pie graph that indicates that year 10 per cent of operating appropriations went to Administration and Finance. In the book that the minister has provided it is now showing Administration and Finance at 16 per cent, so there is a 6 per cent increase in the amount of

money that this government in the Department of Health has taken for Administration and Finance. So the—those are fairly dramatic changes in spending and certainly going in the wrong direction from the amount of money that is being spent in health care. And what is, you know, makes this so much more interesting is that Gary Doer, in, you know, September 1999, put together today's NDP: less bureaucracy, more front-line care. And you know, he was lambasting the government of the day for ever-growing bureaucracy. And, yet, what we have seen with what this minister and this government have done is basically doubled the executive spending, the—in the area of issues that the former premier was railing about in 1999.

So I would ask the minister, and I think we need to drill down here and find out where—who all of these people are. So I would ask that we look at professional/technical, and there are seven people there. Can we start by getting the minister to indicate who those seven people are and what their roles are?

Ms. Blady: Okay, I will provide you with the list of names—I do want to clarify. You made reference to page 17 and the 16 per cent. If you take a look at the top, that's actually a percentage distribution of FTEs, of full-time equivalents. So that is in terms of staffing positions, not dollar values. So that's not an increase in spending, that's an increase in FTEs. If you go back to page 13, you'll actually see it's a percentage distribution of expenditure summary, and departmental expenses in that regard are in fact only 3 per cent. So I just wanted to clarify that point.

And, in terms of bureaucracy, I think what Mr. Doer had been referencing were things like the 13 regional health authorities, which we had inherited, which we took down to 11 and took down now to five regional health authorities. So I think there's a great example of how we've been able to take that, again, what we inherited, brought down the expenses in terms of overhead, and now we have RHAs that operate actually below the legislated funding cap—or expenditure cap that they have there. So I just wanted to clarify those points to begin with.

As to the staffing in my office, the positions that I have are: Lise Fenton is my special assistant, Rebecca Bock-Freeman is my project manager, Shauna Martin is a special adviser, Carol Wenaus is my executive assistant. And there is also a vacant position of project manager. It's been vacant since 2013. And I do also have—this is not a political

position, but it is the intake co-ordinator for the office, and that's Rorie McLeod Arnould.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what the special adviser does?

Ms. Blady: Yes, well, actually, Shauna Martin is someone that brings in extensive experience in policy development and policy management in both the public sector and the private sector. She's worked in ministers' offices in Manitoba Health, private sector organizations as well, as well as in other provincial governments. And outside of government, she's actually worked to help recruit physicians to northern and remote First Nations communities.

So she is filling a vacancy that is in our office. This is not a new position. And so I am—I really enjoy working with her. She's brought a lot of insight, especially cross-jurisdictional insight and a breadth of knowledge in terms of, again, a long career based in serving folks through her extensive knowledge and expertise in terms of health care. And I really appreciate the work that she and all the other staff do. It has made things very much easier and, again, I appreciate the insight and the dedication and the passion that she brings to her position and to the office.

Mrs. Driedger: So just to go through these again, so there's one special assistant, one special adviser, an intake co-ordinator, a vacant project manager—and, sorry, where are the other three?

Ms. Blady: So there's the special assistant; there is a project manager, Rebecca Bock-Freeman; there's the special adviser, as—vacant project manager; there's an executive assistant; and there's an intake co-ordinator.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister indicate what the difference is between a special adviser and a special assistant? I'm assuming salary would be one part, but their jobs probably seem fairly similar. What would be the difference between the two roles?

Ms. Blady: Again, there is quite a difference in terms of the role. Special assistant, in many respects, is the day-to-day, hands-on, right-arm person that is often with me to ensure that when we are meeting with folks, that if I'm not able to take all of the notes myself, they're able to follow up, stay connected to folks, and, again, does a great amount of work in that regard in terms of the hands-on, day-to-day, on-the-ground, in-the-trenches.

And, again, have really appreciated the work that Lise has done and her predecessor before, whereas a special adviser, again, speaks to a larger breadth of information. Shauna is the person that we will sit down and take a look at proposals; take a look at things where there is a larger political scope. And while, certainly, the special assistant is definitely part of the conversation, this is really about advice and about, again, being able to meet with and connect folks with folks that I might not always have the opportunity to meet with, that she does that on my behalf, and, again, provides a breadth of experience, advice and insight.

So titles might not seem all that difference, but—different, but, in terms of the day-to-day, they have very different scopes of work. And, again, there are times where all three of us, as well as other staff members, do work together, so both vitally important team members providing very different perspectives and job descriptions.

So, you know, again, I mean, the best way to put it is an assistant is about making sure that I can go to events related to health care and dealing with health-care professionals; it's about casework; it's about correspondence, meetings and follow-up, whereas an adviser is much more on a policy level, if you're looking for a summary of the two positions.

Mrs. Driedger: Just to go back to the comments the minister made about the pie charts, I am very well-aware that the charts reflect full-time equivalents and positions, but I would say that when you add more positions, it's costing you more money. So, if I'm talking about the cost of the system being more, it is because there have been more people put into those positions: 10 per cent in admin and finance in 2001-02, and in 2015-16, it's 16 per cent admin and finance, so certainly going in the opposite direction from what Gary Doer promised he would do in 1999. And, in fact, we've seen, because of the increasing level of bureaucracy, then, in just executive support, we have seen a doubling of the spending that this minister's doing.

I would ask her what a project manager is and how a project manager differs from an SA and a special adviser and what the project manager is actually managing.

* (15:40)

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

Again, in terms of what is done, I've mentioned already the difference between a special assistant and a special adviser. A project manager is somebody that, again, works in terms of stakeholder relations, both dealing with short- and long-term files. Again, so that's what's being managed, is different projects in that regard as well as following up on requests into the office, whether it's for information, and it—one of the things that I have to say that is a great part of the work that they do is related to working on legislation. So legislative work tends to be one of the areas, and, again, that's working with the stakeholders as it relates to that. So, again, a special assistant might be working with stakeholders as it relates to, again, events in casework and a special adviser, again, in terms of policy work. The project manager is the one that, again, will look after those things that have to do with, again, engaging with folks in a way that allows us to shape legislation and shape projects in particular.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister indicate whether or not those are all political appointments?

Ms. Blady: Well, I guess, for me it's important to note that while some staff might be labelled as political staff because of how they are appointed, they don't necessarily perform exclusively a political or partisan function. So they do some work in preparing me for things like organizing House business, legislation. So it's a variety of, again, areas as indicated. But that's, again, not everything. So I guess if you're looking for those that might be designated as political, that would, you know, in fact, include a special assistant, the project manager and the special adviser and, again, the vacant position of project manager.

But, again, it's—that's a very broad brush to be painting with, and, again, while they are appointed, they are really phenomenal folks that really do a lot of the on-the-ground work, and, I, again, I'm very appreciative of the hard work and the support that they provide and the expertise that they bring to their positions, especially in the case of my special adviser; I'm very, again, pleased with what she brings to the table as well as the rest of the team.

Mrs. Driedger: The position that is vacant, the project manager position that is vacant, can the minister indicate how long it's been vacant for again and who was in that job prior to?

Ms. Blady: I just—I needed to clarify some details. So I wanted to double-check because it has been vacant since 2013, and the role of project manager in

Health, that role was last occupied by Tim Smith, but, as I said, has been vacant since 2013.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate why she's leaving that position vacant or has it become obsolete?

Ms. Blady: As mentioned, again, it's been vacant since 2013 and that in my time in this portfolio I've, again, been very pleased with the calibre of work and the work ethic of the entire team in the office. And so while the position is still there and there might be a need or opportunity in future, at this point, again, the team is working phenomenally well and so it remains a vacant position at this time because of the way staff has been working—again, phenomenally well. And so, again, it was a position filled in past and at this point will continue to remain vacant for the foreseeable future.

Mrs. Driedger: So in the positions of seven professional/technical staff we've accounted for six here. Is this seventh person related to the Minister of Healthy Living? Is that where that position might be as, for example, an SA for the Minister of Healthy Living?

Ms. Blady: Well, again, in taking a look at the seven positions that are listed for professional/technical, there is—again, four are within my office, one is within the deputy minister's office and two are within the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors' (Ms. Crothers) office—and that you have to remember that some of the other staff are, in fact, actually administrative support. So some of the names mentioned—Rorie, for example—would be considered administrative support.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate why from—like, in 2001-02 the transportation budget was \$35,000, and then last year it was \$44,000 and then this year it's \$98,000.

Who's travelling so much in her department and why?

* (15:50)

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

Travel is, in fact, publicly disclosed, and so we are all—we are fully transparent on travel reporting. But, if you would like to have a comparison of a more of a breakdown, I mean, the travel that is listed there is—does include travel both in province and outside of the province for the deputy minister for Minister Crothers and for myself. And, again, if

you'd like the comparative, the breakdown, between 2001 and the current year, we can provide that for you but it's not something that we would have at hand.

So, again, it is for two—you know, again, two ministers and a deputy minister, and so you have to remember that in 2001, the year that you're talking about, was, in fact, only one department. So, again, this is about the addition of Healthy Living and Seniors to Health, and those are the kinds of things that would've obviously changed when we have that new focus on prevention and staff as it relates.

So, again, travel costs are also something that have radically changed since 2001. I would—how—I think I'd actually be afraid to look back and see what we used to pay for airplane tickets back in 2001 compared to what we pay now. I think a lot of us would probably be brought to tears comparing our travel expenses from that time, so I'm sure inflationary matters are a part of it.

But, if you'd like a breakdown of the difference, we can—the department will get those numbers to you during the course of Estimates.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what date it was that Healthy Living was brought back under this one department?

Ms. Blady: Yes, it would've been the fall of 2013 when the departments—the two departments were brought together. That would've been when I became the minister of Healthy Living and first became part of a joint department like this, and October 18th—sorry—is the exact date if one's interested.

And, again, it's something that I have to say that the feedback that we've had from the department since that time has been actually quite impressive. They really appreciate the fact that from a health-promotion-and-prevention perspective and, again, in terms of the sustainability of the health system, it's created a wonderful working environment. The ability to liaise, as I mentioned before, the idea of being able to work together, bring things together and be, again, all on the same team has made a really big difference and it's allowed us to bring together and move forward some projects where—not that there were silos necessarily before, but it's just—it's really broken down some barriers.

It's facilitated communication, and it's one thing that I can say now as Minister of Health that I have strived to ensure that we work together whenever possible so that each area, whether it is something

within Health or something within Healthy Living and Seniors, we each do our own thing and are able to take ownership of particular files and direction but, at the same time, the ability to collaborate is very much facilitated by having one shared deputy minister. And, like I said, I know that the work that the department has been able to do has been something that they—again, they appreciate the kind of direction that they've been given in terms of that leadership where it is about collaboration.

Again, the idea that it's about—really, I guess, the best way to describe it is actually encapsulated on page 7 of the Estimates book where it says, the vision of the department is healthy Manitobans through an appropriate balance of prevention and care. And to now be able to have Health, Healthy Living and Seniors as one overarching department, or what—you know, is one of those things, with the two ministers, it really allows us to do exactly that. We're able to co-ordinate both the preventative work with the care work, create a continuum along there and to ensure that things are supportive. I mean, one of the things that happens with someone that receives a diagnosis is that there still can be preventative work and supports that are done, so it is still about working with folks to ensure that, for example, if it's a diagnosis of a chronic condition or a chronic disease, that they can still get the supports that might have parallels or might be equivalent to things that are working in prevention to prevent a degradation of their health over time and possibly even work in terms of management as part of their care.

So the putting together of the two things and that kind of collaboration, again, I think really both does find not just efficiencies in the sense of, again, having brought together, you know, under one area one finance body, for example, and the kinds of savings that you see there in terms of FTEs, but, I think, really has to do with the effectiveness and about the long-term health-care sustainability by placing that emphasis on collaboration between prevention and care and striking that appropriate balance.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister undertake to provide a list of the 11 people that are in the administrative support area and a list of the names as well as their job titles? Would she be able to table that for tomorrow's Estimates?

Ms. Blady: Yes. I mean, the administrative 'support'—support folks, which, again, are those employees that have duties related to the provision of support and

assistance to program operations, and that's a category that includes employees classified within the clerical component or the administrative officer series. We can get that list of those 11 folks to her for tomorrow.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, and I appreciate the undertaking by the minister on that area.

Now, the other thing I wanted to ask about is related to the comments made by the WRHA, and it was a fairly significant announcement where they admitted failure to meet the standards they set for themselves and the goals they set for themselves. And it was interesting to note that we didn't hear a word from the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) at that particular time, and, in fact, the Minister of Health went MIA and never made any public comment about the WRHA admitting failure to meet their goals.

I would've expected some leadership shown by a minister of Health when their biggest RHA admits to failure, especially with the ER crisis that we have because we've seen that the ERs have gone from hallway medicine to a full-out ER crisis. Yet she went missing in action. I would like to know what—or, I guess why she didn't make a public comment at the time when you've—you know, when the buck stops at the minister's desk, and you've got a major admission of failure by the WRHA, why did she go missing in action and not show some leadership and stand up and at that time indicate, you know, her position on what they said and what her future expectations would be of the WRHA?

* (16:00)

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

I do think it was the right thing to do for the WRHA to set ambitious ER targets and it's clear that they have more work to do to reach those targets. They have learned a lot over the last two years and remain committed to meeting those targets. And, again, it is a top priority for our government to ensure that all Manitobans have access to rapid emergency care close to home when they need it. But, again, I do believe that it was about the WRHA and their particular targets.

And while, yes, I was disappointed that they hadn't made their goals that they had set out for themselves, my not setting out a press release doesn't mean that I'm not on top of it and not concerned and not in contact with folks. I don't know if the only

way one can indicate where someone is involved with something is by issuing a press release or seeking to be quoted in the newspaper.

I have an ongoing relationship with the WRHA as well as the other RHAs and, again, the work that they are doing we've had many conversations at this time about where they were at and what happened in terms of their ability to meet those goals at those times. I can tell you that we have, you know, done a lot of work and continue to do a lot of work.

Believe last week I had mentioned—in fact, it was from this spring, the March-April 2015 article from *The Wave*, actually, by Arlene Wilgosh talking about exactly what was happening within the Winnipeg region and in terms of the reducing emergency department wait times by enhancing the flow of patients through the hospital. Again—and this article talks about how some of those particular protocols worked really well at the Grace Hospital.

In fact, it was in that past year where the team of the Grace led by Kellie O'Rourke, the COO of the region's Winnipeg West Integrated Health and Social Services which includes the Grace, implemented a number of measures to reduce wait times for patients once they'd been registered and triaged. And one example was the nurse-initiated protocols which allow triage nurses to flag a patient for quick assessment, which may include, for example, things like ordering lab tests or X-rays while they're still in the waiting room and it ensures that clinical information for decision making is then available when the patient does see the physician.

Another change was in the creation of rapid assessment zones, and so under that initiative a patient must be seen by—must see a doctor within a certain time and, if not, the patient is then brought into the zone by a nurse who then works with the emergency doctor on duty to assess the patient and set in motion any procedures needed for treatment such as a diagnostic test. And so the doctor, again, may not be available to immediately examine the patient in question, but they can at least determine if a patient, for example, needs a CT scan and get their treatment under way.

And these nurse-initiated protocols and rapid assessment zones were just two of the examples of the kinds of changes made at the Grace that had some really tangible benefits, but, again, that larger picture included more than 15 major changes in a bid to enhance patient flow throughout the hospital.

And one of the things that Ms. O'Rourke has said is that there's been a much more focused attention on the role that every single member from housekeeping to physicians to nurses and labs plays in patient flow not just within the emergency department, but within the entire campus. And the result of those efforts was that of the key targets to ensure that 90 per cent of patients who are not admitted to hospital can get in and out of an emergency in less than four hours. In March of 2014 only about 24 per cent of patients at the Grace were able to do so and by December of 2014 that number jumped to about 38 per cent. So that's a gain of about 58 per cent which is a significant improvement.

And there have other—progress in other areas. The Grace has recorded improvement in three of the four patient-flow indicators even as emergency visits jumped from 1,900 a month to 2,300 a month. So there was improvement in the number of—in the treat and discharge, 90 per cent of non-admitted emergency department patients within four hours. There was improvement in the time to find a bed for 90 per cent of emergency department patients who've been admitted to hospital—needs to be done within eight hours—and that no patient admitted to hospital or not is to remain in the ED for longer than 24 hours. All of those things improved and, again, they all improved despite the fact that the one thing that did increase, the one place that the numbers went a way that nobody really, you know, wanted them to, was the fact that emergency visits actually jumped. So they made improvements with an increase of 400 dollar—400 patients a month coming in.

So, again, while I am disappointed in the overall numbers with the target flows, I can see that work is being done, and I really want to commend all of the folks that are involved on the front lines. I know how important the care is that they provide to so many folks in my neighbourhood and to so many others in west Winnipeg.

And I've heard phenomenal stories from folks in my neighbourhood. One gentleman recently popped into my office to actually let me know how well his experience went when it turns out he needed to go to the emergency department. It was actually—he was a wonderful example of what happens with nurse-initiated protocols. Tests got started right away. He—it was determined that he was having a gall bladder attack, and, in fact, in a very short period of time, he went from that kind of assessment with those protocols, was slated for surgery and, again, in a very

quick turnaround time, went from, again, presenting, diagnosis, surgery and then back home to recover. And, in fact, when he came to see me, apparently, according to doctor's orders, he was still supposed to be at home, but Doug [*phonetic*] is a wonderful vibrant and oftentimes tenacious and stubborn gentleman, so I'm not quite sure if anybody was going to get him to stay in his hospital bed with all the things he likes to accomplish. But it was nice to have him come in and be able to tell me about all of the great things that were happening in the Grace emerg and the quality of care that he received.

And as someone that, again—born and raised in that neighbourhood with parents in their 70s and 80s and two boys, I can tell you I live a heartbeat away from a 911 call at the best of times and have had the benefit of the phenomenal services at the Grace.

And that goes right back to the time as a child—and there's nothing more intimidating than being brought in by one parent to the Grace when you've been off on a little misadventure in the back field behind the house and you're greeted by the other parent who is an employee at the Grace, and she gives you that look that only a mother can give you, which is the oh, my God, so happy to see that you're fine, and, oh God, if I find your brother jumping over things like that on your bikes again, you know, you're going to be grounded and then some.

So, again, the targets, I would like to have seen them do better, but, again, I'm happy to see the progress that we can see here at the Grace is just one snapshot of the kind of work that's being done. And, as I said, someone very recently used the term that they believe that the Grace is on the verge of greatness.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, all of us in the west end—the minister always talks as if the Grace Hospital belongs to her. It belongs to everybody in the west end; that's Charleswood's hospital; that's Tuxedo's hospital; that's Kirkfield Park, Assiniboia, St. James; it belongs to everybody. And yet, with the comments this minister makes here and publicly, you'd certainly think it was hers. It's not hers. It belongs to the people of Winnipeg.

And there are some significant concerns despite what the minister has just indicated where they have the longest ER waits in all of Canada. That is a huge concern to a number of people that are going to that hospital, and there are some serious challenges around that.

While the minister, you know, continues to make a lot of the comments, it's like she's got a bag over her head and is really not seeing what needs to be seen, because you can't fix problems like this if you pretend that they don't exist. And they do exist.

In fact, I just got a letter from somebody, and I will get to that in a while, but it was a failure of the system. And it was an April letter where an elderly person was, you know, again stuck in a long wait at the Grace Hospital. The person that took her in went home to bed one night—came back the next day, and, I mean, she still had to be in the ER. He really questions the signage of the waits in the hospital, because he really felt and questioned the accuracy of them, because, he said, nothing was relating the actual hours of waits that the sign said to what was actually happening.

* (16:10)

So, if the minister could just, you know, focus on some of this reality, that the Grace Hospital—and it's not us making it up; I mean, it came from a very reputable organization. They're—they have the longest ER wait times in all of Canada, not just Manitoba. And then you've got the WRHA making a comment about their failure and we have a Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) that never came out and said publicly one thing or another about their announcement, never responded to this admission of failure—their admission of failure is her admission of failure.

The buck stops with the Minister of Health, and yet this minister never came out and made any public statement at any level whether, you know, she accepted the comments or didn't or what the expectation was.

We've got a full-out ER crisis. We've gone from hallway medicine, you know, to highway medicine to parking lot medicine to taxicab medicine to no medicine, for some people. And yet when it comes to the—a huge admission of failure by the WRHA, this minister goes AWOL, and I'm not satisfied with her answer, and she's all over the map with her comments. I would like her to focus. You know, is it poor decision making by her government that, you know, is causing some of the problems? What is it that, you know, she told the WRHA when they admitted failure and what did she ask of them in terms of fixing that? What was that conversation like?

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

Again, in looking at the WRHA and the flow targets in general and also specifically at the Grace, I can tell you that this is not about, as the member says, having a bag over one's head; it's really about actually seeing things in a holistic perspective. And in terms of the details of it and in terms of reference to, you know, the Grace, it does, in fact, belong to everyone. I just happen to be very proud of the Grace because so many of the folks that work at the Grace are people that I know; they are friends, they are family, they are neighbours, and that I know how hard they work as individuals.

So I take the same ownership in the Grace as every other person in the neighbourhood does, and I'm sure the member is more than familiar with Her Honour Pearl McGonigal and her use of the term, our beloved Grace. And that's the whole thing; it is our beloved Grace. It is the folks that, you know, live in the neighbourhood, work in the neighbourhood that are part of it, and the Grace is really the heart of the neighbourhood.

So, yes, I, like every other person in the western part of the city that relies on the Grace, does see an ownership there. And I think that's part of the reason why I take so seriously what happens on that campus, whether that is the investments that were initially made at the time when I was first elected to deal with staffing issues and things happening in the Grace, whether it's been the commitment to ensuring that there's an ACCESS centre, the commitment to ensuring that there's the MRI and the commitment to ensuring that there is a new emergency department. So, yes, it does matter.

And—but in terms of how I see the Grace, I guess I take a different approach. I'm not sure if the member is familiar with the concept of neuroplasticity, but one of the things within neuroplasticity is about how the brain works, and it has to do with pattern recognition. And one can, in fact, when one looks for particular patterns, one can tend to find them, and there's been some work done. Actually, it's an interesting collaboration between a think tank, slash, academic group associated with Stanford, MIT, and, in fact, the Dalai Lama that does phenomenal work on neuroplasticity and how that affects mood and how it affects how we think and react.

And so, having researched that area, I take great pride in the fact that one of things that I do try to do is I believe that if you are going to move forward in a positive direction, while you do in fact learn from

things that are not going right, you also make an effort to look for what is going right and you find ways. It's—I mean, it's something that—while I'm using the language of neuroplasticity—is really something that I think a lot of our folks taught us about positive reinforcement.

So, when I think about the Grace, is there room to improve? Absolutely; there's always room to improve. You're talking to someone that, you know, one of my students got 98 per cent; it wasn't like, okay, you're done. It's the, you know, do you want to work on getting the other 2 per cent? You can do it if you want to, how do you work a little harder?

So it's the same thing with the Grace. I look for the positives there and I see so many hard-working people that are bringing forward suggestions. So this is not about having a bag over one's head, but it's in fact about how's it that we take the positive things that are there, how is it that we take the good things that are being done there and grow those things. What are the shortcomings? Fine, how do we address those? But I don't think you really make change at—at any environment. In any work environment when you only look for the negative, harp on the negative, there's no way of having any positive encouragement. So, again, it's about a perspective, and going back to the point of neuroplasticity, if one looks—if one trains oneself to look for particular patterns, you'll find them. So, in other words, if you wake up in the morning grumpy and all you want to find are negative things, you will find absolutely everything wrong with your day. Another person looking for the positive can walk through that very same day and see 15 things that went right.

So what I do with the Grace is I look at what are the things that are going right and how do we use those things to improve, to make sure that we get even more things right. So I think it's about the kind of relationship with the Grace and with the health-care system in general. I want to find those places where we're doing things right, and I want to take those things and grow those things. So, again, I am not oblivious to things that have gone less than well, less than the way we wanted to, but I ask folks, what is it that we can do better next time rather than harping on the negativity.

So I think, for example, again, the article that I mentioned was a great example of by taking those things, recording those improvements that were there. That is something that helps build a positive environment and I know that the work that's being

done by the regional health authority, you know, especially in the time that Arlene Wilgosh has been there, that that kind of positive reinforcement and working with people to find solutions is what really affects change, and that's the kind of thing that I'm committed to doing. And that's exactly why I really appreciate the fact I see my colleague the Minister of Healthy Living is, you know, someone that, again, embraces the same idea about how we work together and whether it's in prevention or whether it's in improving services that we look for what's going right and we figure out how to do it better. And so that's, again, the approach that I take in terms of the WRHA.

And, I guess, you know, maybe I should have—you know, in the time when the WRHA came out from this I didn't realize that the member opposite would have expected me to stand and sing this from the rooftops as indication of my ongoing relationship with them. But, again, the conversations that we've had have been exactly on that kind of area, and I really appreciate the work that Arlene Wilgosh and now Lori Lamont have done in terms of that kind of feedback loop that we have and, again, assessing both what is right, what's working right, what needs to be working better and how do we do that. So my focus is always on how can we do things better, but not dwelling in the negativity. I just find that it's not as productive a way to go through life.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chair, this provincial government has allowed ER wait times at the Grace Hospital to become the worst in Canada at triple the amount of time that emergency physicians recommend. That means we're talking about a patient-safety component to health care.

Can the minister indicate how neuroplasticity is going to help to improve wait times at the Grace Hospital?

* (16:20)

Ms. Blady: I was wondering, I know that there's been a little bit of a thing around academia that seems to, well, cause some tension.

In terms of—I think it's about the idea of looking—again, looking for patterns. That was one of the things that the research indicated here, was there was in fact patterns. When we talk about the ER at the Grace and the wait times, again, when you look at the volumes that go through the Grace and the fact that there were—in fact, when we take a look at the treat and discharge for 90 per cent of non-emergency

patients—non-emergency department patients within four hours, in March of 2014 that number was only at 25 per cent. It went up to 38 per cent in the period between March and December and, in fact, in November it had actually peaked at close to 45 per cent. Unfortunately, you know, Christmas and flu season took a little bit of a toll on the numbers there.

That's phenomenal. That's a wonderful improvement. That's something to be commended, so I would much rather work with them to address, for example, what happened with those December numbers going down, so it is about, again, looking for the positive, working with folks to find out, for example, what difference did nurse-initiated protocols make, and what about the rapid assessment zone? What was the impact? The ability to look at those things and learn from them and see what exactly can happen, so in terms of the wait times, again, you have to remember that in the time indicated there, there was an increase in patient flow from 1,900 a month up to 2,300.

So, to have a change of close to—of 13 per cent, to have things improve by 13 per cent when, in fact, you had an overall increase in visits that is just shy of 20 per cent, so you had a 20 per cent increase in volume, but in fact, a 13 per cent increase in—or, sorry—yes, 13 per cent increase in actual movement, that's really impressive. You actually got more people coming in and a faster response.

Is the work done? Absolutely not. Is there more to be done? Absolutely, and that's why I'm really looking forward to the new emergency department because one of the things that I can say is that in working with the front-line professionals, the designers, the RHA, the COO, they've all come together and what they did, the communication that was there that led to the design of the ED as it is proposed was, in fact, about looking for what's going right, what can they do, what is it that is in the best practices, what makes life easier so that medical professionals can do what they need to do best that led to the design there.

So what I can say is adopting a model where you look for what's looking—working right and looking good and building on that, we do, in fact, see changes. We've seen changes as indicated in the Grace Hospital patient flow indicators, but we'll also see those manifested literally in bricks and mortar when the new emergency department is up and running, and that's exactly what it is about. It's—rather than picking on the Grace, I would much rather work

with the front-line providers and, you know, make sure that, for example, as they were at the Grace ER, the doctors were involved in the design discussions. That's really important.

So it's about working with people to bring about better results, rather than blaming and shaming them.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, I would say to the minister that this has absolutely nothing to do with picking on the Grace or blaming the Grace. This is about failed NDP policy, and the Grace is a victim of this failed NDP policy.

I hope her neuroplasticity also helped to figure out a way to deal with the 2,000 patients that left that ER without being seen last year because they were too frustrated waiting to be seen. I hope that none of those fell through the cracks.

I also would indicate to her that after all the positive comments that she has made about the Grace, why this NDP government slated it to be the last ER upgrade in all of Winnipeg. Considering they have the longest ER wait in all of Canada—triple at what doctors say is okay—the NDP left the Grace, even though we have a huge elderly population at that end of town—left that hospital to be slated for an upgrade as the last in all of Winnipeg.

But not only that, this NDP government promised to upgrade and expand the Grace Hospital in 2011, which I'm sure coincided with an election. They promised to complete it by 2015; 2015, here we are, halfway through 2015, and the ground has been broken for an MRI machine to be installed, and that's it. If anybody's failing the Grace Hospital, it is this government right now.

I would like her to explain to all of us and to Manitobans and those of us in the west end that have the Grace Hospital as our community hospital, why they misled Manitobans in the last election, why they broke their promise to upgrade and expand that and complete it by 2015. And here we are, what, three years down the road and we don't even have a glimmer of a new hospital. Why did they make the promise and then break it? Was that something that was said in an election to try to shore up some west end votes? Is that what this was all about? And as this is in the minister's backyard, she's certainly the one that has failed them in following through on that election promise.

So why did they break their promise?

Ms. Blady: Well, in terms of commitment to the Grace I know that there is a lot that is going on there. There is many projects. Like I said, knowing that back in '07 the member opposite was standing there with placards and talking about how it was on the verge of closing when, in fact, no such thing was true. But she had no problem, you know, trying to scare the neighbourhood into that. Instead, we made investments in staffing. I can also say that one of the transformations that occurred was the fact that the Grace was also the last hospital to be fully integrated into the regional health authority model when the Salvation Army—I don't know how many folks are familiar with this, but the Grace Hospital was one of many Graces. The Salvation Army Grace Hospital is a name that exists elsewhere. I know that while my son was born at the Grace in 1992, one of his friends was also born at the Grace, but only the one in Vancouver the very same year. So what happened was there was the full integration of the Grace into the regional health authority model, and that brought some changes which, again, brought stability to the Grace in some respects.

But there's also been a number of projects that have occurred on—at the Grace Hospital campus. So in terms of timelines, any one of the projects that is at the Grace would take a significant amount of time. In fact, the very first project in terms of major scale and involving construction and major capital investment was, in fact, the ACCESS centre. And I know that Réal Cloutier from the WRHA, we had many conversations about the fact that to assess the growth that was going to occur at the campus, one of the very first things that actually needed to be addressed was the layout of the campus and parking. And all of the other visions and projects and capital investments that were to come were contingent on the ability of people from the western part of Winnipeg to be able to park on the site, to also be able to access public transportation and overall traffic flow. There was 18 months right there tied up in ensuring that before we even go forward on any of these things what—you know, we can't have all of this development if people can't actually get to it, park while they're there. So that was one very long timeline in terms of things.

Then it was about the ACCESS centre itself. And ACCESS centres—as you know, while there's an overall model, each one is unique to its neighbourhood. So we first—we then had the ACCESS centre go up and that ACCESS centre also integrated not just the standard one-stop shop for

health and social services and all of the folks involved there and the staffing and the front—and the medical care provided, but it also integrated a daycare, adding new daycare spaces in addition to the daycare spaces that were actually already available on campus. The campus itself is also evolving.

So, from that point, as well, where we have now not just the ACCESS centre, but we have other developments happening, and the decanting of different projects within the hospital has been really interesting to see because it just shows me the flexibility, the professionalism and the high quality of work that's being done by folks there.

And then, when you place that in line with the fact that there is again the MRI that is now coming in, there's basically a series of projects that all line up as dominos. So, like I said, any one of these could have the capital investment and timeline issues that come with any kind of a capital project. But when you put about four or five projects onto the same campus and they include an entire emergency department redevelopment but an emergency department redevelopment they cannot move forward until an MRI is in place and it's the first MRI in a community hospital, there's a lot of major things happening.

* (16:30)

So it is really about the amount of development that's going on there, and I know that in talking to folks from the Grace Hospital Foundation as well as, again, a lot of front-line folks, they're really excited about all the projects that are there, and failure is the last word they would use to describe this relationship that they have with the government and with the RHA in terms of bringing those things forward.

What they do have is a sense of the reality based on the scale with this many projects happening, with this many balls in the air, with all of these things stacking up one after the other, the last thing that they feel is that there has been a failure. It's about the fact that there's a successive layer of investments that each build upon each other. And again, would I like to have it built yesterday? Absolutely, but the thing is that this is a high—there's a high level of projects there, and the other thing too about the emergency department is that it has—we've learned from other projects and that's what's going to make this emergency department again phenomenal in terms of what's been happening, what we've learnt from

previous projects, the integration of the entire diagnostic suite with the MRI.

So there's a lot of good things coming to the Grace. The folks at the Grace know that. The folks at the Grace Hospital Foundation and the RHA know that, and so again I know that the relationships that I've got with them and with others in the neighbourhood regarding this, it's about thinking positive. Does more need to be done? Do we need to ensure that absolutely every patient is getting the care that we would want for our family? Absolutely, but these are the kinds of things, these are the kinds of investments that are going to ensure that they happen.

It's about investing in the front-line services in terms of hiring docs and nurses, but it's also about making sure that we have, you know, the right architecture in place, the right supports in place. And so again when we think about the fact that with the Grace Hospital it's an older building, an engineering site investigation was done in conjunction with the development of the design and it was required to inform the full engineering implications of the complex project.

Those kinds of things cannot be dismissed when you're dealing with an older building. An engineering site investigation along with design requirements, again, it requires significant mechanical and electrical building upgrades to conform to current codes and standards. Those are all things that need to be factored in, and again it has to do with the combination of new construction and renovation and functional programming. So again this is about building, and when you build things and you want to build them right they do take a significant amount of time, and again when we think about the fact that we are adding approximately a 38,000, oh, close to 39,000 square feet to comply with the current CSA Z8000 standards and provide new patient care and flow, that's a huge investment and it needs to be done right.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister is accurate in saying that any project takes time. We know that that is, in fact, a reality.

Knowing that is a reality, I'd like to ask the minister why her government would've made an election promise, then, that this hospital was going to be complete—this ER was going to be completed by 2015 if they knew that it couldn't be done in that time frame.

Ms. Blady: Again, as I indicated, that once the project was undertaken, this is where the engineering site investigation, and again, like I'm sure most of us have at some point, and whether in an exercise in renovation or masochism, has decided to do a renovation on our house, I don't know too many folks that when they crack open the drywall find everything exactly the way they had anticipated.

So this was the case with the Grace, that there was the understanding that we could go forward, do a project and then it was with the engineering site investigation. And as well as looking at again the construction aspects of it as it related to parking and other things that meant that additional time was taken.

So, in other words, when the commitment was made it was with an understanding of the site and of the—what was envisioned, and then, again, like I said, you crack things open, you get the engineers out there, the site investigation happens, and especially, too, when the site was examined and the functional programming was done, it was realized that the—that in terms of emergency room development—redevelopment, we couldn't redevelop the existing Grace but, in fact, had to relocate it onto the eastern side of the campus from its current western location.

And that did a number of things. First of all, it's going to ensure that the current emergency department remains open while the new one is being built. And then when the old one is closed down, other things will be decanted to the front of the building. So, again, yet one more project.

So it wasn't about making a commitment knowing that things couldn't be done; it was about making a commitment and then, as I said, once the functional planning was done, revealing that there were additional challenges at a functional planning and engineering level that added time. So it was about, again, new factors being discovered and, again, wanting to ensure that it was being done right and being done in a proper fashion.

Mrs. Driedger: It sounds like from the comments the minister made, though, really, is that they didn't do their homework before making this promise. It wasn't like the government was a new government making a promise that didn't have a sense of all of the steps that it would take to—you know, to build a building or fix a building. It sounds like what the government may have done was not do their homework, but it was a promise they wanted to make because it sounded good in an election.

And then—they didn't falter, they didn't put any caveats on it, they basically said that they were going to upgrade and expand the ER in 2011, to complete it by 2015. You know, it wasn't a naive government that did that, but I would suspect what we had is a government that did not do their homework by putting such a time frame on this.

I understand from comments I'm hearing also that the square footage is going to be identical to what the square footage is now, that there is no extra space going to be allocated to the new ER. Is that an accurate statement?

Ms. Blady: I'll begin with the first part of my answer. I'm still waiting for staff to track down some technical information.

Well, again, when we think about the sequence of the project started at the Grace campus and, again, we think about the ACCESS west Winnipeg, followed by, again, the emergency department approval and the inclusion of the MRI project, as I mentioned, the site issues and the size of the new ED have, again, taken considerably longer than expected to resolve. And that's really about the idea, too, that, again, what's going on there.

You know, one of the things that is very clear, and it was something that was brought forth by the doctors and other staff at the emergency department, is that emergency medicine really has changed since the department was last upgraded. And I have to say that, again, I'm of a vintage where I remember the emergency department before that one and, again, recall how much those have changed. And one of the things that is really important is that the new space will allow for significant improvements in things like infection control and patient privacy, as well as improved overall visibility for monitoring patients.

*(16:40)

And so it's one of those things—I don't know if the member opposite—I didn't happen to see her there—but it was about two years ago when we had the open house, the Grace Hospital hosted an open house that included all of the designs of—for the emergency department. And so, when one talks about the square footage, it's really about a completely different layout and a completely different philosophy in terms of, again, making sure that the floor plan actually matches what the docs and the nurses and the other front-line staff need. So, again, the extensive nature of community consultation has also been a big part of the timelines

for the Grace. And I know that, you know, my colleagues, the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) as well as the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Crothers), have made a point of being out there and have come to these kinds of things, these open houses for the Grace Hospital.

And, like I said, I know that there was the one two years ago that included the floor plans of all of them—the conceptual planning, both exterior and interior design, the integration of the MRI suite and where it fits in within the current footprint and how that's going to shift, how that's going to take a number of things that when that diagnostic suite comes in, and then what'll happen is the ED is developed on the east side. That means that we're going to have a diagnostic hub which the ED will, in a sense, encompass or wrap around, but it'll also be in proximity to other parts of the hospital. And then there's plans and different discussion around what'll happen to the old emergency department and the ability to decant a number of things to front of house that will be patient centred while moving administrative things more to back of house.

And so the kinds of things that have been happening at the Grace are really, again, on a very large scale and that in terms of the footprint of the emergency department it takes on a very different approach. Everything from decontamination areas so that if somebody comes in as a walk-in, they're coming in off Pearl McGonigal drive and that initial loop that'll be there; it means that before they are able to go into a waiting area, they can actually be taken and triaged in a way that allows them to have complete decontamination and then brought around and into treatment without having to worry about any kind of whether it's infectious or contaminant exposure going into the waiting area. It's all about flow. It's amazing how it's laid out. And, again, that separate entrance in terms of the folks that are able to come in as walk-ins or on their own through that—again, through the Pearl McGonigal Way entrance as opposed to the ambulances coming in through a completely separate loop—but, again, an entirely separate triaging area. It's really about the flow.

So in some respects, despite the fact that they're both emergency departments, it is literally an apples-and-oranges comparison when you look at the old emerg or the existing emergency department and what's going to be going in.

And, again, I really have to say I am very impressed with the architects and the work that they did in terms of working with the front-line staff and

as well as working with the community. So I would encourage the member if, you know—and I'm sure they are going to be happening again in future—when the Grace has one of these open houses and the ability to talk to design staff and to the RHA and front-line folks involved, I would encourage her to come down because I know for myself it was a learning experience. And I know that folks in the neighbourhood that went out definitely enjoyed it and, again, felt that they learned a lot about what was happening at the Grace and it gave them great confidence in the changes that were going there. Change can often bring about anxiety, and this was something that actually gave them great confidence.

And, again, you know, I know that folks are very much pleased with the nature of the relationship that we have. To quote Her Honour Pearl McGonigal, the—who is, you know, former chair of the board of directors for the Grace Hospital Foundation—quote her here. She says, we're very pleased with all of the health-care investments being made in west Winnipeg. We look forward to the redevelopment of the emergency department as well as the ACCESS centre next door that will improve access to primary care, community health and social services.

And I know, as I'm sure the member is aware, that we know that Her Honour is a huge champion for the Grace. And I know that she is, again, aware of the fact that, again, Ms. McGonigal does a lot—you know, in terms of leadership in our neighbourhood and, again, appreciates the hard work being done by those on the front lines and what is it that we do to invest and support those people whether it's through, again, hiring and training more docs and nurses or providing them with leading-edge and state-of-the-art emergency department redevelopments like the one that's happening at the Grace.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, we certainly don't oppose a new ER. In fact, I'm quite supportive of that ER changing.

What I am curious about, though, is whether or not it's going to be the same size as the existing one, with the same long waits. I mean, we want more than just a fancy new waiting room to house the longest waits in Canada. It has to be more than just, you know, the structural changes there. There needs to be other things that are happening to effect shortening those waits so that it can become a shorter waiting line and that patients aren't falling through the cracks and being exposed in any way to unsafe care because of long waits.

So we don't oppose at all the new ER—welcome it for that hospital. But my question which the minister has not answered at all was whether or not the footage is the same. Is it the—basically a new ER that is the same size as the old ER?

Ms. Blady: As I mentioned that, in terms of the square footage, staff are endeavouring to confirm the exact square footage. To ensure we get the— you know, the right numbers, I want to make sure that we get the right information to her.

But, again, to sort of reiterate—trying to figure out a delicate way of putting this—let's just say, yes, size does matter, but it's a case of not so much what size you have, in terms of the emergency department, how well it's used. And, again, what I would indicate to the member is had she been able to come out two years ago to that open house, she would've seen the plans and would've seen that it's about a very different relationship of space.

So, in fact, it's about movement, as soon as one is triaged, into different kinds of treatment spaces. And so the notion of a waiting room, in fact, that was one of the very first things that I noted when I saw the plans, was how small waiting and seating areas were. And it has to do with the fact that, upon triaging, when you hit that front desk, it's about how you are going to get placed into a treatment space. And so—and how that progresses along from, again, initial triage to treatment and whether that requires movement between spaces or not in terms of, for example, any kind of testing, diagnostic imaging, et cetera.

So, again, it's about a very different use of space, and so that's—and it will increase patient privacy. It does a number of different things: it increases visibility between the medical staff and the patients; it allows for better communication and transitioning of patients in terms of off-loads. Again, it's built around what is the ideal type of movement that we need to have when a patient is brought in, and whether that's a triaging that occurs, again, from a walk-in or coming in of your own volition or whether you are being brought in by a first responder.

So, again, in terms of the square footage, again, staff will be getting the exact numbers for her so that we can—we will do that. We're just trying to get that now. They were hoping that we could have got it right away, but we'll have that—I see we're towards the end of the day, so that I can have that number for her hopefully by tomorrow.

But, again, it is one of those things where it's about how that emergency department is laid out. And I have to say, again, I really appreciate the responsiveness. So the space, like I said, includes even things, for example, like the fact that at front of house, when you first come in, the current ACCESS centre which is at present a free-standing entity, it will mean that, if someone comes in, they can either go to the emerg or they will also—again, there's the possibility of using the ACCESS centre. Those will be all included, all under—there's a walkway that's going to be joining them along front of house, and that'll make a huge difference, too, in terms of the supports that are going to be available.

One of the things that the ACCESS centre already provides but will continue to provide will be that follow-up for folks when they come out of the emerg. So, in other words, do you need to come back X number of days later to get stitches? Well, that's something that oftentimes now some doctors will refer folks to emergency—back to emergency rooms to get those stitches out. Having an ACCESS centre there means that those kinds of follow-ups will be there.

*(16:50)

It's also the place, too, for when we have seniors coming in when they present at emerg and, again, like—again I think of the gentleman that I spoke about with the gallbladder—somebody might present, and they didn't need home care before; maybe they need it afterwards. That's what the ACCESS centre will do. And, again, it's now all going to be attached when that emergency department is there.

So, yes, while we will get the exact square feet, I just want to remind the member that, again, it's a very different layout of the floorplan. And if she would like, I mean, I can get in touch with Kellie O'Rourke and others at the RHA, and if she would like to have the opportunity to take a look at those plans, I'll gladly arrange that for her so that she can see what I'm talking about, because I do really think it's the opportunity to take a look at the visuals where you'd be able to see the difference. So we'll see if we can—if that's something that she's interested in.

Again, they were open and available to the public over those couple of open houses in the past couple of years. So if that's something that she would like to see as well as how folks in the neighbourhood have seen them, I will endeavour to do whatever I can to get her connected with that information and to take a look at those floorplans.

Mrs. Driedger: Just for the minister's information, I'm very well aware of what those plans are like. She's assumed that I haven't had any information about it nor that I was at any of the open houses, so she's making an assumption to that. And I have been speaking with a number of folks on the front lines, so just urge her not to make assumptions about what we know or don't know.

And I'll turn it over to my colleague now who's got some important questions for his constituency.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): We've been talking a bit here about the Grace Hospital, but I have some questions in regards to the emergency services at the Vita hospital.

The ER there has been closed—it'll be three years this October. It was supposed to be a short closure of roughly 30 days. Well, 30 days has turned into just about three years.

One of the things that was brought forward in the spring of 2013 was that they could have what's called a collaborative emergency centre in Vita. I spent time with both the previous ministers—because in three years we've had three ministers. This is the, you know, third minister I've been working with. The other previous ministers would sit—and sat down at great length explaining to me how much better Vita would be suited with a collaborate emergency centre, with advanced care paramedics, because the distances that were there—travelled out in the country, the advanced-care paramedic could get to the scene and administer drugs to somebody who's having a stroke, and things would be a lot better.

Well, I've asked the question back in the beginning of 2014, over, like, a year-and-a-half ago, when will this collaborative emergency centre be open in the Vita hospital?

Ms. Blady: Okay. I want to thank the member for the question.

Just to wrap up from his colleague's question, in terms of the Grace ER, I apologize for any presumptions that I might have made, but in light of the nature of the question that it just seemed that there wasn't—that her questioning seemed to indicate that there wasn't a familiarity. So I appreciate the fact that she has taken the time to take a look at those plans because, again, I do think it's very important that, again, that there's a full understanding of that. And again—so, again, my apologies if there was any presumption, but it was a case of, again, the nature of the question focused on square footage and wait

times, et cetera. Again, a familiarity with the—that design would have led me to believe a different line of questioning might have been pursued. So I just want to wrap up there.

I do want to thank the member for the questions regarding the Vita ER again, and his willingness to continue to work with folks here regarding the collaborative emergency care centre model in Vita—that it is one of those things that, you know, in terms of rural health care and meeting with a variety of folks, I have to say, it's been a really interesting learning experience in the past little while, and the ability to work with folks from the rural communities and the AMM especially have—we've had some really good conversations in terms of what's needed in rural communities, and they've really appreciated the investments that have been made in rural health. And so whether it's been things like the six new family residencies in places like Brandon, Steinbach, Morden-Winkler, those help get some folks to some particular communities, again, the renovation of other hospitals. But I know that you're more concerned with what's going on in your own community, not what we've been developing in others, and so I do appreciate the fact that you've been willing to work with folks on these things.

The one thing that I have to say is that, again, I want to make sure that regardless of where somebody lives in the province that they are getting the access to safe high-quality care that's close to home. And I know that the southern region health, Santé Sud, has been working on physician recruitment. And, again, want to assure the member, and he's probably more—very familiar with this, but again, we have not removed the funding for emergency room coverage in Vita, that the money is, in fact, for staffing. It's still on the table. We want docs there. And, again, we want to be able to make sure that we have the complement that's there, and that, again, in terms of making sure that folks are there, that we have the doctors, we have the medical staff that we need. It is about investing and training them.

And so, again, whether it's turning around the physician exodus of the 1990s by expanding the medical seats from 70 to 110, I mean, just that difference of 40 extra doctors a year does make a difference. And, again, it's one of those things that while it is clearly frustrating for you to know that, again, if you have a net increase in doctors and we have more of them coming into rural areas, and when we had the doctors graduating this year, knowing

how many of them were committed to rural placements, that's really important.

It's not—it's a problem that is not unique. I was on the phone just today with some of my colleagues. There was a pan-Canadian ministerial meeting and these are issues that are shared throughout the country in a variety of places, and especially for provinces where there's a concentration in an urban area and then a very large spread out through the rural ones. It is creating crisis for a lot of places, and that's why I'm happy that we're still among the best in the nation on rural doc retention. And, again, while we have more docs per capita than our neighbours next door in Saskatchewan, I know that that's still not meeting the needs that you want at this time. And I'm still waiting for someone to find me the magic health-care wand that is, you know, ministers of Health are given and, you know, we can create doctors, but—and put them exactly where we want them, but I know that that doesn't happen. That's not the reality.

And I know that, again, we still want to test this collaborative emergency care centre in Vita. And it's really going to be about discussions between the RHA, between the community and the staff, and how we formalize it to make sure that it works for Vita. Because you guys are going to be the first site in Manitoba, and when you're the first in anything, it's a blessing and a curse, right, you get to be the ones that are trying this out, and at the same time, we're trying to, in a sense, develop a model, so that it fits you but then also becomes a template.

So it's, again, something that I know you've already met with two other ministers, but I would gladly meet with you and any others, that we can discuss this because it is something that we do want to be able to—I want to get your take on this, whether it's here in Estimates or in another meeting, because I know that the feedback that I've got from folks in the community is definitely an eagerness to put this together, so for me it's a case of how is it that we make it happen and how is it that we make it happen in a way that best suits the needs of the Vita community.

Mr. Smook: Well, you've just told me everything that I've already heard. The question was, when will this collaborative emergency centre, this pilot project, open, because I'm concerned because I've heard from other hospitals that it's been promised to them as well? Now, is this something that's happening? I mean, we know that it's been three

years or going close to three years since the ER has been open. You just finished saying how important it is for health care, for everybody no matter where you live in the province. It was promised that a collaborative emergency centre would be a test pilot project in the Vita area. When is it going to happen and why is it not happening? Why have we heard nothing about it in the last year and a half? That's my concern. I'm concerned about the constituents in southeastern Manitoba, and I would appreciate it if the minister would give me a straight answer, not just sit there and talk and expel a bunch of hot air.

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

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

* (15:00)

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

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

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I—yes, I'd like to start off where I left off the other day when we had to rise because you wouldn't give me leave to sit 'til 6 o'clock.

However, I was referring to raising Highway 75 to—was out of the flood zone and asked about the hydrology study that was being done on the Red River. And understanding that when the water is running over 75 Highway and it's running over by a foot or two feet for two or three miles, there's a lot of water that's travelling northwest and out across the valley.

If you're going to hold that in, then where does this water go? If we haven't completed the hydrology study, why are we doing the highway first just to find out if we're going to flood a lot more land that wasn't flooded previously?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): The hydrology study's in its final phase right now and there's—there is that kind of information that has been developed to make sure that anything and everything that's done will take into account all the impacts both direct and indirect in terms of hydrology.

Mr. Graydon: And that's nice that the minister can put that on the record, but at the same time, would he be prepared to table this hydrology study? The work is going forward and, really, we don't have any confirmation of it—what the minister is saying is actually true. So can he table that study today, then?

Mr. Ashton: I would point out that at the open house that a commitment was made that there would be no significant hydrological impacts and, again, it's being completed, that's being included in the design and that's been consistent all throughout all the work on 75 whether it's the bigger project in Morris which has gone through probably some of the most technical analysis that we've seen on any major project.

I talked to the engineers, and they'll tell you that the degree to which the hydrological calculation put in place really is quite remarkable. It's a good thing we have some of the computer capacity we have in terms of data. So, all along 75, the hydrological effects have been critical, and, indeed, that's the case, and as the final report's out, I think the member will see that's very much the end result.

So the design is aimed not just at the highway side, it's clearly recognized, and anything on 75 is going to have hydrological impacts and we have to make sure that we don't create collateral damage, if I can use that phrase, for other areas.

So I appreciate the comments the member's made. They are—but that has very much been included in all of the design elements all the way along.

Mr. Graydon: So then if it's been included in all of the design efforts on 75 Highway, then why would the minister be reluctant to table this study?

Mr. Ashton: It's not a—being reluctant, there—it's being finalized as we speak. Once it's finalized, it will be released, but the information that is being gathered is being incorporated in the design process as we proceed. So, you know, once the actual physical report is done, we will release that.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chairman, it was a year ago that we asked the same question and we were given the same answer. So can the minister put a time frame on this, try to narrow it down? Will it be within the next 10 months, after all the work is completed on 75 Highway, and perhaps collateral damage outside of the flood zone, the existing flood zone that we know today, we also—we know that we have flood

proofed the Red River Valley, but the collateral damage will be outside of the normal flood area. So can we know when this is going to be tabled?

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate that the member is accusing me of being consistent. I take that as a compliment. But I think the report is close to completion. I do want to stress again that we're aware not only of the immediate impacts on 75, but potential for impacts more broadly. And so, for example, the key challenge we're facing in terms of Morris—I attended the first major open house myself. The deputy minister currently, then ADM, has attended.

So, at the top level, all the way through to the design team, we've been cognizant of two things: one is local knowledge. There was a lot of useful local knowledge that has been brought forward, and I include the member in this; I appreciate over—for the time I've been responsible for this department that he undertakes to bring forward his knowledge, which is quite extensive, of hydrological issues, both in his immediate area but also in the broader sense. So we've taken that into account.

But the clear message right from day one, for the any of the open houses, from the public but also from our department, is we are very cognizant of just how sensitive that area is hydrologically. So we can't just follow through on some of the simple solutions. And usually I find simple solutions aren't solutions at all, and the member's kind of, you know, I'm sure aware of that. I mean, I've—we've had people saying we should raise up 75 through Morris. I mean, if you look at what it would be in way of a causeway and the potential negative impacts on immediate drainage and flooding issues in the area, it really points to why the simple solution was rejected pretty early on because of the potential for very negative impacts.

And the design framework we're looking at is to make sure that there aren't issues, you know, that I describe as collateral damage. So it's being built into the design process, and it—you know, I'll be upfront; I mean, it's—complexity is there; it's one of the reasons why there's been some longer time put in the design process. But the more we got into this, the more we realized if you're going to get the correct end result, you have to make sure that there is limited, if any, hydrological impacts, because, again, this—when we're talking 75, particularly at Morris, the key issue is hydrology, it's flooding, and the impact that does have on a major, you know, artery—impact on surrounding areas.

* (15:10)

So it's not just a highway's project. It's a hydrological project, too, and that's critical right from every aspect of the design process and it's one of the reasons we have taken some time. But that's because we take very seriously the kind of input that we're getting from the member and also from members of the public in the area.

Mr. Graydon: So I don't want to say that the minister's been totally evasive on when this report will be issued. What I would like to do, though, is ask the minister if he could release that hydrology report before the end of this current session. Would he be able to do that?

Mr. Ashton: I've just been getting a, you know, update on the report. It's—I'm advised, again, by staff—it's nearing completion. So the intent is once it's totally finalized we'll be able to release it. So it's not a question of being evasive. There's not a final report to release. You know, I've been very up front in terms of that and it is—has been fairly complex. But I did want to make very clear that the release of the report doesn't mean—you know, the application of the report doesn't start with the release date, that's really just the overall report. It's—any and all information has been incorporated into the design process as we speak, and I will put on the record to—when it is a hundred per cent complete we will definitely release it. It's not a secret report. The member won't have to file a FIPPA. It's, you know, there's no confidentiality. This has always been our intent to, you know, to release it, we will, and I think it's probably sooner rather than later.

And, of course, we do continue to rebuild 75. Just to put on the record, we've done 16 kilometres from Aubigny to Ste. Agathe just last year. We're doing another 12 kilometres to Ste. Agathe to St. Adolphe this year. So we're continuing to upgrade the highway, bring it up to what you could describe as interstate standards both in terms of surface and all the other elements. So 75, major priority, and so we're continuing to do the work.

And I just want to stress again, as soon as that hydrological study is done I will undertake to release it to the member and other interested members of his caucus.

Mr. Graydon: Being reluctant to belabour the fact, I just want an answer, then, from the minister, a yes or no. Will that study be done in this current session

and will it be released in the current session? I—It doesn't have to be exactly on July 15; in this current session.

Mr. Ashton: Of course, we don't know when the session's going to end either, so it's all subjective and I'll just say that I'll leave the one part of the equation I can't control. I'm only deputy House leader. I'm not the House leader. I'll leave that to the House leaders, so I don't know in terms of this session. The other part I actually don't control directly. It's a technical report and I'm not going to push it to be completed before it's done.

So, when the department advises me, and this is direct quote, that it's nearing completion, I think, is a direct quote—quote, unquote. I take that at face value. I think the key thing is I will release—the department will release it once it's completed. So yes, by census it will be completed shortly and then it's just a matter of getting it released and in the public domain. There's no intent to go through the report in any great detail. Once it's done we want to make sure the public has a chance to see it and the members opposite will be the, I'm sure, the first to get copies.

I'll assure the member that we make a point of doing that. I'll offer a full briefing, as well, with technical staff. Again, I value not only the opportunity for staff to share some of the dynamics of the study and the design works going on, but I also do appreciate the input of the member, you know, on the issue. The St. Jean bridge, for example, which we talked about last time, a good example of that.

But it's the same thing here. You know, I do think that local knowledge is very useful. LiDAR serving is great. You need to have it. You need to have all the technological dimensions done and there's a greater ability to do that now. However, one thing local knowledge does give you is a sense of where water flows, and we've had enough major floods and minor floods, you know, that we've had some experience there as well.

So I'll make sure not only that we have the report released, but I would appreciate a, you know, if the member wishes to follow up, which I'm sure he will, the opportunity for him to sit down with our staff and have a two-way dialogue on it. We want to make sure it's done right. That's the main reason why it's taken a bit longer, perhaps, than was anticipated. I think it's a fair comment. I am being consistent in the

sense of (1) saying it's important, (2) saying we'll release it. And same last year, same this year, and I'm hoping it will be sooner rather than later.

Mr. Graydon: I'd be remiss if I didn't suggest that any overland flooding to the east of the Red River ends up in that Marsh River system which doesn't always find its way back to the Red River in—without causing a quite a bit of collateral damage. And I'm thinking just as specifically about the bridge on 23 Highway between 200 and Morris. That bridge is—was shored up in the last flood in 2009, but has really never been rebuilt. Is that on the books going forward?

Mr. Ashton: It is in the capital plan. I'm just tracking down what year it's scheduled for. But it's in the five-year. *[interjection]* Again, it is in the five-year plan. It takes a couple of years that we're doing all the design work both on bridge, but also the surrounding area as well. So—but it's in the five-year plan. It will be proceeding.

Mr. Graydon: Well, I'm sure that the minister understands which bridge I'm referring to, and that's the escape route and the only access for Morris in a major flood event. That's the way out and, of course, the only way that people could access the hospital if it isn't—if it hasn't been evacuated like it was in '97, and the town was evacuated in '97. But in between that's a—right—that's an emergency route and so on and so forth. So I just want to bring that to the attention of the minister, and I'm sure his staff is well aware of that.

We'll—I'd like to talk about the stabilization of the bank in St. Jean. Can the minister bring us up to speed at what level or at—yes, at what level that is done now and whether there will be ongoing work all summer, or is it just going to be started again in the fall with the frost?

Mr. Ashton: It is under construction now. I can get the member an update on what the specific schedule is. But it is definitely proceeding as we speak.

Mr. Graydon: And at the same time, could the minister indicate, then, when they do get back to me whether they're on budget and it's gone according to the—to what was forecasted back over a year ago, a little over a year ago now? We've seen the cost estimates about the same time that the minister blew up the bridge in St. Jean. The cost estimates were put out there at that time, and I just want to know if he's

still on schedule or if the projection needs to be revised.

Mr. Ashton: Well, as the member knows, we did not blow up a bridge. The bridge was damaged by floods. I think he's referring to the sports structure—*[interjection]* Yes, and which was not usable for any other purpose in terms of that, and I do want to, again, acknowledge as I have all the way through, that there was a significant lapse in terms of communication for the surrounding community and communities in terms of that proceeding. And, basically, I will certainly do that. I mean, we have been working on that and completion date is scheduled hopefully for this fall. You know, so we're under construction as we speak in terms of that. It is a priority for the department.

* (15:20)

Mr. Graydon: In respect to the stabilization, there has been a quite a bit of disruption for certain residents in the area, and I have to say that the minister's office has co-operated very well with the individual that was having an issue, and I would hope that that co-operation continues on to a resolution that's acceptable to everyone.

Going a little bit further downstream, if we're building 75 Highway—that it's going to be flood proofed. How does the minister plan on addressing the issue on the Morris River in the town of Morris?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, member knows, we've scoped out the various different options including down to relocating the river itself, some portions of it. The—all of the options that we looked at—because some—I'm trying to remember the number of design options, but we had 50, 60, I think—right? Yes, 50 or 60 initially. They all involved some combination of work on the road, work on bridge, but also dikes, potential relocation of the river, et cetera. I could spend some time in committee on it, but I—you know, if the member would prefer, I'd rather—because I know we're pretty short on time—I can not only arrange a briefing, but I can get him the latest technical information that we put forward at the various open houses, because it's certainly evolved from concept, you know, when we started a few years back, to, you know, the current design parameters that we're looking at.

Again, we've got a fairly decent sense from the work that's been on the hydrological side that, you know, we can achieve the goal. And the goal, the

member knows, is really to avoid the situation we're in right now which is 75 is fairly consistently shut down in floods at Morris where other parts of the highway system, including the interstate in the US, are not shut down. There would be high level of floods where 75 will be shut down no matter what, but if you look at even in minor flooding years, we lose what is a significant number of days. I mean, '09 was a major flood. You know, I think people would expect there would be some impact but through the design parameters we're able to significantly reduce that.

And, of course, we've been at looking at replacing the bridge adjacent to the existing bridge. It would remain open during floods of 2009 levels which is a huge difference. If you go back to 2009, I think we were about 40 days—40-odd days—44, shut down—so 44 days' closure. The new plan would result in—*[interjection]*—38—*[interjection]*—36, or we've—yes. So it's—instead of a month-plus, we would have zero. So that's the key. So the bridge is a key part of it, but it's not the only part of the plan.

Mr. Graydon: So, if I understood right, there isn't a final plan on how to deal with the issue in Morris. It's still in an exploratory stage. But if the river was to be rerouted, and I—that concept has been floated quite often—there would have to be an environmental study on that before that happened?

Mr. Ashton: Correct. Not just an environmental study but the requisite environmental approvals, including Fisheries and Oceans—you know, all of the federal aspects that would be involved, absolutely.

Mr. Graydon: Has the minister given any consideration to—now that there's been an upgrade announced on 201 Highway, has he given any consideration to upgrading Highway 59 from St. Malo down to 201 as an alternate flood route while the negotiations and design work is being done? I bring it to the minister's attention that the land has been purchased along 59 Highway from St. Malo down to 201 for the curves and so on in order to upgrade that particular stretch of highway.

Is that something that the minister has been looking at? It's been asked for by four municipalities more than once by resolution, and is it something that the department has given any consideration?

Mr. Ashton: It's being examined by the Red River transportation study. In terms of 59, you know, we've made some significant progress in the south of

Winnipeg, the northern part—not north of Winnipeg, but the—just immediately south of Winnipeg. We did move to significantly upgrade the highway when we first came into government in terms of the four-laning. And it really reflects the very significant growth in traffic in that area. Traffic jams do drop off, you know, considerably further south, but I certainly do appreciate the alternate route aspects that will be looked at the—in terms of that.

I've had some experience, too, of finding alternate routes myself. I mean, I had a meeting, actually, with the late mayor from Fargo, since he's passed away, and came up and hit a major snowstorm. And, of course, 75 was closed—not by decision of the department, by the way, but by the RCMP—and a phone call to the mayor of Emerson quickly informed me that the surrounding roads were—development and I was able to cut over to 59 which was totally open. So there are other aspects of having alternate routes that often come into play including in the case of a blizzard. So that will be looked at as part of the study.

Yes, and the member's quite right. I mean, as is the case with a lot of projects, we do protect land. We do do the land ahead of it actually being, you know, part of a capital program wherever possible and, certainly, there's been a long-term plan to upgrade 59 which we've been proceeding with. So we will certainly look at it.

Mr. Graydon: When was the last traffic count done on 59 Highway from the existing four lanes to No. 11 at the Niverville turnoff?

Mr. Ashton: I could track that down. They're done fairly frequently, you know, so they're not decades old. We'll track down the exact—*[interjection]* I'm advised, actually, even in the last year it was done.

Mr. Graydon: At what level of traffic would it warrant four-laning that down to that corner? That's 14 kilometres.

Mr. Ashton: If you look at what's happened across the province, it—you know, there's a significant drop-off as you go down further on 59, just represents really two factors. One is population density in the immediate area, but also that the main trade route is 75, so a lot of the traffic is local traffic. I can get you the exact numbers, but it certainly would be—you know, less than other areas we've got significant traffic pressures like Highway 6, where, for example, we're moving to passing lanes. I could

reference—well, I could reference half a dozen different highways where that's the case. And they, you know, getting in sort of the range is one aspect, but increasingly we've been looking at other solutions as well. I mentioned the—you know—passing lanes is a good example. Highway 10, this—you know, this came up in questioning from the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer). I mean, there's significant traffic volumes north of Brandon and south of Brandon, actually, on 10, and we did move there to a—passing lanes. So I can get the exact numbers.

And I'm advised too, of course, you know, traffic signals are being installed this year at the Niverville axis from 59, and that does include intersection improvement. So we'd also—do look at, you know, other issues, not just the road itself, but traffic controls, et cetera. So there's a fair amount of traffic in that area, but it certainly wouldn't rank as one of the highest number of vehicles per day in terms of traffic counts. There are many other areas either comparable with greater traffic counts where, you know, we're not moving on four-laning. We're looking at other options.

*(15:30)

Mr. Graydon: Did I hear the minister correctly saying that he was going to install traffic control lights at that corner?

Mr. Ashton: That's correct.

Mr. Graydon: If there's no traffic that warrants a four-lane, why would you put lights up?

Mr. Ashton: We have lots of intersections that don't involve a four-lane highway that require traffic lights. The key issue with traffic lights is if you've got significant movements in terms of traffic, and, you know, if you have two highways that intersect, you put traffic lights in as one option to handle that.

So, yes, there are many two-lane highways that intersect with each other where there's traffic lights. There are two-lane highways that intersect with four-lane highways that have traffic lights. Traffic lights are really a function of the intersection, whereas on the—traditionally with a four-lane highway or going to passing lanes, that's where you're looking at, in some cases, some of the cross-section, but it's more to do with the actual flow itself, which we're in particular trying to handle is slow and faster moving traffic, giving ability for, you

know, fast-moving vehicles to pass slower moving vehicles. That's one of the key elements.

And, as I indicated before in discussions resulting in questions from the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), we're finding passing lanes are actually almost as significant, probably, as four-lane configurations in terms of safety, because they essentially provide some, you know, ability for traffic to pass without some of the—you know, the risk people sometimes take, you know, given traffic flow.

So, yes, it's standard, no matter whether it's two or four-lane, to put lights in. It's not—it's more to do with the combination of flows, whether you could handle it through, you know, putting stop lights in place on one of the intersections, and it really does reflect, you know, the significant traffic on both the highways that do intersect at that point.

Mr. Graydon: Well, I travel that highway a lot, sometimes on a daily basis. I would submit to the minister that that's one of the fastest growing areas in Manitoba, is in southeastern Manitoba, with Steinbach, Niverville is growing 'exponentially', and also the villages all along, whether that happens to be Landmark, Lorette, Blumenort, all the way through down to—actually, to the Otterburne turnoff for 52 Highway.

But more especially in that Niverville area and putting a traffic light on a highway that has that kind of traffic, you're just going to stop the traffic and create roadblocks on the traffic. But you'll find that out quick enough. You'll create more problems than you do solutions with that type of a situation.

However, moving on to the corner of 201 and 30, there's been a lot of work done on that corner, but the turning lanes are about—they're less than 25 per cent of what's necessary on that corner. There's a lot of heavy truck traffic from Bunge, which is quite an economic boon to the province of Manitoba, I might add. A lot of truck traffic coming out of there or/and going down there, and the turning lanes off of 30 onto 201 into an industrial park to the west—or into the industrial park on the west, 201 Highway on the east, but the turning lane is not much longer than this table, and if you have a semi bearing down on you, it can scare you a lot.

Also the corner is not lit. In fact, I would suggest that the stop signs that are there don't even have

reflectors on them to indicate where the corner is for anybody coming from either direction.

So is there any plan to upgrade that corner to—at least to provincial standards, or is that provincial standards nowadays?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, well, what I can do is undertake to follow up in terms of that. The member's correct; there is work being done in that area, and I'll ask the department to respond directly to the concerns that were raised.

Mr. Graydon: One last question. I appreciate the work that the department has done on a number of the highways with this new coating that they put on. And I don't know what the duration, the life expectancy of this coating is, but it goes on very quickly and it seems to seal the road pretty efficiently. And, of course, if you can keep your roadbed dry, your road's going to last a lot longer.

What I would ask the minister, though, is why he narrowed the roads up by at least two feet.

Mr. Ashton: The advice from the department's quite clear; we don't narrow the roadway.

He's referring to microsurfacing which does provide seven, maybe even up to 10 years of life. It's a very effective covering and it does—the member's quite correct—it does bind the road together.

And if it's a specific section, we'll look into it. We lay the microsurfacing according to the actual width of the highway. So if it's anything that's different from that, I'd appreciate the information and we'll follow up on it.

Mr. Graydon: For the minister and for his department, they can measure any place between 200 south and 218 south that was done last year, and there's minimum a foot on each side of old pavement or old blacktop. Some of that was covered with gravel afterwards when they did the shoulders but at the same time the road is much narrower.

Mr. Ashton: I appreciate the specific information; we'll follow up on it.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Chair, I'd just like to ask the minister a few questions in regards to some bridges and highways and the sort, in the Lac du Bonnet constituency and also the surrounding areas.

The bridge on 313, I'm just wondering if the testing has been completed on all of the piers, to see that we're able to move forward.

Mr. Ashton: What I was going to do and I will get a direct answer on the question, I would—just if it's agreeable with the committee, I was just going to read in—on to the record some of the specific questions raised by the critic and others, and I'm undertaking to do this by notice. Specific information is available, so we will get the specific answer.

The question came up about the emergency channel operation current flow. As of the time that the question was asked, was 3,200 cfs, currently operating around 60 per cent of its overall width. DFO restrictions were in place 'til June 15th for any instream works due to spawning; that's the issue there.

There's current DF authorization which ends August 15th. Again, because of levels in Lake St. Martin and the discharge from Fairford, no further operation is contemplated currently. Lake St. Martin levels were 803.6 when open last summer and currently at 801.3, so it's a drop of over two feet. We're in ongoing discussions with DFO on interim operating authorization. We believe it would be appropriate to have authorization when above flood stage without us having to go through it on an ad hoc basis—and, of course, the engineering and other works proceeding for the permanent outlets.

I'm just going to run through quickly again some of the other issues that were raised.

Kemnay bridge—we're working on a number of items to reduce the chance of trucks hitting the Kemnay bridge, including: installing an automatic advisory sign that would detect over-height vehicles, provide feedback to drivers to stop; making changes to geometry and pavement markings; undertake a functional study of a future new route for the eastern access into Brandon that would not include the Kemnay bridge. There have already been some open houses on this. We're also working with the Trucking Association to have this route removed from their GPS units as a truck route but that has proven to be complicated to do effectively. So it's complicated with a GPS.

* (15:40)

PR 457 debris from the 2014 flood, the remaining debris is not easy to clean up as it requires heavy equipment and it's the materials under the roadway and—includes other materials. The department awarded a contract to Tri-Wave, T-r-i-W-a-v-e Construction, to raise 457, and that contract includes the removal of debris. This work will all be completed this summer.

In terms of 110 speed limit, i-trans was the engineering service provider that completed the report. What we released: most reporting including items related to personal—excluding items related to personal privacy regulations. And if the critic could contact my office after the Estimates process, we'll forward it on.

Four sixteen, Shoal lakes area, there was discussion of this last time. Just to follow up again, it's the—the route is on the eastern shore; lake's been high for many years and is an issue with wind and most of the original roadbed has been lost. There are safety issues to reopen the road due to storm action, water overlapping it. There are significant primal issues with the undertaking any work in this area as the west side as long as Shoal lakes in the east side also has water and fish habitat to deal with. Upgrading this to an all-weather provincial standard would be cost-prohibitive and, again, I think I referred to some of the other issues last time.

UHF and CIF cost share programs: we do have a list of approved projects. We continue to work with local governments and businesses on adding projects under this program. In terms of Oakbank the issue—206—it was identified that Cedar Avenue is an issue. There are reports of incidents where drivers use the right shoulder to pass vehicles that have stopped at the traffic light waiting to turn left at the intersection. Cedar Avenue is controlled with traffic lights and crossing guards during school hours. It does also have pass—turn indicators as part of the traffic signals. Unless there are drivers or pedestrians proceeding against signal indications, there should not be a conflict even if impatient drivers pass illegally on the shoulder. We have been working with local RCMP and RM to identify possible solutions. We're aware that there—that this is a problem at other intersections in Oakbank including at Willow Avenue. Willow Avenue has a lit pedestrian corridor with pavement markings. However, we've had reports of impatient drivers illegally passing on the shoulders. As a result, MIT has recently installed regulatory do not travel on paved

shoulder signs in both directions as a reminder of the law. Earlier this spring, the RM did an article for the local paper, which is the Clipper, explaining the law and the enforcement efforts. The RCMP have stepped up enforcement as well. In the go-forward, MIT will continue to work with the RM and RCMP. We will look at more permanent pavement materials in the crosswalks. Given the existing volume, the existing painting lines can fade fairly quickly, so we're going to address that. This all can be an issue in court because HA specifies there needs to be overhead signs or road markings. Therefore, the solution that we're looking at in the short run is, obviously, better visual awareness.

The question also came up, page 75 and the Emerson border. The next open house is in September. And I have a list of UHF projects which—maybe what—I'll just read it quickly in summary, and I don't know if it's possible, perhaps, if I have leave to add the detailed list in the interest of time here. But terms of funding partners we have the Red River Ex, Falcon West Estates, City of Steinbach which has several projects, Shindico properties, RM of Franklin, RM of Springfield, City of Selkirk; we've got Morden, the RM of Lorne, RM of Morris, City of Portage la Prairie, RM of Lorne again, Sand Hills Casino, City of Brandon, Village of Binscarth, Town of Melita, RM of Eriksdale and there's also Manitoba Hydro—that's actually 280. So total \$25 million for 22 projects plus the \$28 million of 'crosst' sharing with Hydro on 280 and \$60 million proposed for the Daly street bridge which we dealt with in committee.

So, rather than read the detailed amounts, if I could ask for leave of the committee, we could attach that to the Hansard.

And now I'm just going to run through some more information, if that's okay. My apologies to the member for Lac du Bonnet, but I don't want to hold up progress for—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

We have a choice to make on this report from the minister. We can either have it given only to the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), or, by unanimous agreement, we can have it included in Hansard. And it's a list of UHF projects that was asked for by the member.

An Honourable Member: Put it in Hansard.

Mr. Chairperson: The member wishes it to be in Hansard. Do we all agree? *[Agreed]*

List of UHF projects

Region	Funding Partner	Hwy	Project Description	Total Estimated Project Cost	Project Status	CIF/UHF
1	Red River Ex	1	Intersection Improvements at Camp Manitou Road and Race Track Road	\$1,000,000	Completed	CIF
1	Falcon West Estates	1	Intersection Improvements at Falcon West Estates (Turning Lanes)	\$522,000	Approved	CIF
1	City of Steinbach	12	Intersection Improvements at PTH 12 and Park Road	\$1,000,000	Approved	UHF
1	City of Steinbach	12	Intersection Improvements at PTH 12 and Madison S. Bound Left Turn Lane	\$3,000,000	Approved	UHF
1	City of Steinbach	12	Millwork Intersection Improvements	\$400,000	Approved	UHF
1	City of Steinbach	12	Intersection Improvements at PTH 12, Acres Dr/Penfeld Dr. (signalized intersection)	\$2,500,000	Approved	UHF
1	Shinkle Properties	12	Intersection Improvements at North City of Steinbach limits	\$1,992,000	Approved	CIF
1	City of Steinbach	52	Reconstruction in Steinbach: PTH 12 (Brandt St.) - Kroeker Ave. (various locations)	\$530,000	Approved	UHF
1	RM of Franklin	200	Paving PR 200 by Dominion City	\$900,000	Approved	UHF
1	RM of Springfield	206	Intersection Improvements at PR 206 and Springfield Road	\$1,200,000	Approved	UHF
1	City of Selkirk	9A	Design of PTH 9A - Manitoba Avenue from Main Street to Easton Drive	\$375,000	Approved	UHF
2	City of Morden	3	Drainage Improvements along PTH 3 at Victoria Street	\$50,000	Approved	UHF
2	RM of Lorne	34	Intersection Improvements at Road 35N and PTH 34	\$100,000	Completed	UHF
2	RM of Morris	205	Paving of shoulder for 1 km. along PR 205 through the community of Rosenort	\$150,000	Completed	UHF
2	City of Portage la Prairie	240	Paving on PR 240 from Queen Avenue to Crescent Road	\$127,000	Completed	UHF
2	RM of Lorne	245	Intersection Improvements at Road 43W and PR 245	\$100,000	Approved	UHF
2	RM of Morris	330	AST (Includes grading and base)	\$4,300,000	Approved	CIF
3	Sand Hills Casino	5	Intersection Improvements on PTH 5 at the Sand Hills Casino access	\$364,000	Completed	CIF
3	City of Brandon	10	Daly Bridge	\$60,000,000	3 Partner Cost-Share - Approved by MIT, Awaiting Federal Approval	UHF
3	Village of Binscarth	608	Paving of Russell Street from Highway 16 to 1st Avenue.	\$210,000	Completed	UHF
3	City of Brandon	610	Intersection Improvements at PR 610 and Richmond Avenue/17th Street East	\$3,500,000	Completed other than some CN related work.	UHF
3	Town of Melita	644	Bituminous overlay on Main Street between Front Street and Summit Street	\$462,000	Completed	UHF
4	RM of Eriksdale	417	Paved shoulder at the access connection of PR 417	\$63,000	Approved	UHF
5	Manitoba Hydro	280	Upgrading	\$28,000,000	Work Ongoing	CIF

24 - ± \$25M ≈ 22 projects
 PLUS → \$28M for Hydro @ PR 280
 → \$60M proposed for Daly St. Bridge

These two are included in the 24 in the table

Mr. Ashton: And I have answers to 11 more questions here. So it's been a very busy committee here.

(1) Staff who took leave during the leadership campaign: Darryl Livingstone and Donna Kildaw for portions of that.

(2) Number of staff currently employed with MIT: As of March 31st, 2014, 1,914 employees, and that included Accommodation Services and Procurement which, of course, is in transition to Minister of Finance.

Technical appointments: Chris Pawley, Strategic Initiatives manager; and Darryl Livingstone's the special assistant.

Positions reclassified: 92 positions increased, and classification of 77 positions reduced in classification. In total, 464 were reviewed and unchanged.

Vacancy rate—and this is the staffing vacancy rate—vacancy rate of April 17, 2015, was 13.52 per cent or 185.05 FTEs. The vacancy rate on April 18th, 2014, was 13.55 per cent or 183.55 FTEs, a reduction of only half FTEs, so, very consistent.

Sole-source contracts over \$25,000: There were 14 such contracts 2014-15.

Positions moved from Brandon or Thompson to Winnipeg: We're not aware of any in the department.

Number of retirements: In 2014-15, 91.

Number of retirees rehired by MIT: 18 were rehired in 2014-15; 13 retired civil servants were currently employed in MIT.

The question was asked, the list of flights taken by MLAs and ministers on government planes over the past year: July 1st, 2014, and at that time it was the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and Minister of Agriculture; August 1st, 2014, the Premier; September 18, 2014, the Premier and Minister of Education; December 11th, the Premier; January 20th the Premier; March the 4th, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), the minister of Municipal Affairs; March 20th, the Premier.

In terms of ministers' out-of-province travel, which, by the way, is available online, but—and we could put on the record here: April 3rd, 2014, I attended the Hudson Bay Route Association annual convention in Nipawin, Saskatchewan. Total cost was \$1,283.05.

October 1st, 2014, I attended the federal-provincial-territorial council of ministers' meeting that was held in Montreal. Total cost was \$1,423.19.

And October 20th, 2014, attended the board of directors meetings of WESTAC, that's the Western Transportation Advisory Council, and, actually, they have a fall conference as well. The total cost of that was \$630.26. And I think that's it.

And on the bridge: We've evaluated the entire bridge in terms of replacing girders, bridge deck, the railing and the sidewalk. Piers are in good shape. The preliminary design is under way. Environmental approvals are required. A detailed design will be taking place through to next year with construction to follow. If we do get positive response to environmental approvals, construction may begin late this year. So, again, that's the question mark. And time frame for construction is two years.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister, for the answer once we got there.

But—so you're saying that all the piers have now passed and to proceed with construction is fine. The construction was supposed to start in the fall or late fall of this coming—of 2015. So we're on track for that?

* (15:50)

Mr. Ashton: We're on track. Again, the only question mark at this point is really the environmental approvals, but that's our intention, yes.

Mr. Ewasko: So, then, the minister says that you're in with—you're in the design portion of the bridge, or we've got it designed already and we're just going to have to go to tender for that?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's down to the stage of detailed design. Obviously, you have, like, the broader design. This gets down to the final stage which is detailed design.

So, given that again and given the other time frames and the importance of the bridge, our goal was to finalize the detailed design, get the approvals and get it under construction. And this year remains the target, yes.

Mr. Ewasko: What type of environmental issues do we foresee happening with this, considering there's an existing bridge there already?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I mean, the reality is whenever you're dealing with any project of this type, you

pretty well have to go through the design issues and then the environmental approvals based on that even though—I know, I've asked the same question myself in the past. You know, existing bridge—why would you need to do that? But we're going to be modifying the piers. We'll have a wider deck and a sidewalk. So, you know, there are differences in design. We're not anticipating any significant difficulties on the environmental side, but it is a step we have to go through, and we are working on it to make sure that we can pass any of the environmental scrutiny and then move on to construction because it certainly is a high priority for the region.

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

To move on, on the same topic, tough, with the 313 bridge, the initial estimate for the reconstruction of the—to put the new deck on top of the existing piers were 20 to 30 million dollars. I know that we have not gone to the stage of tendering it out yet, but does the minister see that that number is going to be off at all?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's still the number we're looking at. Again, the member's quite correct. I mean, you don't know until you actually get the tender and the exact contract. But—I hate to say it, but we do have fairly significant experience with bridges the last number of years, a lot of cases because of flood-related issues, also the overall challenge of rebuilding and, you know, in some cases, totally, you know, reconstructing bridges. It's an increasing part of what we do in the system, and so we do have some significant experience both with the design side but also the actual cost element. So that's still the working number, yes.

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

The timeline for the bridge to be totally closed, I know that was—there's, of course, as with any other project or pretty much anything that happens within government or anything within local communities there's always these myths and things that are floating around—rumours. So can the minister put on record just roughly how much of a timeline are we looking at for the bridge to be totally closed within the construction time period?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the process we're going to follow is what we do with other similar projects where we can, which is to keep on lane open so it won't involve a total closure. And, again, the time frame of the

construction will be two years. So it'll minimize the disruption and the end result will be a significant new, you know, re-investment in that bridge that will—I'll maybe check the design, if we're talking 60-, 70-year, you know, life cycle, probably, in terms of that. So it will not involve a major inconvenience for the public. Some—you know, some impact, obviously, going to one lane, but we recognize it's an important artery and we're going to manage the traffic to keep it open.

Mr. Ewasko: The 211 bridge, I just noticed on—we have a printout of the detailed listing of major provincial road, highway and bridge projects which was printed off, I guess, or was tabled—or not tabled but released to the public fall of 2014. And I notice that the 211 bridge is actually on that list.

And I'm wondering, if it's been completed, why it's still on there, or is this just a list of projects that have been started and completed within a certain amount of time frame? Because there's a \$4.7-million tag to the 211 bridge. It says structure rehabilitation at the Winnipeg River west of Pinawa.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'm not sure what list the member's reading from, but what year is he referring to?

Mr. Ewasko: It's the annual core infrastructure report.

Mr. Ashton: And actually the answer is it's completed. The annual report, really, would reflect, you know, past work. It wouldn't necessarily provide, you know, a reflection of the fact it was kind of—but it is—it has been done and it's completed.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister. Yes, I'm aware that the bridge has been completed. I was just wondering if there was something else that was going to be coming up.

So the minister is saying that that 211 bridge took, you know, roughly three years to complete, cost \$4.7 million in total?

Mr. Ashton: That was the expenditure in that fiscal year. I would have to double-check other, you know, other costs outside of that fiscal year, but that was the actual number for that year. So I can get that detailed information, either for Estimates when we continue sitting or we'll find some way to perhaps—perhaps through the critic—yes, I—because I think—I'm advised the total cost, again, subject to verification, was between 10 and 11, so that only referred to the

one fiscal year. The total cost would be, you know, nearly twice the amount, 10 to 11.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Honourable Minister, for agreeing to get me that information. Yes, if I can get the total cost of the bridge at 211 from start to finish, would be greatly appreciated, so thank you for that.

The No. 11 Highway from just east of Sagkeeng First Nation through the town of Powerview-Pine Falls, I see that there is an amount of money on the same list that I'd referenced to the minister just a few minutes ago. I'm just wondering if—when that construction is set to be started.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I can—again, we're working with the community of Powerview in terms of the details. I'm just tracking down the latest information on the scheduling. I can perhaps, maybe as a response to follow-up questions, put that on the record at that time.

I can actually jump in earlier than that. The plan is to start work next year.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, so I'm assuming the minister said next year?

Mr. Ashton: Next year, 2016.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, we're keeping the Chair busy here, that's good to see.

The Bachman Drain, I know that—which is a drain which is northeast of Beausejour in the RM of Brokenhead—I know that we've sent numerous letters over the last few years in regards to fixing up that—the bridge and also the drain in that area, and I'm just wondering where that is on the list of projects, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Ashton: I'll undertake to get a full update on that. Our staff person that was here previously who's responsible for that area isn't here today, but I'll make sure we get an answer, either by the next sitting or, if we're completed before that, in writing.

* (16:00)

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, thank you, Minister, and I guess I'll wait for that detailed answer.

The—back to that No. 11, since you mentioned that stretch of road that is going to be going through the town of Powerview-Pine Falls, so you're saying that that construction's going to start next year, and that's going to go from the tracks which is basically just east of Sagkeeng First Nation right through the

town of Powerview-Pine Falls, and that's going to go how far east-southeast past the town of Powerview-Pine Falls on No. 11?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it's just east of 304, I'm advised. I do know the project from sort of original iterations when I met with the communities in the area. I know it's—you know, it's a high priority. But I—what I suggest if the member wants a updated briefing, be more than happy to provide it through the department. If he could just contact my office we'll get him the latest information. As I said and I'll just re-iterate it, we're just in the final stages, but we're looking at going into construction next year.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister, and I will take him up on that offer and I will get together with his department to get some specifics.

Now, being the MLA for Lac du Bonnet, I often get many phone calls from constituents, you know, from Dawson Trail, from the constituency of Selkirk on some concerns that they've had—the constituents have had in regards to these various areas. And I guess the ministers and the MLAs for those areas have been preoccupied, so I do have a question in regards to Highway 501 which is just north of Ste. Anne.

There's been quite a few car accidents which have led to many, many injuries in the area, and I'm just wondering if there's any plans for safety measures being put into place on Highway 501 where it crosses Highway 12 south, just north of Ste. Anne.

Mr. Ashton: Well, certainly, we have been busy in the Dawson Trail constituency, 59 south which was raised earlier. It was our government that fully upgraded south of the Perimeter Highway for the first time for a major project. We've done significant work, as well, on the Trans-Canada east of Winnipeg. I could run through numerous projects that we're run through and, actually, the MLA for the area for many years was able to deliver extensively directly as minister of Highways. So we have been preoccupied with significant work in that constituency—quite frankly, in the region as well. I wouldn't underestimate the degree to which we've made significant investments all throughout that region, reflecting the growth that was referenced earlier by the member from Emerson and also the degree to which we're committed to meeting that.

So, in terms of the specific, I can—question—I can undertake to respond directly in terms of that. Again,

I'm—we can track down the detailed information, and I'll undertake to respond as soon as we get it either in committee or when we're—if we're out of committee, in writing.

Mr. Ewasko: I would also like on top of that No. 501 information that crosses No. 12, if the minister can get his department to check to see how many accidents there has been at that corner within the last 10 years as well, please.

Mr. Ashton: I'll undertake to do that as well.

Mr. Ewasko: I thank the minister for checking into that. I'm just going to have to ask for some sort of timeline when I could expect to see that information back.

Mr. Ashton: Well, as I indicated before, what I've tried to do as minister is when I receive questions or other detail that would require some follow up to track information down and read them onto—read it onto the record where it's available at the next committee meeting and, where we do run into a situation if there are questions raised and the committee has completed its business in terms of this department, respond in writing to the critic. So, in this particular case, I'll follow the same procedure. We continue to sit at a later date, then I will put it on the record at that time and, if not, we'll make sure we respond in writing to the opposition critic.

Mr. Ewasko: The 520 is located between provincial Highway 211 and 313, basically in between the two bridges that we've been talking about today. It is—on your infrastructure spending and upgrading I see that there's a list or an amount put of \$200,000, which is for grading and gravelling.

I just want to know if there is any plans, or if the 520 is on the books for getting upgraded to either asphalt or, you know, highway standards due to the number of people who are—live inside or from elsewhere and using that area as a seasonal home because the route for cottage country to the nearest hospital, which is located in Pinawa, the ambulance or the emergency vehicles, whether that being fire or, like I said, the EMS would have to travel that 520. And more times than not, the road itself is at a quite a questionable route and I think the EMS providers and fire paramedics as well have to travel a greater distance around. So I'm just wondering if there is some plans in the near future for the 520 to be upgraded.

Mr. Ashton: What the member's referring to are spot-road improvements, which probably we've

identified are appropriate, and we'll continue to look at other spot-road improvements as well as we do with other highways in a similar circumstance, both in the member's constituency and elsewhere in the province.

Mr. Ewasko: So, the 520, then, minister, is not on the radar right now for improvements?

Mr. Ashton: We're doing spot-road improvements as we are, you know, other similar highways. That's reflective in the budget, and that continues to be a priority for the department. You know, we do look at spot-road improvements, both on the—on 520 but also elsewhere throughout the province where necessary and, again, there's a specific budget that's been put in place for that.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Good afternoon, Minister. Just want to seek some information about several projects in the Morris constituency.

So, the community of Rosenort is quite a economic hub relative to its size, in terms of economic output. The questions put to me is the—and that I would extend to you—is whether or not there's any plans in terms of upgrading 422 between highways 205 and 23. It's currently a gravel road. Obviously, there's weight restrictions on that road during spring times and that. There is, obviously, individuals within the community, especially the business sector would like to see that road paved. I'm not sure if it's on the department's radar or not.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, nothing in the program. I'm familiar with the road. I have been on it and certainly is—things evolve in the area, you know. We do reassess needs on the highway system as we proceed. You know, this has been, you know, some significant growth in various areas, including, you know, activity it's impacting in terms of that. Again, it's not in the capital plan currently but we certainly wouldn't preclude it from consideration in the future.

Mr. Martin: I believe in the capital plan, and the minister can advise me as to when the timing of it is, but 330 between the—where the boundary of the RM of Morris starts, south to Rosenort, I believe, is to be scheduled later this fall, I understand, for upgrading and paving.

Can the minister confirm the timing of that project?

* (16:10)

Mr. Ashton: Yes, at St. Mary's for any of this, for the cost shared. You know, we just released the list

about half an hour ago, and basically subject to contractor availability we're scheduled to go this summer.

Mr. Martin: Is—does the project—do the—sorry. Does the improvements at 330 extend down past—sorry—south of Rosenort straight through where it connects to 75, or is it just that portion between essentially Rosenort and where the RM of Morris boundary is?

Mr. Ashton: Currently it's from 205 to eight kilometres north of 205.

Mr. Martin: The department late last year, I think around Christmas time, turned on the lights at 330 and the Perimeter, though I do understand actually the long-term plan or the original plan was to merge the 330 intersection with the Brady landfill intersection, merge them into a singular lighted intersection partly. And, I mean, obviously the traffic flow going into La Salle has increased considerably in the time that I've lived there and, then, obviously the heavy trucks going into Brady could use some additional safety measures. There was that tragic accident a few years ago involving those young men crossing in a pickup truck. So I'm just wondering if that's still part of the plan.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, the member's quite correct, we—there's really two stages. We're dealing with some of the impacts in the short term on the Perimeter in a number of ways. One is what the member has referred to. Also we're moving to a significant upgrade on the southwest Perimeter—southeast Perimeter as well, by the way, in terms of, you know, some significant surfacing work that's been done. And it does reflect the significant growth in traffic in the area. We are particularly cognizant of the fact that when you do upgrade to current highway standards there are impacts in terms of access. So that's something, you know, I want to identify in advance. But, you know, a road that was built in the 1950s with different traffic flows, you know, is very much in a different situation than the needs in 2015-2016 and beyond. And, of course, with CentrePort, the southwest Perimeter is a key part of connecting into CentrePort which, of course, has now the separate Canada Way. Well, over the next few years we'll have the Headingley bypass and we are looking at some interim measures. But, again, there's a significant upgrade to the Perimeter that we believe will improve not only the traffic flow, but also safety because there are very high traffic flows that are only increasing. And, again, that's a

reflection of a lot of the growth south of Winnipeg as well as in Winnipeg itself.

Mr. Martin: Sorry, I'm just looking for some clarity, then. Is the current lighted intersection at 330 and Perimeter, is that a temporary measure that will be removed when the—when 330 and Brady are essentially merged together as a single access point off the Perimeter and, if so, what is the time frame of that?

Mr. Ashton: It is interim, yes.

An Honourable Member: And the second part?

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Morris.

An Honourable Member: I can get the member a—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Ashton: Sorry—the full briefing of the current timetable. I'd have to get an update in terms of the current plan, but this—I want to stress again, it is interim and he's—the member's identified the degree to which it will only be in place 'til we have the major capital upgrade that's involved. So I can get the exact time—current time frame.

Mr. Martin: And one last question about the 330-Brady situation. Are there plans to put in a temporary lighting intersection at Brady and Perimeter until such time that the blended or merged intersection is created?

Mr. Ashton: Not at this point in time, no.

Mr. Martin: Moving along to the eastern part of my constituency, 59 and 311, Minister, right by Niverville, last few days there was another accident at that intersection. Earlier, I think it was in February, there was quite a potentially tragic accident and luckily some bystanders were nearby and were able to pull the individual from the burning wreckage. So I'm just trying to get clarification from the minister as to the status of upgrades on 59 and 311 that were—that have been referenced on a number of occasions but haven't occurred yet.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, and as I referenced earlier, the traffic signals will be put in place this summer. I put that, for his answer, actually, just previously.

Mr. Martin: Are there any plans for any other additional safety enhancements or improvements to that intersection?

Mr. Ashton: I can double-check, but that's a pretty significant enhancement. You know, it reflects the traffic flows which are significant on both aspects of

the intersection, so it will have a significant impact and reflects, again, the growing traffic in the area. So I'll check if there's any further work, but certainly that's pretty significant.

Mr. Martin: Sorry, I just want to—just the—seeking the member's—or minister's clarification in terms of the time frame for installation, what's the goal, I guess?

Mr. Ashton: This summer, and I'm assuming it's—I hear it's 28° out there, so this sounds like summer, so we're finally into it. So, over the next few months. Again, you've got contractor availabilities, you know, as well, but, yes, the goal is this summer.

Mr. Martin: A couple questions related to the Oak Bluff area, Mr. Minister. Highway No. 3 and the Perimeter, which—sort of McGillivray area, obviously, there's a significant amount of traffic through that area. I believe I've seen plans for the creation of a major—for an overpass and some major improvements to that area. I just want confirmation if that that's still on the books and what is planned and if there's a time frame attached to that.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there's various phases to the upgrade to that area. As I referenced earlier, the—it improves the surface and traffic management, or part of it, some work on the bridge over—the Roblin Boulevard bridge, if you want to describe it as that. And the member's quite correct; that's a future phase in terms of the improvements. In total, there's going to be a major upgrade to the southwest Perimeter. It reflects not only immediate traffic but the trends which are pretty significant.

Mr. Martin: Specific to the intersection of No. 3 and the Perimeter, what are the plans specific to that intersection and what is the time frame for that, those improvements?

Mr. Ashton: That is a future phase, so it's been identified, and that's a future phase for upgrade.

Mr. Martin: And then just slightly west of that, another intersection that comes up a lot in conversation from residents is the corner of No. 2 and No. 3. And I'm wondering if there's any plans for enhancements in terms of safety to that, whether it's changes to speed limits, whether it's any other kind of safety enhancements. It's an area that comes up quite a bit.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, we are looking at upgrades at the same time that we'd be working on the interchange.

So that's definitely been recognized as an issue and will be part of the plan in the go-forward.

Mr. Martin: Can the minister be more specific than the general term upgrades?

Mr. Ashton: We're looking at the various options, but it's been identified as an issue. And, again, partly it's going to be scoped under the broader projects, so it definitely is something that the department is not only aware of but is looking at options.

* (16:20)

Mr. Martin: And lastly, the minister was out with the Premier (Mr. Selinger), I believe, out in November for another announcement related to the—similar improvements of 75 and flood proofing, and I apologize if you've already covered this off, but I'm just looking for a time frame because I know it was supposed to be a phased-in approach, a five-year plan specific to the raising of two bridges as well as sections of 75. Specific to the status of the raising of the two bridges that have been referenced.

Mr. Ashton: We have a further open house coming up. The member's correct in terms of some of the details. I have dealt with a lot of it before, so without repeating some of the information that was already on the record; yes, it's in the five-year plan. We've done a lot of work on the hydrological side, and we've identified the situation, you know, in terms of the go forward, and our plan is to move ahead. It is a major priority for us, and I can assure the member that we're engaged right now in moving it from the detail design to construction. That really is the next phase. So there's been extensive consultation, which, I think, is valuable. But we are moving ahead with this. In fact, as I said, there's another open house coming up. I'm sure it will be in the public domain, but we can make sure the member's aware of it.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Thank you to the minister and his staff for the information put on the record for the questions that were asked in previous Estimates meetings. And, just to follow up on some of those answers, we did talk about the city of Brandon, the Daly street overpass, and I see that it's got a cost estimate of some \$60 million, and that's sort of been what's bantered about in the media the last couple of years as a three-part cost-sharing arrangement. And would the—could the minister tell me again why this provincial structure is seen as a municipal, federal and provincial cost sharing as opposed to a provincial responsibility for—with some federal funding?

Mr. Ashton: Brandon initiated the request. It provides an effective alternative, cost-wise, to the kind of work that Brandon would be looking at doing itself. And we certainly have engaged with both the federal government and the city. We think it makes sense, and, again, it reflects—without repeating myself from the other committee hearing—the challenges and opportunities in terms of the upgrading. So the request came from the City of Brandon and it really is a win-win for Brandon and it results in a better asset at cost of *[inaudible]*

Mr. Helwer: Is there formal communication from the City of Brandon? The councillors are—cannot recall ever passing a motion to that regard.

Mr. Ashton: The former council did.

Mr. Helwer: Well, that was my communication from councillors that had been on the former council, and they can't recall doing it, so I'll have to jog their memories, then. Are there similar projects that have taken place in Winnipeg on a three-tiered type of structure?

Mr. Ashton: Winnipeg is different because 100 per cent of roads are the responsibility of the City of Winnipeg. There is, you know, obviously, the cost sharing through the general transfers, but inside the city of Winnipeg, 100 per cent of the asset is the responsibility of the City of Winnipeg. So unlike, say, Brandon or my own community in Thompson, where, you know, major highways—in my case, you know, Highway 6—are a you know, significant artery for the community itself, you know, which is under provincial jurisdiction, in Winnipeg, it's a very different scenario, so any of the bridge upgrades here—it's a city asset. I'm talking about here in the city of Winnipeg. It's a city asset. And the Province has cost shared in a number of cases through infrastructure funding or in terms of general transfers, and I'm advised the request from the City of Brandon came in October, 2013, in writing to the department.

Mr. Helwer: So BRT funding for the city of Winnipeg, is it a similar program, then, or is that something that's totally separate, again, with the federal involvement at all and they—now the city is complaining, of course, and the Province, I guess, has talked about paying the interest on the last loan but not the loan. Perhaps the minister can tell us a bit about that situation.

Mr. Ashton: Although it's not directly under this department, I do have familiarity with the issue

having been the minister when we brought in the first BRT. It is a city asset. It's transit. What we did on the first leg of BRT is the federal government did have some funding, but it was \$18 million for infrastructure funding which could be put towards rapid transit. We were able to talk to city council and come up with a funding formula to recognize it is a city asset and that we would transfer it to the city funding to cover their costs. If you like, it's a city asset. They have whatever financing they've put in place including borrowing, and we've agreed to pay not only our portion, but it was actually a higher portion than one third at the time, because the federal funding was not, you know, fully one third.

It's a similar situation currently because the federal government's position is under the triple P infrastructure program which is restricted to 25 per cent funding from the federal government. Notwithstanding that, we made the same offer and it's very equivalent to what we do in our provincial highway system. We have part B capital. We have to make the payments on that. You know, it's just like a mortgage, if you like, or a business loan, for an asset. And in this case, you know, we've indicated our willingness to support this and future legs of rapid transit by very much reflecting that. And you know, the equivalent you'll run into is even with grant—you know—programs for infrastructure, it—if it's investment on the highway system we're still responsible for the full cost, you know, the maintenance over time, the finance, you know, in the go-forward. So there—you receive a transfer from other levels of government on an annual basis or in terms of direct capital, It does reflect the fact—it—you know, it's our asset. I'm talking about the provincial highway system.

In the case of BRT it's, obviously, a city asset. You know, we couldn't include it on our accounting. It's not our asset. So we can't amortize it.

So, yes, that's the position we've taken forward and it worked to get the first portion done. We think it can work to get the remaining portion done, as well.

Mr. Helwer: So does the Province have any guidance on the direction of the project in terms of where it goes, or is that just left up to the City? Is there any environmental ramifications of applications or is it all city responsibility?

Mr. Ashton: Again, not being directly responsible for it, I can—in a general sense, it is the City that's responsible for what to build, where to build, deal

with any and all issues. And, of course, the route's gone through several iterations the last few years. Rapid transit Winnipeg has gone through several changes, you know. It's important to note that we were there when Mayor Murray put forward the initial proposal for rapid transit. We've been—we were there to work with Mayor Katz in the first leg of current constructed rapid transit and we're there for the next stage. There's certainly every indication with Mayor Bowman and council that rapid transit is on his agenda and their agenda. So we're hoping to get some significant progress.

You know, in a general sense, given the growth in the city of Winnipeg, if there's not a significant move on rapid transit it will have impacts not only in terms of convenience—that's obviously something that's important—but on the growth of the city, because I'm sure the member's aware of what's happened to travel times, commute times, you know, Pembina Highway, St. Mary's, any of the major thoroughfares in Winnipeg. And rapid transit, to my mind, it's good because transit's good. It's an important area for us.

* (16:30)

We're proud of our record, by the way. We did increase, for the first time in many years put back 50 per cent of operating, cost sharing. So 50 per cent of the operating costs are funded by the Province in partnership with the City. That's huge. But there are huge potential benefits from, you know, from that. And the good news, by the way, is bus passenger counts are up dramatically over the last number of years. After decade-over-decade declines, they're increasing. So I think the City and Winnipeg Transit have shown that, you know, that they could make the difference, you know, there's—of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't point to transit in the member's constituency in Brandon, you know, in Thompson and Flin Flon, you know, which have had historic transit services and, of course, in Selkirk, currently.

So bottom line here is transit's good for everyone, including people that use the road system because if we don't deal with it soon—and I say we, collectively—Winnipeg's traffic system will slowly grind to a halt. That's one of the negative aspects of the growth. So we've been very supportive going back more than a decade, and we were there at the start, and talk of rapid transit; we will be there as it proceeds, and we're committed at the next leg, and we're committed to further expansion throughout the city.

Mr. Helwer: So moving up to Highway 59 interchange, there's been several announcements made over several years and more recently. Can the minister update us on where we are at that stage? Is the land acquisition completed? Is the design finished?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, 59 and the Perimeter is going to be under construction this year, and that's a huge achievement, by the way, and I want to really commend the department engineers who've been working on this, the MLAs from the area as well and certainly the Minister of Labour, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) have been very active and other MLAs, as well, have given input; the member of St. Paul's been quite involved in, you know, a lot of discussions. So it's going to be under way this summer, recognizing that it's a very significant priority. It is important for a number of reasons—obviously, traffic in the area. It's the busiest intersection in the provincial system.

We are now going through a final review of technical documents. So in the next two weeks we're going to have next stage through the process with the private sector firms that are putting in submissions; we're expecting that over the next two weeks, and we will have it under construction starting this fall.

Now, the other significant thing I should mention is it will fully integrate active transportation, and I think it's probably the first major project in Manitoba, certainly the first project of this magnitude that fully integrates active transportation and the more, you know, traditional automobile-trucking configurations. It's not inexpensive. Again, it's—we're able to do it because we do have the funding in our capital program. But the good news is after a lot of work and, quite frankly, some, you know, some real issues were identified early on. You know, we did listen to the public. Some of the early designs, I think, would have created some difficulties. We're now in a position to start the work. So I would say probably, if not late summer, early fall, it will be fully under construction.

Mr. Helwer: In some of the earlier discussions of that project, there was some comments made about it being a very complex project, and the minister's comments would reflect that. We've recently heard that the Plessis Road area is amongst the most complex projects that a particular engineer had dealt with. The Highway 59 interchange, I take it, will be complex but not as complex as the Plessis Road, or where would you put it on a range of scale there?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I'm sure the member's looking at the Chair here. I don't know if this was co-ordinated in advance with the Chair. I know the Chair has a distinct interest, both in 59 and the Perimeter, and the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), as well.

But, yes, Plessis Road—Plessis Road, I was minister, actually, when we made the commitment; you know, I was minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. I think it's very frustrating for people in the area to see the delays that taking place. Again, it's a City of Winnipeg project, so we don't have any direct control over that. I think there's some real concerns currently about the potential to lose infrastructure cost sharing at the federal level which, I think it would be very unfortunate. I know that project, I was there for the announcement, and it's an absolutely critical project.

And it's important to note, by the way, it's not atypical, the traffic challenges that are facing Winnipeg—elsewhere, not just Winnipeg—you know, similar issues in Brandon, which is you start with rail lines that, you know, perhaps had some limited impact on traffic over time but which end up with a significant growth, and in the—northeast Winnipeg, there's huge growth. It does mean Plessis Road is a priority.

So I can't speak specifically on the project, not being directly responsible for it, other than to indicate that I think there's certainly some legitimate frustrations with what's happened. I realize there are some complexities, you know, with utility issues and other issues, but I think the key thing there—quite frankly, I haven't been involved with this project from day one—is to make sure that the cost sharing is protected. And I do note, for the record, the Province was the first government to commit. We made our commitment clear; we made it clear that it would come from money that had been identified specifically, not a notional consideration.

Mr. Chair, 59 and the Perimeter, we're—we don't have the complication with the feds to the same degree. We've identified in our capital budget the \$200-million-plus cost. It's a very significant project. It's a full cloverleaf intersection, and that certainly reflects the feedback from the area.

And that, you know, I think it's important to note that both the highways are significant in terms of traffic flow. And you've got not only traffic flows that we're managing here, but, as I mentioned, the reason we put forward a ground-level, active-

transportation corridor is for two reasons: one is active transportation is very important in that area. It's a priority to people in that quadrant and it's also part of our provincial priorities. But there's another side to it as well, and that is if we reversed it and put ground level for the highway, the bridge would have to be, you know, very high to deal with some of the specific traffic needs we have, for example, and they're—reflect the need to deal with, you know, RTMs, you know, houses, you have to have the clearance. So that's why the design has been moved to a ground-level corridor with essentially the traffic going over and above.

I can tell you it's not the only thing we're doing in that quadrant. There's a lot of planned—we're looking at a lot of impacts on traffic. I think some of the most significant growth in Manitoba is in northeast Winnipeg and in the surrounding municipalities, so what we're looking at now is something that really is going to be a legacy project for probably 60, 70 years to come.

So, yes, the—I guess the summary is not good news on the Plessis Road. That is not a project that we do control directly. We'll certainly continue to be committed to it, but on 59 and the Perimeter, good news: under construction this fall.

Mr. Helwer: In one of the early Estimates sessions here, we were talking about the Province purchasing oil for the use in projects and asphalt, and just to expand a little more on that, if the minister could, in terms of how that purchase goes about. Is it something that's tendered annually? Is it a long-term contract? What type of suppliers and volumes are engaged in that?

Mr. Ashton: We tender it contract by contract. So it is tendered.

Mr. Helwer: So this is not something that the Province gathers together all their anticipated contracts and does a bulk purchase for the year in order of, you know, the benefits of size, that type of thing?

* (16:40)

Mr. Ashton: The approach we follow is to time as close as possible to the start time of the project because then it minimizes risk. I mean, there are significant fluctuations over time—and we've certainly seen it in recent months—on the price of oil. So what it does is it minimizes risk. The further out you get from—you know, from a tender in terms of the actual construction, the more that those are—you

know, that bidding will put in a factor for their own risk, and, certainly, we feel that the end result is a competitive price. And I mentioned this earlier, quite frankly, one of the success stories here as we've increased our capital program, probably about 45 per cent, in fact, maybe more—haven't got the final numbers in—year over year is we've done it without impacts on our, you know, competitive contract prices. We're getting very competitive prices and I think that's largely because we've been at work with the construction sector to get out early contracts, to manage them throughout the year, to give them our long-term plan so they're able to plan ahead. And we look at—as I indicated last week, that we look at the second biggest year in terms of asphalt, for example, this past year.

You know, that really speaks to the degree to which the system is working, and I really want to commend our staff, our engineers—can't leave the accountants out either. They play a key role. But we've been able to get pretty competitive tenders all the way through the system, and I do think—and this is—I don't mean this as a—you know, strictly a political comment, right, but I—you know, when I talk about the Manitoba model, I do think you'll see evidence of that, for example, with the city, and it may have something to do with the current CAO being the former deputy minister. But I think you're going to see the city follow similar processes with the construction industry, which I think is, you know, is wise.

I mean, we can always learn lessons; we continue to learn lessons, you know, from other jurisdictions as well. But we run a pretty tight ship in MIT and I'm, quite frankly, really proud of the degree to which the department has been able to step up all the way through, and that includes, by the way, not just on the highways side but on the flood mitigation, you know, drainage side and the accommodation service side, which, of course, we're no longer to be responsible for. But, basically, it's been critical—and, by the way, we have done a study and it showed that our asphalt prices are second lowest in Canada. So we don't just rely on it works, seems to work, we're sticking with it, we do analyze with it from time to time, and our approach is giving us competitive prices and the product we need.

Mr. Helwer: Has the Province ever used the futures markets to manage the risk?

Mr. Ashton: Not on asphalt.

Mr. Helwer: So not on asphalt, but on what?

Mr. Ashton: We—no, we don't deal in that. We are, basically, not just in asphalt, but generally. Like, other products are less subject to world market fluctuations, for example, gravel costs. You know, aggregate—we know where the supply is. We know what the cost is, you know, and the contractors know that as well. You know, so it's less of an issue. Really, the only major project or major material we'd be using would be asphalt. We don't use a lot of concrete, for example. So, again, we're not subject to, sort of, the world fluctuations. And, you know, again, the fact that we've had the second highest—or, pardon me—the second lowest asphalt costs when we had the second best season ever in terms of actual asphalt shows that we're paving a lot and we're getting good prices at the same time which is a good sign that our tendering and fiscal management policies in the department are working.

Mr. Helwer: There's recently been some concerns expressed about wildlife's impact on infrastructure projects—core infrastructure—and borrowing—burrowing owls in particular were the one species that was brought up. Has this particular owl been discovered adjacent to planned infrastructure projects in Manitoba recently, and has it delayed any of our projects?

Mr. Ashton: I must admit this is the first I've heard of this, and I'm advised here the answer is no. But I'm intrigued as to how an owl could have a significant impact on our infrastructure. So appreciate any further information here. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Brandon West.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My understanding is, of course, they are burrowing owls and they are a protected species. So they do tend to burrow to create their nests and other things, and roadbeds, ditches, sides of roads are some of those targets. So that was one of the concerns that I heard about in my travels, that this particular project wasn't moving ahead because burrowing owls had been discovered, so it was put on hold until they could hatch and move along, but if the minister is not aware of it, that's perhaps an urban legend then.

Mr. Ashton: Or maybe a rural one.

Mr. Helwer: They'll be happy to know that anyway. That's not a region—reason why a project might be delayed, and this project isn't the one I heard about. The No. 21 Highway was removed from tender and

then reissued, and I understand there's been a few changes in that particular RFP.

Could the minister tell us what some of those changes might be? Fairly minor, I believe, but—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Ashton: Which part of 21?

Mr. Helwer: I believe it was No. 21, south of No. 1 Highway towards Souris. I believe in that area there is what I was told about, but it might be even further south—southern portion.

Mr. Ashton: I'll undertake to follow up, get some details on that.

Mr. Helwer: Brought to my attention again on the weekend, as I was in Brandon, was the lovely lights we have on the Thompson Bridge, nice bison that's in the—etched in the metal there, and wondering when the lights would actually come on, as opposed to the street lights, but perhaps the minister could inform me, so I can answer some of those questions that I'm getting.

Mr. Ashton: I'll make sure we get the latest updated information. I will—no pun intended here—I will try and shed some light on the question.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you to the minister. The STARS helicopter has been an issue, obviously, coming up, and the helicopter itself—is that owned through MIT and maintained in this department?

Mr. Ashton: I'll confirm if we can get any role in all that. I'm not sure if we do. I believe it's contracted out. I'll just make sure that we don't have any secondary role. It's not part of government air, the main fleet. We do have air ambulance, the ambulance system again, you know, the Citation jet, and we do have, you know, limited profile of aircraft in the system. But I'll just make sure there's no other involvements in terms of that, and I'll undertake to respond probably next sitting of the committee.

Mr. Helwer: Thank you to the minister. During the NDP leadership campaign, the minister took a leave of absence, and the only candidate to do so, I think, from his own decisions, so I think that was probably a good step. But I didn't see a lot of discussion on infrastructure promises amongst the various candidates, but there was one made about the PST introduction was maybe done the wrong way, and that there should have been a referendum on it.

Does the minister continue to advocate for a referendum as he's back in caucus now?

Mr. Ashton: Well, I always, you know, have appreciated the attention of members opposite to the NDP leadership race. Of course, we actually had one, which they didn't, and after question period today I can kind of see why. But we had a healthy debate, and our party, as it does, makes—made a democratic decision and one that I do appreciate and I certainly appreciate the member's comment. I did step down during the leadership race, but I'm very excited to be back as MIT minister and be able to implement the infrastructure that we're building.

And, of course, there was never any disagreement at all from anyone, not just during the leadership debate but more broadly, on the fact we need the investment in infrastructure. And I think even as we go through the committee discussions, I appreciate that members opposite are asking questions about both our very healthy capital program and also areas where we could extend it.

So, you know, I do believe, you know, that the investment we've had, our five-year plan, is paying off. We're meeting our targets. I've said—I've already put on notice, too, we haven't got the final numbers—we'll probably be ahead of our target this year, you know, from what we said we would have last year, which is in excess of \$700 million, and I gave the detailed figures at the opening, \$700 million on roads and bridges alone in a single year, a significant increase year over year. When you consider the capital program, it will be probably 45 per cent or more higher year over year.

So in the bigger picture, I think it's very clear, if people do support investment in infrastructure, we're delivering. Obviously, we've had various debates, both in the House and, you know, in—within the NDP in terms of that, but the Legislature decided, you know, the party made a decision, and I'm very pleased to be in a position now to focus in on my No. 1 responsibility.

I've said this, and it's maybe a little bit political here, but I think we've been accused of being the get-'er-done party. I consider myself—one of my roles is to be the minister responsible for getting 'er done. And I think, increasingly—and this'll be—I don't like getting too political in Estimates, but I think people are going to have a choice between the shut-'er-down party, which the member opposite represents, and the get-'er-done party. I'd rather be on the get-'er-done side.

Mr. Helwer: Well, interesting comments from the minister. And I'm sure the 'comerian'—the minister

enjoys comedians. I do as well. But I think we do have to be cautious of the particular type of comedians that we follow that may have—portray a certain racist, sexist type of a portrayal in the character that they play, and perhaps that's not the type of character one might want to promote to the youth of Manitoba as a good role model. But I'll leave that up to the minister. If he—that's what he thinks is a good role model for the youth, and especially the women of Manitoba, then that's his right, I guess. But I think there's other role models out there we could use other than that particular character.

Now, moving into budgets, I guess, can the minister tell us what the current advertising budget is for the department in this Estimates process here?

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I'm somewhat confused here. I—the reference to the—get 'er done came, actually, from the member from Tuxedo. She actually put it on the record a while back. And I must admit, I did say we're guilty, we're the get-'er-done party.

So, in terms of role models, I think you couldn't have a better role model for young people than when you set about to build the economy of the province, invest in infrastructure, show that, you know, we've got great potential ahead. I—you know, I'm—I'll be the first one to say the investment in infrastructure is a huge part of our economic success story. We're going to have the best growth rate in Canada over the next couple years, and it really is because of things like hydro and investments in infrastructure.

And I realize members opposite have a different view, certainly on hydro. They've talked about shutting 'er down—that's actually a, I think, from the member from Lakeside, direct quote—before. But, yes, I do think the—you know, in terms of providing a good role model for people, I do believe that is absolutely critical.

And, in terms of advertising, I will undertake to get any and all advertising in the department. Obviously, there are, you know, various different things that are done, and of course we work through the requisite processes within government. We advertise tenders, job opportunities, et cetera, but not—we don't have specific advertising within the department outside of, you know, the many job opportunities and tenders. Again, actually, I must admit, we do have quite a few tenders we're advertising, but, again, that's because we're doing a lot of work.

Mr. Helwer: I believe the quote in question, in addition to the minister, came from the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and that was echoed perhaps from our side as a startling statement to come from the Premier, but I will turn it over to one of my colleagues to continue here.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I had a couple questions for the minister regarding infrastructure in my own constituency, in particular, Provincial Road 227. There's a bridge across the Portage Diversion. The bridge has been replaced since the flood of 2011 when it was destroyed. It has yet to have a topcoat put on it, making it extremely rough. I wondered if the minister could enlighten us as to when that might be completed.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, there was a coat put on last year. I'm advised there was some issues with it so we're going to be redoing it this year.

Mr. Wishart: So if I heard correctly, and I must apologize, I'm having a bit of a hearing issue, but—in the room today—you said, this year you would put a second coat on? Is that correct?

Mr. Ashton: That's the current plan of the department, yes.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

When that's completed, will there be any further work on Provincial Road 227 done? Especially west of the diversion—Portage Diversion, because most of the rest of the road has received an upgrade some time ago, but the remainder is in very poor condition.

Mr. Ashton: It is—yes, there's some focus on spot road improvements and recognize there are some more sections that we can improve.

Mr. Wishart: So there's no plan to do anything more than fix what's there, to the west of the Portage Diversion—between there and Highway 16?

Mr. Ashton: Nothing in the current highway capital program.

Mr. Wishart: I had a couple of other questions about the access to—on Highway 1A, on the west side of Portage la Prairie, an overpass that the minister, I think, is familiar with. It has been damaged now four-and-a-half years. I believe I have it right. I wonder if you could put some numbers around what would be done and when it'll be done.

Mr. Ashton: We're kind of looking at whether to replace that span or to put in new infrastructure, and it's not dissimilar of what we do elsewhere in the

system again, you know; see if we can rehabilitate, refurbish or if we have to reconstruct it. But it's certainly a priority right now for the department.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for that.

So, if it's a priority, will we expect something within a year or are we talking multiple years yet?

Mr. Ashton: The simple answer to that is it depends on what the preferred option is. If it's a replacement, you know, it's one thing. It would just take longer in terms of design. You also have, you know, other issues you have to deal with. If it's simply a refurbishment, it would be more imminent.

Mr. Wishart: So just to be clear than, Mr. Minister, after four-and-a-half years we're still evaluating? Is that what we're doing?

Mr. Ashton: I would describe it as actually doing full, you know, design—it's looking at design options. And it is, you know, obviously, we faced a lot of challenges throughout the system in terms of bridges over the last period of time because of flooding, et cetera. But, this is a priority and we are looking at which option to proceed with.

Mr. Wishart: Well, as the minister knows, we're down to one-lane access and it is not well marked. And I get frequent calls, and I'm sure your department gets frequent calls, from people that are coming into town from the west, because there are implement dealerships still located in there who have wide loads on, and cannot make it across the one lane that remains and have had to stop, back down into No. 1 Highway traffic, and go the other way around. What are we going to do to make this safer?

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

*(15:00)

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

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

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thanks, Madam Chair, and congratulations.

How frequently does the Province meet with Moody's bond-rating service?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I believe there's at least annual contact with them.

Madam Chairperson: I ask the honourable First Minister just to repeat the answer. I don't think we picked it up.

Mr. Selinger: I said I believe there's at least annual contact with them.

Mr. Pallister: When was the last meeting in the Premier's recollection?

Mr. Selinger: I believe officials met as recently as this budget cycle, this spring.

Mr. Pallister: So approximately when would that have been? Would it—was it before the budget was released or since the budget was released?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check, but I believe it's subsequent to the budget.

Mr. Pallister: And just—could the Premier (Mr. Selinger) just outline the nature of those discussions? How long does it take and what is sort of the agenda? Does the government agree on an agenda with Moody's or do they come in with an agenda, that they direct the discussion? How does the discussion actually take place and flow?

Mr. Selinger: Again, that was a meeting among officials, and I don't have the specifics of their agenda. I just know that I was informed that they had met.

Mr. Pallister: Well, who are the officials that meet with Moody's when they—does Moody's come here or do the officials go someplace else? How does that work?

Mr. Selinger: I believe it goes—they both come here, and on—we also go there. I believe officials—I have to check the facts on this. I'll get information for the member, but I understood if—but I stand to be corrected that they may have been here.

Mr. Pallister: I'd appreciate some clarification on that. So it can't be both, I guess, unless it was an alternate thing, you know, company comes over and then we go to their house next time or some such thing.

Where is Moody's physically located when the—does the Premier sometimes participate in the discussions?

Mr. Selinger: We, the minister of Finance and myself, met with the bond rating agencies in New York last spring—not this spring but the previous spring.

Mr. Pallister: So, after the budget of '14, the Premier and Finance minister went to New York to meet with the officials at Moody's, is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Yes. *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Madam Chair, I apologize for interrupting.

Thank you to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) for that clarification so—just so I can understand the process a little bit better.

So the—so, of course, these meetings take place, then, subsequent to the budget, and, of course, then Moody's asks questions about the budget in its discussions, is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Usually they review, yes, items like the budget, yes.

Mr. Pallister: So besides the budget documents, what other kinds of questions does Moody's ask about the financial situation of the government?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I wasn't at the meeting so I don't know what they've specifically discussed this time around. All I know is when we met with them, we gave them a portrait of how the Manitoba economy's doing and where we're going with the economy.

Mr. Pallister: So last year the Premier was part of the discussions, not this year, and last year gave Moody's an idea of where we're going. That would've included projections on our Crown corps?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I wasn't at the meeting this spring. We presented them the budget of last year and presumably we presented them the budget of this year.

Mr. Pallister: I'll just restate. I was asking about last year when the Premier was part of the discussions. Last year's discussions, was Moody's presented with the forecasts for the Crown corps last year when the Premier was part of the discussions last year?

Mr. Selinger: The Premier was presented with the information in the budget of last year. The bond rating agency was provided with the information in the budget last year.

Thank you.

Mr. Pallister: Well, what I was asking, though, because the Premier said he—in an earlier answer said that he gave them a picture of where we're going. I would assume that meant forecasts, so I'm asking did Moody's get forecasts of where the Crown corps were going last year at the discussions that the Premier was part of?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, we—they were presented with the entire budget. We didn't discuss it at that level of detail. We discussed the broader issues about where the Manitoba economy's going, what our future plans are, what's going on in Manitoba. It was at a higher level. We weren't getting down into the details of forecasts at that level of meeting that I was attending at. Officials may have discussed that at other—on occasions.

Mr. Pallister: So, okay—so the—I accept the Premier's answer, of course. The—but the budget documents last year did contain the forecast performance for the Crown corps as part of the summary that was provided, isn't that correct?

Mr. Selinger: The last year's budget had the information in it that included forecasts and it also included information about Crown corporations, yes.

Mr. Pallister: And this year doesn't contain the forecasts. So I'm curious as to what was the reasoning for that.

Mr. Selinger: I've put this on the record several times already. The member might recall that we said we wanted to focus on those things that were directly in the control of the government in terms of protecting core services and ensuring we were budgeting appropriately for core services.

Mr. Pallister: So the argument was that there was a concern that by putting in too much information that would reduce the ability to focus on the core services of government, I guess. Is that—is—am I right in interpreting it that way?

Mr. Selinger: No, I didn't say that. I said we provided information that allowed us to focus on the core budget and protecting services. The member will recall that in question period that all the information with respect to the Crowns is in front of the Public Utilities Board, specifically Hydro.

Mr. Pallister: That the information's not in the budget documents on the forecast, so the argument the Premier has made is that there is a desire by the government to focus on core services, and the way to do that is to leave out the information on the forecasts for the Crown corps. Is that not the argument that the Premier has been making?

Mr. Selinger: Again, what I've said is is that we're focusing on budgeting with respect to the core budget, which was what the original balanced budget legislation focused on, which is what the opposition demanded that we do, and we're considering returning to that approach. We're considering all options at the moment, but in this year's budget we put out information that we knew we had a reasonable prospect of certainty around that.

The information with respect to Hydro is presently in front of the Public Utilities Board, including future projections, as the member knows. And once the Public Utilities Board renders a decision on what they think an appropriate rate increase is, then we'll have a clearer idea of what the future forecast for Manitoba Hydro is.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I understand part of the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) argument: that until he knows what the Public Utilities Board's going to do in respect of their ruling on the rate increases, he may not have a full picture on the cash flow—whatever, the projections for Hydro. I agree that's a possibility, but that's always a possibility. I suppose applications can come at various times from the Crown corps on rate increases and so, I guess, the Premier says he wasn't—didn't drill down to the lower level discussions about projections last year when he was in New York, but he may know.

Moody's having been provided with the information on projections last year, would it not be logical to assume they would also want to have a look at what the government's projections were this year?

Mr. Selinger: I'm sure that they—any information they seek will be made available to them. As I said earlier, Hydro's integrated forecast is presently in front of the Public Utilities Board, and I believe it's on the website as well.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier was alluding to changing the balanced budget law and I know it's been changed numerous times. What—besides going to core exclusively, what other changes was he anticipating?

Mr. Selinger: No final decisions have been made. We do know that the courts have struck down portions of the existing balanced budget legislation. We do know that every jurisdiction in Canada that had balanced budget legislation had to change portions of it to deal with the recession '08-09. And many—most provinces are still dealing with coming back into fiscal balance and at the same time keeping their economies going and providing essential services to their citizens. So this is not a surprise.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has indicated that there are big challenges with fiscal imbalance with the provinces, that the federal government seems to have more resources to come back into balance than—but has restricted some of the resources available to provinces going forward. For example, the health-care transfer will be changing and being reduced, and there has been caps put on other transfers such as double hard caps put on other transfers such as equalizations. So the Parliamentary Budget Officer has indicated that there will be a challenge for the majority of provinces across the country with respect to how they come back into balance over time.

* (15:10)

And we also know that there's been quite a bit of commentary by international economic agencies such as the IMF and the OECD that have said that—be careful about austerity. Make sure you keep—find ways to grow your economy at a time of global economic fragility. We know that the first quarter results in the United States, as well as in Canada, have been less than was anticipated, and that that has created some challenges. But, in the midst of that, Manitoba's economy has been projected by the—most forecasters, all the forecasters that we're aware of, to be one of the better performing economies. But that's in a context of an overall slower recovery than was anticipated, not only in North America, but around the globe, as well, internationally.

Mr. Pallister: What are the current—I know there used to be penalties for failure to balance the books. Are there penalties in the legislation now?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the penalty that's been put in place was a 20 per cent reduction in Cabinet salaries, and that has been in place for—since the changes were made, I believe '09-10. I'd have to check the start date on that, but those penalties of a 20 per cent reduction have been in place consistently since that day.

Mr. Pallister: I know I'm asking the Premier for historical information here, and I appreciate him—his patience on this, but isn't that just—if it's not balanced over a four-year average? Am I correct in that? Or is it an annual thing?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to check the facts for the member on that.

Mr. Pallister: Madam Chair, when the government introduced the amendments, and I know there were several different—a variety of amendments over time—you may have that document, do you, on the amendments to the balanced budget acts in place? You can get it? Okay—well, we'll—I'll save that for later and we'll get the document brought up and that'll help.

So, back to Moody's commentary last year; it wasn't, obviously, very good. I'm sure the Premier (Mr. Selinger) wasn't very happy about it. I don't think anybody was, the negative outlook comments that they made.

What is the Premier's understanding of why there was this—I'm struggling to find the right words—negative outlook commentary from Moody's last year? After the meetings in—it was New York City, was that correct? It was. Yes.

Mr. Selinger: Again, they were concerned about when we were going to come back in balance, and we indicated to them that we were taking a balanced approach by continuing to grow the economy, assure that key services were provided and continuing down a path of increasing fiscal prudence in a way that didn't threaten those services and growth in the economy.

Mr. Pallister: When was the date that Moody's was under the impression that the government had moved back the date? When was the original date that had been projected for the budget to come into balance?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get that information and verify it for the member.

Mr. Pallister: I remember the question was asked back in the last election, and, of course, the Premier said that the government was ahead of schedule on it but I wasn't sure of the date exactly that the government had scheduled to balance. And the Premier might remember that date. Was it '14-15 fiscal?

Mr. Selinger: Subject to verification, I believe it was '15-16, but I'd have to verify that for the member.

Mr. Pallister: Madam Chair, I thank the Premier for determining that. I wasn't sure whether it was last year or this fiscal year that the government had projected that. So then, the government moved back its target last year from '15-16 to when?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get the sequence of events for the member. We had—we have moved the dates in order to contain—continue to have appropriate balance while reducing the deficit over time and, at the same time, protecting core services and growing the economy. But I'll get the sequence of the original—what we thought was plausible. The member will know that the economic recovery has been slower than anticipated, not only in Canada but across North America, and, indeed, across the entire planet. It has been a sluggish recovery from the '08-09 recession, and that's why international agencies that focus on economies are making comments about recommending to governments that they not overly focus on austerity to the exclusion of strategies for ensuring people have jobs and employment and economic growth.

Mr. Pallister: Well, subject to the Premier getting the verification on the dates, Moody's was let know that the government was departing from its original target last spring, right? That was part of the influence on this negative commentary, is that correct? Whether it was '14-15, '15-16, the date was pushed back as a consequence of the budget so that is what—that—I'm not suggesting that's the only thing, but that was one of the factors that they looked at clearly in the—in giving this credit-negative report, isn't that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I don't think that's an unreasonable assumption.

Mr. Pallister: Right. I think Rob here just verified it was '14-15, I think, was the original target, and where are we now? What's the target now?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I believe it's the same as what the members opposite ran on in the last election, '17-18.

Mr. Pallister: Different, will all due respect, different from the one the government ran on last election, right?

Mr. Selinger: Right, and, I mean, as I've indicated to the member, the economic recovery has been slower than anticipated and we've put a priority on continuing to have strong economic growth which we're getting good results on that and ensuring that we keep key services like health care and education and supports and to families adequately funded.

Mr. Pallister: So the new projection is now '17-18. Now, that includes, though, anticipated revenue flowing into the government from—now, Hydro pays a—I know there's a couple of different levies that Hydro pays, water rentals, things like that. But here I'm just referring to the use of the government's credit rating to borrow. The government of Manitoba charges Hydro 1 per cent on the amount that Hydro borrows to use the government's credit rating, is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, there is a debt-guarantee fee which allows the Crown corporation to use the Crown's credit rating as part of their borrowing initiatives.

Mr. Pallister: Right, so a couple of questions on that. How—approximately how much, say, in this year's budget is taken from Hydro over to the government for that debt guarantee, for that charge or the right to use the government's credit rating?

Mr. Selinger: I'm sure that we can come up with that relatively rapidly.

Mr. Pallister: Could—while he's got the Finance Minister right there, maybe the Premier (Mr. Selinger) could just give me an idea of the magnitude of this. Is it—because it—is it the whole amount Hydro borrows, I guess, that is—the 1 per cent applies to the gross debt of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get the accurate information on the member. The debt-guarantee fee is intended to allow Hydro to get access to borrowing at a better rate than they would get if they were doing it without the guarantee. So it's to their advantage as well as to the government's advantage and the ratepayers' advantage to do it that way. It allows for the cost of borrowed funds to be more cost-effective which allows them to be able to do more of what they're trying to do with less cost.

* (15:20)

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate that. I get the logic of it. I was just trying to get an idea of the magnitude of it, I guess, because the issue of a credit rating—because Hydro is saying at the PUB that if they don't get the rate increases that they're wanting—and I'm paraphrasing here, I'm not quoting their actual testimony. But they're basically saying if they don't get the rate increases they want, they feel that this is a threat to the province of Manitoba's credit rating. So it must be a pretty significant amount of borrowing.

Is the Premier at all concerned that this is the case, that Hydro's indebtedness poses some type of additional threat to our credit rating? I mean, we did get a negative outlook, but we didn't get a downgrade in our credit rating. We both appreciate that. Is there some concern here that a further deterioration could add to the pressure that is on the—our credit rating as a province?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we'll have to see what the outcomes are of the PUB review of the rates and what the implications are. We do know that Hydro has—is on a very significant capital program to build new generation, to build new 'transmission'—transmission and also to upgrade existing facilities throughout Manitoba. It's not unlike initiatives going on all across the country.

As I indicated, I believe, in question period, there's about a \$360-billion rebuild going on of electricity assets across the country right now based on the fact that a lot of these assets were built 40, 50 years ago and many of them are in—at the stage where they need renewal. So what we're seeing in other jurisdictions is very significant rate increases, as high as double-digit increases, over a couple—two to three years, far higher than what we're seeing applied for in Manitoba, and, at the same time, very significant investments going on in the assets to ensure their reliability for the future service of their customers and jurisdictions across the country.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, so the Premier has undertaken to provide me with some detail on the amount of the debt-guarantee fee. Hopefully, we could have a look at that tomorrow and have a further—I won't go down that road until we both have those figures in front of us, and then we can have a good discussion on that. I hope that would be possible tomorrow. Would that be possible to have tomorrow so we could further pursue that issue?

Mr. Selinger: We'll see what we can do on that regard.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, so what was the effect on borrowing costs of the negative outlook that Moody's gave last year? Is there a—I know there'd be a difficulty in estimating that. Is there a ballpark number that the Premier could share with us? Was there an impact to any degree on the—what is the current prime—what is the current rate the government borrows money at?

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to get that information for the member. I think the rates vary depending on the

length of time, et cetera, but I'll endeavour to find out what kind of rates we're getting for borrowing in Manitoba right now.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, well, I appreciate that too.

What is the average duration of the money, like, of the bonds that the government issues? Like, is there—I know there would be a mix. I expect there's a laddering strategy that takes place, of course, but what—is there—is it 15 years or 12 or is there a—you know, could the Premier give me a bit of an idea on how long—what are the terms that the government borrows under?

Mr. Selinger: There are bonds issued for different rates of—variable periods of time. They can be 10 years; they can be 20 years; they can be even longer periods of time, 30-plus years, depending on the nature of the borrowing requirements and what the best options are available in the marketplace.

Mr. Pallister: I guess I'm trying to get some insight into what those best options are. What is the government's strategy in terms of best options? Is—interest rates, I guess, in a general sense, are at rather historic lows. Is the general term of borrowing lengthened over what it was, say, 15 years ago when interest rates were two, three, four times as high? Are we trying to lock in money for longer periods of time, I guess, is what I'm asking.

Mr. Selinger: I—generally, I think, they are—there are different rates and different offerings put out there to get a proper mix within the portfolio of borrowing requirements, and ladder—as the member said, have different ways of structuring them, but I'm subject to verification.

I believe that there have been more opportunities to go long, get longer periods of time for borrowings at good rates which provides an advantage to the borrowers, the government or the Crowns, because they have a clear period of fixed rates and they can have a better predictability of what the costs will be for servicing the debt on the new assets they're building. And the member should know that the assets are increasing faster than the borrowings at this stage and that they've been able to build up quite a few very high-quality assets over the last decade.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: —ask the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) how his trip was, but, in any case, hope he's okay.

The effect of this—let's go back to that for a sec. Obviously, it wouldn't have been good to get a negative outlook—outlook of what—the Premier (Mr. Selinger) have any comment on that? Like, we got different comments last year from people in the media and so on as to what the impact was. Some were saying, you know, millions, some saying tens of millions. Does the Premier want to share his perspectives on what impact this had on additional borrowing charges, to have a negative outlook from Moody's?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'll get that information for the member. I do have some information now that—and this, again, will be subject to confirmation—but the average borrowing seems to be in the 4 per cent range.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, thank the Premier for that.

There was a comment—I can't remember who it was; I believe it was a Finance official last year in the process. I'm not sure if it was Estimates—saying something—an impact would have been not a half point but probably a quarter point or something like that, in terms of borrowing.

Is that—is there any reason to believe that the official was wrong on that?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not aware of any statements or evidence in that regard but I'll verify that. That doesn't sound accurate to me but I'll check on that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we'll just check, too, and find out who it was that said that. You know, I'm interested in knowing and, obviously, I think we're all concerned that we borrow at as low a rate as possible and, whether personally or here, that makes sense.

Now the commentary that they gave last year said inability—the title page was Moody's Investors Service notes the Province of Manitoba's inability to return to balance by the original budgeted date is credit negative.

And oh, yes, okay, here's the answer to a previous question. The Province of Manitoba yesterday announced it now targets a balanced budget by '18-19, two years later than previously assumed. So this was commentary on this year's budget, not last year's, and I'm sorry I didn't mean to—I have another article here on last year's commentary as well but that was on this year's.

When do they come out with their ratings? Do they only make an announcement if it's a change from the previous rating?

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to check the dates on that but usually into the second quarter.

Mr. Pallister: So if we were going to get any bad news it'd be here in the next two or three weeks or otherwise; there's probably no change to our credit rating. Is that a fair guesstimate?

Mr. Selinger: I suspect it'd be later than that.

Mr. Pallister: Any idea how much later?

Mr. Selinger: Again, usually the report in the second quarter comes out late summer or early fall, I would suspect in that range. But it's entirely within their prerogative when they do that. We don't have any control over that, but they'll make their own decision on that.

Mr. Pallister: Right, I'm sorry. I was thinking calendar year. I wasn't thinking fiscal year, so I hear you. Thanks for the clarification, appreciate that.

So they went on to say here—well, just referring to the continued gradual increase of the debt burden until at least '17-18—are they—when they say that, are they talking about the summary debt or are they just talking about the core debt?

Mr. Selinger: The member's—is the member referring to last year's Moody's statement?

Mr. Pallister: No, I'm referring to their commentary from May of this year where they said what I just quoted there. That's what I was referring to.

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check. I didn't prepare the statement; that's their statement. I'd have to check what basis upon which they're doing that.

* (15:30)

Mr. Pallister: I think Rob has copies here we can get over to the Premier (Mr. Selinger), so he can have a look and see what I'm referring to.

But—I'll just help if I can. I was just referring to their comment here in the third paragraph down, for the Premier's benefit, the quotation-marked paragraph there, and then it says: Prolonged deficits and high capital spending will likely result in a continued gradual increase of Manitoba's debt burden until at least 2017-18. Was—and I was just asking, does that mean just the core deficit or are they talking about the whole deal here? Like, is that the summary debt they're talking about, because I can't tell from the context here whether they're referring to core or summary.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to check the facts. I think the member's referring to the paragraph which reads, well, forecasts of deficits are small. Canadian, \$422 million in '15-16; and Canadian, \$328 million in '16-17, relative to revenues. The extended time frame required to restore fiscal balance shows that the government continues to prioritize program spending and capital spending over return to balance.

And then it goes on to say: Prolonged deficits and high capital spending will likely result in a continued gradual increase of Manitoba's debt burden until at least 2017-18, adding additional pressure on its current AA1 rating with a negative outlook, says Kathrin Heitmann, Moody's assistant vice-president.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, that's the paragraph I was referring to, and I was just asking the Premier if they were referring to Manitoba's—their concerns here, as they expressed them, are about Manitoba's debt burden and the gradual increase in Manitoba's debt burden they refer to. Does that, in the Premier's estimation, refer to the core—just the core debt, or is that the summary debt? *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: —their statement. I'd have to check and see what on—what basis they were doing that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I accept the Premier's argument that he wasn't part of the minutia of the discussions, but the discussions that take place with these bond rating agencies, don't they normally look at all aspects of the Province's financial management? So wouldn't it be logical to assume—am I missing something here? Are they—they wouldn't look at part of the Province's financial picture, they'd look at the whole fiscal picture, wouldn't they?

Mr. Selinger: As I said earlier, they get to examine all the information they wish and they get to work off of that, and so there's nothing that they don't have access to in terms of questions that they ask. And—but, again, I'd have to check upon the basis upon which they're making their comments.

Mr. Pallister: Right, well, I believe it was the former Finance minister who communicated that there would be—likely be a small increase in the interest on what the Province pays on its borrowing as a result of the previous years. So my concern, obviously, the—a small increase; we don't want a big increase, so that's why I'm raising these questions, of course, about the commentary that came out this year as a result of this year's budget, so.

They had—Moody's had said last year—now I'm back to August 18th of '14, the change ratings rationale—the change in the outlook to negative was prompted by Moody's assessment of the execution risk surrounding Manitoba's plan to achieve a balanced budget by fiscal year '16-17 and the risk of a continued increase in Manitoba's high-debt burden beyond '16-17.

So we got a negative outlook as a result of things possibly not being executed the way that Moody's had hoped they would be, and the way, I suppose, the government had communicated to them. Then that happened. So now, you know, I'm communicating a concern that I want the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) view on. It seems that what Moody's had warned us about has actually happened. We have a higher projected deficit than last year's projected deficit by quite a bit and we also have a departure from the previous date committed for balance. Isn't this dangerous in respect of risking a higher, you know, higher debt service costs?

Mr. Selinger: Again, my information is there was little or no effect determined from last year's negative outlook. I'm just receiving that information now. And it remained as a AA1 credit rating, and the other agency, Standard & Poor's, maintained their credit rating. So I don't know that there was any significant or detectable change in the rate structure. And the average rate structure, and this'll be subject to confirmation, they're indicating is around 4 per cent, which are historic lows for borrowing for the government of Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the questions I'm asking, and the Premier said he'd undertake to get the accurate information, so I'm—I guess I'll have to take that as accurate information, but the questions I'm asking are about the consequences of ignoring the warning. The questions I'm asking are about the consequences of ignoring the warning, the warning related to execution risk, which is not a good phrase when one is evaluating somebody's credit to read, if you're the one being evaluated.

And just last August, the concern was expressed about both of the things that have happened with this year's budget: the pushback on the time to balance being one; the—and the increase in the actual projected deficit of 20 per cent, approximately, over last year, the other. So is the Premier not at all concerned that this could have negative consequences in the future as far as our credit rating is concerned?

Mr. Selinger: We're always concerned about maintaining the appropriate balance between fiscal prudence, protecting core services and growing the economy in Manitoba, certainly we are. And that's why we meet with credit rating agencies and give them as much information as they require. And we'll continue to do that.

I do note that our credit rating is higher than when the member opposite was in office by at least two notches, and it is a solid AA credit rating, A—AA1. Obviously, we wish that there wasn't a negative outlook, for sure, but we also want to make sure that we stay attuned to the realities of growing the economy and protecting those core services. So we're trying to take a balanced approach overall as opposed to a approach that focuses on austerity.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, and the Premier now is comparing apples to oranges when he speaks about credit ratings 20 years to now. In virtually every province, the credit ratings have gone up. We're not in the same circumstance that we were 20 years ago—well, unless we cause it to happen again somehow. So that's my concern here.

The Province got a negative outlook. That's a warning and, not heeded, I'm concerned that it'll have consequences, obviously, for—that would be pretty severe, given the fact that our provincial debt is doubled, essentially doubled, since this Premier came to power. This would have even greater ramifications, wouldn't it?

*(15:40)

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member knows that our economy's grown faster than the assets that we've acquired through any borrowings—have grown faster than the borrowings themselves. And that has grown the wealth of the province and the ability of the province to have economic prosperity. We have more than doubled the economy since we've come into office, in partnership with all the different sectors of the Manitoba economy. These debt servicing costs have been reduced from 13.2 cents on the dollar to about 5.6 cents on the dollar, about a 58 per cent reduction in debt servicing costs. Our debt-to-GDP went down to, I think, 21, 22, 23 per cent of GDP; it's now up at, I believe, 30.9 per cent of GDP coming out of the recession, lower than what it was when we came into office when I think it was around 32.9 per cent of GDP.

So, you know, we've had a Fiscal Stabilization Fund that we put in place, without selling any assets

off, of over \$800 million, and we've used it prudently to even out the ups and downs of the economy since the great recession and reduced the cost of any deficit that we've incurred to keep the economy going and services protected.

So, yes, we always remain concerned about all dimensions of having a balanced approach to the future of Manitoba, keeping growth and jobs and opportunities for employment, ensuring services are provided to Manitobans and also doing it in a way that demonstrates long-term fiscal prudence.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier is concerned about the situation I'm describing here, and he is concerned about the potential damage that could be done with an increased cost of borrowing. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Again, as I said, I've remain concerned—and we all should—about the overall balanced approach we're taking in Manitoba—fiscal prudence, protecting core services, growing in the economy—and doing it in such a way that we have stability and opportunity in the short term and economic prosperity in the long term and a continuing trend line towards reducing our deficits.

Mr. Pallister: Well, in 2009, when this Premier (Mr. Selinger) came in, our debt service costs were comparable to Saskatchewan's. Now we're in excess of 800-plus million annually; they're below 600. So the trend line is a concern, I think, to me too.

And, you know, comparing debt service costs in an era when interest rates are 4 per cent to an era when they were 12 is not really that useful. I think every province has experienced these same changes because prime is not what prime was. So those comparisons are nice talking points but they don't get to the core concern that I think is the one that, you know, I would like the Premier to address.

Last year's Moody's commentary, August 18th, said that what could change—under the section what could change the rating up or down, said, a loss of fiscal discipline leading to a continued and sustained increase in debt and debt service ratios beyond projections could exert downward pressure on the rating, and that's exactly what's happened.

And they—you know, so I guess I would just like to know that the Premier is taking this situation seriously. The—speaking about balance when the actual deficit projected for this year is 20 per cent higher than the deficit projected for last year tells me that we're not going in the right direction, that we're

going in the wrong direction. And these things that the government has done fly in the face of the warning that they got last year to get their fiscal house in order, and what they'll do is lead to additional debt service costs, and those debt service costs take money away from health care, away from education, away from the higher priorities that we have.

So, again, you know, I'm just wanting an indication from the Premier as to his acceptance of the fact that what his government has done with this year's budget is depart dramatically from what they stated were their goals and from what was stated by Moody's as their concerns, that they've actually done the opposite of what Moody's warned them last year they should not do—or should do, I should say, and they've done the opposite of that.

Mr. Selinger: Our debt servicing costs as a percentage of GDP have been declining since '11 and '12. They've gone from 1.5 per cent of the GDP to 1.2 per cent of the GDP. And so that indicates it's going in the right direction.

I'm going to—I'm looking for information on the actual costs. I believe that they have moderated this well—as well this year—as well.

On the government core expenditure, there are \$220 million, and on a summary basis, there are \$842 million, and I believe those are slightly down from last year as well. [*interjection*] Here—is from 230 million down to 220 million.

So we are making steady progress in the right direction while continuing to grow—so we're continuing to grow the economy, and, at the same time, there has been more moderation in the debt servicing costs.

Mr. Pallister: So what the government is trying to do is ignore the summary debt in this answer and just look at core debt?

Mr. Selinger: I think the member heard me say that the core debt—that the costs were down, and I believe they're also down on the summary debt as well—the cost of servicing the debt, and so I wanted to indicate that to the member. And that indicates it's going in the right direction—that the economy's growing faster than the costs of servicing the debt, and it's shrinking as a portion of the GDP, but it's also, according to this projection, shrinking in absolute terms as well.

Mr. Pallister: And did the borrowing costs go up this year or down, because I think what the Finance

Minister and the Premier are trying to do together right now here is take credit for reduced borrowing costs, but I just—I could be wrong, so I want them to maybe explain to me if the cost of borrowing went up or down this year over the course of this year.

Mr. Selinger: I indicated that the projection was for the cost to go down.

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, what the Premier's trying to do is take credit for interest rates dropping, but he loves to blame the previous administration, when the interest rates were double digit, for having to manage in that time. Now he's got the lowest interest rates in modern history. They've just gone down, which nobody predicted, which should be a lesson to the administration and not rely too much on predictions for their reputation. And now, they're trying to take credit for interest rates dropping.

I—you know—what Moody's said in warning them a year ago—and this inattentiveness to this warning is a concern to me, as you can tell, Madam Chair. I mean, you were a Finance minister yourself and you know the relative dangers of higher interest rates in future. Now interest rates can drop, but if a credit rating drops, interest rates go up, and those interest charges are avoidable if a government listens. Now what they referred to last year on August 18th as concerns is exactly what the government's done. A loss of fiscal discipline leading to a continued and sustained increase in debt is a concern.

Well, that's what's happened. The government has advanced further deficits 20 per cent higher than last year's deficits. And it seems like they actually believe that most Manitobans don't understand what happens to debt service charges when interest rates drop. Now I—that doesn't show a lot of faith in the fiscal literacy of Manitobans, but I think any Manitoban who's got a mortgage understands that if they renew it at a lower interest rate, then the chances are really good their debt service costs are going to go down, but that doesn't make for good management practice if they're also running deficits every year because that's going to add to their debt burden.

*(15:50)

So I'm—you know, Moody's in its commentary last year said Manitoba's debt burden's expected to reach 150 per cent of revenues in '16-17 versus 101 per cent of revenue—so 150 in '16-17—this year still the projection—versus a 101 per cent of revenues in 2008-09. That's a better indicator of fiscal

management than the interest rate that's charged on loans is. And what that says is rapid escalation in the amount of debt in our province, being incurred by this government which is exposing us to greater risk. This is what—this isn't me—this is what Moody's international, a respected bond-rating agency, is saying to the government, and it appears the government is ignoring this.

So, put my mind at ease, if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) would, and explain how he's listened to this warning and how he's reacting to it.

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, we have taken a balanced approach. The member acknowledges that interest rates are lower. We acknowledge interest rates are lower. Interest rates are made lower by the Bank of Canada to send a signal that this is a time to make investments and grow your economy, which is what we're doing. And then we're doing that in a way that the cost of servicing the debt is 58 per cent lower than it was when the member opposite was in office. And we're showing that the overall borrowing costs are slightly down on a summary basis, as well as down moderately on a core basis as well, and we're showing that the trend line is that, for the cost of servicing, borrowing is as a smaller portion of the GDP as well. So it's shrinking in all that regard.

The other thing the member needs to be aware of is, is that we have more assets in Manitoba now, and so that the borrowings have supported greater assets in the province of Manitoba. What are those assets? Those are things that help Manitobans have a healthier lifestyle. They're assets invested in health care, they're assets invested in schools, they're assets invested in infrastructure. And, on a summary basis, they're assets that increase the reliability and effectiveness of our Crown corporations, such as Hydro and auto insurance in Manitoba. So there has been a very significant growth in assets in Manitoba, and the wealth of Manitobans. And the member needs to take that into account when he starts expressing concerns.

It's a balanced approach. There could be a focus like he seems to want to pursue of hard austerity, and we've seen that the international agencies have suggested that there should be some careful paying attention to the need to grow the global economy and grow economies across the world right now and increase employment. There still hasn't been a full recovery from the loss of employment during the '08-09 recession. And the forecasts for the first quarter of this calendar year have shown economic

growth being more sluggish than was originally anticipated in previous forecasts. So all of these things are factors that need to be considered when a government takes an approach on how they're doing things. Bond rating agency analysis is an important dimension of that, so are unemployment rates, so are international recommendations from agencies like the OECD and the IMF, and so are the needs of growing the economy and providing core services to people and employment to people. So all those things are taken into account in our balanced approach.

We haven't heard that from the members—from the member opposite. He hasn't indicated anything else other than he wants to balance the budget immediately, which would put at risk core services to Manitobans and create higher levels of unemployment, and that has its own negative consequences. When you have a slower economic growth and higher levels of unemployment, it makes it even harder to bring government books back into balance. As a matter of fact, higher levels of unemployment create more pressures on government services. They generate more demands for services, both in the social services, employment services and health-care services. So we have to take a balanced approach on this, which is what we're doing.

Mr. Pallister: Well, it took us, in this province, from 1870, 138 years to get \$18 billion in debt, and it took this Premier (Mr. Selinger) the last six years to double that. So I'm concerned and I think a lot of Manitobans are that this is a financial manager who can't manage and the exposure to risk is very high.

And I'm—I don't like to think the Premier and I are very old, but I'm old enough to remember people coming to our farm when I was a kid and trying to tell my dad—from banks—trying to tell my dad that he had lazy equity in his farm. And they went to a lot of our neighbours. They went to people around rural Manitoba, and they convinced them that the interest rate was really low and they should borrow a lot of money just as this government's doing now. And they could borrow that money and they could make more money with the money that they borrowed. And those same banks came back 10 years later when the interests rates had doubled and quadrupled and they wanted the land that had been placed as security.

Now it concerns me that the Premier isn't learning from that lesson. It's not such an old-timer who can remember what interest rates were in the 1980s. I remember my first mortgage at five years at

17 and a half per cent. This is—you know, this borrowing excessively thing that the Premier likes to defend is tying the hands of core-service capability in years to come, should interest rates rise, and very few people don't believe that they will.

So this is what Moody's tried to warn the Premier about last year, and he disregarded the warning. Now we're in a pre-election year, and he's really disregarded the warning. And, you know, the fiddler's going to get paid at some point by this approach that he's taking. Now, granted, interest rates are at historic lows, and perhaps they'll stay there. But when they rise, what will a 1 per cent increase in borrowing costs cost the province if this was to happen over the next year—what would it cost the province? I know that all of the province's debt isn't going to come due in one year, but, approximately, how much would a 1 per cent increase cost in terms of additional debt service charges?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the member made the statement that the debt doubled since we've been in office and that it had taken the entire history of the province to get to that stage, and then it was doubled in the last 15 years. *[interjection]* Since I was Premier. Reality is this, Mr. Speaker: The economy has doubled since we've been in office, which doubled more than it grew in the entire 130-plus years prior to that. So there has been a growth, a tremendous growth in Manitoba: growth of population, growth of wealth, growth of the economy, growth of employment, growth of the number of people living here and very significant growth in our assets, our publicly owned assets in the province of Manitoba. So, if the member would look at page 19 in the budget, the replacement value of our assets is at 41 and a half billion dollars for all the public assets that are owned in Manitoba. That's very significant. *[interjection]*

The member doesn't have a plan to do that. He wants to suggest that somehow all the borrowing doesn't serve a useful purpose. When you build a school, that makes sure that young people have an opportunity to get a decent education which means they'll be better able to participate in the economy and support themselves and their families in the future. When you build a personal-care home or a hospital which—many of which his colleagues demand all the time, that means that those people are better looked after in their communities. When you build daycare centres, that means that children have a safe place to be while their parents participate and

work in the economy. When you build infrastructure like roads and flood protection, that means communities are protected from future floods—very significant.

I think in Winnipeg that the flood protection that's been put in place in Winnipeg in part through borrowed money over the many decades has resulted in billions, like 14-plus-14 dollars saved for every dollar invested. I think, actually, the ratio is higher than that, but that would be a very modest estimate of the avoided costs there. So the member has to take a balanced approach on this like we're taking. We are very cognizant of what bond-rating agencies are saying. I've indicated to him that the cost of servicing the debt as a portion of the economy has gone down. The actual cost of servicing the debt has gone down both on a summary basis and a actual basis on a moderate—in a moderate fashion.

* (16:00)

The member asked earlier what time frames assets are being borrowed over. They're being borrowed over various time frames, but there is, I indicated, a tendency to go longer, which allows low rates of interest to be locked in for a longer period of time and provide assets that allow the economy to grow faster in the future with a well-educated citizenry and good infrastructure and good institutions that allow people to get that education and to be looked after in terms of health care. So it is a balanced approach. The—we're seeing international economic agencies recommend that governments find a way to continue to grow their economies and generate employment, coming out of the '08 and '09 recession, and not to be exclusively focused on austerity, which the member obviously is focused on. He's saying he wants to balance the budget right now; \$550 million would be eliminated, then, of expenditure, and revenues would be taken away. That would be very significant.

So these things are all part of what has to be looked at. What would the additional cost of a 1 per cent increase? It would depend on how much capital is being rolled over at new rates that year, what the rate was before and what the rate is when it's being renewed, and what incremental borrowing was to be done that year, and that would depend on the year in which the rates went up. The member raised these same questions about rates going up last year. The rate actually went down. The Bank of Canada reduced its rate by a quarter of a per cent in a pre-emptive way because they were concerned about

the global economy and the Canadian economy in particular.

So forecasts change, as the member knows, but the advice we're getting is to take a balanced approach to make sure you're growing the economy, growing employment opportunities. We're obviously doing that with regard to fiscal prudence as we go forward, which I've indicated in the stats showing the reduced cost of servicing the debt as a portion of the economy and the reduced cost of servicing the debt in our budget, at 5.6 cents on the dollar versus 13.2 cents on the dollar, so that's a very reduce—reduction of the cost of servicing the debt, which means more money is available in the budget for core services like education, family services and health care, as well as other services that are provided in Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: I'm naturally disappointed in the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) non-answer. You know, he refers to the province growing and buying things, but he doesn't appear to understand the difference between gross and net. The gross debt needs to be serviced. The net debt, which he has also doubled in this province, was 10 and a half million the year before he became Premier. It is over 20 million now—billion, I'm sorry, I'm very sorry. So he's doubled the net debt of the Province. He just a minute ago tried to take credit for interest rates dropping when he claimed that the debt service costs are going down; they went down a projected \$3 million this year, \$3 million, but the total is \$842 million that we can't spend on health care, education or any of your filling a pothole this year, because it's got to go to servicing the over-expenses of the past.

The Premier talks about net. He should know, and he does know, that the net debt of our province, net debt to GDP of our province—he keeps speaking about the province's economy growing—the net debt to GDP was just over 21 per cent the year before he became premier, and we're over 30 per cent now. These are significant increases. These are massive increases, and internationally respected bond rating agencies are telling him to get his spending under control, start thinking about the long term, and he is this year committed to spending 20 per cent larger deficit.

He's raided the rainy day fund. How much was taken out of the rainy day fund this year? Will the Premier share that with us? Was it \$100 million or was it more?

Mr. Dave Gaudreau, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Selinger: The member seems to forget that during that entire period, we were going through the great recession, and every government was, and still many governments are, keeping things going through a deficit-financed approach in terms of fiscal policy, including the federal government which indicated they would never run a deficit. In fact, they had to run deficits to deal with realities in front of them, and other provinces have done the same thing across this country. So the member needs to bear that in mind.

What did the former bank of governor—the head of the Bank of Canada say, David Dodge? He said: Low interest rates should encourage infrastructure spending. Low interest rates and a surplus—this is the quote from the former governor of the Bank of Canada: "Low rates and a surplus of manpower in central Canada make this an ideal time for governments to invest in infrastructure," a respected economist and former governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, said.

"Just as we're trying to encourage private companies to borrow to make investments to enhance their productive capacity . . . in order for that to work and for them to be as productive as possible, they need appropriate infrastructure, whether for sewers or power to be hooked up to the plant or whether it's for roads for people to get to work."

"At these very low interest rates, and given the need for infrastructure to allow for further economic development in Canada, it really does make sense at this point in time for governments to borrow in order to finance that infrastructure," Mr. Dodge said. So these are respected people that have weighed in on these matters.

Credit-rating agencies have important roles to play, too, but we look at the wider canvas and take a balanced approach on how we're providing the right mix of economic growth, protection of core services and fiscal prudence in the province of Manitoba during what has been called the great recession, where we're seeing a slower than expected recovery, and I've indicated to the member that that recovery stalled in the first quarter of 2015 in Canada, and also in the United States it's lower than projected. All the economic forecasts have been geared downwards.

In the midst of that, Manitoba's economy has been considered to be one of the top three for this coming year's performance. It has been in the top three for the last 10 years, and so this just indicates some of the stresses going around—on around the world on the economy, and governments are taking a variety of approaches on that. Those that are taking a hard austerity approach are winding up finding higher levels of unemployment, in some cases even larger deficits and slower economic recovery.

So we're taking a balanced approach, ensuring that we continue to move towards balanced budgets while increasing employment, while protecting core services and growing the economy, and doing it in such a way that Manitoba is well positioned for future economic prosperity.

Mr. Pallister: So the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) record since he became Premier—he cites a 10-year record, but I'm not sure about what he's using for numbers. I know that Stats Can has him ranked ninth in terms of economic growth during his term.

He also is using these forecasts which is interesting because what the Conference Board says is that Manitoba is going to do well, and that's nice, but it says it's not necessarily because they're doing that much better; it's more so because competitors have been shot in the foot. That's what the Conference Board says.

Now, the oil price going down—I want the Premier to outline what did he and his government have to do with that?

Mr. Selinger: I'm assuming that's a facetious question by the member opposite, and he knows the answer to that question. What Manitoba has done is it's taken a balanced approach to growing the economy. It has taken advice from people like the former governor of the Bank of Canada and invested in infrastructure. It has ensured that we are investing in education so young people get the skills they need to enter the labour force. It has protected core services. It has worked with all different sectors of the economy, the private sector as well as the public sector and the non-profit sector to look at ways to increase opportunities for people to live and work in the province and to grow our economy. That's the approach we've taken. We've done it at the same time as we've continued to have a focus on fiscal prudence and reduce our debt servicing costs as well as reducing our deficits going forward, and having a deficit this year which is 0.6 of 1 per cent of the

economy, which is last year—less than last year's—or which was projected at 0.7.

In Budget 2015 there's \$105-million draw from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund; \$85 million is for a debt repayment, and \$20 million is for a principal repayment.

*(16:10)

Mr. Pallister: Okay. So the facetious question I asked was to make the point that the Premier had absolutely nothing to do with what he's now trying to take credit for. He had nothing to do with the decline in oil prices; he had no role whatsoever to play in it, yet the decline in oil prices is Manitoba's gain. In fact, this is a Free Press article from—dated January the 21st, which says, Manitoba is in line to enjoy a net gain from dramatically dropping oil prices.

Great, okay. So oil sands' loss, Manitoba's gain. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) had nothing to do with it, but he's quite happy to cite forecasts showing Manitoba doing well because of the decline in oil prices—interesting.

So—and again, the author of the report he frequently cites from the Conference Board of Canada said that Manitoba's going to do well, but it's not necessarily because of anything that the Premier's doing that much better; it's more so because competitors have been shot in the foot. Now he relies on forecasts, forecasts which are based—in fact, the Conference Board says half of a point of GDP growth would be based on the gains received because of the low price of oil. Without those gains, we'd be below middle of the pack.

So the Premier is using the reality of lower oil prices as an argument for his management capability when it has nothing to do with his management capability. It isn't even a point in support of it. He admits he had nothing to do with the drop in the price of oil. In fact, I've heard him, on occasion, and I've heard others say, you know, we can't do as well as other jurisdictions; we're not on a bed of oil. Well, right. Well, we're not on a bed of oil, and it's serving us well right now.

But for the Premier to now take out advertisements at taxpayer expense and brag about his economic forecasts, when they're based on something he had nothing to do with, is a monumental stretch of logic, I think he'd agree.

Mr. Selinger: Actually, I think the statement just made by the Leader of the Opposition is once again a classic example of how he focuses on a single variable and doesn't look at the broader picture. It's a classic example of the double standard. He was out there taking credit for investments in infrastructure when he was a minister, including in his own jurisdiction, and counting them as jobs, and now he suggests that that doesn't count.

The reality is this, Mr. Speaker. The economy of Manitoba is growing due to a number of factors, one of which is investments in infrastructure; another of which is the ability of our industries to be competitive after years of investment in training and technology in their businesses. Oil and gas prices are a contributing factor in lowering the inflation rate in Manitoba and allowing Manitobans to have more purchasing power. But wages have grown in Manitoba as well, and those wages have grown because companies are doing well in Manitoba. Exports are increasing in the manufacturing sector; exports have done better in the agricultural sector. All of those things are improving in Manitoba, and we've worked with industry to do that.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

So the member tends to exaggerate on all of these matters. Not a surprise; it's nothing new about that. But the reality is we've taken a balanced approach. We're not in any way claiming that all the credit accrues to the government only; we're saying it's been an approach where we've worked in partnership with business and industry and our training institutions and citizens themselves as well as communities to find ways to strengthen their economies and to create opportunities for people to have good opportunities for employment. And we've restructured some of our policies in Manitoba to facilitate that: more support for people to get training, more support for people on Rent Assist so that they have money when they're in training or working in the economy.

That's a very different approach than the members opposite have taken. The Leader of the Opposition has said that he wants to increase welfare rates, but he put nothing in place for people when they are—move into employment, so that if they leave welfare that they get less resources.

We've taken a different approach. We've structured things differently to support working people and working families as well as people on social assistance. He had a double-standard approach

when he dealt with the National Child Benefit when he was in office. He clawed that back from people on social assistance, so those children and families were worse off than people that weren't on social assistance. And that was not only unfair and inhumane; it didn't help those people have the resources they need to get off social assistance. There was less resources for them and their families, and that didn't seem fair and appropriate either.

So we changed that policy and made that money available to people—families of low income, regardless of their source of income, and that allows for that benefit to stay with them when they enter the labour market or training and other opportunities that will allow them to have more economic opportunity and more educational opportunities.

So the approach we've taken is one to provide opportunities for people to participate in the economy, including in infrastructure projects that we're building, including in hydro projects that we're building. We've wanted to ensure that communities have a chance for their people to get trained and skills and participate in those jobs, get trades, have the opportunity for equity, stakes in these projects and to see some long-term benefits from it. So it's an inclusive model of economic development, one that partners with all dimensions of the community to move forward.

And the member seems to want to sort of suggest that the only reason the economy's growing at all is because of lower oil and gas prices. It's a factor, but the economy has grown well when the prices were higher, and it's growing well when prices are lower. So, overall, the Manitoba economy is doing a number of things correctly, and that is a tribute to all the people in the economy: the private sector, the entrepreneurs, the working people, communities that have participated in programs to grow their economy on a regional basis, other levels of government including the Manitoba government. Everybody's been trying to pull in the same direction.

One key dimension of that has been a major investment in infrastructure. That has been identified as one of the highest priorities by Manitobans—that they really want to see money going into infrastructure across this province, first and foremost to protect people from floods where we've seen very good results from investing in flood protection: less cost to communities, less disruption of people's personal lives, greater security of—in their personal lives and greater security for those local economies.

We've seen good results from investing in strategic infrastructure as well, and that has included projects like CentrePort, major highways like Highway 75, Highway No. 1, Highway No. 10, Highway No. 6. All of these things have strengthened our capacity to deliver goods and services to markets.

The Labour Force Survey shows that over the last 12 months from May '14 to May '15, we've had the strongest employment growth in Canada at 14,200 jobs or about 2.3 per cent growth in employment. That's well above the Canadian average of 1.1 per cent. We've seen the best full-time job growth at 16,100 or 3.2 per cent, which is exactly double of Canada at 1.6 per cent. We've seen the second strongest private sector job growth in Manitoba at over 9,000 jobs or 1.9 per cent—higher than Canada's 1.1 per cent. So all of these things are positive indicators that there has been more opportunities, more economic growth in Manitoba at the same time as we've kept our debt servicing costs significantly lower than they were, continuing that trend line as we grow the economy. And we're looking for that balanced approach, going forward as well, to find the right mix of doing that.

Mr. Pallister: And, of course, because our baseline's declined so much, relative to other provinces since this Premier (Mr. Selinger) came into power, and that baseline has declined remarkably except against New Brunswick's, percentage gains are a dangerous way to compare performance. That's what the Premier is doing right now. He's saying our percentage gains exceed other provinces. But, actually, when you've declined to almost bottom of the barrel—closer to 10th than to 8th as this Premier has done over time—even a percentage gain that exceeds the other provinces doesn't make up for all that lost ground, especially a short-term performance forecast like he's citing and is fond of citing.

Now the interesting thing is I agree with him, though, on the point about the diversity of our economy, and I would certainly agree that promoting our private-sector diversity and our incredible strength and the loyalty of our small-business community is worthwhile. It's interesting that this government would take out multimedia ads promoting itself instead of the small-business community in our province or the manufacturing sector which have faced such challenges under this government. It's interesting and also disappointing that they would throw money at a self-promotional ad campaign, but that's exactly what they're in the

midst of doing and continue to do—started last year and it's kind of a shame and an insult. But what it does point out is that this province has great potential to recover, even from the damage that's been inflicted on it by this administration and this Premier.

What I'm concerned about with my questions is this higher—the potential for increased debt charge costs as a result of higher—of a lower credit rating, and that I'm glad to hear the Premier undertake to get back to us with some more detail on that, because it is an issue I think Manitobans would appreciate him taking seriously.

But, again, here's a quote from the Conference Board, and I know the Premier did a study after he brought in the PST about a year later, a year-plus, saying what the benefit would be to Manitobans—the gross benefit if he took the PST revenue and he spent it. He got a report done by the Conference Board to outline what the gross benefit would be. But I wonder if he would undertake—because out of respect for Manitobans who he took the money from—they do some good with it too, I think he'd admit that. Since they earned it, saved it, they deserve some respect.

* (16:20)

So why did he do a study of the gross benefit created when he took the money and spent it instead of a net study of what the effect would be of taking it from Manitobans so they couldn't spend it themselves, and then him taking it and spending it? In other words, net and gross. Maybe the new Finance Minister could explain that to him, the concept of net and gross. But I think it's important and I'd like him to answer this question: Would he undertake to do such a study so that he could explain to Manitobans what the net effect of raising the PST from 7 to 8 per cent actually is on the province, not just the gross effect that it would have with him taking the PST revenues and spending them?

I think he didn't really need a study to show that him taking \$300 million and spending it would do some good. I would hope it would do some good. Strategically invested maybe better, but not so much on the splash pad thing. But, nevertheless, would he undertake to pursue, perhaps with the Conference Board, because the Conference Board is the one that just commented that Manitoba could benefit from the lower oil prices, something that the Premier seems reluctant to admit, by half a per cent of GDP, with the 50 per cent reduction in crude oil prices? Maybe the Conference Board could do a study on the net

effect to Manitoba's economy because the Premier (Mr. Selinger) likes to cite the gross effect but, more accurately, I think Manitobans deserve to know what the net effect would be of them paying that higher PST promised he wouldn't have them pay.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've said it for the member that the Manitoba economy is considered to be one of the stronger ones in Canada this coming year and in future years, given this year's forecast, and so far so good in the first quarter, we are performing well. So that's an important part of what we're doing. We have seen good growth in our economy over the years. I'm going to get more information for the member about how our economy's done. I think he's inaccurate in saying that we've lost ground. I think actually we've held our own quite well, including against the strong resource economies, but Manitoba's economy is one of the better performing ones in Canada, compared to all the economies east and west of us. I think the resource economies did very well when oil and gas and potash prices were booming, but we also had steady growth and good performance during that period of time as well and we've continued that. The steady growth, good jobs theme is accurate.

Our debt to GDP ratio is the fourth best among the provinces. Our major cash transfers from the federal government from '99 to 2000 to 2015-16 is below the Canadian average, which was a 154 per cent; ours was 90 per cent. The provinces to the west of us got far more cash transfers on a percentage-increase basis. Our provincial government expenditures per capita are the fourth lowest in Canada for 2012, and our debt services costs are—per dollar of revenue—are the fourth best in Canada, exceeded only by provinces that had lots of surpluses because of natural resource revenues, which allowed them to keep their cost down.

Our competitiveness has been ranked very high among agencies that look at competitiveness for like a city like Winnipeg and a province like Manitoba. We have very significant advantages in that regard. And we remain one of the best—Winnipeg and Brandon, for example, remain one of the better cities for investing in, and we will continue to do that. We've made sure that Manitoba is a good place to invest. We've seen today, for example, a new company setting up a headquarters for an airline in Manitoba, a new airline to service Canada and the United States, in Winnipeg. Businesses want to be in Manitoba and we want them to be here as well. So we're doing things that make it attractive for Manitoba to be a place where businesses can grow.

Our small-business rate at zero per cent is the lowest in Canada. Our—these are important dimensions of a future prosperity when we can do those kinds of things. Our affordability advantage for families remains in the top three in the country, and that's an important dimension for affordability for families, and part of that affordability advantage is that our rates for home heating, electricity and auto insurance are very competitive. They're the—that package of goods is the lowest in Canada.

So, when you look at internal rates of return for a manufacturing firm in Brandon, it's No. 1 compared to a range of cities across the country, including some American cities; Winnipeg's No. 3. For a larger manufacturing firm, again No. 1 and No. 3. For a small manufacturing firm in cities over 500,000, we're No. 1 position. For the internal rates of return for a larger manufacturing firm in cities over 500,000, we're in No. 1 position for the rate of return a company can earn by locating in Manitoba. So a pre-tax net income for a smaller manufacturing firm is No. 1 in Brandon and No. 3 in Winnipeg. Same with a large manufacturing firm, pre-tax net income is very effective, No. 1 and No. 3, Brandon and Winnipeg again. The effective tax rates for smaller manufacturing firms in Brandon and Winnipeg are No. 2 and 3 against a cross-section of other cities that they compete against, and the effective tax rates for a larger manufacturing firm are No. 2 and No. 4 compared to a range of cities that other firms choose to invest in. So we're doing a good job in making sure that we're competitive in Manitoba, and we'll continue to do that across the country.

The study that was done by the Conference Board of Canada on the infrastructure program indicated that the investments—5 and a half billion dollars—would be very effective in creating jobs over those five and a half years. Our unemployment rates have remained among the lowest in Canada at No. 2 or No. 3 across the country at a time when we have more population living here. And I indicated earlier to the member that our job growth rates were the strongest in the country at 14,200.

So our GDP by the Royal Bank of Canada is ranked at 2.6 per cent for 2015, compared to the national average of 1.8 per cent. Now those forecasts are being revised, but I still think we'll be in the top three as we go forward. Employment growth at 1.6 per cent will be among the best—will be the best in the country in 2015, according to the Royal Bank

of Canada. The Conference Board puts us in the leading position over the next two years, and it—the Conference Board also forecasts Winnipeg to be the strongest growth rate on the Prairies.

So these things are changing as we go along because economic forecasts, as the member has freely acknowledged, are always subject to variation and change, and we're seeing them trend downward on a global basis, on a North American and on a Canadian basis. The near-term economic outlook is not primarily due to changes in oil and gas prices, according to the Conference Board of Canada. The positive outlook is mainly due to a boom in the construction industry and the manufacturing sector.

So those are the two sectors that are leading the growth in the economy of Manitoba. The manufacturing sector, I think, is benefiting by a lower Canadian dollar—no question about that, so I want to put that on the record—and the member's aware of that. He may wish to discuss that as well.

We're not taking credit for that; we're giving credit to the manufacturing sector for being well positioned to take advantage of those conditions with the lower Canadian dollar into the American marketplace, and we worked with them on, for example, having a manufacturing investment tax credit in place by eliminating capital tax on manufacturers and corporations generally and reducing the overall corporate tax rate from 17 to 12 per cent.

So the member may not want to acknowledge any of those things, but those were significant contributions to them becoming more competitive and allowing them to do well in these fragile economic circumstances.

*(16:30)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, my first question for the Premier (Mr. Selinger) concerns the—I know there's been a request from Richard North and Chris Vogel to have their marriage of a number of years ago recognized. And I know that the Premier has resisted any efforts in this direction for some time, so I just thought I would ask the Premier what's his perspective on this.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I don't think the member is accurate in his statement. We're very supportive of the individuals that the member mentioned getting recognition for their marital status, and we've searched for every way to do that. It's federal law, as the member knows, and if there was a change in that federal law that would allow their status to be fully

recognized, we'd be very supportive of that. We continue to look for other ways and means to recognize the marital status that they have in law in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: So your position right now has been that under current law there is not a way to do it?

Mr. Selinger: That has been the advice we've received, but we continue to probe and seek advice on how we can move forward and be supportive of the request of those individuals.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the significant issues has been the disparity between the amount that First Nations children in grades K to 12 get for their support of their education versus those in the rest of the province, the children in the rest of the province. And I know the Premier (Mr. Selinger), like I, have been very concerned about this, and I just would offer the Premier to tell us what he's done to advance the cause of equity because, although it's a federal responsibility, there certainly is a provincial opportunity to advocate and to push this agenda forward.

Mr. Selinger: We've been very supportive of more support for education in First Nations communities and First Nations education authorities. I've certainly raised this with the Prime Minister on more than one occasion. The Council of the Federation or, in other words, the premiers, have raised this matter. It's been a talking point and a policy position we've advocated for a long time. We do have a—if a First Nations community wishes to participate in the Frontier School Division and in partnership with them, that has allowed us to get more resources for those students in their communities at an equivalent level to what the Province pays in the Frontier School Division. So we have seen one mechanism to increase the support for indigenous students to get for their money for education in the province of Manitoba. We continue to pursue a path of higher amounts for education for students in First Nation communities. We think that's vitally important to the future.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, in Estimates last week, I had mentioned an individual by the name of Michal Vancura who was on a hunger strike, and just in an update, Michal was admitted to St. Boniface hospital over the weekend. He is getting fluids and electrolytes and vitamins, but his decision has been not to have any calories. So he continues on his hunger strike, but, of course, under the care of, you know, physicians in hospital. He was under the care

of a physician before. I had mentioned the—last week, the potential opportunity for the Premier to look and see whether there was any option in terms of trying to achieve any mediation in this dispute, and I raise it again just to see what the Premier has done to date and what his view of the situation is.

Mr. Selinger: The member has the same information that I've received. I did chat with him about this matter, and we did follow up on it to make sure the individual was in safe hands. We understand that the individual is in the St. Boniface hospital, and we consider it a serious situation and we want to ensure that this person's health is protected. There has been conversations with the faculty and we are looking at resources to support a proper—a renewed dialogue between the faculty and the individual and his family. But we do want to say to everybody that the first priority should be this individual's health and well-being, and we encourage everybody to make that the priority as we sort out the issues related to medical residency which is handled through the Canadian Resident Matching Service process.

So our top priority is the health and well-being of this individual person, and I believe that's the priority for the member from River Heights as well. And I think we should all be encouraging this individual to make sure that he has the nutrition he needs in order to continue to remain with us in the community, and we want that to be the top priority. And, at the meantime, we are encouraging all the parties to find a way to have further dialogue and conversation together.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm pleased that the Premier is encouraging further dialogue between the—Michal Vancura and family and the individuals at the University of Manitoba.

And, like you, I'm concerned about this individual's health, but in the discussions that I've had he appears to be a very committed individual and—on an issue which he feels very strongly about. And, you know, that's just the way the situation is, and I pass that back to the Premier.

The—there was an issue, another issue, which I raised last week, and that was with regard to the subsidy for Energy East. And in the Premier's comments back, he talked about is the cost of producing energy, the levelized cost across the whole system, is that the cost based on the newest and latest facility that comes online.

My interpretation is if you have a levelized cost across the whole system that that would include the new and the old facilities, the whole system, the levelized cost. I think, you know, it—if you were to include, for example, Wuskwatim as a recent facility, Manitoba Hydro have put on record in the Legislature that their estimate of the level—of the cost of power at Wuskwatim is 7.2 cents per kilowatt hour which would be significantly higher than the average cost across the whole system.

So just to come back to the Premier, you know, would the Premier consider that any cost which is below the average cost for the whole system, which includes lower cost power from years ago and higher cost power more recently on an average, to be the benchmark against which one would look as to whether there's a subsidy or not?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we'll take advice on that, but we've said we don't think it's appropriate to be subsidizing facilities like pipelines that don't generate a lot of employment in Manitoba. First of all, we always want these facilities to be safe for communities and for water and for the environment. That's the first priority, which is why we sought full intervenor status with the National Energy Board, and we are encouraging anybody else that has those concerns to seek that status as well to be able to put their views on the record, but the advice we would receive is to ensure that energy provided for it, if and when it's applied for, to move that resource through the province would not be subsidized by Manitobans.

* (16:40)

Mr. Gerrard: Another issue which I had raised concerned the—what the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said in terms of his efforts were focused on hotels in the city of Winnipeg when trying to ensure that there was no children in hotels.

I would ask the Premier: When was the first occasion when it came to his attention that there was also a significant issue in hotels in rural Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: I don't have a specific date on that, but the department made that information available as 'part' of their plan for the June announcement on eliminating children in hotels in Winnipeg, and they'd actually been able to achieve that prior to their announcement.

Presumably, through their core—review of the circumstances of child-welfare agencies across the province, they came upon the issue that there are some communities outside of Winnipeg where hotels

are being used, and they've—those agencies have asked for more time to address that issue, and the minister felt it was appropriate to give them that time. Of course, the first priority is always to ensure the safety of the children, that—and the well-being of the children; that's the priority under the child-welfare act and the common-sense priority. So these agencies are working on addressing that issue while ensuring the safety and security of the children.

Mr. Gerrard: Earlier today I was asking the Premier about the efforts with regard to surface water management and mitigating the impacts of climate change. And, although there is, you know, a—what's called a Surface Water Management Strategy, it's in many areas really pretty vague in terms of what will actually be done. And I give an example, the point here which deals with creating no net loss of wetlands, and that would seem to be a, you know, a fairly important point in terms of addressing, you know, water management on a watershed basis. What is going to be the approach that the Premier and his government takes toward no net loss of wetlands?

Mr. Selinger: Could I get that question repeated again?

Mr. Gerrard: One of the central things of surface water management is, you know, how you balance drainage and water storage and do that in a way that's going to make sure that we're storing a lot of water on the land and so we have less flooding. And one of the central elements that has been proposed in the Surface Water Management Strategy is an approach which would involve no net loss of wetlands, and so I'm just trying to understand, you know, because that's a fairly broad concept, what the approach the Premier will be taking to no net loss of wetlands.

Mr. Selinger: Sorry, I'm—loss of—I need—

An Honourable Member: Wetlands.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you. All right. That's extremely helpful, to know what the—

An Honourable Member: No net loss of wetlands.

Mr. Selinger: Okay, thank you for enunciating that more clearly.

Well, wetlands are important sources of ecological activity in Manitoba. We would like to see a policy of no net loss of wetlands. We'd like to actually protect wetlands, but in instances where there's no alternative other than to reduce wetlands in one area, we'd like to see wetlands in other areas

enhanced to offset that so that there is a no-net-loss policy. Details of that, obviously, are being worked out, but that policy informs decision making on where building occurs, where infrastructure occurs, and will be used as guidelines in making decisions with respect to those kinds of matters in Manitoba, particularly matters under our direct jurisdiction.

But wetlands are, as the member knows, are very important. They're—they can be important sources for reducing nutrification in lakes because of the plant life that grows there, such as cattails. They can be in sort—important sources of carbon storage with peat being involved in wetlands. They can be important sources of aquatic life because of the environments, the rich environments that they have. And they can be important storers of water, generally, on the surface of the land instead of having—if wetlands are destroyed, that water runs off into the main tributaries in the province and can be lost as a source of water resiliency at times of dryness or drought in Manitoba.

So all of these things are part of the Surface Water Management Strategy as we go forward.

Mr. Gerrard: We'll—implementing the no-net-loss-of-wetlands approach requires legislation. Will it be implemented solely on the basis of regulation? Will it have—you know, what will be the approach in terms of whatever government financing may or may not be needed?

Mr. Selinger: Presumably, all the tools will be considered as we go forward on that. But, obviously, the best approach usually is to have a co-operative approach with people that are—have an influence, an impact on wetlands, whether it's on Crown land or private land or municipal land or other sources of ownership, so presumably a co-operative approach. We have a very good conservation district system in Manitoba and they bring together people from a watershed basis to look at how to manage that watershed in the best way possible.

So, for example, there's been wetlands protection and restoration initiatives for the Delta, Netley, Libau marshes which can help reduce nutrient loading in Lake Winnipeg by 6 per cent. So that's a co-operative approach there.

But there's been investments in waste water treatment, very significant investments in waste water treatment throughout Manitoba which reduces nutrification. And there's been tough laws brought into place like The Save Lake Winnipeg Act which

protect—which also improve protections of wetlands and strengthen nutrient removal requirements. And brought in some moratoria—more moratorium on licences and leases for peat mining. And we were the first jurisdiction in Canada to restrict phosphorus content in dishwashing detergents, which has now been taken up by the federal government as a pan-Canadian policy.

We've strengthened septic field rules as well to ensure safer operation of those systems that would—it protects water, protects wetlands.

So—and we've also put money into the Lake Winnipeg research 'veshel'—vessel, the Namao. And we've established the U of M watershed system research centre.

So we're looking at all the different ways that—different sources of nutrients and pollution can impact wetlands and phosphorus release and want to make sure that we continue to have an overall approach on that and look at all the different tools with respect to that.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, there's, you know, a big step from, you know, protecting an individual wetland or draining an individual, you know, farmland area or what have you, and—to having a no-net-loss-of-wetlands policy approach which is—whether it's watershed-wide or province-wide. And it would appear to me that, you know, for all the talk about individual initiatives and individual wetlands, that what's needed here is to take the step beyond the strategy and actually implement a no-net-loss-of-wetlands approach, and I'm just trying to find out a little bit more about, you know, how that's going to be achieved.

And it likely will require legislation. Such legislation would allow it to be formally discussed in the Chamber and have input from citizens around the province. So has the Premier (Mr. Selinger) been considering legislation? Is there any thought to drafting such legislation? What is the approach going to be?

* (16:50)

Mr. Selinger: I think all tools are available, and many of those tools have already been used. And I want the member to know that projects are going on to preserve wetlands in Manitoba, as we speak. It's not a question of tomorrow. I mean, there will be further initiatives in the future, but one of the bigger challenges to overcome was the federal government's decision to eliminate the PFRA, the prairie farm

rehabilitation agency, which did a good job co-ordinating wetland preservation as well as other landscape projects throughout western Canada. And the loss of that federal role has put a greater burden on the provinces and local municipalities and conservation districts to pick up the leadership on that, so that has been a big loss. That was a setback.

But the Surface Water Management Strategy, we've worked closely with our conservation districts, and I note a modest increase in the budget this year for conservation district and watershed assistance through a Rural Economic Development initiative, so there has been some additional support provided this year. But conservation districts are one of the better vehicles to look at these issues because it involves the local producers, local leadership, local conservationists, all working together on a watershed basis to look at that watershed and what needs to be done to preserve wetlands and the viability of that watershed in general.

So that's part of the approach that we're taking in partnership, and we work with other agencies such as Ducks Unlimited as well to protect wetlands. They play a big role throughout North America in wetland protection, and we've worked closely with them in Manitoba as well.

Mr. Gerrard: Is it the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and his government's, you know, approach going to be to implement the no-net-loss-of-wetlands policy on a watershed basis or for larger areas across southern or central Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: We'll work closely with conservation districts to see what makes sense on their—at their level they have a much closer feel for the texture of the issues in their areas and know the circumstances that they have to deal with. But we'd like to see wetland preservation become a greater theme and policy initiative at the provincial level. So, obviously, the department will play a role in co-ordinating an overall strategy, but conservation districts are one of the main organizational mechanisms to deal with this matter on a watershed basis.

So we'll work at all levels, but we've worked closely with conservation districts and we want to continue to do that.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if the Premier can let the Chamber know whether the government has any plans to introduce no-net-loss-of-wetlands legislation in this session.

Mr. Selinger: Again, if that legislation's brought forward, we'll certainly make members aware of that. I haven't seen it introduced so far, and I don't see it coming forward in the next couple of days, for sure.

But, you know, the Surface Water Management Strategy is one that we've put out about last year at this time, as I recall, and it's one that took a broad look at that. And wetlands are important. As I said earlier, there're already practical, protection and restoration issues occurring in the Delta and Netley Libau marsh areas to reduce nutrient loading in our major lakes.

And there are other projects being done by conservation districts. I don't have them all in front of me. The member could discuss that with the minister in his Estimates, the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Nevakshonoff), and I'm sure they'd have quite a bit more information at their fingertips to provide him than I have currently in front of me.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the Premier, and apparently still a long way to go in terms of the Surface Water Management Strategy.

I'm going to hand this over to the MLA for Morden-Winker, because he has some questions. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable member for Morden—did the honourable First Minister want to respond first?

Mr. Selinger: Sorry, was there a final question from the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)?

Madam Chairperson: No.

Honourable member for Morden-Winkler.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): I have some questions for the Premier pertaining to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council. On a basis of information received from a information request, it would appear that the—this particular committee—and we understand that it's—it exists to provide information and advice to the Premier on the development of government economic strategy.

I wonder if the Premier can comment on the fact that this particular group met three times in the period of one year, and I'm wondering—when I look at the amount of resources that are marshalled to this particular group and the salaries and employee benefits that go to it, does the Premier believe that

this is good value for money when the committee only meets three times in the period of one year.

Mr. Selinger: Broadly, I would say that they have provided a lot of valuable advice to the government. They may have—they've got many subcommittees and they work away on a variety of assignments, and it brings together all sectors of the community: labour, business, non-profit sector, various individuals with expertise to offer.

I think overall they've done a pretty good job and they've given us some really good advice. Many of their recommendations have wound up in our budgets, for example, on the skills agenda, how to increase the number of apprenticeships in Manitoba, how to increase private sector investment and economic growth in Manitoba, just a whole variety of issues, post-secondary training and co-ordination of growth in the post-secondary sector. They've been very helpful on a whole—health care, for example, as I recall, they had some good advice on how to manage health-care expenditure while continuing to provide good quality services to Manitoba, including increasing the efficiency in the delivery of services in the province.

So I think they've been doing a pretty good job overall.

Mr. Friesen: I'm trying to understand how this particular group conveys information to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and to his Cabinet for consideration. I'm just thinking about the mechanism of that.

In the request that we received back, it appears that the advisory council doesn't keep records of its meetings, and I wonder—can the Premier comment, in the absence of formal records from these meetings, how is the information that is discussed there captured and conveyed for consideration?

Mr. Selinger: Members of the advisory council provide reports and recommendations to government through myself, in many cases, and those are considered.

And as I've indicated, some of those recommendations have—for example, investments in greater apprenticeship training, investments in post-secondary programs that are target skills where there's a shortage of skills in Manitoba, recommendations on how to increase private sector investment and enterprise development in the

province, recommendations on how to improve the efficiency of the delivery of government services; some call it a Lean Council, or service excellence is another way to look at it. So they've been pretty active.

They all—they're all volunteers. They don't receive 'meruneration'. So it's a pretty good group of Manitobans, I would say, that offer their time and their expertise and their life experience and their business experience and working experience to how to make Manitoba a better place for people to live, and I—overall, I would say that they've worked hard and done a good job over the many years they've served us.

Mr. Friesen: Well, and it's an important area, I believe, to pursue in the context of this Estimates process, because the money that is allocated to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council is continuing to increase. As a matter of fact, the council spent \$306,000 in 2013-14, but now the budget has ballooned to \$418,000 for the current fiscal year, for the upcoming fiscal year. So it is an area of concern.

Now, the First Minister has said that it's not necessary to keep minutes because the group prepares reports. Can the First Minister please clarify, does the committee—do the committee individuals prepare their own reports and send them in, or are they seconded to various subcommittees and then those subcommittees meet, discuss and report directly to the Premier?

Mr. Selinger: I believe the process is they strike subcommittees to look at different subject areas and the subcommittees report back to the overall advisory council, which then reports out to myself and other officials in government.

Mr. Friesen: And yet, according to the information we received back, the committee does continue to gather. They meet and they met three times a year. Can the First Minister—

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 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 8, 2015

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