

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
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| ALLUM, James | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | NDP |
| ASHTON, Steve, Hon. | Thompson | NDP |
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| PEDERSEN, Blaine | Midland | PC |
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| WISHART, Ian | Portage la Prairie | PC |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

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, know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 18—The Affordable Utility Rate
Accountability Act**

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 18, The Affordable Utility Rate Accountability Act; Loi sur la responsabilisation en matière de tarifs de services publics abordables, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Struthers: This bill will ensure that the government is accountable to Manitobans for our promise—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Co-operation of all honourable members to allow the Minister of Finance to complete his remarks.

Mr. Struthers: Jealousy will get them nowhere, Mr. Speaker.

I want the House to know that this bill will ensure that the government is accountable to Manitobans for our promise that Manitobans will continue to enjoy the most affordable utility costs in Canada.

The bill requires the Minister to Finance to table a report each year that lists the comparable cost in each province of a utility bundle consisting of electricity for home use, natural gas for home heating, and automobile insurance.

Given the response today, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to their support and the passage of this bill.

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

**Bill 209—The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Conflict of Interest Amendment Act
(Cooling-Off Periods Related to Independent Officers)**

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen), that Bill 209, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Conflict of Interest Amendment Act (Cooling-Off Periods Related to Independent Officers), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: This legislation would strengthen the work done by independent officers of the Manitoba Legislature who work for each of us as MLAs and all Manitobans. It would prevent the designated independent officers of the Assembly from taking employment with the Manitoba civil service for three years following the end of their tenure, a cooling-off period.

That would ensure that there are no perceived or real conflicts with independent officers who are one day the watchdog for a government, and the very next, employed by government. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill 27—The Insurance Amendment Act

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister for Family Services and Labour, that Bill 27, The Insurance Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les assurances, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Struthers: Bill 27 will amend The Insurance Act to modernize an act that is outdated and where many of the provisions date back more than 70 years.

These amendments are the second phase of the modernization process that started in 2007. As a result, the amended legislation will be better

understood by consumers, the insurance industry, and more consistent with the insurance legislation in other jurisdictions.

The bill reflects the results of a lengthy consultation with the insurance industry.

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

Bill 26—The International Interests in Mobile Equipment Act (Aircraft Equipment)

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief), that Bill 26, The International Interests in Mobile Equipment Act (Aircraft Equipment), now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Rondeau: This bill will allow financiers to guarantee security on aircraft parts, engines, et cetera. It is part of a very comprehensive strategy for financing throughout the entire world, and what it'll help is it'll help companies like StandardAero, Magellan, et cetera, conduct business around the world.

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

Any further bills?

PETITIONS

Cellular Phone Service in Southeastern Manitoba

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

And the background for this petition is as follows:

During early October 2011, parts of southeastern Manitoba were hard hit by wildfires. Thanks to the swift action of provincial and municipal officials, including 27 different fire departments and countless volunteers, no lives were lost and property damage was limited.

However, the fight against the wildfires reinforced the shortcomings with the communications system in the region, specifically the gaps in cellular phone service.

These gaps made it difficult to co-ordinate firefighting efforts and to notify people that they had to be evacuated. The situation also would have made

it difficult for people to call for immediate medical assistance if it had been required.

Local governments, businesses, industries and area residents have for years sought a solution to this very serious communication challenge.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the appropriate provincial government departments to consider working with all stakeholders to develop a strategy to swiftly address the serious challenges posed by limited cellular phone service in southeastern Manitoba in order to ensure that people and property can be better protected in the future.

And this petition is signed by C. Faucher, N. Coulombe and J. Dueck and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

* (13:40)

Personal Care Homes and Long-Term Care—Steinbach

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The city of Steinbach is one of the fastest growing communities in Manitoba and one of the largest cities in the province.

This growth has resulted in pressure on a number of important services, including personal care homes and long-term care space in the city.

Many long-time residents of the city of Steinbach have been forced to live out their final years outside of Steinbach because of the shortage of personal care homes and long-term facilities.

Individuals who have lived in, worked in and contributed to the city of Steinbach their entire lives should not be forced to spend their final years in a place far from friends and from family.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health to ensure additional personal care homes and long-term care spaces are made available in the city of Steinbach on a priority basis.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by H. Koop, M. Koop, I. Penner and thousands of other Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative report for Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Don Bjornson from Gimli, who is the father of the honourable Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson).

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

And in the public gallery, we have with us from Grandview School 26 grade 8 students under the direction of Ms. Barbara Grexton. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers).

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

And also seated in the public gallery, we have from the Northern Shield Academy 16 grade 9 and 10 students under the direction of Ms. Joanne Dowsett. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Crown Corporations

Policy for Access to Sports Tickets

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): As we know, this Premier broke his election promise to Manitobans not to raise taxes and brought in a budget with \$184 million in new taxes on hard-working Manitobans. Number 2, he broke his promise to seniors and to farmers by not eliminating property taxes for those people who he promised that he would eliminate taxes for. He praised a Cabinet minister who broke election laws. He supported a minister who used the civil service for political purposes. He uses interns for political purposes to attack federal Cabinet ministers. He stacks Crown corporation boards with NDP political

donors. He gives patronage appointments to the NDP's own auditor. He supports ministers who jump the line for Jets tickets. And that's just the last four weeks.

In light of this record of arrogance, Mr. Speaker, how can this Premier ask any Manitoban to trust this arrogant NDP government?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I think you can start in January when we gave a 2.2 per cent increase to the education system in Manitoba, and that contrasted with 2 per cent reductions during their time in office.

And then you could roll forward to see what we did in the budget, where we made a very significant contribution to our health-care system, and reformed our health care—health authorities, and then rolled forward with announcement to make cancer-care drugs—oral cancer-care drugs free to all Manitobans suffering from cancer so they can stay at home with their families.

And then you can move forward to see the announcement as recent as yesterday, where we're going to allow Manitobans to have on-bill financing of energy improvements to their homes to bring down their utility bills in the first month after they install the new technologies.

Those are just some of the examples of things we've done to keep Manitoba one of the best places to live in the world and an affordable place to live.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, you know, the Premier brags a lot about how much money he spends, and we know that they'll outspend pretty much anybody.

But the results in education, for example, are the lowest test scores in Canada for math, science and reading. So they spend money on things like Jets tickets for their ministers and their friends, and they cut in other areas. And where they do spend, they get the worst results in the country.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier said this morning on CJOB that he thought that ministers in his government and NDP MLAs and insiders getting Jets tickets was a big deal.

I want to ask the Premier now: If he thinks it's a big deal, what's he going to do about it?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, just first of all, with respect to the preamble, we have 16 per cent more young people graduating from high school now,

something that never occurred under the members opposite. When the members opposite were in office, the number of people completing high school went down. Under us, it's up 16 per cent to over 83 per cent. That's the kind of thing that we're doing to make Manitoba a better place to live.

And what we've done, I—perhaps the member missed it, but we've said, no more tickets to Cabinet members, caucus members, or senior officials in our government, and we're still waiting for the policy from the members opposite on how it applies to his caucus. What is the policy for his caucus? We've put our policy forward. We await their policy for their caucus.

Mr. McFadyen: Let me—the Premier's asked the question so let me be clear. Our policy is we don't take taxpayers' money and spend it on Jets tickets for NDP Cabinet ministers, Mr. Speaker.

We call on Crown corporations to spend the money on things that produce goods for the people of Manitoba. We call on Crown corporations to transfer their net revenue to government to spend on health care and education and other things that bring value for the people of Manitoba.

His policy is to use the public money of Crown corporations to give Jets tickets to members of his Cabinet, to his donors, to his cronies, to his friends, Mr. Speaker, in addition to all the other things that have led to an erosion of trust in his government. We know that he'll spend money. We know they'll get terrible results. Now we know that it's all about taking public money, spending it on his ministers and on his friends.

How are Manitobans expected to believe anything other than this government is just a bunch of arrogant socialists?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member raising the issue of Crown corporations. There is a big difference. We actually think Crown corporations should stay under public ownership on this side of the House. It was only the Leader of the Opposition that was involved in privatization schemes after they said they wouldn't do it with respect to the telephone system. It was only his candidates that said they thought it was a good idea to privatize the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

And I'm glad that he's enunciated his policy with respect to Crown corporations. What is his policy with respect to members of his caucus getting tickets

from private businesses in Manitoba? Does he or does he not allow that for his caucus, Mr. Speaker?

Manitoba Hydro Access to Winnipeg Jets Season Tickets

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, in response to a freedom of information request, Manitoba Hydro has confessed to having four Winnipeg Jets season tickets or 160 tickets to Jets home games. Eighty of those tickets were received due to Manitoba Hydro's sponsorship, and 80 tickets were purchased directly.

Can the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro tell us who had access to those 160 tickets and, Mr. Speaker, could he please tell us the names of those individuals?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): I recently discussed the matter with the president of Manitoba Hydro. I understand there's been a number of media requests and there was a FIPPA that was answered with respect to this.

There were two pairs of tickets that Manitoba Hydro had access to, and provided it. There was a policy put in place by the president of Hydro when he assumed office via memo on February 22nd, and as I—and I know that none of those tickets went to any member of this government.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, to be very clear, Manitoba Hydro received 80 Winnipeg Jets home game tickets for being a sponsor. Seemingly, that wasn't enough, and Manitoba Hydro purchased an additional 80 tickets.

If Manitoba Hydro has received 80 free tickets and has bought 80 on top of that, who got them?

* (13:50)

Mr. Chomiak: As I indicated, there were two sets of tickets. One was bought by Hydro in order to move the Jets campaign over the 13,000, whatever that issue was. The second was as a result of Manitoba Hydro sponsoring the—its advertising there, and for that they received two tickets.

As I understand it, the list is being compiled with respect to that. None of them went to any members of the government, Mr. Speaker. They went mostly to, I understand, corporate customers and employees. And they were seats and they were not boxes like other companies have purchased.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro had 160 Winnipeg Jets home game tickets, so the question is very clear. Who got the tickets? Was it the Hydro board? Senior Hydro staff? Was it political staff?

Someone got these tickets. Why won't the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro release the list?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as indicated earlier, there was a process put in place when the new president came in, with respect to the utilization of tickets, and that was to senior officials at Hydro dealing with business, et cetera.

No tickets went to any government member, Mr. Speaker. And, as I understand it, only one ticket was used at one time by one board member of Manitoba Hydro of all of those tickets in place. The rest went to employees and customers, and that's been the advice that I've been advised by Manitoba Hydro.

Cabinet Ministers

Payment for Winnipeg Jets Season Tickets

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, NDP Cabinet ministers and insiders have scored Jets tickets, paid for by hard-working Manitobans. Those people may not have been able to buy those tickets themselves.

But, since they got caught with their hand in the cookie jar, Mr. Speaker, I would like to know: How many Cabinet ministers scored those freebies and who are they?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister charged with the administration of The Crown Corporations Public Review and Accountability Act): Mr. Speaker, the member for Morris is absolutely incorrect. The—as we reported yesterday, as has been made very clear, no Cabinet minister benefited on behalf of the Manitoba taxpayers, absolutely, end of story on that.

It was reported yesterday—it was reported honestly and accurately yesterday that any minister who received tickets paid for those tickets. It did not come from the people of Manitoba, so, Mr. Speaker, they can try that narrative all they like, but the facts don't back them up.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, first he says Cabinet ministers didn't benefit but he—then he—yesterday he said they paid back the tickets. The fact

is, they put themselves at the head of the line, ahead of hard-working, taxpaying Manitobans.

So I'd like to know: When they got these tickets, did they disclose that they got these tickets? Who did they disclose that to? When they got this—when—they do that disclosure, when they got the tickets, Mr. Speaker, or when they got caught?

Mr. Struthers: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I know it must be frustrating for members opposite when the facts don't back up the narrative that they're trying to get across. I understand that frustration, but the facts of the matter are that nobody from this side of the government benefitted through Jets tickets at the expense of the Manitoba taxpayer. That's clear; that's obvious.

Mr. Speaker, it does require this government to move forward with a strong policy, which we are doing. A strong policy that ensures a framework of fairness on behalf of the people of Manitoba, but members opposite are absolutely incorrect to suggest that anyone on this side of the House did not pay for those tickets.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, those government ministers were at the head of the line, ahead of hard-working taxpayers in this province who may not have been able to buy those tickets themselves. This government needs to come clean with the dirty details of this.

Did the ministers pay for the tickets when they picked them up, or did they pay for them when they got caught, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me be very clear. If the minister—the member for Morris, maybe, didn't hear me the first number of times that I've said this, but I made it very clear the tickets were paid by the ministers who attended the games. That's very clear.

Mr. Speaker, I would also advise members opposite, like I did yesterday, to pick a story and stick to it—several different stories emanating from their side of the House.

I want to quote the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) from yesterday. What did he say, Mr. Speaker? He said, and I quote: If they're going there for ministerial duties we understand that. So he understands why people would take tickets, and then in the House what do we get? We get a lot of self-righteous questioning. We don't see a policy coming forward from [inaudible] side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, ministers—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Time has expired.

Flooding Financial Compensation Omission of Rural Municipalities

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): The flood of 2011 has had a devastating effect on many homeowners, cottage owners, developers, businesses, farm families, of course, local governments.

Yesterday this government announced the funding for a number of rural municipalities that are impacted by the flood of 2011. However, there was also some glaring absences from this list. Some that come to mind are the RM of Woodlands, RM of Portage la Prairie, Westbourne, where area of—since the flooding had occurred.

I ask the minister responsible: Was the omission of these municipalities unfortunate oversight and is he going to rectify it today?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the member is asking questions about the flood because I think it's very important to recognize that while we're still fighting the flood we have over 2,400 Manitobans that are still away from their homes. We're now very much in the recovery stage. We did make a number of announcements this week including specific increased staffing that has been put in place. And I want to stress, by the way, this is the critical time in terms of recovery because we're now into spring and summer conditions, the lake is clear and we have a significant number of additional staff.

The identification—the effect that municipalities would face partly on consultation with municipalities, but also on the fact that last year was an assessed—or assessment—reassessment year, and we do think it is a positive step. Because what we're trying to do, Mr. Speaker, is recognize not only the impact on flood victims, but in—particularly in some of the municipalities where there's a fairly small tax base the kind of transfer that can have to other taxpayers, very significant potential increases. So we have moved in this area, and I would hope that the member would support what is a very positive initiative—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, I specifically—about those three municipalities that I pointed out whether or not

that was an omission. Obviously it was, and we hope the minister rectifies that.

The minister knows full well that it'll take more than a full year to cover the flood damaged properties. Every region affected by flooding has lost a portion of their tax base. The difference has to be made up by the balance of those ratepayers in that particular municipality, town or city. That can create a real hardship. All rural governments, Mr. Speaker, need to be treated fairly as a result of the flood.

I ask the minister responsible why this government is playing politics with those RMs that have been left out on this one-time-only program?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the member would recognize that the announcement was very much recognizing the pressures on local government.

And, in fact, one of the other components of the announcement, and again showing our commitment to the City of Brandon, is the fact that we had originally put forth a grant of \$800,000 last year for flood preparation. The actual cost of that was significantly higher, \$1.7 million, and as part of the announcement we said that we would cover the full non-municipal share which is 90 per cent.

And, again, our commitment is to support Manitobans in the flood.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, we have repeatedly asked this government to provide fair treatment to all Manitobans affected by the flood of 2011, including local governments. Concerns have although been raised by this one-time-only program simply doesn't go far enough for those hard-hit municipalities. In fact, the RM of Reeve Earl Zotter has likened to put a band-aid on a bullet wound.

Mr. Speaker, this government made a mistake yesterday; can it right this wrong?

I ask the First Minister: Will he ensure the shortcomings of this program are addressed immediately? Will it take—it will take longer than a year for this flood and this disaster to be approved, and we ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to stand up for those that were not included in the last press release.

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to stress that when we made the announcements we also made it very clear that as much as fighting the flood has been a challenge we are going to be dealing with a recovery of historic proportions. We're anticipating now that we're going to have triple the number of claims from the 1997 flood. In fact, this flood in

terms of recovery pales by comparison with any other flood going back to 1950.

* (14:00)

I want to put on the record that we have significantly recognized the impacts of this flood. We've already paid out, either in terms of flood prevention or in terms of compensation or assistance, \$650 million.

I want to put on the record that last year, when people around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin said, don't forget us, we moved on an outlet. We built it on time, in fact, on budget. It has now reduced Lake Manitoba by 2.8 feet, Lake St. Martin by 1.5 feet. We're working with Manitobans during the flood, and we will work with them every step of the way during the recovery.

Flooding (Lake Manitoba) Property Inspection and Cleanup Delays

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): The NDP government promised assistance for debris cleanup around Lake Manitoba following the flood they caused in 2011. That debris cleanup should have started weeks ago, yet there was no reference, whatsoever, to the debris cleanup in Monday's announcement. Many people around the west side of Lake Manitoba want to start cleaning up their property. However, they have been told that the—that should they start work before an inspector visits their property, their claims will be refused.

Mr. Speaker, when is the government going to end their double-talk? Why has this NDP government taken so long to provide the needed inspections?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to stress that we have hired a significant number of staff. In addition to the 73 staff at EMO, there have been significant employees. In fact, what really struck me visiting many of the employees in Portage, dealing with these claims, there's only one person that actually has quit since last year. People have been driving in from Brandon, from all over the province, into that particular office, and they've been working full-time.

Part of the announcement on Monday was the fact we're bringing in eight assessors. We're bringing them in from the province of Québec because of their very specialized expertise. We're working with municipalities; we're working across the country to

bring in the expertise. It is historic, 30,000 claims, but we're going to meet that challenge.

Mr. Briese: In spite of what the minister says, I'm being approached, almost daily, by people that haven't seen an inspector yet. The longer the debris cleanup from the 2011 flood is delayed, the more difficult and costly the job becomes. The people around the lake have had so many claims turned down or delayed, they really don't trust this NDP government to keep promises on their progress. They are reluctant to commit any many resources to cleanup because they fear the NDP will break those promises just like they've broken most of their other promises.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier (Mr. Selinger) commit today to getting the property inspections done, or was the debris cleanup program just another empty election promise?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important—and the member knows this—in and around Lake Manitoba and around Lake St. Martin, there's been a significant reduction in the lake levels that has occurred over the last number of months, partly because of weather but also because of this government's, the Province's, commitment to build an outlet from Lake St. Martin, which has reduced the level of Lake Manitoba by 2.8 feet.

So one of the reasons we're actually in the position of talking about cleanup in and around Lake Manitoba in Lake St. Martin is because the lake levels are down, and it's partly because of the actions of the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, that cleanup should have started months ago. The debris in question was caused exclusively by the intentional flooding. It consists of uprooted trees, parts of buildings and corrals, fences, contents of destroyed buildings and soil that's been moved by flood water.

Mr. Speaker, when will the NDP government take some action, allow the cleanup to begin, and keep their promises about property rehabilitation in the Lake Manitoba inundation zone?

Mr. Ashton: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the lake levels, a number of months ago, were at very high levels. And, also, it's not uncommon in and around Lake Manitoba, in the spring, to have significant damage from ice. Now, we were fortunate in terms of the weather. We were not fortunate, we actually worked and reduced the lake level. And this is the time of year, this is the time, during the flood

recovery stage, that you would expect the kind of recovery that is taking place right now.

So, Mr. Speaker, we were there to fight the flood; we'll continue to fight the flood, for the 2,400 evacuees that are out there. We're going to work on mitigation for the future, and we're going to undertake the challenge of the most significant recovery since 1950, and we're going to do it by working with Manitobans, as we have, 24-7, since this flood last year.

Flooding Financial Compensation Feedlot Operators Claim Delays

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): The effects of the 2011 flood continue to be felt in the agricultural sector.

Last May, when asked by the media how soon compensation cheques would be issued, the Minister of Agriculture's reply was: very quickly. People took him at his word. I guess they should have known better. Yet, one year later, several Manitoba feedlots are still waiting for their claims to be processed. Feedlot operator Brad McDonald from north of Portage la Prairie has recently received one half of his claim, but he's received no indication when the rest of the claim will be paid.

Mr. Speaker, what part of very quickly does this government not understand?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question, member from the—from Midland.

Yes, we all have cases that we're on dealing, and I suppose every case is very unique, and I suppose this one is no different than the other ones. And I want to assure you that we value the importance of the livestock sector in the province of Manitoba as we move forward. And I want to assure you that our department is reviewing the cases. We are very diligent in moving forward on processing these claims, and I can assure you that we will do in time, and if I foresee any delay, as he's indicating, I'd gladly he be able to speak to the affected personnel in person if need be. Thank you so much.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, flood victims like Manitoba feedlot operators were assured by the former Agriculture minister that their claims would be approved and processed very quickly. They should've known better. However, these delays are causing serious cash flows as work has been

completed and contractors have been paid, yet there's a systematic delay in reimbursing these claims.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture: When will these outstanding flood claims be paid, or is this yet again another broken promise by this government? Is this another government lie?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Before I get to the honourable minister, I want to caution all honourable members to please pick and choose your words very carefully.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, I suppose that I have to inform the MLA for Midland that we have to understand the equation, the financial equation, that it was a joint partnership between the federal and provincial government. And I think it's at this point in time that we need to study the fact: has the money from our federal partnership come across to deal with these issues? I think those are some of the issues that we need to address at this point in time as well. Thank you so much.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, a vibrant feedlot sector is essential to the health of the Manitoba cattle industry. A number of feedlot operations were hard hit by the 2011 flood, incurring hundreds of thousands of dollars in losses. The former minister of Agriculture repeatedly said compensation cheques would flow very quickly. But we are hearing over and over again from affected producers that compensation process is dragging.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister today commit to ensuring these producers' claims are reimbursed now to help with their cash flow position, or is this government content to break yet another promise to Manitoba flood victims?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I just want to reassure the comment that I made in my last discussion. It was that the fact that this was a participation by the federal government. Although, unfortunately, at this point in time, we haven't had co-operation to deal with it. And I will refer to the federal participation in AgriRecovery programs. And obviously, that they're—the opposition's well aware that we've had minimum participation in this, such as the other programs as far as the greenfeed programs, which we provided to the farmers of our province. The federal government didn't—nor with the support of the opposition, to help us move this forward. And also, the infrastructure, who—from flood mitigations regarding assistance programs, we've had no co-operation also.

So I would ask if the opposition would consider supporting us to let their cousins know that we need the support as well from that side of the party. Thank you so much.

Children in Care Supports

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the NDP poorly support children who are not well off. Children suffer because of inaction by the NDP. They suffer because of the priorities of the NDP. There's statistical and empirical evidence to show this.

We have a virtual city of care in Manitoba. The number of children in care has increased from 5,000 to almost 10,000 since this government's been in power because this NDP has failed to support children and families. The government's done such a poor job of looking after children in care that 75 per cent of sex trade workers in Manitoba have come from children who've been in care.

Besides splitting the department up so there's even less accountability, I ask the Premier: What has he done for Manitoba's poor and vulnerable children that's actually effective?

*(14:10)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, with specific respect to the number of children in care, one of the things we've done is we provided an extension when a young person reaches 18 years old, to continue to receive care and support within the child welfare system. That has grown the number of people officially within the child welfare system by over 400. But they do now get support and care that they never received before. They used to go out of the system at 18, regardless of their circumstances, regardless of their support system in the community. We now provide ongoing support.

So it does look like, on the numbers, there are more children in care, but in reality there are more children being cared for through support of the provincial government's Child and Family Services program.

Aboriginal Youth High School Graduation Rates

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, as Carol Sanders in the *Winnipeg Free Press* reported today, the dropout rate for Aboriginal youth is 50 per cent of youth in First Nations communities and 33 per cent elsewhere in the province. The

Premier directly contributes to this by his failure to support children and families, his failure to ensure adequate housing for those who are poor. Aboriginal children are just as important as every other child in this province, and yet the Premier and his rotating ministers of Education have been utterly ineffective in improving graduation rates in First Nation communities.

I ask the Premier what he and his Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) are doing that's actually effective in improving the education rates of Aboriginal children in Manitoba.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): It's an important question, Mr. Speaker, and one of the programs that we put in place is a program called the Brighter Futures program, and that has funded a number of initiatives in school divisions all around Manitoba. I'll just mention one right now; it's called the Pathways program. It provides additional support for people to get tutoring; it provides a safe place for them to go to do homework and get coaching; it provides them with an opportunity to earn some income which is set aside so they can go to a post-secondary institution, and there are other programs under different names but accomplish the same thing in many school divisions with-in Manitoba.

In addition, we have another—we have other initiatives at the high school level that allow people to complete high school, and we have put forward, on behalf of the Council of the Federation and the Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson), a request of the federal government to put more money into First Nations education, where each student gets \$3,500 less than they would get if they were in the provincial system. The federal government, in this current budget, has said they will commit an additional \$275 million over the next three years. We see that as a good beginning. It's a long time this issue has been on the table, but we see a beginning in that now and we are committed to working with people to get more done.

First Nations Communities Water and Sewer Infrastructure

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): With the poor housing conditions, the lack of access to running water for Aboriginal children are contributing factors in this very high—continuing very high dropout rate. The government's 12-year reign has failed to ensure adequate housing for families who aren't well off and has failed to bring the desperate need for clean

running water, a human right, to 1,400 Manitoba homes.

Sadly, the Premier, his ministers and the board appointees seem to be spending far too much time trying to get free tickets to sports events when they should be ensuring those without running water have this basic human right.

When will the Premier use taxpayers' dollars to retrofit homes in northern Manitoba for running water instead of the obscene amounts that he wastes on NDP damage control and NDP entitlements?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the rhetorical flourish from the member from River Heights, but another practical example of what we've done to stabilize and support the lives of First Nations people in Manitoba:

When the recession came in 2008, it was the Province of Manitoba that argued that housing for people, including people in First Nations, should be considered as part of the infrastructure program. That resulted in several hundred units of additional housing being built in First Nations communities, and when I visited them, I saw the indicator on the wall of the housing units that were being built under the infrastructure program that we advocated for, and each of those new houses has sewer and running water.

There is a backlog on the old houses, and we have said—and I've said this to the member in the Legislature, we want to be a part of that solution in two ways: One, through training people in those local communities to do the work and, in a second way, in providing a road to First Nations communities without a federal support contribution that will open up those communities to goods and services at the same cost that we get in the rest of Manitoba.

Manitoba Hydro Energy and Water Retrofit Program

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): In my short eight years here in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, I've been proud to see some pretty remarkable moments. One of them, the first that comes to mind, was our government led this whole Chamber in a universal apology for the residential schools. Another moment was when we launched Manitoba's first-ever comprehensive poverty reduction strategy for Manitobans. Another one, when we very bravely set aside the east side of Lake Winnipeg for proper

community consultations and ecological future for future generations.

Members opposite, they're going to pick the questions they think that are important, Mr. Speaker. But I was at another highlight yesterday when our government announced a novel new program to help all Manitobans everywhere conserve resources, save money and make a better future.

Could the Minister for Energy please tell us about that program.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think we're very fortunate in Manitoba to have a Crown corporation owned by the people of Manitoba like Manitoba Hydro, that is considered number one in energy efficiency in the country and has the lowest electrical rates in the country.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, looking forward—the corporation, through legislation—we've introduced legislation to allow for on-meter financing, that will allow all homeowners in every single part of Manitoba, in every city, every town, every village, in the north and otherwise, to put in place energy efficiency programs to fund them off of the meter, to have the costs—the efficiency come to those individuals at no cost to themselves. But they'll improve their energy efficiency and at the same time, will be financed by Manitoba Hydro, over the lifetime of that particular device and provide for all Manitobans.

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

Manitoba Hydro Projected Net Income

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, Budget 2012 projects a positive \$65-million impact on the summary budget for Manitoba Hydro. This is net income according to the budget. A couple of days ago, the Minister of Finance could not give us any details on the figure. What is it based on?

Can the Minister responsible for Hydro give us any background on the projections that were used to arrive at that \$65-million number?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, several years ago this government accepted the GAAP principles, the generally accepted accounting principles, and we will report to the people of Manitoba on that basis.

And on that basis, Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about moving forward in a positive way, in terms of both summary positions and core positions. And it's our very, very persistent commitment that using these principles and using common sense, will bring our budget back into balance in 2014-15 and work towards increasing our—making better our debt to GDP ratio.

It all plays into this and, Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of the approach that we're taking in Budget 2012.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance told me he didn't have the answer to that question a couple days ago, and he won't let the minister responsible for it answer the question, which is what he told me to do: ask the Minister responsible for Hydro.

Mr. Speaker, in his emergency application to the PUD-B, without a 33.5 per cent rate increase and recovery of the \$23 million in overcharges, Manitoba Hydro said it could lose \$51 million this year. This is a difference of \$116 million from the forecast in the budget.

How are we to believe a \$65-million profit figure in the budget?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Yes, in point of fact—[*interjection*] We discussed these issues in detail at Crown corporations committee, and I'd be prepared to offer the member *Hansard* copies of those particular answers, because we went back and forth on that. But I want to assure the member that we've introduced, today, legislation that will ensure that on bundle of rates, Manitoba's will be the lowest in the country. Hydro rates, heating rates, I think insurance rates, Mr. Speaker, and we'll keep Manitoba the most affordable place in the country to live, to grow and to raise a family, which is why this province is doing well compared to the rest of the country in terms of our economy.

* (14:20)

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, we did indeed address some of these issues in committee but, at that time, the budget was not yet released and the \$65 million wasn't out there. So in that Standing Committee on Crown Corporations, Manitoba Hydro did appear, and they projected; they gave us their forecasts. In committee, their forecast on net income in fiscal '13

was \$40 million, unless they had to pay back the \$23 million that they owed to Manitoba consumers. Then it was \$17 million in net income.

Can the minister tell this House which number we should expect to see in the budget? Which is the real number?

Mr. Chomiak: As was indicated in Crown corporations committee with the president and the chair of Manitoba Hydro, we went back and forth looking at the various exigencies and the various scenarios that would play out with respect to matters that were both before the Public Utilities Board and matters that had been determined on an interim basis by the Public Utilities Board. And we went through the various scenarios indicating that it would depend upon the determination of the Public Utilities Board.

But one thing was made very clear: Not only does Manitoba Hydro have the lowest rates in the country, but we brought in legislation to equalize rates across the province, something members opposite voted against. They voted against equalizing rates to rural and northern Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and that's one of the reasons why we want to keep Manitoba Hydro as a Crown corporation.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Highway 304

Upgrades for Increased Tourist Travel

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): The Waabanong Anishinaabe interpretative centre, which is located 200 kilometres northeast of Winnipeg on the Wanipigow River, is expected to attract tourists from across the province and beyond. This will drastically increase vehicular traffic on Highway No. 304.

Can the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Ms. Marcelino) tell us whether her government has anticipated the traffic volume increase that will occur as a result of increased tourism in the region?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Indeed, the interpretive centre is a significant asset. We're very proud in this government to be moving ahead with the interpretive centre, and I know it's been certainly something my colleague, minister of northern and aboriginal affairs, along with the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, have been spearheading.

And, as is the case throughout the province, Mr. Speaker, you know, this is a growing province. We have new developments. In fact, on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, we're building an entire new highway system that's going to connect many remote northern communities.

So my answer is this, Mr. Speaker: We have quadrupled the capital budget and I would hope member—if the member opposite is concerned about highways, including Highway 304, he might actually vote for that increase in highways funding.

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

Speaker's Rulings

Mr. Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

Order, please.

Immediately following members' statements on April 30th, 2012, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu) raised a point of order advising the House that she had heard the comments, in quotations, he lives on a grassy—on the grassy knoll, end of quotations, being spoken in the House from the floor, while the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) was asking a question during oral questions. The honourable Government House Leader (Ms. Howard) also offered advice to the Chair. I took this matter under advisement in order to check the words in *Hansard*.

I have looked in *Hansard* for April 30th, 2012, and the words in question do not appear. Previous Manitoba Speakers have ruled that if the words in question do not appear in *Hansard*, the Speaker cannot make a ruling as to whether or not the language was used—whether or not the language used was unparliamentary.

Speaker Rocan made four rulings between 1988 and 1995 supporting this concept, while Speaker Dacquay made seven rulings between 1995 and 1999 where she was unable to rule on the words—on words that do not appear in *Hansard*. Speaker Hickes also made three rulings indicating that the Speaker cannot make a ruling on language that does not appear in *Hansard*.

I would therefore advise the House that I cannot make a ruling in this situation, as the words do not appear in *Hansard*.

I have another ruling for the House.

Order, please.

Following members' statements on April 30th, 2012, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader raised a point of order concerning questions being answered by ministers. She noted that questions being addressed to a specific minister were instead being answered by another minister and stated that this affected the ability of the opposition to do their jobs.

The honourable Government House Leader and the honourable member for River Heights also offered advice to the Chair. I took the matter under advisement in order to consult with the procedural authorities. Earlier on that sitting day, a similar point of order had been raised during oral questions and I had ruled that there was no point of order.

I am happy to report that further examination of the procedural authorities has confirmed my initial ruling earlier in the day was correct. On page 509 of O'Brien and Bosc of the second edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states that questions, in quotations, questions, although customarily addressed to specific ministers, are directed to the ministry as a whole. It is the prerogative of the government to designate which ministers respond to—to which questions, and the Speaker has no authority to compel a particular minister to respond. End of quotations. On this topic, *Beauchesne's* citation 420 advises, in quotations, the Chair will allow a question to be put to a certain minister, but it cannot insist that minister rather than another should answer it. End of quotations.

This concept is reinforced by numerous rulings from Manitoba Speakers. Speaker Rocan ruled in 1991-92 and in 1992-93 that questions are put to the government as a whole and that it is up to the government to decide who will provide answers, while Speaker Hickes made seven rulings from the years 2000 to 2010 also confirming that it is up to the government to determine which minister will answer questions.

I would therefore rule that there is no point of order, and I hope that this ruling clarifies this practice for the House, based on the House of Commons and Manitoba practices.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Newborn Screening Program Expansion

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform the House of the good work being done through Manitoba's expanded universal newborn screening program. Yesterday I had the

pleasure of joining the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) at an event announcing this improvement in newborn health care in Manitoba. The event was held at the John Buhler Research Centre at the University of Manitoba's Bannatyne campus.

Over 16,000 babies are born each year in Manitoba. Most babies are born healthy, and their parents will gain peace of mind from this screening. However, a small number of newborns have rare conditions, some serious or life-threatening, that can be detected by newborn screening. Early intervention can make a real difference in the health outcomes for these newborns, providing a better quality of life and ensuring that they grow up as strong and healthy as possible.

Expanded universal newborn screening uses a technology called tandem mass spectrometry to detect over 40 genetic, hormonal, and metabolic disorders, including cystic fibrosis, with one test. Since we started expanded universal screening last September, the program has identified 26 affected children. In most of these cases, their condition probably would not have been detected early.

I'm proud to be part of a government that continues to give health-care providers and families the tools they need to ensure healthier children and a better quality of life for all Manitobans.

* (14:30)

As a father with a new baby on the way, I was proud to stand with the Minister of Health at the event formally announcing the expanded universal newborn screening program. I encourage all members to join me in acknowledging this new addition to health care in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Scotties Tournament of Hearts

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I'd like to recount this year's Scotties Tournament of Hearts, held in Portage la Prairie from January 25th to 29th. The event was attended by curling fans from afar—as far away as British Columbia and Nova Scotia and drew hundreds of visitors each day. One day alone saw at least 1,600 people attend the tournament, prompting organizers to declare the success of this year's tournament as unprecedented.

Having regularly attended the tournament myself, I can say that all attendees greatly

contributed to the championship-style feel of the games with their fervent enthusiasm for the game of curling. The tournament saw Manitoba's best curlers, Jennifer Jones and Cathy Overton-Clapton, and many others play in an exciting, competitive spirit. In the end, Canada's top seed, Jennifer Jones, and her team were crowned as winners. I must note however that Morden's Chelsea Carey and her team gave the winning team quite a challenge to overcome with their incredibly skilled play.

I think I can speak for all of the tournament spectators when I say that it's a true pleasure to witness some of the best curlers Canada has to offer. I would also like to commend the efforts of the 360 volunteers, without whom this event would not have been as successful as it was. It was incredible to see so many community members volunteer their time to facilitate the smooth running of this event. In particular, I'd like to mention co-chairs Jo-Anne Inglis and Diane Sadler.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the Scotties Tournament once again took place in Portage la Prairie, and I thank the talented organizers for working so hard to make this a 'memorable'—memorable, sorry, event. Once again, I would like to congratulate all of the participants in the Scotties Tournament and thank the hundreds of attendees and volunteers that have done so much to contribute to the sport of curling.

And before I leave this, I will note that I paid for my own tickets at this event. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the next member for a statement, I want to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery, where we have Robert and Donna Brown, who are family members of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here today.

The honourable member for Selkirk, on a member's statement.

Royal Canadian Sea Cadets Corps Daerwood

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, in April of this year, 45 sea cadets from the prairie region, including five young men from Corps Daerwood in Selkirk travelled to France for the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Mr. Speaker, Selkirk cadets Dylan Collins, Robbie Human, Erik Horne, Kieran Raymond and Sam Schwartz took part in the march to the Vimy Ridge Memorial, and they join us here today. They were accompanied by Lieutenant Conor Lloyd and several parent chaperones, many of whom were cadets themselves. Kieran Raymond was selected to carry Manitoba's flag during the march. These young men made our province proud.

Mr. Speaker, this trip helped give the cadets a better understanding of the realities of war. Prior to the trip, the cadets contacted Canadian relatives of fallen soldiers to offer tributes to their—on their graves on their behalf. They also participated in leaf-wreath-laying ceremonies at Juno Beach, the Menin Gate, and at Beaumont Hamel.

Mr. Speaker, several of the young cadets had personal connections to the historical sites they visited. Some of their family members fought in the First and Second World War and even at Vimy Ridge. And I, too, have a personal connection to Vimy Ridge; my great uncle, James Dewar, was killed at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and, like 24,000 other World War One dead, has no known grave, and his name is carved into the Vimy memorial.

I wish every Canadian had the opportunity to make this trip to see the battle sites and memorials to Canadian sacrifice. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the young cadets for representing Selkirk and Manitoba so well and learning more about Canadian history. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a member's statement.

YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding group of Manitoba women honoured at this year's YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards.

This year, the 36th annual event paid tribute to the talent, achievement, and innovation of over 65 nominees in 10 categories. I was lucky enough to attend the event with my wife, Naomi, on May the 2nd. While winners and nominees ranged in age and background, they all shared a similar commitment to helping others in creative, groundbreaking ways.

For instance, Dr. Maureen Heaman was recognized for her work in the field of science, technology and the environment. Most recently, her

research has focused on the factors associated with inadequate prenatal care among inner city women in Winnipeg. In this, she's engaged women in identifying ways to improve access to prenatal care, and ensured that the experiences and perspective of marginalized women, including Aboriginal, inner city, immigrant and low-income women, were represented in her findings.

Another remarkable woman honoured was Janice Lukes in the wellness, healthy living and recreation category. An advocate and educator for active transportation and living, she's been directly involved in securing upwards of \$56 million towards trail and cycling infrastructure in Winnipeg.

Also, Anna-Celestrya Carr, Métis filmmaker and fine arts student, who created the Men's Banner, a special project to involve men in solving the problem of violence against women, took top place in the public awareness and communication section. The banner is covered with the handprints of men who promise never to use their hands for violence against women. Anna-Celestrya is, as she put it, making a difference one handprint at a time.

Well, unfortunately, I don't have enough time to pay tribute to all of the amazing work done by each and every one of the women who were nominated or were award recipients in the 2012 awards here. I want to say congratulations and thank you to all of them for their efforts.

Thank you, also, to the YMCA-YWCA and all of the staff and volunteers that work hard every year to ensure Winnipeg has a spectacular event to recognize women who truly make a difference. I believe annual events like the Women of Distinction Awards, that demonstrates such a strong sense of community and recognition, are crucial to encouraging women and men alike to continue, or even get involved in, bettering the world for years to come. Thank you.

Pat and Owen Beaver

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): It is truly my pleasure, along with members of this House, to stand and recognize the contributions of Pat and Owen Beaver, who have played an integral part in both the inception and organization of the Ag Days trade show held annually in Brandon, Manitoba.

The Beevers have been involved with Ag Days since it began 35 years ago as the Manitoba weed-wheat fair, and have spent the 13 years—past 13 years managing the trade show. To the disappointment of

those who travel from Manitoba and beyond to get a peek at the latest agricultural products and technologies, Pat and Owen announced this January that this year would be their last.

Under their watch, Ag Days has grown exponentially, and both Pat and Owen have remarked that this remains one of their proudest accomplishments. Since the couple took over management of the event, the numbers—number of exhibitors has increased from 270 in 2000 to over 500 this past year. There is always a long waiting list for new exhibitors, and Pat and Owen are very creative at finding new areas of the Keystone to use while calming new applicants.

The show brings together a wide range of professionals from the agriculture sector, such as implement dealers and developers, financial and computer specialists, and livestock breeders.

Ag Days has become a boon for the economy of Brandon and the surrounding area. In recent years, 35 to 36 thousand visitors have attended the three-day fair. Hotels in Virden, Spruce Woods and even as far as Portage la Prairie had guests staying with them after Brandon hotels filled up. Restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, and the Brandon mall also benefit from the influx of visitors. Well, this is just one more example of the positive effect of agriculture on the province of Manitoba.

Walking with Owen—he's quite a knowledgeable person about weeds and everything in—regarding agriculture in Manitoba. I walked with him this past summer out in several areas, and someone asked: You know, I wonder how they name the streets in some of these places? And, yes, Owen looked up and saw Fife Close and Marquis Crescent, and he said: Well, they're all wheat varieties. So you learn something every day when you're walking with Owen.

The Beevers are a calming presence at Ag Days, and will be missed. I will miss both of them at the show as they were always assuring people that everything was going great even though they had to deal with many, many situations that were critical to the individuals involved.

* (14:40)

Owen and Pat always had a great team of volunteers working with them, and I know those volunteers will step up and continue the tradition of presenting a great show and great experience at Ag Days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you move us into the Committee of Supply, please.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections) CONSERVATION AND WATER STEWARDSHIP

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Order. 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 Conservation and Water Stewardship. As previously agreed, questions for the department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I just wanted to thank the minister for taking my colleague's questions yesterday in regards to some of their issues while I had the opportunity of asking some in other areas myself.

I wanted to touch base just quickly on the—and thank you for the information that you were able to supply yesterday. There may be some more issues there as we go forward that we were still looking for some information on that we may get in the next day or two, but I just wanted to touch base with the realignment of the portfolio of the department.

There were—I believe it's on page 7 in the supplementary information booklet here in regards to the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship expenditure summary and the main appropriations, the reconciliation statement—there were transfers of functions from Infrastructure and Transportation. You've outlined what those were. I believe this would end up being \$217,000. Is that staffing or can the minister just indicate to me where a few of those numbers would've come from?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I'm advised that there were two positions in water control systems management area that were found to be more appropriately aligned with the Water Stewardship side of things, rather than the MIT side.

So it was really part of the reorganization of the positions that took place following the amalgamation of Water Stewardship with Conservation. So that, I'm advised, is the explanation for the 217—two positions.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks, Mr. Minister, I appreciate that.

The transfer of functions then, these numbers that—there was funds, I assume, that were transferred out of your responsibility before. The Children and Youth Opportunities got \$333,000; Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs got \$108,000; Infrastructure and Transportation, \$9.015 million.

Could you just give us a—give me a—just a mile-high view of what those dollars represent in regards to why they would be moved to each of those portfolios?

Mr. Mackintosh: In terms of the amount, first of all, there was over \$9 million that went to MIT from Water Stewardship then, which was the water—the flood management-related issues and forecasting, water control.

The \$333,000 and the 108 that went to Children and Youth Opportunities, as well as Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, was a redistribution of six FTEs that were in the deputy and minister's office of the former Department of Water Stewardship.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, so they would just pick up a new role in those departments, those particular full-time equivalents?

Mr. Mackintosh: The Children and Youth Opportunities was a new department, and so this would go to fund the creation of the staffing in the deputy and minister's office.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, the Infrastructure and Transportation's pretty straightforward, and I just wondered about the other two, what reasoning there was behind that, of moving those, but it was just a transfer of personnel in that area.

Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs, the 108, was the same. Was there a couple of transfer of one or two people there to that area as well?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I'm advised that the transfer to Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs represents one FTE of the six that we spoke about earlier, and that, of course, would include salaries and benefits and associated operating.

Mr. Maguire: Just near the end of this, but I've—there's an allocation of funds to I, E and M. Is that—does that bracket around that mean that you got \$15,000 from inventory, energy and mines, or was that \$15,000 that went to Innovation, Energy and Mines? And just the details around it, if I could.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I'm advised the \$15,000 was transferred to Innovation, Energy and Mines in respect of information technology licence or licences on behalf of government. In other words, there was a transfer of the licensing costs from our department to IEM, which has overall responsibility in government for that.

Mr. Maguire: Okay, thank you. Just in the capital investment area, part 4 of the supplementaries, a \$25-million increase there, and I'm assuming, of course, parks restoration, because of the flood damage from last year, is a huge part of that. General assets, as well as the polar bear conservation centre—and I just wonder if I could get a—just a breakdown of that. What was the advance, or how much is going towards the International Polar Bear convention—Conservation Centre, I should say?

* (15:10)

Mr. Mackintosh: So there's been a significant increase to the capital investments being made this year, or anticipated to be made in that line. The \$15.8 million has been allocated under general assets in respect of the polar bear exhibit at the Assiniboine Park Zoo. And another \$9 million has been allocated for parks infrastructure.

Mr. Maguire: Thanks, Mr. Minister. The—so the dollars that you just indicated, I think it was \$15 million for the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre comes out of general assets? Or is it—I'm assuming that's—yes, that that's, I believe, what the minister said. If he could just confirm that. And then, I'm assuming that there is a \$9-million increase in parks infrastructure, in infrastructure assets, and I'm assuming that that would be for fixing up some of the other parks that had damage to them from the flooding as well.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, under the line, general assets, that's where the polar bear exhibit can be found. And the actual amount is 15.8 that's been allocated. And

then the difference on the line 12.(b)(1) Parks Infrastructure, that should work out to a \$9-million difference for this year. And that is focused, as the member says, on Parks Infrastructure Enhancement.

Mr. Maguire: That leaves about the same amount in general assets that was there the previous year, if you were to take the Polar Bear Conservation Centre amount out of that. But—so we appreciate the fact that those dollars are being allocated in that manner.

I just wanted to, then, say, you know, the overall budget went up about \$4 million in Water Stewardship, and the appropriations for Conservation and Water Stewardship in that whole area. The capital investments, are they included in the \$156 million, the capital investments of \$51 million this year, or are they—they're outside of the \$156 million for the budget?

Mr. Mackintosh: The total capital investment, page 179, shows \$51,332,000. That's the amount that's expended, but the actual cost to the department on an annualized basis, given the amortization schedule, would show up then on schedule 3 on page 7 as eleven-five-two-five. That is the costs relating to the principal and interest payments on the capital investment.

Mr. Maguire: My colleague from Emerson has a few questions in regards to a little bear that they found down in his area, and so I'm going to turn it over to him for a minute.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): And, yes, I do have some questions. There's been a lot of inquiries into what has happened to Makoon and since he became the custody of the Department of Conservation, and so maybe the minister can update us on the status of Makoon at this point.

Mr. Mackintosh: The bear is under the management and control of Assiniboine Park Zoo, and the director of the Assiniboine Park Zoo has responsibility, of course, for the oversight. So the—Mr. Sinclair-Smith, who is the director of the zoo, has advised that the bear has been gaining weight and they're keeping a close eye on the bear's development with a view to determining, according to the peer review literature, when the bear would be at the developmental stage that helps to ensure that the chances of survival for a bear like this is at the same rate as a non-orphaned bear in the wild of the same age. That's the state of—the last I had heard. I think it was late last week I was able to speak to Mr. Sinclair-Smith directly,

and he assured us of the bear's continued development.

Mr. Graydon: There's been—Rene Dubois, the individual that rescued the bear that was dying in a ditch, and also another lady by the name of Judy Stearns have both taken a great interest in the survival of the bear, and both of them have requested to see the bear and both of them have been denied that request. They asked me if it was possible that as the MLA of that area that I would be able to see the bear. Can the minister tell me why I would be turned down?

Mr. Mackintosh: When the member asked me that question, I said that the answer would be provided then by those that have care and control of the bear in light of their understanding of what is appropriate given the wildlife biology. So I understand that, you know, conversations were to take place directly with the member. So I let that occur as between the officials and the member and relying on the science that would be known to the wildlife officials.

Mr. Graydon: The—I did talk to the—to Mr. James—I'm not exactly sure what his last name is now—James Duncan, by the way. At any rate, his remarks were that they wanted to have limited exposure to humans, as much limited exposure as possible. At the same time, I didn't expect that I was going to be petting the bear, that I would like to see it and I was turned down.

So my next request then, Mr. Minister, was that I would see the bear released when he was released. And I was turned down for that, too, because he was being released in a remote area, it wouldn't have access by vehicle and that there wouldn't be room on the helicopter to go there, and I understood the expense of that. So then I made a request that I would be there when Makoon was being transferred from the zoo to the helicopter. I felt that was a reasonable request, Mr. Chair, and I was told that I would have to talk to the minister about that.

So the question to the minister is: Is it possible that I can be there when that transfer is done?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, my understanding from Mr. Sinclair-Smith is that it's in the bear's interests not to see humans if at all possible for any and all reasons, and the—I trust that the same message was conveyed to the member as was conveyed to me is that humans should make every effort to let this wild animal be a wild animal, and to enhance the chances

in the wild by way of minimized, or ensuring, that members of the public don't have access to the bear.

* (15:20)

And, so I have to defer to the advice and the science and determinations of people like Mr. Sinclair-Smith. I might add, Mr. Sinclair-Smith ran, or managed, a refuge facility. He's had senior positions in zoos and has lectured and trained on this matter and has great expertise, so, we're fortunate to have that kind of skills in Manitoba that can deal with situations like this.

So the solution, I understand, was to provide some pictures with the Dubois family. I understand that was an effort that was made by officials to assure the Dubois' that the bear was doing well.

Mr. Graydon: The minister refers to the manager at the zoo, or the individual that's in charge of that, that it would be him then, that would make the decision whether I would be able to see the bear?

It's not going to be loaded mechanically. We know that he's going to be exposed to humans while he's being transferred. My concern is that he's handled in a safe and humane fashion.

I understand what wild animals are. I do run a farm and do live in the country and I do have a lot of domestic animals that I know that can be dangerous too.

So, I would suggest that the bear needs to be restrained in a safe manner, not just for his own well-being, but also for the well-being of those that are handling him. At the same time, this isn't going to be a cuddling match between me and the bear or the handlers. It'll be the situation of moving the bear from the facility that it's in, to the helicopter, to be released.

So, is the minister saying then, that the individual at the zoo will be the one that determines whether I can be there or not?

Mr. Mackintosh: As one member of the Legislature, it's my position that we should let wildlife biologists do what they've been trained to do and, in this particular case, I know that additional efforts have been made by the director of wildlife in our department and, as well, relying on the expertise of Mr. Sinclair-Smith to review the peer-reviewed research and literature to understand what's in the best interest of the bear.

And so, when the member says he wants to make sure that it's handled in a safe and humane fashion, I—the wildlife biology would, I think tell us as members, that we should let those that are particularly trained in this one, do their job and get on with it.

Mr. Graydon: Does the—tell me then, does the province have a bear rehabilitation facility?

Mr. Mackintosh: The zoo has been providing, I think, a very welcomed service in this regard and has been providing expertise, as I've outlined earlier, so we certainly appreciate the role that they've played with this bear.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chairman, I think the question was fairly direct. Do we have, in Manitoba, a rehabilitation facility for orphaned bears?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, the bear in question is being dealt with at the facility at the zoo, so, in this case the answer is yes. Is there one that can take unlimited numbers? I'd have to ask the zoo how many, you know, a number they could take, but they certainly have been responsive to the interests of this bear's development.

Mr. Graydon: The—I'm sure that the minister is well aware that there's been a petition to have the bear moved to a rehabilitation centre in Ontario. And there's also a rumour that is floating around the communities now, that the bear might not be alive. What's the minister's response to that type of a rumour?

Mr. Mackintosh: I've heard from the member, and from many, some strongly held views on how the bear should be dealt with, and I've heard rumours from the member that, oh, there were reports in the media, you know, certain things being said, and that all reinforces, I think, what we as MLAs should respect. And that is, there's an important role for science and for people who have skilled approaches and expertise, to handle these matters. The—because, you know, when a population with big hearts wants to help, you can have some very differing views on what is right and wrong.

But the responsibility on the wildlife officials at the zoo and in the department, is to base their decision making on the best peer-reviewed evidence that there is, which is from all across North America. And, as well, of course, there have been many conversations, I understand, taking place as—between officials with biology expertise and, experience dealing with bears, in particular.

So—oh, and in terms of the answer to the question, I was advised last week of the status of the bear as I relayed earlier in my first answer.

Mr. Graydon: I believe, also, that it is the responsibility of the MLAs to represent the concerns of their constituency and of their constituents, and one of the concerns is that the bear might well be dead. And it would seem, at this point, that the minister's terribly reluctant to have anyone see it. Obviously, someone is feeding the bear. You don't have to be within 20 or 50 feet of it to see the bear.

So the question, again, is: Can you give me a guarantee today that that bear is alive and that I will see it before it's released?

Mr. Mackintosh: If the member's been advised by wildlife experts or officials that it's in the bear's best interest that the public not have access to this bear, than I think we, as MLAs, should respect that.

We've made decisions in the Legislature to create a public service that is skilled. That's why taxpayers go to work, to put in place officials that have expertise, that are trained. That's why there's a director of wildlife and wildlife officials, and that's why the city has Assiniboine Park Zoo, with a director who has particular expertise on—in the area of bears. So I think that we have to respect the—that everyone has a job to do and let them get on with it.

Mr. Graydon: So then, the answer to my question is, no? No.

Thank you.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I have a couple questions in regards to the water levels on Falcon Lake. Are the water levels in Falcon Lake regulated, and if so, how?

* (15:30)

Mr. Mackintosh: Just—and further follow up to the member for Emerson if—because of what he had put on the record, if he has any evidence at all of—that the bear isn't alive, he certainly should pass it on.

But what I think we should do in meantime, is if the member wishes more contact information for further assurances from Assiniboine Park Zoo, we can provide that to him. I think that he deserves that assurance—*[interjection]*

Sorry?—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Member for Portage la Prairie, want to ask a question?

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Yes, sure, if—did we get an answer on the Falcon Lake question?

Mr. Mackintosh: The—in MIT there's a—we talked about it earlier, sorry. There's a water control system's management unit there and they determine the appropriate water levels of the lake. If there is a concern and if there should be an adjustment, they then advise our department, because our department in this case operates the water control structure there because it's a provincial park—in Whiteshell Provincial Park.

So the right answer to the question is MIT determines the lake levels, but we do have a role then in responding if there is a need for any adjustment.

Mr. Smook: I have concerned cottage owners there that they say that the structure that's there doesn't really regulate the water properly because the water just continues to flow through. And they're concerned about levels for their docks, that they won't be able to use their docks because the lake is too low.

And I'm just wondering, like, are that—is the system there working properly? Are there target lake levels for Falcon?

Mr. Mackintosh: There's two ways of dealing with this. The member could ask that in MIT when officials are there. I think they may be the next one up. But, you know, in the meantime we'll ask that question of MIT officials through our contacts.

We'll determine what the lake level is and if there is any concerns right now, and we'll let the member know what the results of that may be. But he may get the answer just as quickly directly through the Estimates process, but we'll certainly undertake to get that information.

Mr. Smook: The road repairs and maintenance of road inside the park, is that also an MIT jurisdiction or is that—does this department budget funds for road maintenance inside the park?

Mr. Mackintosh: So the division of responsibilities for roads in the area, are as between our department, which is responsible for the unnumbered roads in the park. The numbered roads are the responsibility of MIT. So, if he has a concern about a particular road, then, we can address that and—because there are some changes that are happening, particularly at West Hawk Lake, for example.

Mr. Smook: Has there been any money budgeted for the south shore road at Falcon Lake for this summer?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I am advised there are dollars that are set aside for the maintenance of the roads, which would include this road. So if there is any—if there any—is there any damage or anything that has to be addressed, and that can be addressed within the existing budget. If the member is concerned about an allocation for a reconstruction, there hasn't been an allocation this year for any reconstruction on that—on the south road.

Mr. Maguire: I was just wanting to refresh in regards to a number of items that I asked the other day of the minister, in regards to overtime hours, flood—you know, general flood questions that we were asking. And I know the minister indicated that Finance was compiling all of this information. But Finance tells us that, of course, and as I mentioned to him the other day, his department will have to put all this together to provide it to Finance, to start with. And I just wondered if he'd had any more information that he could share with us in regards to the total hours of work, of overtime, you know, the dollar value to that. He's had a couple of days to try to come up with some more of that, if he could supply that with us.

There's a lot of temporary and contracted staff in regards to those areas with dollar values, submitted by Conservation and Water Stewardship for payment to the Department of Finance in relation to the 2011 flood. And I just wondered if he could provide us with any more of those types of amounts and the numbers.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I'm advised that the record keeping is being done with Finance involved, because they were—it's classified as an emergency expenditure, so it's not the usual kind of expenditure that the department itself would be dealing with. So, my understanding is that that work is under way in terms of, you know, concluding the necessary information to let us know what the totals are.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I appreciate that, but the numbers of staff people would have been hired through Conservation to kind of do the work, and I know from the recording and reportings, processes and stuff, the staff did a lot of overtime. I know they had to, to keep ahead of the water as much as they possibly could.

So I appreciate all of the work that was done. I just was looking for an update on the—sort of the—

I guess the dollars involved from your department to the information that you would have had to send over to Finance. I realize that they're compiling it all through some appropriation 27.1 or whatever I heard over there when I was there the other day, but those numbers would have to come from the departments to them. And I just wondered what you could enlighten us on, in regards to the amounts that came through the department that you're now in charge of?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I'm advised that those numbers are still being crunched and are not yet available. That's the numbers to March 31, 2012, so that's the latest information that I've been advised of.

*(15:40)

And so, specifically, just asking the department, not even so much as the dollars, but the number of officials, but they say that is a number that is being crunched and, again, the costs have been charged to what's called line 27, or appropriation 27, which is the emergency expenditure number, which is why Finance is doing that work.

Mr. Maguire: If you could—yes, and if there was a number of hours of overtime that you could supply us with, you know, we'll probably be looking for that here before we're done Estimates, if we could, in some of those areas, if you could supply us with that, request an overview of the responsibilities of, you know, related to the water management and flood management in those areas—if you could supply us with that—excuse me—and somewhat—there has to be some ballpark number from the Conservation area and Water Stewardship area at that time to—now that it's combined, to go to the Department of Finance for those to be done up, because they will not know in that department what was done; your department will be the one that knows what was done and how it was managed. And so once those are compiled, I would appreciate knowing that.

Mr. Mackintosh: Certainly, and the staff hears that and so we'll certainly make all efforts to determine what's available.

Mr. Wishart: Moving in a little bit different direction, I had a few questions regarding some policy development processes you're involved in.

You made reference the other day to a peatlands stewardship strategy that was under development by your department. Can you tell me, in general, what consultations have been done, what will be done, and when you anticipate completion of this process?

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. A recorded vote has been requested in another section of the Committee of Supply. I am therefore recessing this section of the Committee of Supply in order for members to proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

The committee recessed at 3:44 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:05 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. We are resuming where we left.

Mr. Mackintosh: The issue of recognizing the value of peatlands to Water Stewardship was first raised a while back around the Copenhagen conference. Then in The Save Lake Winnipeg Act, a two-year moratorium on new peat leases was put in place, the first workshop in the development then of a peatlands strategy, and that followed some research internally. And discussion amongst stakeholders was held in November of 2010, and that was co-sponsored by Ducks Unlimited and the Canadian Boreal Initiative. That led them to the—more of a summit workshop in February of 2010—or 2012, and there was a preliminary vision that was distributed and talked about. It was a summit or a workshop that was attended by a broad cross-section of interest and stakeholders. There were 14 First Nations; there were about 14 non-government agencies or academics there, and there were, as well, representatives of industry. So it really was an enriching workshop in terms of the sharing of perspectives across what one might call lines of perception. And it was very important, in particular, to bring, I think, industry there because, quite frankly, the peat industry has worldwide been looking at how their practices can be made more sustainable.

And so, as a result, summary documents of both of those events are now being concluded and are going online, I think, imminently. And in the meantime, though, a draft strategy document is being prepared and it will go online, and that is where the feedback will be invited from the general public as well as the more direct stakeholders, and we anticipate that the draft strategy will then be available by this fall.

And so I'll just conclude by just a few other comments. It's certainly an area where I have learned very quickly about an area of the province or an

ecosystem of the province that I think, at one time, we thought of as just—those were the backwoods. You know, if you could just go make some money out there in the bog, well then good on you. And now it's been recognized increasingly that peatlands do provide a very important function when it comes to cleaning water as it flows through the watershed. But, as well, it has a climate change role, and of course it has the habitat role that we're more familiar with. So Manitoba has really positioned itself as a leader on recognizing the role of peatlands.

* (16:10)

And so the stewardship strategy, I understand, will be the first comprehensive strategy in the country and we're going to make sure that we get it right, that we have the right input from others. And as the Canadian parks and wilderness committee said, the strategy is really unprecedented and will make our province a global leader in the protection of water, wildlife and in addressing climate change.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister, for the update on what you're doing there with your peatland strategy.

If I'm clear on the dates and the summary of the two consultations that you've already had—workshops I guess you called them—will be online and available shortly, and the strategy will be when specifically?

Mr. Mackintosh: We haven't put a fine—a deadline on the final strategy because we are going to release a draft which really will encompass observations, insights from what we have gained here in Manitoba, and there are some lessons that I understand are being learned from other jurisdictions. But it will be in draft form, and then we'll invite public comment because it's important, as a principle, that we do ask for broad public comment when it comes to strategies, especially when they're leading edge. So the idea is to get the draft strategy online by this fall at the latest.

Mr. Wishart: We've certainly been made aware of a number of downstream impacts from the current industry on water quality in some waterways. So I would certainly encourage you to move quickly to get an opportunity out there so that people can have some input because there certainly has been some public concern about the impact of the industry on water quality.

Moving on from that, then, you had a similar process a few years ago on wetland policy development and you have now a document out there

that, I believe, has gone past the consultation stage and, I think, is adopted by the department as policy. What actions have you taken regarding the wetlands policy and how are you gauging the outcomes of this policy?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, first of all, I want to just acknowledge the role of the member for Portage la Prairie as a member of the Water Council. And I reviewed the materials and spoke to the chair of the Water Council on what took place, which, of course, was before my time in the department, and I was very pleased to see the extensive consultations. And we also spoke about some of the areas that were not covered yet, and, I think, in particular, the member will—I'm sure, has been part of those conversations, is focusing on the north as well. I'm just going by recollection here, but, as I recall, there were three main recommendations that came from the review, and the first one was that we create an inventory of wetlands in Manitoba and that—the funding of that initiative is in progress now. That is an action item that we are pursuing.

The second is, of course, that we ensure that we have strong educational efforts and that we—and I think implied in that one is we continue on with efforts that have already been identified as making a positive impact, and maybe I can just talk about a few of those. And I'll just go on to the third one, and that is that we develop a formal strategy.

The recognition, I think—and this is one of the benefits of bringing together Water Stewardship and Conservation—we had the development of a wetland strategy over in Water Stewardship and we had a peatland strategy being developed in Conservation. At the same time, there was developing good thinking about the need for a comprehensive water-surface water strategy.

So one can see here this little story that I just told I think is indicative of how we, perhaps as Canadians, even, have approached water management. When you look even at water governance, that is quite a myriad of approaches and differing organizations and responsibilities that need some rationalizing, and I think we, as Manitobans, have really got to roll up our sleeves and think better about how we govern water in this province.

But, getting back to the recommendations from the wetlands strategy, it's important that we not now just develop stand-alone strategies for wetlands, peatlands, and surface water, and, indeed—and I'll be bringing in legislation that the member and I will be

talking more about in terms of groundwater protection, you can't leave groundwater out either because, of course, it depends on surface water and, you know, recharge areas are really, I would say, part of surface water management.

So this is really demanding on us now to determine how we can pull all of these elements together. So, on the third recommendation, that's where that is going. It is going to be comprised in the Surface Water Management Strategy, which I think the member will welcome.

Getting back to the other recommendation, though, in terms of developing and continuing to embrace and further the good work that has been done around wetlands, I think it's a story that just has not been told enough and has not been celebrated enough, and that is the work of two organizations in particular—well, no, I'm going to say Ducks Unlimited, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Habitat Heritage Corporation. What they are doing with regard to wetlands is absolutely extraordinary. And when you look at the Conservation easements, for example, that have been concluded by the last two organizations, when you look at the leadership that Ducks Unlimited is providing, it is extraordinary.

Now, what—we're not looking at a static approach, and so within what the wetlands strategy—or wetlands conversations with Manitobans told us, we are continuing to build on the work of those three organizations.

For—first of all, let's talk about Ducks Unlimited, the work that they're doing in Delta and, you know, the work they're doing around carp is very important, and I understand, you know, really exciting approaches that are leading edge in terms of how to safeguard the marsh from the damage caused by these carp is extraordinary. And so I'll go out, and maybe the member will have me over for a beer, but I look forward to seeing firsthand how those structures are going to look and how they're going to work. And I can go on about Ducks Unlimited. I don't think that's as directly on point.

But the other two issues I did want to touch on, for the record, though, the work of the Habitat Heritage Corporation being so extraordinary, and I have now asked them to consider some strengthening of a focus on water protection, on riparian approaches, because I know they also have embraced the importance of habitat, generally. But I think that we all have to ask ourselves, whether

we're in NGOs or we're delivering services or we're at the policy level, what more can we do to protect water in Manitoba? With Lake Winnipeg at a tipping point, we just can't do business as usual, and while we all have important business to do, our different NGOs and habitat protection, is important always. And—but this is a time for us to ask, is there something more we can do, specifically, around water?

* (16:20)

And, so I asked the Habitat Heritage Corporation that, and I have also asked the Nature Conservancy of Canada, on a go-forward basis, if they would consider that request. So that has gone to those two organizations.

And, just to conclude, on the Nature Conservancy of Canada, we have made a very, very sizable commitment to their work and we have assured them of a further down payment and, it was very, very well received a couple of weeks ago.

So there's a lot of work that's at hand. And, I will just say that those last two organizations are particularly effective in using provincial funds to leverage funds from outside of Manitoba, whether it's the federal government or whether it's from United States government, actually. That's been a really big part of the funding formula that goes to the Habitat Heritage Corporation.

So those are some of the wetlands views that I have, the vision that we have, and that's the state of play of much of the work that came from the wetlands strategy.

And I'll just say, as a footnote, that I've recently met with the Water Council and we talked about their work plan for the coming year. And, so, we're going to get back to them formally, in terms of some of the proposals that they put forward, to make sure that they're good and busy.

But, we do see an important role for the Water Council as a convenor of the Surface Water Management Strategy. In other words, take their expertise and what they heard from Manitobans, first hand, on the wetlands hearings, and put that to work now so that we're not just starting from scratch again, that we're building it and morphing it right into the Surface Water Management Strategy. So I hope that's going to be useful. I know it will. And, because, you know, the membership has remained fairly stable on the council.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for an update on, well, several processes, I guess, in that because it does link together, as you mentioned.

Now, you mentioned both Nature Conservancy and Manitoba Heritage Habitat Corporation. And I invite you to expand, in particular, on the expanded roles that you've asked them to consider. The Heritage Habitat Corporation has a long-standing history that has been very consultative and co-operative in their process. I must say, somewhat less so, in some cases, for Nature Conservancy; there has been some issues in the past, between the landowners and Nature Conservancy.

But I ask you to expand on what you've asked the two of them to do. And, you did make reference to commitments to Nature Conservancy in terms of dollars, and I'd like to know what numbers you're talking about in that regard.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, the Nature Conservancy has asked for a grant of \$1.5 million this spring and so we're going to work to ensure the delivery of that. And, that was important for them because they were able to leverage some federal funding as a result.

So I was able to announce that to a warm reception at their annual dinner a couple of weeks ago where they recognized the just tremendous contributions of James Richardson to Manitoba but, specifically, to Mother Earth here, in this province. Just a great speech, by the way; a very stirring recognition and celebration of what is so unique about Manitoba. So that's the one question I believe you had.

And the other, in terms of the request to them, on—just before Earth Day, we had an event with the Habitat Heritage Corporation to celebrate the 600th easement having been concluded. It was an easement in the Turtle Mountain area.

And, we also replaced the duck habitats in St. Vital Park that day, and I didn't fall down in the water with all the cameras on; never walked so carefully. But we got into some really deep mud and I had a feeling this was going to be—this was definitely going to be on the television that night. It's not the kind of way I wanted to bring attention to the Habitat Heritage Corporation. But I made it in and out of the water, and I was struggling.

But when—I met a number of the board members and Tim Sopuck and others that have really invested a great deal of effort into the corporation, and

I thought that here was a tremendous resource that has to continue in a robust way.

So, at a meeting that we held earlier, I had asked whether they would consider, take it back to their membership or to their board, and consider how they may be able to prioritize to a greater extent, not to the exclusion of the work in the past, a focus on riparian areas and water retention and nutrient management areas when it comes to developing their initiatives and their easements. And they were very keen to follow that up and so we'll have further discussions with them on that.

And you can see that that won't be, you know, an immediate change because there's a lot of easements that are in the works. There's a lot of works—work in progress. But that is a bit of a shift for their efforts.

And, as well, then I made a similar request of the Nature Conservancy, and the follow-up to that will take place as we discuss our relationship with them in the months ahead and we'll more formalize that request with Jeff, their director.

So that was a start to what I see as a need to just make sure that we are all paying attention to water issues in our respective areas of responsibility. I—when I was first appointed to this portfolio, I was asked by one of the reporters, well, what are your priorities? And I had a number of them, but I did say job one was Lake Winnipeg and, you know, climate change has to, of course, always be a top job as well.

But, when we have the science telling us that the lake is at a tipping point—it is our great lake; there's so much at stake—we all have to look to see how we can do a better job. So I'll certainly be spending a lot of time on that, and I'm sure the critic will be providing advice to me as we go along.

So I look forward to that and, at the same time, we have to, I think, engage our NGOs, those that do provide services for us as stewards with—reminding them of the importance of water and, you know, what more can we do, what can we do differently?

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for an update on that.

You also have an initiative called WaterSmart Manitoba, which we did hear quite a bit about it a year or two ago in terms of water conservation and the average household and related industries. Haven't heard too much about it lately. I wondered where that is at. Are you still pursuing some of those

initiatives or going in different directions? I guess we'll leave it at that.

You did make reference to the water well legislation that you'll be tabling shortly, or have you already? It's on tomorrow's list, if I'm not mistaken. And what consultations went into that, as well, will be good.

* (16:30)

Mr. Mackintosh: With regard to water conservation, we're rethinking—perhaps not the right word, but we're thinking about what more we can do in that regard. We have been looking at the practices of some other jurisdictions. We're looking at the role of building—the building code and how we can move this agenda along.

As well, Manitoba Hydro is continuing with much of the initiative, and we're also having discussions in terms of what their long-term role should be. We're also looking at some other innovations when it comes to water conservation, and within that ambit I have taken a particular interest in the whole potential of what's called green infrastructure by looking to see how we can better manage stormwater as well, which is a little outside of where the question was, but when you look at the impacts of water flows in a combined sewer system, the two of them are much the same challenge.

It's how to reduce CSOs in those areas in the province, in the urban areas. There's a few of them, as the member knows, that are a particular concern. And I know the City of Winnipeg has been working on this issue and we've been working with them. And we, nonetheless, have to look to see how we can advance this whole cause of reducing CSOs.

I see this as very serious. I think it's a prerequisite for us being able to talk to everybody else about their need to engage in better nutrient management for the lake. I think we have to look to see if we can do more, again, following our conversation yesterday, further upstream.

What can we do to guard against rapid runoff that can cause the CSOs and look to see how we can perhaps build the urban environment in a way that is more environmentally friendly and, quite frankly, has been found more aesthetically friendly in places where green infrastructure has been advanced. And so, even just the potential of porous pavement, for example, can make a big difference. So we're developing our thinking on that. It all ties into the

objective of making sure that we deal with our water wisely.

On the second question about the groundwater legislation, this went out for consultation this winter, and as a result of very extensive work that had been done in the Water Stewardship division, and I, myself, met with representatives of the Water Well Association, or the well water—I can't remember what goes first, water or well, but I think it's the Water Well Association of Manitoba which are essentially the drillers. And we had a really good conversation about some of their hopes and expectations and what they hope to see in the new legislation. We were able to share where—what our vision was and what we were looking at. And, as well, we've had discussions with the geothermal industry.

So what makes the groundwater legislation particularly important isn't just the fact that it's 50 years old and is in need of a serious update. For example, just in the area of certification, you know, the member and I could actually become well drillers very quickly under the current legislation. There is a need for certification. There's a need for training and there's a need for better vigilance, and so that was the underpinning of the legislation. But now we have one of the most robust ground-sourced energy sectors anywhere in North America, and, of course, they rely on well drilling to deliver their loop. So it has a newfound importance that we get this right.

I also am—was amazed at how important the sealing of wells is to the health of groundwater. It was—what, between 20 and 25 per cent of Manitobans rely on well water for their water, and when you talk about runoffs, you talk about, you know—you don't have to fingerprint climate change, but if you get into more serious, you know, rain events, you know, risks can only increase. But it really is important to ensure that there's integrity with all the wells that are drilled and I mean, there's what, a thousand, 2,000 a year that are—I think, 1,500 are drilled a year.

So the skinny is that the geothermal industry and the well drillers are very supportive of the legislative changes that are being contemplated and we look forward to them, working with them on the development of the new regulations because there will be a lot of regulatory work that has to be done. The legislation is rather extensive, but there are some more detailed work that has to be done by regulation, which is appropriate, of course. So that partnership, I think, is going to only become stronger.

We also had other input because the document—the discussion document was put online, and so we heard back from—[interjection]—I think from about 20 stakeholders on the legislation. So it's on the Order Paper now. So I hope that in the coming days we can get the bill out there and then we can, hopefully, move that along for passage this session.

Mr. Maguire: I look forward to being briefed on that bill and—by the minister when it comes out.

Just to back up to the Nature Conservancy there, you mentioned that you've allocated \$1.5 million. Is that the total amount for this year or is that an annual amount, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, we're having—we'll be having ongoing discussions about the—all the financial commitments and when it's needed by them and, you know, make sure that any provincial money is used in—to the best possible advantage, you know, and that it leverages money. But the \$1.5 million is what they have requested this spring in order to leverage other dollars.

Mr. Maguire: And so they would use that—those—that \$1.5 million, then, to raise other funds that they would have through other sources, but the \$1.5 million would be what the government will put in. If they came back, you know, I don't know how often they'd do that, to ask government for dollars, but—and is that \$1.5 million mainly for acquiring land and—or are there other functions for it as well?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, they put in place a multi-year strategy to focus on certain vulnerable areas of the province, and we had asked them to focus on Netley-Libau and Delta Marsh as part of that. I think there were, oh, there might have been eight areas where we had asked them to focus and the two marshes are coming up as their next priorities. So the Province has, in the last few years, advanced \$3 million, and then the \$1.5 million will be on top of that as well.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, so there's—you're saying basically that there was \$1.5 million in each of the last two years, and this is topped up by another \$1.5 million for this year. And I guess just, is that the total then of the amounts that have gone in for the last couple of years, \$1.5 million?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes—no, I'm advised that since '09, the Province has provided \$3 million and then the \$1.5 million will be on top of that. So far it's \$4.5 million that will be flowing.

Mr. Maguire: So is this an ad hoc—done on an ad hoc basis or is there a long-term agreement with Nature Conservancy?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I think that there's been agreements made with them, but what's important is that they have advised us that they need a certain cash flow at a certain time in order to leverage federal dollars, in particular, so that's what we've been paying attention to. So we're actually going to engage in some discussions with them about their—what their long-term needs are just to make sure that it works to the best way possible for both the Province and for the Nature Conservancy. So they expressed their—that, you know, they're very pleased to have that commitment, so.

* (16:40)

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I just wanted to move to—the minister's indicated a number of times in regards to cosmetic pesticide use and that sort of thing. I wonder if he can just bring us up-to-date on the time frame for consultations around the cosmetic pesticide use here in Manitoba and who all he's consulted with in that area.

Mr. Mackintosh: The regulation of nonessential cosmetic and chemical pesticides is one that has certainly been getting the attention of governments all across Canada in the last number of years, and so a number of provinces, in fact, the majority of provinces in Canada—and I think BC is expected to be next, I think, sort of any day—has been working on somewhat differing but at least a common purpose of trying to reduce exposure to chemical lawn pesticides as best as possible by way of differing forms of regulation.

So we've certainly been taking lessons from other jurisdictions and consultations that have taken place in other provinces, some very extensive consultations. In fact, the consultation that's happening right—that's concluding in British Columbia has been very extensive. They had about 8,000 people respond to their consultation document, and then they sent it to a committee and it's expected to report any day now. But—so there's been a lot of lessons learned over the last few years about what works best and how it can happen.

Our interest here in Manitoba is to follow some of those lessons. There—we have no interest in any—in dealing with agricultural lands, for example, farms. That's not what we're interested in. I think we really want to focus on that sort of that nonessential

cosmetic pesticide use that we have seen as the focus in other jurisdictions. It's also important that it be scientifically based, that it be well-founded, that we proceed based on all the available evidence as well as the lessons learned in other jurisdictions.

So the long and short is that there is extensive scientific study that has shown that there appears to be links between pesticide use and health and environmental impacts, disproportionately on children, pregnant women and pets in particular. Children has been—they've been found to be particularly vulnerable to risks. So the science has indicated this risk which then, I think, demands that we ask what is the best approach then in terms of any regulation, and we really are looking at an application of what is called the precautionary principle. It's set out in The Sustainable Development Act and has been, really, the principle that's guided the science on this one by other jurisdictions, and when there is indications of a risk, that we should try and minimize that exposure and you focus on where there can be an alternative applied.

So I've been—there was one riding and there's some others that say, well, you won't be able to control weeds. Well, that's, of course, entirely false, that the biggest growing area in the landscape industry in North America has been in organic applications. Of course, farmers know all about organic applications. We know, too, that chemicals aren't very targeted. They find their way. They get around. They kill things in the soil that make the soil very healthy. And so what's developed is a very strong organic industry and, in fact, a new application organic pesticide or application was just approved by the federal government in April of 2010 that is really changing what's happening.

And so what's important as part of the strategy is that there be an awareness that there are alternatives because we want—I'm a lawn lover, for one—and I'm bound and determined to maintain my lawn the same way into the future, and we've got to make sure that people are aware that there are alternatives to the old synthetic chemical pesticides that can do the job. And there are ways that—and it's not just maybe changing what the spray is, because there are people out there with a great deal of experience, particularly in school yards in the United States, that have shown that you shouldn't have any application, that the healthiest soils are those that have a bit longer of a grass growth so that there's greater photosynthesis and a more penetrating root where there is

over-seeding and the applying of compost or other soil and, you know, but—

An Honourable Member: You're welcome to come and help me out.

Mr. Mackintosh: Good luck.

I was driving around Brandon and there was the member for Brandon out, you know, working in his yard. I thought I should really run and get a camera.

The—so—and there's been applications like corn gluten, for example, that have worked for some time, but the chemical, or I shouldn't say the chemical industry, but the organic industry, certainly, has been taking this on and developing a lot more alternatives. And so that—that's been going to work in places like Toronto and Montréal and Halifax and other cities and in communities for quite some time.

So I think we've got to move, we've got to bring people with us, as always. We've got to make sure that they are given the tools to be able to maintain their lawns to the degree that they should, at the same time reducing exposure to risks, particularly for children.

Oh, and so the conclusion is—I think the answer to the particular question was—as to the timing of the consultation paper, and I had said publicly that we were going to try and get that done for this spring. So that means, I guess, I've got till about June 21st to get that out the door—eh, Dan? Which will—and the idea would be to have a consultation paper that would be similar to what we saw in the other jurisdictions. I mean, we've got a—there's a number of them out there and—but we'll do it our own way.

Mr. Maguire: Are there any other kind of legislative changes, then, I guess, that—types of changes that the department's got on the horizon over the next few years in regards to new programming and that sort of thing that they might be bringing in? There's a number of areas I can think of, but—provide it to the minister's options.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, in terms of the pesticide regulation we are going to go one step at a time. And so, when changes would actually happen on the ground, I'm not going to predict that, but we're going to get the results and then we'll see if we can get legislation in for the next session. It will really depend, I think, on the perspectives that are offered.

In terms of other legislation this session, I can tell the member that we're looking at the contaminated sites legislation and we're looking at

bringing something in there in the next several days. It should be on the notice paper, I think, any day. We're looking, actually, at a broader approach to considering the contaminated sites legislation in Manitoba, but this will be a little more targeted right now, and look the—how—just to formalize what we're doing with impacted sites.

Mr. Maguire: I noticed under the sustainable resource and policy management area that the—one of the notes in the supplementaries here is that the, you know, the co-ordination of the province's Crown-Aboriginal consultations in regards to Bipole III transmission line. Can the minister just outline for me how those discussions are going or where they're at?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, as the member knows, Hydro, of course, is seeking approvals for Crown land use and environment licences, a class 3 licence, and the minister has ordered public hearings on that that are expected to start by, certainly, by the end of this year, I think, is the projection, or this calendar year, I understand. And, as the member I'm sure knows, then, that the Crown has a duty under section 35 of the Constitution to do consultations with the Aboriginal communities that may be adversely—or they're—where their Aboriginal or treaty right may be adversely affected. So the department's engaged an external consultation facilitator to do this work, and there are some extensive numbers of communities that may potentially be affected. And so communications have happened to determine their interest in having consultations take place and so that—state of play, as I understand it.

* (16:50)

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Chair, I wanted to ask—just to ask the minister, if I could for a minute, you know, in relation to his departmental role whether or not he had received any tickets from his department in regards to the Jets area. I was going to ask him how many he got, but it was on the news last night, he got four. So I don't know if that's right or not.

Mr. Mackintosh: No, I got no tickets from my department.

Mr. Maguire: So where did those four come from then, I guess?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I was invited by the MLCC, you know, if I wanted tickets for a Jets game. So I had four tickets that were given to me and shared them with family, so. For—it was a game in February, you know.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks, Mr. Minister.

Through the Chair, I'd just like to ask then, your Finance Minister's indicated that those will be paid back. And I just wondered, if that's the case, you probably have paid them back, the amounts of them, and so who do you pay that to.

Mr. Mackintosh: The Liquor Control Commission was paid.

Mr. Maguire: And so do you—yes, you just pay that back out of your own pocket to them and, or does it come out of any other department area or anything like that?

Mr. Mackintosh: No, my wife and I paid the amount, yes.

Mr. Maguire: I assumed it wasn't the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) so—just, thanks.

I know my colleague from Portage here has a couple of questions in regards to an issue that he wants to ask today, too, if he could, before we get finished, and so I'll let him go.

Mr. Wishart: And—touched briefly with some of the staff after the session yesterday. Hearing an awful lot of concern around the big game hunting licences this year, some related to the charging of the—in the draw process for elk and moose, charging them all the fee front—upfront. Why has that policy been changed and is it cost effective? Because it seems to me it's far more expensive to send the money back than it is to just charge an upfront fee and then ask for the second. Is there reasons for that?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, the senior officials would like to hear more from the member in terms of those—the allegations.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. *[inaudible]* honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Wishart: Sorry, I've been told that in the past there was just a fee charged to enter your name in the draw and not the whole fee for the licence, and now the whole fee for the licence is required to enter the draw.

Mr. Mackintosh: So the officials are—have advised that they'll look into that because my understanding of the minister's—or the member's question is that, he's saying that rather than there be an application fee, the full licence fee is being asked for at the time of the draw. And if that's the member's question, then we'll take that back and they'll look into that.

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank you very much and we'll look forward to your answer. I did actually see an ad myself in one of the papers, and certainly that was the implication for that—requesting that, but that the whole fee would be upfront.

I also have a related question. We did talk briefly about the deer hunting season, and normally at this time of year, the brochures start coming out about what the season will be and what the restrictions on the season will be. Wondered what—where the department was on that and when they think they might have this information available.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, I understand that the online version expected in the next few weeks, the hardcover will follow very soon—online version first.

There is a concern that has been shared with the wildlife federation and the lodge and outfitters association, and that is the lower—deer population in certain GHAs and the need to address that this year. So my understanding is that they're moving towards the finalizing now of some different approaches to tailor the hunting guide in respect of some of those GHAs where the deer population is—has declined.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and Mr. Minister, for the information. So, by the end of May, would that be, at least the online version would be available. Is that fair?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes. I've been assured that's the case.

Mr. Chairperson: Member for Portage la Prairie. Or Member for Arthur-Virden?

Mr. Maguire: Yes, just one last question before the day's over, I guess.

Mr. Minister, in regards to the tickets, did you pay for those in February or this week?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes. You know, I think the—I don't want to get on to sort of what I was—the thought—the conclusions that I came to but, yes, the amount was paid a few weeks ago.

It was—the—it was paid in April after—well, I'd made a decision to pay for those tickets, and we had to determine the cost of them. And then when we got the cost, I wrote the cheque. So it was last month that we did this.

Mr. Wishart: You made reference a little earlier to further activities for the Manitoba Water Council that you had—they had brought some recommendations, and you had charged them with some.

Could you brief us on, a little bit, what direction you've asked them to look at now in the future?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, we're going to look at—I won't sort of put it on the record in terms of where we're likely to go, because I'll let the decision making be concluded there, and I want them to be the first to know.

But they did provide, I think, a fairly robust menu of matters that they would be interested in pursuing. But what I did say to them, and I'll confirm today, is that I do want them to take leadership by helping to convene the water stewardship—the surface water stewardship strategy. So that much I can assure the member.

Mr. Maguire: Well, I know there's, I guess, just a whole area here of, you know, protected areas that the government has looked at in regards to the number of protected areas. And can he indicate to me how many staff years that they've dedicated to the protected areas establishment?

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

FINANCE

*(14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): All right. Will the Committee of Supply please come to some kind of order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance, and as has been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. The entire floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): And I gather the minister was out with the media and discussing some issues with the media, so was maybe a little delayed coming here today. No problem, but I do have a question for the minister.

I wonder if he could indicate if he went to any Jets games at all this year.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before recognizing the minister, as Chair, I'm probably duty bound to point out that we're dealing what's in the purple book in front of us which would be the Estimates of the Department of Finance and questions usually need to pertain to the purple book in order for any particular minister to be compelled to answer them.

But I will leave it to the minister's discretion what he may choose to do with that.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): I don't mind the question. It gives me an opportunity to go back in time and remind people of how the Jets got here in the first place and who supported the building of the arena which is part of the equation for the Jets to make their triumphant return back to Winnipeg, and who participated in locking their arms around the Eaton's building to protest a progressive move forward.

But I won't do that, Mr. Chair.

Very directly, I went to three games. I went to three games because I'm a, I guess, a small player in a consortium of season ticket holders. So I managed to get drawn for three games.

I attended against the Washington Capitals before Christmas. I attended New Year's with my son, on—against the Toronto Maple Leafs—my former team. I want to make it very clear, that would be my former team, the Leafs, and we cheered for the Winnipeg Jets. And then we went to the game later on in the season in which the Jets, still in the playoff hunt, picked off the Florida Panthers, seven to nothing, and my son high-fived with everybody up in our section, up in the upper section there.

So those were my three season tickets, and I got to say, it was good to get to these games and cheer for the Jets. And I want to make it very clear that each of those three games I paid for—much as the member for Portage pointed out today in his member's statement.

Mrs. Stefanson: I appreciate the comments from the minister. So is—am I to take it that the minister himself did—wasn't one of the lucky chosen Cabinet ministers from his caucus who—to have received any of the tickets that—the Jets tickets—that were being talked about in the House today?

Mr. Chairperson: Again, before recognizing the minister, we're supposed to be here to discuss Estimates. It's fine with me if people around the table want to talk about something completely unrelated to the Estimates of the department, but we are supposed to be talking about the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

Mr. Struthers: She's correct. I was not a minister who received tickets that were being discussed in question period today or yesterday. This does allow me, yet again, another opportunity to make it very clear that my colleagues, who have been the subject of the discussions, paid back the money. They paid for the tickets. For members to suggest that they

didn't, just is incorrect. I think there's a stronger word for it than that, but let's just let it rest as being inaccurate in their—some of the assertions that they made in the House. Oh—*[interjection]*—do I have to start again? What did I say? Did you take any tickets?

Mrs. Stefanson: The minister talked about the—his colleagues having paid back these tickets that were given to them, I guess, originally and they were paid back at some point in time.

Who did they pay back for those tickets? Was that the Minister of Finance, or as—or who would they have paid back for those tickets?

Mr. Chairperson: Again, the question's not relevant to the Estimates, but, honourable minister?

* (15:00)

Mr. Struthers: I don't know who the cheques were made to. It wasn't made to me—far as I know.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for—*[interjection]* Yes. Honourable member for Brandon West.

An Honourable Member: Sorry, Reg.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Oh, that's okay.

Thank you, through you, to the minister, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm interested in some of the things you've talked about in the House about the plans you have for how these tickets are going to be handled in the future, and it does, also, go back to how they were handled in the past with some people, as you said, paying back someone for the tickets.

And, you know, that's fine if it's the 2012 year—other than there's some question about the government ticket master program—but if it was paid back for tickets that were—and they seemed to be paid back fairly recently. So, if these were paid back this year for tickets that were acquired for the 2011 year, there's a tax implication. And wondering if this is, indeed, used as—or was it qualified, or did—was it used as a taxable benefit that these individuals would get, you know, the T5 from the department or the particular agency that they received these tickets for, because paying them back in 2012 for a 2011 ticket doesn't fly.

Mr. Chairperson: Since it's a new questioner, I am probably bound to repeat something I've mentioned already.

An Honourable Member: It's a tax question.

Mr. Chairperson: The—yes, and I can appreciate where the question might be headed, but what a questioner at Estimates needs to do is make a connection between the question they're asking and the content of the book. Now, as Chair, I'm not going to require you to point to a specific section and say, my question relates to this. That's part of a global discussion.

But asking about this line of questioning is not something that's directly related there. If you would care to rephrase the question so it does link, then the minister might be bound to answer it. As it is, he's not because it's not on topic. But, having said that, I'll leave it to the minister's discretion to decide what he'd like to do.

Mr. Struthers: Thank you, well, there's two things. First of all, that kind of detail I'm not aware of, but what I do know is that the policy that we're—have been working on, that we're bringing forward will be comprehensive. It will ensure fairness in the framework in terms of these tickets that we're talking about.

I don't want Crown corporations to think that they can't advertise. I don't want them to think they can't be sponsors and support entities in Manitoba. I think that's legitimate. They get tickets for doing that, and, for me, the key question is where—what happens to those tickets. And I think that's a very legitimate discussion, and a debate, to have.

I think we need to—given the experience that we've had with the Jets coming back to Winnipeg for the first time in 15 years, I think we need to have a framework in place. I think we've learned through this year that we have to have a framework in place that's fair, and we are doing that.

Every—I would suggest that every MLA would sooner see those tickets be used for school patrol groups or minor hockey teams. The member asked me if I'd been to Jets games before, and I was quite impressed, each of the times that I've been there, to see that the Jets organization, and others, including some Crowns, making it possible for kids to be at

those games. I'd like to see some earlier games so that the kids aren't out as late as they are sometimes, but I think that's legitimate.

What we don't want to have is a situation where any of the 57 MLAs, quite frankly, are put in a position where they can elbow people out of the way and restrict access to Manitobans. And that, in my view, would govern, you know, the Winnipeg Jets or the—I'm very hopeful that the Blue Bombers sell out all nine of their regular season games and that they go into the playoffs and sell out some more and—you know, and win the Grey Cup. Why not go all the way? And then we will be—we would be facing, with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, the same kind of a situation where, if we don't put a framework in place that's fair, you'll see Manitobans being edged out by people in our positions, either here from the—you know, from 450 Broadway or from—or by executives or board of directors at Crown corporations.

So we do understand that we need to have a fair policy in place. That's—that will be imminent. That will be very clear. I will be meeting with the Crown Corporations Council to go through this and make sure that they understand that they can't offer tickets to us and that we can't accept anyway. That'll be very clear.

Mr. Helwer: Well, I guess following on the minister's comments there, Mr. Chair, indeed, some of the corporations have elbowed out Manitobans as Manitoba Hydro bought an additional pair of tickets in addition to their advertising—the dollar—the tickets that were provided with their advertising package. So, presumably, they—those came from the lottery that were available to all Manitobans. So someone wasn't able to get Jets tickets because of Manitoba Hydro, I would presume.

But, to go back to the Chair's comments, the reason I believe this has implications for, you know, Estimates, from last year and from this year, is they—because there is—there are thousands of tickets out there, and those were used in the 2011 year by board members, by MLAs, by staff, and because they are so many tickets, it will actually have an impact on the numbers in last year's budget and this current year's budget. We could actually see a difference if those were indeed a taxable benefit to those people that used them or if they are a liability, because if you were not issued a T5 these, you owe tax on them. You can't pay them out of your chequing account for this year because the past tax year is closed, as I'm sure the minister knows. So those are

implications that I think, going forward, have an implication for Manitoba Finance. And that's the truck—crux of the question there is: What types of numbers are we going to see change because of those implications and that liability?

Mr. Struthers: I hope you don't mind, Mr. Chairperson, but I'm about to congratulate the member for Brandon West for finding a way to ask a question on this and honour your very wise counsel, to begin with. That was very impressive.

The—I will say that the taxable benefit issue is decided by the Canada Revenue Agency. So the CRA will be dealing with that, and I don't believe that they have the kind of information that they need yet to be able to—to make decisions on this. So—but nevertheless, I won't offer that up as an excuse on their part. They're very competent—it's a very competent group who does their job and they will be making those determinations.

Mr. Helwer: I understand the answer, Mr. Chair, but I don't believe they would be the—the CRA would not be the body that would be issuing those documents to the individuals that have received those tickets. That would come from, I would imagine, your own department.

* (15:10)

Mr. Struthers: Right, and we make those decisions on the basis of the information that the Canada Revenue Agency tells us. So we're not going to get in a big battle with the CRA on this. We're going to—we'll be our usual co-operative selves and work with the national body to make sure that the rules that are there are followed and that we are part of following the rules.

Mr. Helwer: So is this something you will be pursuing with CRA to say that we have this possible difficulty here in Manitoba that we did not issue a T5 for these particular tickets and they were issued and they were not claimed, or is it something you're going to wait to see if CRA finds it?

Mr. Struthers: These kind of issues are things that the CRA acts upon independently. They're very good at their work. They know what they're doing. We—if there are rules and obligations that we have to assist the CRA in their deliberations and in their actions, that's fine. We are co-operative with them. But, as I said this is a decision for the Canada Revenue Agency. They're good at their work, and they'll ensure that the rules are followed.

Mr. Helwer: So is this something, then, that you expect the individual staff members that receive these tickets to self-assessed and have to go back and revisit their past tax return that was just last month or is it—you're going to wait for CRA to audit them or you or what's the process?

Mr. Struthers: My expectation is is that the normal proceedings of the Canada Revenue Agency, their normal systems will kick in that whatever normal process they go through will be followed, and that all the rules involving this and any other tax issue in Manitoba will be followed through by the CRA, and that—as I said they've proven themselves to be effective. They've proven themselves to be good at their work, and the normal—the way this is normally handled will be handled normally.

Mr. Helwer: I guess I have two experiences with how these things are normally handled, and one is that the department does issue the proper documents, and I don't believe that that would've been done in this case. And the other issue is that CRA comes back and audits the individual and the department, and that is a little more punitive than the first way because they do often come back with fines and interest and it's not a very comfortable thing to go through.

I mean, the companies that I have been involved in get audited by several different agencies, so we are always in an audit. But nonetheless you have to show cause, and to the individuals that may have received these tickets it could be quite a devastating hit. You're going back, you know, depending on how many they got the value of the tickets is substantial. The numbers they receive could be substantial. So you could be looking at a pretty good tax-dollar hit here to those individuals.

Mr. Struthers: Well, the—I'm not going to engage in any kind of speculation as to what might be out there. I am going to be clear that Canada Revenue Agency will treat this as it treats any other tax issue in Manitoba. My experience with them is that they are thorough and that they are—in the end they're fair. They know the rules. I don't want Manitobans—it doesn't matter if it's this issue or any tax issue in the province—I don't want Manitobans being treated unfairly. I want the rules to be followed. But the Canada Revenue Agency is good at what they do and their normal processes will be eventually what guides them in their decision making. I'm not going to interfere with that. There's no way that can happen. The CRA knows what they're doing. They

know the rules, and they have their processes by which to enforce the rules that are put in place governing tax issues in this and every other province.

Mrs. Stefanson: And, along the same line of questioning, this could also be an issue that comes up and it's relative, you know, for the budget for the reasons that the member for Brandon West has already indicated. This could also be an issue with tickets that have been given by the Crown corporations from the Blue Bombers as well, and one of those things is, obviously, I mean, I think that, you know, there have been a number of tickets that have been issued in government and I know that you had, yesterday, talked about your policy on this and that it was just related to the Jets tickets.

But, since then, I know we saw in the paper today that you might be extending that to the Bombers tickets as well. And I'm wondering if the minister could indicate: Is that now the new policy to have—to extend that to the Bombers tickets as well?

Mr. Struthers: Well, those kind of questions have always been part of the discussion. We've committed to coming forward with a comprehensive policy. We've committed to come forward with that policy as quickly as we can and, most important of all, that that policy would be fair.

The—we learned a lot through the experience of having the Winnipeg Jets back here in Winnipeg where they belong. We've learned a lot from our experience here this past hockey season. We are absolutely committed to, you know, the—learning from that experience and making sure that we have in place for the next hockey season a fair framework for the distribution of tickets that come available through advertising and sponsorship by Crown corporations.

One of the things that really drives that is the success of the team, and the—not just on the ice but off the ice and the availability and accessibility of tickets to get into the games, I know that—I mentioned earlier that I was part of a consortium of people who've purchased season tickets. One of the advantages that we had was one of the people in the consortium had Moose tickets and the Jets organization decided that the Moose season ticket holders would have the ability to get in line for the Jets tickets, so my three games were as a result of that.

The—there's a lot of demand on those tickets, and if we have a situation where some people get tickets

because they are Cabinet ministers or MLAs or directors of corporations or executives of corporations, then there will be some Manitobans not having access to those tickets.

My fervent hope is that the Blue Bombers, this season and any season, are just as popular, that we have nine sellouts and then playoff sellouts, and in a way, my hope is that the tickets are just as difficult to get a hold of. But I don't want and our government doesn't want a situation where because you have a certain position that you have an advantage over other Manitobans to get Bomber tickets.

So in—a while ago when we started asking for options to come forward, when we started comparing other jurisdictions, we started to do the homework to get a policy in place. Because I want to make it clear: I mean, you—far from what you would've believed in question period yesterday, given some of the questions, these policies just don't kind of cook themselves up overnight. You have to do the homework to get them—to get these policies in place. The—and there is a lot of work to put these in place. There's a lot of consideration that needs to take place, and that work has been ongoing by this government for some time now.

We are on the verge of putting forward that policy. It will be comprehensive. It'll include the Blue Bombers as we have with the Jets. We want to keep ourselves in the position where our framework can be fair for Manitobans and help Manitobans in terms of accessing games.

* (15:20)

When I have attended Blue Bomber games, on my own dime, we—I've always been impressed at the number of school groups. On a Sunday afternoon, you know, it's easy. You know, you can have lots of junior football teams. They've got—they have kids carrying flags. They've got, you know, kids involved in different aspects of the Blue Bombers operation. Those are the kind of things that I think—those are the kind of entities, I think, who should be benefiting from tickets, whether they be Blue Bombers or Jets. That makes much more sense to me than me, as a minister, or the member for Tuxedo, as an MLA, jumping ahead of those groups in the queue. So she will see that our policy will address that.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I thank the minister for his comments, and I know that there is a significant amount of funding coming from the provincial government for the stadium, and I'm wondering—and

I—so I know that this—all of this questioning, you know, sort of falls under that area, as well, of the budget. And if they—you know, if the Crown corporations are sponsors and are given tickets as a result of that sponsorship, in the past, I guess, has this—is the reason that some of this has come up, obviously, is because this has happened. We did have Cabinet ministers, we did have people, staff and so on, who did receive tickets in the past. Did that also take place with the Bombers, as well? And I just ask the minister, are you aware of either you or any of your colleagues having received tickets by their Crown corporations or sort of free tickets, I guess, by government—any government entities?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I'm not aware, and I think there's been questions asked, and I have, at least, one of my colleagues who's been asked to follow up on a number of questions asked by the members of the opposition, and he's endeavouring to get answers for ministers.

I'm very loath to participate in kind of speculative kind of discussions. I mean, I can tell you; I mean, I heard tons of stories of the, you know, the Filmon government going to one football game after another and attending Pan Am Games events and Blue Bomber games and tickets for Grey Cups when we hosted them in Winnipeg. And I heard lots of stories about that. I'm not willing to engage in that kind of speculation, though.

It's more important to me—and there was no policy back in the '90s. There was no policy governing, you know, actions of Cabinet ministers in those days or Crown corporations in those days. I—my focus, very clearly, is to make sure that, given what we're up against in terms of the popularity of the Jets and what I hope to be the popularity of the Bombers, is that we do put a framework in place to give the kind of clarity that ministers in the 1990s would've, I would've presumed, would've appreciated, too.

I suppose, in the 1990s, to have Crown corporations understand there is a very clear policy set out by the government and to be led by the government would be a good thing.

So I'm not keen to, you know, participate in kind of speculative decisions about who had tickets. I do want to make sure that people understand that, you know, that the cases that I'm aware of, ministers paid for those tickets. It was not, as members of the opposition have suggested, that it was on the dime of the Manitoba taxpayer. Those were paid by ministers

and that we're doing the responsible thing in getting a policy together that is going to be clear and it's going to be fair and it will provide the kind of clarity that I think the government needs and I think Crown corporations need.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I thank the minister for his comments and I know that we will have—at least, I hope we will have the opportunity to discuss this further if there is a piece of legislation that is being brought forward on this matter.

Is that the—is that the way the minister is planning to deal with this policy change? Or how is he planning to go about this?

Mr. Struthers: Well, we are going to have our policy in place. We are going to make it very clear and commune it very—communicate it very clearly to all involved. I have undertaken to meet with the Crown corporation's counsel, who represent all of the Crown—all of our Crowns in terms of making it clear to them what our policy is.

I notice—I noted today that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) made some statements about how the policy governs members of his caucus, and I appreciate that. The—whatever form—that's ominous—*[interjection]*—yes, the ghost of Bombers before—whatever form it takes is—will be a—it'll be very clear exactly where the government stands and where we—and the expectation levels that we have on Cabinet ministers and MLAs and on executives and board members in Crown corporations.

Mrs. Stefanson: I guess part of this, that, you know, this policy has come out after the fact. There was a freedom of information request, as we understand, that was brought forward from the Taxpayers Federation on this matter, and I believe that was dated back in March sometime. It was finally sent out to him, but—to them, but, you know, it seems that, you know, the ministers got and received those tickets at one point in time, but they didn't pay them back until after they were caught, so to speak, in having them.

So it's, you know, I guess, you know, I—it's a little bit after the fact, you know, because I think if the minister was going to bring in this legislation, and if he felt strongly about it, they would have done it 12 years ago, and—you know, a long time ago. So, I mean, it seems to only come up when members get caught doing things. And I think that that's unfortunate.

In—just in terms of the—just one last question on this, and I know my colleagues have some other questions, but in terms of the timing on coming out with the details of this policy, when would we expect to have the whole package?

Mr. Struthers: Well, what's—kind of a two-part question. The first part, what really is unfortunate is that the facts, again, don't fit into the narrative of the members of the opposition. And this is a recurring theme, I've noticed, whether they're talking about expenditures of the government, or whether they're talking about availability of Jets tickets. The fact of the matter is, that this government embarked on doing its homework on this policy well before any FIPPA requests, and well before members of the opposition finally got interested in it. If the member expects us to bring legislation forward on this then, clearly, the first opportunity to bring legislation forward was post-March 30th, which is the date that members opposite have used.

So, I mean, there's one fact that doesn't help their case. But I can tell, I can tell very clearly, members opposite, that work on this policy began well before the—this—before they started to participate in this discussion. I've been saying consistently, all along, that we've taken the opportunity, having the Jets back in Winnipeg, we've taken an opportunity to learn a few things about having an NHL franchise in our town. One of those is the distribution of tickets that Crown corporations receive for their sponsorships and for their advertisements. And we think that a strong, clear, fair policy from this government, would go a long way in assisting the fair distribution of those tickets.

* (15:30)

The—it's fine for the member to talk about should have done it 12 years ago. She can make that case if she likes. I mean, it could've been done before that, if she's really concerned about it. I would suggest that that's a pretty politically driven statement that she made, actually starting the clock at 12 years. Why not start at 23 years ago when Mr. Filmon first became Premier and the Winnipeg Jets were in town and the Bombers were in town and all of those? And the MLA for Tuxedo was in high school and she doesn't care about it, I get that.

But, you know, Mr. Chair, this is an important issue and this government—not another government, not any previous government, but this government—is taking this on because we are committed to having a fair framework in place to give clarity to ministers

and to MLAs and to Crown corporation decision makers, so that we head off at the pass problems that could arise.

You know—and that's one of the reasons why we—in the homework we did, to get this policy together, that's one of the reasons we check with other jurisdictions who have a lot of experience with dealing with this issue.

I mentioned earlier, my former team, the Toronto Maple Leafs—they have sellouts all the time. Doesn't produce much on—in terms of the on-ice performance, I'll grant that, but they have a lot of experience dealing with an Air Canada Centre, and a Maple Leaf Gardens before that, where there were sellouts, and if we—what we wanted to do is tap in on the Ontario experience.

We believe, if we can get some good advice from other jurisdictions, we should incorporate that in the policy. If we find that there's things that they got themselves into, or things that they missed, we want to know that. Not every province has a—has this kind of a policy. We like to think that we're doing the right thing in getting a fair framework in place and that it's going—and it's going to be in place to ensure fairness in the upcoming seasons for our professional teams.

Mr. Helwer: Through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister. I guess I'm surprised by the minister suddenly discovering in March that this policy is necessary.

Obviously, professional sports teams have been available in, and present in, Manitoba for a number of years. My understanding is that the history of sponsorship by Crown corporations is fairly recent and was more prevalent under the current government than under the previous one.

But, you know, I've been in business for a number of years and companies have had these policies in place for years and years and years, for—so, to say that the—we've suddenly discovered that they're necessary, I've—you know, can vividly recall taxable benefit notices and the limits that you've—what you could get for tickets and other things when I was working for the Royal Bank 20 years ago.

So these policies are by no means new. They are present in the corporate world and have been for years and years, and to say that the government is so slow in picking them up, that we can just suddenly discover we need them in March, I think is a little simplistic.

So I'm surprised it's taken the government this long to discover they have a policy, that they need a policy, and, you know, obviously it's something that seems to be dictated by the media attention to it as opposed to anything altruistic.

Mr. Struthers: Well, as Ronald Reagan said to Jimmy Carter one time: there he goes again.

I mean, how many times do we have to make it clear to the member for Brandon West that this isn't something that was born on March 30th, this was something that we started working on before that.

I think he needs to understand that, through the Conservative Party rule from 1988 to 1999—let's be honest here, Winnipeg Jets were in town, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers were in town, there were—I heard stories, speculation, about Cabinet ministers at games. There was no policy in place, there was no—we can talk and speculate as who's ministers were at what games all you like, but the difference is, is that this government's putting a policy in place for fairness. The previous government in the '90s didn't think it was important enough to do; that is the basic difference between the two.

Mr. Speaker—or Mr. Chairperson, given all the political noise that members opposite can generate on this, when it comes right down to it, who's going to put the policy in place? Who's going to support it? Who's going to live by it? [*interjection*] That's this government, and the policy has been worked on, the policy has been well thought out—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, order. This is not question period. There's two people talking at most—me, first of all.

Mr. Struthers: Good advice.

And this government will put in place a fair framework so that we can be governed by something that's clear and fair. And it will be there for this government, the next government, all down the road. It's a fair way to approach this. And it may not fit into the political agenda of members opposite, but you know what? That's not as important to me as doing the right thing for Manitobans.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I can assure the minister that I have not had the luxury of attending a Winnipeg Jets game yet, with any kind of a ticket, from any source.

I want to ask a few questions on the civil service. I presume you have civil service staff available or—I

only have a few questions but have you got somebody—

Mr. Chairperson: Questions—if I may—questions in the past, in this situation, have been submitted orally and then, you know, answers can be provided at a subsequent sitting of Estimates, should the committee wish to proceed in that manner.

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm just—sorry—I'm wondering at what point the minister would have staff here for the civil service.

Mr. Struthers: We're more than willing to have people here whenever you need them. We just need a little heads up as to when they're coming. My understanding is, is that we're going to go globally within the Finance Estimates. Maybe I misunderstood, but my assumption was that we would go globally under civil service and then we would have people available to answer. I want to make it as easy as we can to have people available to give good answers to MLAs.

Mr. Chairperson: Just a quick moment before recognizing the next speaker.

I've been reminded by the hard-working Clerk that, in fact, the Estimates process for the civil service, is a separate entity from the Estimates for Finance. They fall under the same department, they fall under the same minister, but they're two different pieces. So what we technically need to do, unless the minister wants to answer questions, as we've been doing all afternoon, which don't relate to Estimates per se, what we do need to do is pass the Estimates for Finance and then whenever the civil service comes up, subsequently, questions could be posed then.

Mr. Briese: I'm quite happy to come back at another time. There's—as I said, I probably don't have a lot of questions under the civil service aspect, probably 15 minutes to half an hour is all I need on the civil service. So, with that in mind, I guess we can probably agree to a time when I can ask those questions.

Mr. Struthers: Just let us know when, in the Estimates, would be good for you and I'll make sure—

An Honourable Member: Right now.

Mr. Struthers: With a little warning, I'll make sure that we have staff available. If you want to ask your questions and we can follow up, we could do that too. I'm trying to make this as easy as I can for you to ask your questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Recognizing the honourable member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) and just a re-emphasis that, you know, this doesn't relate to the Estimates we're talking about, but, if the minister is amenable, then, you know, questions can be posed and answered if necessary.

* (15:40)

Mr. Briese: One of the things I wanted to follow up on is, we had requested some information. There was a thing called, the commission's common recruitment initiative, that was put in place. And it was supposed to be in place by March the 31st this year, and the total estimated cost was supposed to be two hundred and sixty-one and a half thousand dollars. The planned implementation date was 2012.

Can you give me any updates on that?

Mr. Struthers: We'll endeavour to get back with some specifics on that for the member.

Mr. Briese: I specifically would like to know if it was—if you met that budget. And I want to know if it was implemented on—in April 2012, as was stated that was going to be.

The other question that I wanted to check on is the one being the number in the civil service at the present time. I notice that I've got the numbers from 2011, but I don't have as of March 2012. I'd like to have that figure, and I would like to also have a vacancy rate on positions in the civil service along with that number. And one of the things that I'm not absolutely clear on is—and keep in mind I'm kind of new to this particular critic's portfolio, too—is who is actually all included in the civil service.

I have a breakdown by departments, but there are considerably more government employees than actually are listed as civil service. I don't think the nurses, for instance, are included in this, and I know they technically might be RHA, but they're still, basically, it's the Province that's paying the bill on those so—could you make a comment on that?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I'll undertake to make sure that that information is passed on to the member. I understand that our civil service Estimates are followed directly behind Finance. If the member does want to come and ask those questions, or if he just—if it's just better for him if we just follow up with him outside of the Estimates process, that would be fine, too.

I will say, and I think this is a good opportunity, given things that have happened with the flood and

with some of the economic downturn—economic pressures, we have a civil service who, in my estimation, has performed very well, over and above the call of duty many times.

I'm specifically thinking in terms of the flood and how hard working those civil servants were on behalf of Manitobans. And I know that members opposite agree.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

It sounds to me like a recorded vote has been requested in another section of the Committee of Supply. I'm therefore compelled to recess this section of the Committee of Supply in order for members to proceed to the Chamber for a vote.

The committee recessed at 3:45 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:06 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

And, just for everyone's information, given where we left off, I want to point out that there are, in fact, five different and separate sections of Estimates that are attached to the department that we're currently considering. And we have to do each of these separately and in order according to the Estimates order that I have dated May 7th that I understand has been negotiated by the House leaders. Those five sections are Finance, where we are right now. Following that will be the Civil Service Commission, then is Enabling Appropriations, fourth is Other Appropriations, and fifth and lastly is Employee Pensions and Other Costs—that's one category. So we'll do each of those separately and in that order unless the House leaders inform us otherwise.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, I thank you for that. I was just wondering if—because, just from a critic standpoint, there is one on this—the one on the civil service, I think, I'm responsible for the others. So, if we could do it in the order of when I—we could do the four, first, and then leave the civil service to the end. *[interjection]* The—okay, so—

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, just to clarify, the—when we come to the end of the questioning for the Estimates for just the Finance Department—well, just the—yes, the Department of Finance—I then, as Chair, need to read out the resolutions and hear the committee's

decision. So we have to go through that process of the resolutions, and then, unless the House leaders negotiate something different in the scheduling, we would follow the sessional order as it currently is—or the Estimates order, rather. And up next is the Civil Service Commission. So, certainly, if the honourable member wants to discuss with her House leader those slight changes that can be negotiated. Okay?

So the floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I did want to move on and ask some questions just regarding some—an issue that—the situation that came about on budget day before the budget was introduced.

There's a normal process where there's a number of people who go into lock-up, and are able to read through the budget in those—in the lock-up. And there's a lock-up for the media, I gather, and a lock-up for the third parties. And I know that there was a—I found out about this after the fact that—well after the fact and, actually, did bring it up as a matter of privilege in the House.

And I know that the Speaker has ruled on that, but I'm just wondering if it is the policy for this government to provide information in the lock-up—in one lock-up, when not the same information in the other lock-up.

* (16:10)

Mr. Struthers: Our policy is to make sure that all the information—all the pertinent information is made available to both lock-ups, I guess, is the proper way to describe that. We—as with the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), it was not a situation I became aware of, I suppose, until she brought it forward and I appreciate her doing that.

My commitment as minister is to make sure that as much information as possible gets to the people of Manitoba, and I think it's legitimate to have that information flow through MLAs in the House, media in the lock-up—there's third parties in that lock-up. And listen, I—I'm not going to surprise anybody with this, I thought it was a darn good budget and I'm going to take every opportunity to brag about it.

If somebody was missed in that—I know the member from Lakeside may not agree with that, but if somebody was missed in that, then I—my responsibility as Finance Minister is to make sure

that that doesn't happen again. Like I said, I take seriously my obligation to get that information to people.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can the minister indicate what happened that day? Why was it just the media that got it in the media lock-up and not the third-party lock-up? Was it a mistake?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I think that we had a request partway through that day that we scrambled to try to fulfill and I think there was an oversight. I think there was some people who didn't get the information that they should've got. Like I said, I want to make sure that anybody who's participating in the delivery of a budget gets all the information that we can to them. I believe it was an oversight, and I want to be clear that everybody in those lock-ups, I believe, needs to get all the information that we can make available.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister could just indicate—I mean, from our standpoint, it's very difficult for us to be able to do our jobs if—and certainly, our staff; they sit in the third-party lock-up with others from the community and it's very difficult in there when the media, you know, come out and they ask questions about specific things and information that you've provided to them but you haven't provided to us; us as MLAs, and us as our staff or other third parties, to be able to answer those questions in the—so we're put at a very significant disadvantage when dealing with something like this, and I think it's very important that this not happen again, and, I guess, I would just ask the minister: you have indicated that you will ensure that it does not happen again.

What steps will you take to talk to your staff now about what, perhaps, took place at that time? What happened that day where a mistake that, to me, is a pretty big mistake took place and, you know, was it, you know, I mean, it—was this—I hope it wouldn't have been a deliberate attempt to try and keep information from one party over the other.

Mr. Struthers: There was nothing deliberate about what went on. We, as I said, we—in the—kind of in the heat of the day, the bustle of the day, we were asked to—there was a request made for some information. Somehow that information was partly released to people, and some got it and some didn't.

And I remember the days—I guess, I'm, you know, maybe one of the older members now—I remember the days of being in opposition and I know

how tough it is to be a critic and not receive the information that I wanted to get. And I have no intention of leaving members opposite in a position where they don't have the information that they need, because my general attitude on this is that the more information that I can get into the hands of members opposite, the less room for monkey business there is in the long run. You know, I—like I said, I'm a good solid supporter of Budget 2012, and I don't mind defending that budget. I want to do it on the basis of factual information. I believe the document that's in question was a number of the fee increases that were contained within the budget. I fully expect, when I deliver a budget, that I will stand and defend that budget, and every part of that budget, including the information that was partially released on budget day.

The normal practice, my understanding is, is that the lock-ups, both lock-ups would get the same information. Clearly, that didn't happen this time. My expectation is that we will go back to the normal procedure which is to make sure that when information is requested that it be distributed across the board, not to some and not to others. So that's the undertaking that I have, that's the assurance that I can give, that there was an oversight, and I don't intend to have that happen again.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I brought forward a bill, Bill 211, The Increased Transparency and Accountability Act, which calls on the government to include, in the budget, a schedule that breaks out all user fee increases and tax base expansions. And we will be debating, I guess, that bill at some point, but it really takes into consideration what we're talking about today, because the backgrounder that ended up going to the media and not the third-party lock-up, included a new fee increases, and indicated on it various departments and fee increases in Manitoba.

And what our bill talks about and suggests is that we should have this in the budget itself, and if it actually was in the budget, as a schedule in the budget, whereby you have a comparison of what the fees are this year versus last year and previous years so that Manitobans really have the ability to turn to that schedule and see, you know, exactly what they paid for, for specific fees. Some of them are indicated in the budget, but they are not all there. And, I believe, park fees and some of those are indicated, but there's many that are in the backgrounder or that are not actually included in the budget.

And I'm just wondering if the minister would—I mean, again, if that had taken place, and if this was actually in the budget books then no one would have been at a disadvantage here. You know, depending on which lock-up you were in, it wouldn't really matter, because that schedule would be contained within the budget books which are given to people as they walk into the lock-up.

So I'm wondering if the minister could indicate, today, if he would be willing to support this bill, and to include a schedule of fees, to make it more transparent and accountable for Manitobans.

Mr. Struthers: I want to be clear that, you know, part of—you know, when I became Finance Minister in October, it was close to the beginning of, kind of, the cycle towards—building towards budget day, and getting a budget together, and Estimates, and prebudget consultations. One of the things that I wanted to do was think about the processes that we use, and think if there's some better ways of doing budgeting in this province. So I am obviously open to suggestions that members opposite would have, and others.

*(16:20)

I don't—I'm not convinced that—I don't want to prejudge, you know, our support or not of the members bill, but I'd be a little nervous about tying a bill to a specific bad incident that happened, and responding to an oversight on budget day with a bill. That's not to say that we're not open to improving the process, improving transparency and accountability. I think that—those are legitimate goals for all of us to have. But, you know, the—if there are specific suggestions on how to improve our budget process, I'm open to hearing on that.

I do want the member to understand that, you know, that due consideration will be given to the bill she's brought forward, and we haven't just dismissed every bill that comes forward. We—I think we try to work with our critics to make sure that, whether we accept the bill or not, we take a look at the content and see if there's ways in which we can improve the process that we have.

Mrs. Stefanson: And just to be clear, this bill did not come about as a result of what happened that day, but it is something that, if the information had been in the budget books, that would never have happened that day.

This has come about as a result of past years where that information has not necessarily been

complete or included in the budget books, and we have found it, year after year, very difficult to go through and figure out which fees, you know, where they're at this year and to try and do a comparison.

And I think if you're trying to be truly transparent and accountable to Manitobans that it would be a very simple way of doing it. The information is there somewhere, and I guess it's just helpful—I think it would be very helpful to have that for Manitobans to be able to turn to that schedule, or however you would want to put it in there, in the budget books. But I think it would be very helpful for them to be able to see, in a very transparent fashion, the comparison of fees, year over year, and the comparison of an expansion in the tax base when it comes to the PST.

Some of those things have been mentioned in the budget, but there is not a sort of line-by-line comparison of—and the breakdown of, you know, how the individual items—what the revenues would be to the government with respect to the individual items. And I think that would be very helpful to have the breakdown. There's an overall number, but overall doesn't necessarily affect, you know, all Manitobans, but it will affect—overall, it will affect all Manitobans, but not, you know, not every single Manitoban will be affected by all of those items there, and so they may want to see, okay, this is something; I buy this kind of insurance, and what is the expectation in terms of the increase in revenues as a result of expanding the PST base.

So I—you know, I appreciate the minister willing to—is willing to look at our bill, but, I think, beyond just the bill, I think it's about creating more transparency within the budget, and I'm wondering if the minister would be willing to consider including that kind of a schedule in next year's budget, as I understand from his comments previously is that they're—they've already started. They started April 18th on the next budget, so if he could just comment on that, please.

Mr. Struthers: Well, as I said, Mr. Chairperson, I'm the—I'm open to discussions and ideas coming forward about how we can improve the whole budgeting process. I'm committed to being transparent with Manitobans on this issue, including members of the opposition.

I—as I mentioned earlier, I can remember being a critic; I was Natural Resources critic and searching and digging for information and trying to squeeze information out of the government of the day. And,

you know, a fee that comes to mind is when that government brought forward the park permit fee to begin with, and trying to get information out of the government was like pulling teeth. So I understand what it's like to try to get that information and try to do your job and provide, you know, the legitimate constructive criticism that opposition parties need to do. So it's—I think the government of that time, I think, made some moves towards—and I remember working with Mr. Glen Cummings at the time, as the minister, to try to find ways in which we could improve the reporting of fees and such things coming out of that—the old Natural Resources department. So I think it's an ongoing discussion that needs to take place. I said that I'm open to, you know, to good ideas that can help all of us that serve the 1.2 million Manitobans that we serve.

So, yes, I'm committed to being transparent; I'm committing to being accountable. And I think that's good for our democratic process, overall, so I think we should continue to exchange good ideas on this, and incorporate the ones that make sense and that we can move forward with.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister could indicate what all the user fees are, by government department, and what the expected revenues are for—in this budget as compared to the last budget for those same fees?

Mr. Struthers: That is quite a large request, so what I will undertake to do is to get those numbers for the member. I think she's looking for a listing of the fees. We'll have to do some comparison work is kind of the year-over-year comparisons that she's asking for, but I'll endeavour to, as quickly as we can, get back to the member with that.

Mrs. Stefanson: I appreciate the minister endeavouring to get back to me on that.

I'm wondering if you could also include not just the revenues, but what the actual fees are, how it affects Manitobans, what they would be paying, as well. If they—that—if that could be included in the information that he could get for me.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I think we can do both the year-over-year change and the amount of the fee, plus year-over-year change in revenue. I think that would probably be helpful for the—for my critic.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I am—I'm not sure if this falls under the Department of Finance or not, so I'm going to ask the question. It might be a very short time.

An Honourable Member: We'll tell you.

Mrs. Mitchelson: You will be able to tell me, yes.

It's the rent tax credits that are available to Manitobans that live in rental properties, and it would be, I guess, school tax credits—education, property and school tax credits that are available.

Is that administered by the Department of Finance, or is that—would that be under Housing?

Mr. Struthers: I think we can—yes, we do and I think we can, depending on what your questions are, I think we can help you with that. Hope so.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I've had a request by a constituent, and I can forward the detailed information on to the minister, but it's just been in the last few days so I thought I would raise it here.

She is a widow who has been widowed since 1997 and moved into—sold her house and moved into rental property, and wasn't aware of the education tax credits that were available and just became aware of them. So she went to her accountants and applied for the tax credit and, I guess, received two years tax credit back. And when the accountants inquired, they indicated to her that the Province's policy was that they would only go back three years. They wouldn't go back the full length of the request.

So I guess I would ask the minister what the policy is and why, you know, the Manitoba tax rebate policy is different from Canada's.

* (16:30)

Mr. Struthers: I appreciate the question the—and, of course, we want to make sure that her constituent realizes all the benefits that she is due. So the policy, which has been in place since the '70s when the tax credit was introduced, the policy is the current year plus two years running back. So I think it sounds as if the policy—the member might correct me if I haven't got that right, but it sounds as if the policy was at least administered correctly in this case, but that—but her constituent would be making the case that from, I believe, 1997 to that year, she would like to be considered for a benefit then. But our policy's clear. This year and two years running back.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But I—and it may have been a policy that's been in place for a long time, I don't know. But the reality is people can be reassessed by government, by Canada Revenue, for seven years back. And they can be reassessed and they can be charged if they haven't properly paid. And so I guess

I wonder why the policy for someone that is looking to government to be fair to them, why that policy wouldn't go back seven years rather than just, you know, the current year and two years previous. It appears to me to be quite unfair.

Mr. Struthers: The policy that's in place has been there since the '70s as has—it is governed by the Income Tax Act, the Canada Revenue Agency Income Tax Act. That's what sets up the current year dating back two years.

I think the member had mentioned that the GST or other federal programs where they go back more than two years, those are out—my understanding is that those are outside of the federal income tax. They would be outside of the federal Income Tax Act, but this one is actually based on Canada Revenue Agency and the federal Income Tax Act.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I'm certainly not a tax expert. So I'm going to ask the question: Is the minister indicating that this is a federal policy not a provincial policy that they're following?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, this is based on the federal Income Tax Act, and that's what governs us in this case.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So this policy is not a policy that could be changed by the provincial government should they choose. Are they saying that they're governed by—I mean, there's income tax collected by the Province and by the federal government. So is there no legislation that governs the Province that allows them to set policy that could be changed?

Mr. Struthers: We have arrangements with the federal government in terms of administering the income taxes. I mean, I think the member is correct in saying, you know, that there's—we pay provincial, we pay federal. We do that together. It's governed by the CRA. It's contained within the federal Income Tax Act, you know, that's why we do one income tax form, you know, every year, when we busily work to get our income taxes in.

We—so our policy is based on that. We would—I can't imagine that we would be in favour of breaking away from that, especially when all the other provinces in the country are signed up, as we are, to do our taxes in that fashion. I understand the point that the member from River East is making. I know that that doesn't help her with her constituent in—but that's—there's very clear advantages to us working together with the federal government and

having this governed by the federal act that's in place.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Mitchelson: And I guess I'm still having a little difficulty with this. Is the minister saying, then, that right across the board, if there are provincial programs, and this is a provincial rebate, that all programs would have a three-year time limit, or are there others that might have a longer time? I'm struggling a little bit with this because I'm sensing a real unfairness when, you know—is he telling me that the federal government is saying they can only go back three years and that's the federal government's policy? Because, quite frankly, if government can go back to an individual for seven years and say you've cheated us or we haven't collected enough income tax from you, you owe us.

But a renter who very often doesn't have a huge income, who hasn't been fairly treated or didn't know about a program, very often people maybe make mistakes legitimately and don't pay income tax on certain things and, you know, when they're reviewed or reassessed they end up having to pay. But we're saying to people who, for some reason, in the instance of a widow who probably wasn't putting tax credits No. 1 on her priority list when she looked at having to sell her house and relocate, you know, wasn't sort of thinking tax credits and what am I eligible for. But she can't benefit or access the seven-year rebate that in my mind would be a very fair policy or process.

I mean, if government can go back, why can't individuals who haven't claimed what they're entitled to go back seven years? So is the minister telling me that this is a federal policy that they can't change provincially or is it a provincial policy?

Mr. Struthers: The member's description is, I think, correct and I think her frustration is correct. It's the—in terms of the—and it's contained within the federal act that the federal act indicates that in terms of this tax credit as we've discussed, it's two years plus—it's the current year plus two years you can go back to receive that benefit. But in the act as well, the federal act, the member is right. If they believe that you owe them money they can go back seven years to do that reassessment. That is what exists in that federal income tax act.

I can understand like in the case that the member's brought forward those would be trying times for the widow who's lost her husband and now

is moving, and I don't expect she would be thinking first and foremost of tax credits and those sorts of things. I would think that that's kind of—maybe in a little bit defence of the federal government on this—I mean, maybe that's poor thinking when they thought they would put in place the current year back three years.

Now that's short of what the member and her constituents were thinking. I understand that. But that is what is reflected in the federal Income Tax Act.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So, then, it is a—it's in federal legislation the three-year timeframe. And is there any other instance where the Province makes a different decision outside of the federal Income Tax Act on other programs or tax credits?

Mr. Struthers: Not in the area of income tax. We as—we play by those federal government rules that are found in the federal Income Tax Act.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I won't pursue this any further, but I think I will get a letter off to the minister with the circumstances.

I mean, it—to me, I have some difficulty with a policy that does treat individuals differently than, you know, the way government can treat them.

It is, certainly, a fairness issue, and I'll do a little thinking on it and I'll send the information over to the minister and have him have a look at it. Thanks.

Mrs. Stefanson: And just in the area of taxation as well, since we are there, and one of the areas that there has been an expansion in this budget to other products and services that are offered to Manitobans, which will now be where PST is applied to those services and products.

And I'm wondering if the minister could indicate—again, we talked about a global number for some of the fee increases, but I'm wondering if the minister could give us a breakdown of, individually, some of these services and what they are expecting to gain in terms of revenues with these services.

So I'll start with property; start with the insurance side. I'm wondering what the expected revenues are for property—from property insurance PST on the property insurance claims?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, I can give a—two things, one, I—a global number in terms of the amount of revenue we're expecting in terms of all of the insurance that we're dealing with, and I can get back to the member

on a further breakdown, more of a line-by-line breakdown, on that. We're—in terms of expansion of the PST on insurance, all angles of the insurance that we've mentioned could be an \$85-million revenue item.

* (16:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for that. I guess, I—yes, I would appreciate having the breakdown of all of those insurance products as well.

What—how did the—what was the criteria used to come up with this \$85-million estimate of revenues?

Mr. Struthers: Was the—is the member looking for how we add up to get to the \$85-million number, or is she looking for a rationalization on why it is we took this route?

Mrs. Stefanson: I'd really just like to know, I mean, how you came—how the number or the \$85 million came about. So I know you're going to get me the breakdown, but how did you come to those numbers in the individual areas? How were—that's.

Mr. Struthers: The numbers that we came up with were based on the numbers that were filed with the superintendent of insurance. We have a record of insurance that we can rely on, that confidently gets us to that number.

As the member has talked about in a question in question period, she's aware that there're discussions with members of the insurance industry in terms of a start date and, you know, we've been very open in dealing with the insurance companies in terms of where we can land on for that date.

The other thing that I would point out is that, you know, we've been looking at what they do in Ontario, and it's always good to look at another province who's got some experience with these things so that we can come up with as reasonable a number in terms of revenue and also a reasonable understanding of what that impact would be for the companies and for their clients.

Overall, our approach in this budget to come back into balance in 2014-15 was to—it was to balance that between expenditure reductions and revenue increases. We've been up front about saying we're—there'll be revenue increases, and members will be able to point to that in the budget. We don't think we can do—we don't think we can come back into budget only on revenue increases or only on expenditures—expenditure reductions. We think this is a balanced way to do it.

And what she's talking about now is confidence in the number that we project in terms of revenue, and we've taken every step we can to make sure that we can reasonably be confident that that number's a real number.

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm wondering when the minister is endeavouring to get back to me on the breakdown of the revenues by category and that if he could also do the same with respect to the other items that are listed that will now have PST applied to them as well.

Mr. Struthers: I think that's something, I think, we can very quickly get back to the member on. I would suggest even as early as tomorrow in Estimates.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I thank the minister for that.

Are these all products and services that—where this expansion of the PST has taken place, do all of these services and products, do they have—is the GST also applied to them currently?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, and as the member would note, the—would know the GST is actually a broader tax than what we do in Manitoba with our PST. But, yes, the GST would be applied.

Mrs. Stefanson: What are some of the other products where GST is applied but where PST is not in Manitoba—the products and services?

Mr. Struthers: I can give a few examples. These are items where the GST is applied but not the provincial sales tax: home heating, gasoline, entertainment, taxis, new houses and, I'm told, funerals.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is there an—are those all of the products and services that—where GST is applied but not PST, or could we get a list of what those products and services are?

Mr. Struthers: I think that's a pretty forward—straightforward question that I can get back to her on tomorrow.

Mrs. Stefanson: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

And—just looking at the time—

An Honourable Member: Do you want me to make a speech? Only—

Mrs. Stefanson: That's okay.

I wonder if the minister could just—it's really a general policy question of—on taxation—what the policy is of this government. We did see in the last election, of course, a promise was made during the

election not to raise taxes and we know that taxes have been raised in the way of revenues in the expansion of the sales tax and other taxes have been increased like the gas tax, et cetera, and I'm wondering if the minister could just explain what would happen—what the long-term policy is of the government when it comes to tax increases because, obviously, the policy has changed from the election to now. So what is the plan over the course of the next number of years with respect to taxation increases?

Mr. Struthers: Well, again, I think the challenge the—that my friend from Tuxedo has is trying to get the facts to fit the narrative that they want to run forward with.

There hasn't been a change in approach from the election. Our approach has been—and over the 12 years—is to make sound decisions, both in terms of expenditure and revenue.

You know, you look back to the 1990s when the PST was expanded broadly in those days, and I'm assuming the government of the day needed revenue. They faced an economic downturn in the early '90s, and Gary Filmon's government, instead of bumping up the PST by a point or two like has been done in some provinces and like some people have asked us to do, that government broadened out the provincial sales tax—broadened it out to include, I think I find—just going by memory here, and, you know, in those days, that they broadened it out into—I think one was babies' clothing, if I haven't—if I remember correctly, or feminine hygiene products, those sorts of things, meals and such.

So, you know, so that—those kind of decisions are taken by governments. In the election, our Premier (Mr. Selinger) was very clear that we weren't going to bump up the PST as we were being asked by a number of people.

We did, however, though, say that we would dedicate an equivalency of 1 per cent—

Mr. Chairperson: With all due respect and apologies, the minister's speech notwithstanding, the hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

*(14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of Executive Council.

Would the First Minister's and the Leader of the Opposition's (Mr. McFadyen) staff please enter the Chamber. We're on page 30 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I do have a few questions. The first one has to do with community pastures, of course, and I know that the number of head of cattle that's lost through the flood and since BSE since 2003 has had a significant impact, and now, with the possible closing of the community pastures throughout the province of Manitoba, with the cost-cutting measures from the federal government, and most of that land is, of course, owned by the Province of Manitoba, either through Crown leases.

I would like the First Minister's response on what the intent is from his government in order to expedite the community pastures so that they can still become and still be a viable operation, either through a co-op or through the Department of Agriculture, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): This is an issue that surprised all of us, that the federal government, through the PFRA program, would drop the Community Pasture Program. I would hope the first initiative would be to ask the federal government to reconsider having the program, not just drop it and then leave it on the shoulders of the provinces. It's been a very important program for cattle producers and other people that use the land. It has provided very significant environmental benefits out there as well, with trees and shelter belts and those kinds of benefits.

And I know the member—it sounds like the member supports it, that we need some kind of Community Pasture Program. So I think the first initiative is to ask the Member of Parliament that represents these areas, or the members of Parliament that represent these areas, why they let the program be cut in Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: Well, Mr. Chair, we do believe very strongly in community pastures and what the economic growth is for those that are surrounded by those, and the number of head of cattle through the flood has been put on the community pastures as a result of the flooding. But we as opposition don't have the ability to hold the federal government to account, and the number of land and acres that are

impacted as a result of—that's owned by the Province, a decision will have to be made by the provincial government in order for those to happen.

So my request, Mr. Chair, is that whether or not we're going to see support, or continued support for those lands to stay in community pasture developments.

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the member declaring himself as being in favour of the Community Pasture Program because I think it is an important program and has provided important services, especially at the time of the flood, because this was land that was available to flooded-out cattle producers to provide grazing and feeding opportunities for cattle that were under—otherwise under an enormous amount of stress when they were on lands that were impacted by high water, flooded lands, often close to the Lake Manitoba.

So, first and foremost, we have to ask the federal government to restore the program. This shouldn't have been cut in the first place, given the positive impacts on rural producers, particularly the cattle producers and other livestock producers. And that is the first initiative that we need to undertake together. And the opposition can be very helpful in this regard. I think if, for example, the member from Lakeside and the member from the Interlake work together on this, that would cover both sides of the lake. That would cover a significant amount of the community pastures out there where cattle were impacted. And I think if the opposition and the government, this side of the House, came together, we could have a stronger voice in advocating for a community pastures program in western Canada and, in particular, in Manitoba where the federal government played a role as they have for decades.

Mr. Eichler: Will the First Minister and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) be writing a letter of request asking for the community pastures to be maintained?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. Eichler: I want to move on. On December the 26th, in fact, in the last session, the First Minister requested when we stood in the House and asked regards to flood compensation, that we advise his office. On December the 26th, Fred and Judy Piscelevich from Twin Beaches, which is located in the RM of Woodlands, wrote the First Minister. I, at the same time, wrote the First Minister requesting a meeting. Again, they had never had a follow-up call

from the minister's office. I again wrote on January the 17th.

Mr. Chair, would the minister's first office care to update the House in regards to whether or not he did meet with the Pisclevich family?

Mr. Selinger: I'm going to take this question as information and check into what happened with the correspondence and how it's been dealt with, and I'll endeavour to get back to the member on that.

Mr. Eichler: To my knowledge, they have not been either called back or acknowledged even receipt of the letter. They have been devastated, Mr. Chair. Their value package, and I know there is appeal mechanisms, and they've been trying to do that, but the First Minister did assure us, and I forwarded the questions not only to the Pisclevich family but a list of about 400 other flood victims encouraging them to get a hold of the departments in order to move forward.

So I would ask that the minister and his staff—the First Minister and his staff, certainly do get back to those that we had asked in particular, Fred and Judy Pisclevich.

The other four is—that I would like to put on the record for the First Minister to reply back to is Rudy Kitsch, Leanne Lawless, Ruby Grymonpre, and Alice Dent. And I know that those people have made several requests. Unfortunately, they feel that they haven't been heard. So—and I know the First Minister takes it quite seriously to get back to people. So I am very concerned that this hasn't happened, so hopefully he'll do that very quickly.

In regards to my question today with taxation for the RMs surrounded by Lake Manitoba—

Mr. Chairperson: Stop.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Selinger: Just a follow-up to the comment that the member for Lakeside made about the four names. If I—with his permission, I'd like to just ask him if he could provide information so we can verify addresses and make sure that they have been followed up on.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, I'll forward that to the First Minister's office.

* * *

Mr. Eichler: Back to what I was about to base my next question on, Mr. Chair, it has to do with taxation. The three municipalities that was glaringly absent was the RM of Portage la Prairie, the RM of Woodlands and, of course, the RM of Westbourne who had significant impact because of the flood as well.

They were not on the list for compensation for the one-time increase in taxation. I would just like to get the minister's opinion as why those would—were missed. And, if they were not intentionally missed, will his office be making sure that they will, in fact, be receiving compensation along with those other municipalities?

Mr. Selinger: My understanding is, is that the recommendation for which municipalities should get compensation was developed by analysis coming out of the Department of Local Government, and so we will ask—and I encourage the member to attend that minister's Estimates, because I think the officials will be there that were involved in the decision-making process and identifying the rationale for who should be in and who should be out.

And if the member's okay with that, I would recommend that that'd be the fastest route to get an answer for him.

Mr. Eichler: You know, as we all know, consultation is very important, and I did contact these three municipalities. They were not consulted; they were not called; they'd had no feedback. They were totally blindsided by the fact that they did not receive any funding from this government, where the others did. So I want that to be into the record, Mr. Chair.

I guess, my last question, and I know we're short of time, but the First Minister's been on the radio several times talking to a lot of my constituents and a number of people from around the world in regards to Makoon. And I got a call again this morning, right before lunch—and I understand there's a great lady in your office by the name of Karen that answers the phone very accommodatingly, and she listened to the story. And she has yet—in fact, she's asked the minister, himself, directly on CJOB whether or not Makoon is, in fact, alive. And they would like me to ask today if we can have the assurances that Makoon is—in fact, is alive.

Mr. Selinger: I—well, I know this much, nobody's told me that Makoon is not alive, and I will confirm his—I'm assuming it's a him—his existence. But—well,

I'll seek to verify that. But there's been no information about the demise of Makoon.

Mr. Eichler: My final question for the First Minister is: Is it possible that either the member from Emerson or myself could attend to, in fact, verify that Makoon is alive?

Mr. Selinger: I don't know, that's—that sounds dangerous, those two individual MLAs could put—I don't want to put a chill into Makoon's future existence. So—but, no, I mean, we'll check and see what's possible there.

The most important thing is to verify that the bear is, in fact, alive. I'm—I hope we're not developing an urban myth here about the existence or non-existence of this bear cub, but we'll verify whether he's alive. And I'll take advice from the department that's looking after this situation on whether other MLAs should attend it. I doesn't sound like a problem on the face of it, but they may have specific issues. They may want the animal not to be in too much contact with human beings in terms of its ability to adapt back to its natural habitat. But we'll take advice from the professionals on the appropriate way to handle verification procedures.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): There's been, as the Premier knows, a lot of discussion over the past number of days about the purchase and distribution of tickets to sporting events by Crown corporations.

To this point, we're aware of the 10 season tickets obtained by MLCC as part of the sponsorship arrangements that it has with True North, netting a total of 440 tickets. And, to date, we've had information provided for a very, very small fraction of those tickets in terms of how they were distributed and used. And we await detail on the balance of those 440 tickets.

* (15:00)

We've also just learned that Hydro has, as part of the ticket drive, purchased two sets of tickets—of season tickets—which would provide, roughly, 88 tickets over the course of a season. And the information concerning other Crowns is somewhat sketchy. But can I ask the Premier if he can indicate what arrangements are in place—or were in place, for the past season, with respect to all the Crowns and their—either sponsorship arrangements, or ticket purchase arrangements, with True North for Jets games?

Mr. Selinger: As the member knows, we've put in place, for the first time ever as a government, a policy that tickets that are acquired as a result of corporate sponsorships by Crown corporations shall no longer be available to board members or senior staff, with the exception, potentially, that they're only usable for business purposes, in other words, as part of the job responsibilities of the organization to deal with people.

So—the more I look into this issue, the more I've come to understand that there has been, for many decades, in Manitoba, a practice of Crown corporations having access to tickets when the Jets were here in the past, and with other professional sporting teams in Manitoba. And that as part of their sponsorship, which all organizations that are large corporations in Manitoba, public and private, have been—have played a role in corporate sponsorships to support these kinds of activities in Manitoba. And that there has, in the past, been many elected officials that have attended games through the availability of seating and tickets from Crown corporations.

And so it may be the case that, when the Jets came back this fall, that some of the practices that were followed when the Jets had previously been here, were uptaken again—they were brought back into practice, based on previous experience.

So, it's now time—and this has occurred—it's now time to have a new set of rules with respect to how tickets are used when Crown corporations are corporate sponsors. And those new rules are being brought into effect as we speak. And it addresses a practice that probably has gone on for decades in Manitoba, when the Jets were here previously, and when professional sporting has been in Manitoba for many decades in terms of professional football. And then other professional sporting leagues, from time to time, have been very present in Manitoba as well at different periods in our history, so—

And now we're at a stage where there's a high degree of saliency to this issue with the tremendous public support for the professional hockey in Winnipeg. And sporting, in general, is—looks like it's going through a bit of a renaissance these days, and we need new policies to reflect current realities that the public's desire to see that practices and rules are fair in terms of how we handle these resources.

Mr. McFadyen: And I think the—I'm not going to take issue with comments made by the Premier in response, but would only observe that the situation we're dealing with now is somewhat unique in that

there's overwhelming public demand for tickets for the Jets in particular.

And, certainly, when you look at the profitability of True North this year, as I understand it, they came in the top half of the NHL in terms of their profitability this season. So they're on the giving side of the revenue-sharing equation because of that success. That's a great story, but the frustration that people are expressing around this story arises from the fact that regular Manitobans have had a very difficult time getting their hands on tickets. There was a mad rush, obviously, on the day the tickets went on sale. I think they were sold out within something like 14 seconds. And thousands of Manitobans were denied access at the same time as Crown corporations, either through sponsorship arrangements or through direct purchases of tickets, were acquiring tickets and then distributing them to insiders.

So, in view of those circumstances, the explanation that was offered today for why Hydro purchased tickets was that they wanted to support the drive to 13—I think it was—the drive to 13,000 tickets. But, when you look at the demand that was there, the public was perfectly ready to fork out the money from their own resources to acquire those tickets. So I wonder if the Premier can indicate whether he thinks that explanation really can be taken seriously when you look at what the overwhelming public demand was. True North certainly wasn't in need of any help from Crown corporations in terms of sales.

Mr. Selinger: Well, it's that—I think, to put it in a nutshell, hindsight is 20/20. I think we have to remember, at the time, there was a real question being asked by the NHL owners, the corporate governors of the league, whether or not Winnipeg was a viable market for the professional hockey to return here.

And the No. 1 face of the NHL, Gary Bettman, was saying, very publicly, that for NHL hockey to survive in Manitoba, there needed to be a sellout virtually of every game. And as a result of that, there was kind of an implicit challenge to the community, can you sellout the arena? And everybody in Manitoba, including Crown corporations and private corporations and groups of people rallied to the cause, is really what it came down to, and everybody wanted to get out there and show that they were part of the solution to have NHL hockey return to Manitoba.

We knew there was tremendous support for it; we didn't know if that support would translate into sufficient demand to fill every seat in the house. And I think Crown corporations, like many corporations in the private sector, because of the way the new arena and all NHL arenas are structured, is there's a certain amount of corporate boxes and then tickets for the public at various levels of price, and everybody wanted to do their share, and I do believe that it was all done with the best of intentions to support the drive to have NHL hockey return to Manitoba. There was a tremendous feeling that it should have never left; there was a tremendous feeling that it should come back; there was a tremendous feeling that if we all pulled together we could help it happen, and I think everybody acted in a spirit of good faith by participating in buying tickets, whether it's corporations, individuals, families, ethnic organizations—I don't know—there's a myriad of groups that came together on this issue, and so I do think that they were acting in good faith, if that's the rationale they get for participating, and I think that was the rationale of everybody. And I think there was a rally going on; all the corporate players in Manitoba, including government business enterprise, were being encouraged to be a part of the solution and come to the table and buy corporate boxes and tickets, et cetera.

So it's not surprising to me, without knowing the specifics inside the corporation, that they would think that they wanted to be part of the solution. It's not surprising at all that they would want to do that and be seen to be part of that solution and step-up to the plate like everybody else was doing.

Mr. McFadyen: And there—two issues: There's the issue of whether it was appropriate to buy the tickets in the first place, and the second issue is, once the tickets were purchased, how they were distributed and whether that distribution was appropriate, whether the people sitting in the seats were the right people to receive those tickets.

As I recall, the lead-up to the tickets going on sale, I think, as most Manitobans recall it, there was tremendous interest and tremendous excitement, and on the day that the seats went on sale, Manitobans from all walks of life were sitting at their computers either at home or in the office. I know just about every single friend of mine went into the office that day because they thought they'd have a better chance of getting tickets online from work. And so, just in the particular case of Hydro and their purchase of the two sets of tickets, can the Premier—and he may not

have the answer to this now, but can he just undertake to check on whether Hydro followed the normal process of purchasing online like everybody else or whether they followed a different process?

* (15:10)

Mr. Selinger: Again, I don't know the specific procedures for how corporations were approached to buy tickets for the Jets. They may have been well approached before the general tickets went on sale to the public. There may have been a separate campaign for corporations to participate in the buy; I don't know that. That's presumably in the realm of the marketing plan and strategy and how it was executed by True North.

So the reality is, is that everybody wanted to be part of that solution, and there was a tremendous rallying going on inside of Manitoba to be part of the solution and, certainly, government business enterprises were being asked to step up and be part of the solution on the corporate box side and on the ticket side. They wanted—they were all being approached as part of the marketing plan by True North, the specifics of which I do not have any information on.

But I do remember the feeling in the community and reading the sports pages and reading the newspapers that the corporate sector had to step up and the general public had to step up and government had to step up, but everybody had to be on the same page to make this go in Manitoba.

And that was, sort of, the suggested challenge from the commissioner of the NHL hockey league to Manitoba, that for it to be a viable operation here we had to show that we could fill that arena every night. And I think part of the underlying message there was that the arena is not as large as some arenas in the rest of the league, and for a small-market team in a small-market arena which everybody thought—which certainly the owners thought was appropriate to the community that we lived in, had to max out the potential for local revenue for the NHL to be viable in Manitoba.

And as it turned out, Manitobans in great numbers rallied to that cause and wanted to participate in that, and I don't know of any games that might—that were not sold out this year. As far as I can tell, every game, every ticket was sold. I don't know if every seat was occupied for the game, but I know every ticket for every game at every level was sold. And people, not the same people, but more

than—what is it? How many—15,000 tickets, something in that range, are available for each game. More Manitobans than that: it wasn't the same 15,000 going to every game. It was 15,000 times—I don't know—six, seven, a factor of eight or nine, but a lot of Manitobans got involved in going to the games. And there was a tremendous sort of enthusiasm for that, almost a contagious enthusiasm, I don't think would be too small an expression to use, with the emphasis on contagious in the sense that everybody was excited about it. Everybody wanted to be a part of it and everybody thought they were doing the right thing by buying tickets, whether they were corporations or individuals or families or community organizations. Everybody thought they were doing the right thing to get Manitoba back on the map for NHL hockey.

And so I don't want the member opposite to think that Hydro's were intentions were any different than that than anybody else because there's no evidence to suggest they were.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, I don't think there was any Manitoban that had any doubt about whether or not season tickets would sell out, and I think there was a question whether it would happen in 14 seconds or 18 seconds or 60 seconds, but I don't think there was ever a doubt that the seats would sell out.

And I think what the Premier is saying is that he agrees with Crown corporations purchasing Jets tickets, and that's even in circumstances where there's overwhelming demand for the—from the rest of the community to acquire those tickets.

And so I just—I need to ask the Premier, and I think he knows I need to ask the question: I know he had the opportunity to attend games, did he have any tickets provided to him that he didn't pay for personally?

Mr. Selinger: No.

Mr. McFadyen: And were any of the tickets sourced through any of the Crown corporations that the Premier used which he then reimbursed them for?

Mr. Selinger: No.

Mr. McFadyen: So did the Premier directly purchase his tickets, then, from Jets box office.

Mr. Selinger: I directly purchased my own tickets, yes.

Mr. McFadyen: And were they purchased directly from the Jets organization?

Mr. Selinger: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: In terms of the other tickets purchased by the Crown corporations, we're aware, as of today, that three ministers were—at least that we're aware of at this point, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Mackintosh), the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Ashton) sourced their tickets through the Crown corporations and later reimbursed those Crown corporations. We learned today that a former NDP Finance minister, Mr. Schroeder, who's a former chair of Manitoba Hydro, used tickets that were acquired by Manitoba Hydro. And so we have—we're now aware of four individuals tied to the government who received tickets through Crown corporations.

Can the Premier just indicate how many others there are?

Mr. Selinger: I don't have that information.

But I would, actually, like to take the opportunity to ask the Leader of the Opposition to declare where he stands on the same questions he asked of me personally.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier will know I was asked the question in the scrum yesterday and responded to it at that time, so he's welcome to look back at the record.

Mr. Chair, the—I just want to ask the Premier again if he will be—when he and his government will be reporting back on who else received the tickets through MLCC and other Crown corporations.

Mr. Selinger: The information is being compiled and it'll be made available as soon as it's been compiled and verified.

And I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition on the record in the House to answer the same questions he asked me.

Mr. McFadyen: And, again, the—that question was answered both in question period today and in the media scrum yesterday, so he's welcome to go back and look at the record to refresh his memory.

On the—just on the issue of the distribution of tickets, can the Premier just assure us at this point that there's no other NDP MLAs other than the three mentioned who received tickets through Crown corporations?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not aware of any, but we still—there may be, but I'm not aware of any at this stage of the game.

And I have to say I don't recall the Leader of the Opposition answering the three direct questions he asked me in the House today. I do not believe that he answered those questions. Just as a matter of simple courtesy, I think he should put himself on the same level as he's asking everybody else to be accountable for.

Mr. McFadyen: Sure, I'll repeat I've never received a ticket—publicly funded ticket to a Jets game. I can confirm that.

With respect to the issue of the Crown corporation boards, can the Premier just indicate—they have established a policy of ministers having to repay Crown corporations for tickets. Is he also asking his board appointees to repay the Crown corporations for the tickets they received?

Mr. Selinger: I don't have that information and therefore I haven't asked anybody to do that, nor have I intended to without the information.

But, just—I want to be clear on the three questions the member asked me. He just has now said that he did not receive any free tickets from government organizations, including Crown corporations. He hasn't answered the question of whether he received any tickets for which he paid through government organizations.

Mr. McFadyen: Yes, I can respond to that. I've never received a ticket sourced through a government organization, period.

And so in terms of the 66 board tickets that were allocated to MLCC, and the breakdown that was provided through the freedom of information request to the Taxpayers Federation shows that 66 tickets were allocated to the board of MLCC and that many of those, anecdotally, were distributed for the higher profile games, including season opener.

And I wonder if the Premier—they've established a policy of ministers having to repay the Crowns for the tickets they received, whether government's appointees to the board of a corporation will also be asked to repay the corporation for the tickets that board members received.

Mr. Selinger: Again, our policy is a prospective policy. It says that board members and elected officials on this side of the House should not get any free tickets.

And there is one remaining question that the member asked me, and that was whether I only received and purchased tickets through the Jets box

office. And I would ask the member, as a simple matter of courtesy, to put on the record whether he only received any tickets he got to go to Jets games through the box office, if that was the only method through which he obtained tickets.

* (15:20)

Mr. McFadyen: And, again, the question of the board members, the 66 tickets to board members that were distributed—purchased by MLCC. We're awaiting information on who received those tickets, but I'm wondering if the Premier is going to be asking people to repay the price of those tickets.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I just answered that question and I'm still awaiting the member—the Leader of the Opposition's answer to the direct question: Did he only receive tickets and obtain tickets through the Jets box office or did he obtain Jets tickets through other means? He has not been clear on that point.

Mr. McFadyen: And I responded to that very direct question with a very direct response yesterday, and he's welcome to check the transcripts.

So—and the answer is, that there were no tickets acquired through public organizations.

Mr. Chairman, the question for the Premier is, with respect to the 66 tickets that went to board members at MLCC—again, the—we're not—I know that they're going to provide those names in due course, but the question is whether those board members are going to be asked to refund the money to the Crown corporations for any free tickets that were provided.

Mr. Selinger: The member's asked me that question twice; I've given him the answer twice. And—but I still haven't received an answer on the very direct question: Did the member of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the member for Fort Whyte, only obtain his tickets through the Jets box office, or did he obtain them in any other way? He hasn't been given a direct answer to that question.

Mr. McFadyen: You know, Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry if the Premier missed the briefing, but it's on the record yesterday. There's a transcript available and the question has been very directly responded to.

And I know they're feeling defensive. I know they're feeling defensive; I know they feel like they've been backed into a corner and they're running their smear campaigns again, I—you know, they're good at that, we know that, and I give them credit, you know. And I think the response to his smear campaigns is well known throughout the province.

Mr. Chair, the question, with respect to other Crowns, can the Premier just indicate, because of the three ministers who received tickets, only one of them received them through MLCC. Can he just provide information about the total number of tickets purchased by Manitoba Lotteries Corporation and how they were distributed?

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to get that information for the member, but I do believe, in the case of Lotteries, that a very substantial portion of tickets were made available for the benefit of community members through charitable donations, et cetera.

And I'm only going to ask this question one more time, and I promise I'll leave the Leader of the Opposition alone after that, but, I just ask him, as a simple matter of courtesy, to put on the record today, in the House, in the House today, on the record, whether or not he only obtained his tickets through the Jets box office.

That was the same test that he asked of me and I'd like him to confirm whether that was the only way he can receive tickets for the Jets games. On the record today, please.

Mr. McFadyen: And, again, to be clear, I've never abused my position in government to get tickets through Crown corporations. I think that's the issue. That's the issue. Did we abuse our position to get tickets from Crown corporations?

And the answer, very clearly is no. The answer, very clearly, is no. [*interjection*] No. Never said that.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order. The honourable Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Mr. McFadyen: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and just as we think we're getting down to our final five minutes.

Just in terms of last year's Estimates, we went through the process through the month of April and it wasn't until October that responses to undertakings were received, and I wonder if the Premier can just indicate to provide a—provide responses by no later than June the 1st this time around, given the inordinate amount of time that elapsed the last time.

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for the question. We will try to provide information as it becomes available to him.

And I know that he was concerned about the timeliness of some of the responses I gave, but I was

providing information as I got it, on an ongoing basis throughout the summer and through the flood period and then the pre-electoral period; there was lots going on, as we all know.

But, as—I can tell him that I asked for the information to be put together and provide it to me and read it and wanted to make sure of the accuracy of it, and then as soon as I got all that verified, I did provide him with that information, and I will endeavour to do that again. I can't guarantee him that I'll get all the information by June 1st, but I will assure him that I will—and I have already. I've been saying to these folks, give me some stuff to give back to him on the questions I needed to do follow up on, and as I get the information I will provide it to the member opposite.

Mr. McFadyen: Just back to one of the commitments that was made in the campaign that was on the issue of property taxes paid by seniors and farmers, and the commitment was to eliminate those entirely for every senior and every farmer in the province of Manitoba. Has—can the Premier just indicate what is the expected revenue impact of that commitment?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get that number for the member. There's two points, two questions that he's asked me there. There's two revenue streams: the education tax on farmland and the value of the remaining 20 per cent as we phase it out, and then the question of what the cost will be of phasing out the seniors' responsibility to pay education property taxes on their property tax bill.

And both questions I'll endeavour to get accurate information for the member on what that will mean in terms of revenue streams for the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: And I just want to ask: Is the Premier's intent to eliminate those taxes? What's the timeline on that promise?

Mr. Selinger: I said we would try to do it in this term of office, and that's what we're aiming for.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just indicate whether the mechanism that they propose to use is through tax credits or are they going to find a way of exempting those Manitobans from paying in the first place?

Mr. Selinger: That is an important question to which we do not—I do not have a definitive answer yet. We're looking at the ways and means to make that—

resources available. The member from Fort Whyte would know that we increased the Education Property Tax Credit for seniors this year to \$1,025, which is a, as I understand it, a \$225 increase over the last two budgets. And so that is one mechanism we've used for many decades and it's one that's one that's easily available, but it may not be the one we settle on finally. That's still a question that has to be canvassed as to the best way to do that.

Mr. Eichler: Just further to the farm tax formula, the way it's set up now is the farmers pay the tax and then it's rebated back through an application, which is a very expensive process. And I brought this up several times when I was—my previous role was the Ag critic, and according to the numbers that was presented to me in Estimates—that's the only thing I can go by—but those numbers represented well over a hundred thousand dollars just in administration cost, which is substantial number. The farmer has to go out and pay for it, apply for it back, and then once that's done, then the Department of Agriculture goes and cuts a cheque to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers).

So, if there's a way that we can streamline this, and rather than—as we know, farmers are the best payers in the world. They take their responsibility very seriously, but that is, again, cash flow that they don't have. So I would encourage the First Minister and his staff to see if there's some way that the tax that's paid by the Department of Agriculture be paid directly to the Department of Finance before it ever goes to the farmer in the first place, because it just creates a whole bunch of extra work and I think it'd be streamlined very, very easily.

Mr. Selinger: We'll take a look at that and see if the cost-benefit of doing it in a different way—the important thing is that we get the tax credits out to the producers, the farmers, the owners of the farmland. And we started, I believe, at 20 per cent, 10 to 20 per cent, and we've gone up to 80 per cent, and now we would like to take it the remaining 20 per cent.

Mr. McFadyen: Just with respect to the stadium project, can the Premier just provide an update on how much money has been advanced to date by government to finance that project?

* (15:30)

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to get that number—to verify that number for the member. Certainly, not all of it,

but a substantial number, but I'll have to verify the number for the member from Fort Whyte.

Mr. McFadyen: And can the Premier just outline, in terms of the loan repayment obligations on the part of the football club, have those obligations been altered since the original deal was made?

Mr. Selinger: I do not believe they have been, but I do think there was a timing variability, depending on when the stadium was completed, in the original agreement that allowed them more time, if the stadium was completed at a later date, for when they started repaying the interest, and I think that was anticipated as something in the original agreement.

So that later date may be triggered, depending on when the stadium is completed. But it is part of the—contemplated as part of the original arrangements.

Mr. McFadyen: And just as a general observation, in going through the Estimates book, particularly the estimates of expenditure, I note that the administration and finance lines for each department have—are either flat or have gone up from last year. And where there are reductions in expenditures, it tends to be in the area of actual programming, front-line programming. And I'll just go through it department by department.

But for administration and finance, Executive Council is flat. Administration and finance has gone up for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs at the same time as programming has been cut. Advanced Education is flat at the same time as student aid—the student aid line has been cut. Agriculture overhead on administration has gone up even as direct programming has been cut. Children and Youth Opportunities administration line has gone up. Civil Service Commission, the line is flat. Conservation and Water Stewardship, the administration line has gone up, but programs have been cut. Culture, Heritage and Tourism has stayed flat. Education is flat, although there's a reduction in capital assets. Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade is flat, but there's been a cut to capital assets. Family Services and Labour administration and finance has gone up. Finance administration's gone up slightly while there's been a reduction in terms of tax credit programs. Health is flat. Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs has gone up. Housing and Community Development has gone up 4.4 per cent, even though the programming lines show cuts. Immigration and Multiculturalism is remarkable; it's gone up 4.3 per cent at the same time as they're cutting services. Infrastructure and Transportation

has gone up 4 per cent, with major cuts to capital expenditures under that department. And so I want to ask the—oh, sorry, Innovation, Energy and Mines has stayed flat. Justice has gone up in terms of administration and finance. Local Government has gone up slightly, and Sport is flat.

Just in terms of the general message it sends in terms of priorities, can the Premier comment on why it is that administration and finance lines throughout the Estimates are either flat or increasing as direct programming is being cut?

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the question from the member. Clearly, somebody's done some review of these lines, and in some cases there's an explanation within the text related to that line on administration. For example, sometimes there's a commission, such as the Clean Environment Commission, that's part of that administration line.

But, in other cases, it's not entirely clear from a first look at it on what's going on there. So, if the member's asking me to give an explanation, I'll look into that and see what the explanation is across those various departments, particularly in the cases where there might be a rise in administration.

Mr. McFadyen: Again, it's a significant budget. It's a significant indication of government's priorities.

And it's just, when you see 12 departments with increases in administration and then—and some of them having reductions in spending and nine departments flat and no departments with an actual reduction in administration and overhead, it suggests that the government is becoming top-heavy as it's reducing both spending on infrastructure and front-line services.

And I would just note that's one of many reasons, including the broken promise on taxes, that we'd be voting against it.

And I wonder if the Premier would undertake to get back with an explanation as to why overhead is going up and front-line services are being cut.

Mr. Selinger: As I said in my previous answer, I will look into that, and in the cases where the line is going up, I'll try to give him an explanation as to what's going on there.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Chairman, I think we're either at or close to the end of the time we had allocated, and so we're ready to move by line—to line by line consideration of the Estimates for the department.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 2.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,000 for Executive Council, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the Minister's Salary contained in resolution 2.1.

At this point, we request that the minister's staff and staff of the Leader of the Official Opposition leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. McFadyen: I'd like to move a motion, and I'll move the motion, then provide some comments.

The motion is: I move, seconded by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen),

THAT line item 2.1.(a) be reduced to \$199, which is the equivalent to the price of a ticket to a Jets game.

* (15:40)

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen)

THAT line item 2.1.(a) be reduced to \$199, equivalent to the price of a ticket to a Jets game.

The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Mr. McFadyen: And I think it's a motion that members will want to support. Mr. Chair, the—in years past, it's not a motion that I've brought in my capacity as Leader of the Opposition, but we think it's important, this year, to bring it for a variety of reasons.

We have the broken promise with respect to taxes, a very clear promise made during the election campaign to not raise taxes, followed just a few months later with a complete betrayal of that commitment. There's a lack of follow-through, with respect to the commitment to seniors and farmers, with respect to property taxes. We have a situation where the Premier, rather than expressing concern about his Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) breaking the election laws, actually went out of his way to praise the minister in the—in response to questions

about the breach of the election laws. We saw the Premier support a minister who misuses the civil service for political purposes in the context of the immigration debate, see through both interns and the use of the own—Premier's own staff, the use of public resources to attack federal Cabinet ministers at a time when we rely on the federal government for a very significant proportion of our revenue, and need a good relationship.

We see the stacking of Crown corporation boards with NDP political donors. We see the appointment of the NDP's own political auditor to a board of a Crown corporation which impairs that person's independence as an auditor. And we see a situation where NDP ministers are jumping the queue, in terms of Jets tickets, and misusing Crown corporations in order to get the inside track on Jets tickets.

We have a number of other concerns and issues, but for all of those reasons and the need for the Premier to take responsibility for those failings, we think it's appropriate to reduce his salary to that point. And I would only ask the Premier if he were to grade his own performance, what grade he would give himself in those circumstances.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Chairman, we'd request a recorded vote.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote has been—is there a second member who supports your—I see there is.

A recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

* (16:00)

All sections in Chamber for formal vote.

Order. In the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in the Chamber considering the Estimates of the Executive Council, a motion was moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen). The motion reads as follows:

THAT line item 2.1(a) be reduced to \$199 equivalent to the price of a ticket to a Jets' game.

Order. This motion was defeated on a voice vote and, subsequently, two members requested that a formal vote on this matter be taken.

The question before the committee is the motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 20, Nays 32.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is accordingly defeated.

The sections of the Committee of Supply will now continue with consideration of the departmental Estimates.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. McFadyen: We're ready to proceed with further consideration of the remaining lines in Executive Council's Estimates

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 2.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,812,000 for Executive Council, General Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2013.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the committee are the Estimates of Justice.

Shall we recess briefly to allow the minister and critic the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates?
[Agreed]

It is agreed we will recess for five minutes.

The committee recessed at 4:04 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:07 p.m.

JUSTICE

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Justice. Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): It's my honour as Minister of Justice and Attorney General to provide opening remarks for Justice Estimates.

The Province of Manitoba continues to make investments in the justice system and public safety. The total budget for the department in the 2012-2013 budget year has increased by \$34.6 million or 8.1 per cent over last year's adjusted vote.

I'll do my best, in a limited time, to give an overview of the new resources this budget is dedicating to the department's core priorities, objectives, and strategies. The department's first priority is safer communities, a priority that's shared by government as a whole and particularly the new Children and Youth Opportunities portfolio which assumed responsibility for a number of programs previously administered by Justice.

The core objective for safer communities is providing strong support for policing. The governments of Manitoba and Canada recently signed a new agreement to have the RCMP continue to provide provincial policing services across Manitoba. The new 20-year Provincial Police Service Agreement strengthens governance and provides greater financial accountability and measures to monitor and contain costs over time. To meet our commitments under this agreement and to provide solid support for provincial police services in the interest of public safety, investments in provincial police will increase by 3.4 per cent or \$3.8 million. This includes an additional \$77,000 for Aboriginal policing.

Budget 2012 builds on the province's ongoing investments and support for law enforcement with funding for 13 additional officers for police services

across the province: 10 for the city of Winnipeg, one for the city of Brandon and two for the RCMP. With this budget the Province will have funded an additional 274 police officers since 1999. Manitoba, through the Department of Local Government, will also support 10 additional cadets in Winnipeg in 2012-13. This investment will see the total number of Winnipeg Police Service cadets increase to 60.

*(16:10)

We'll continue support for the Manitoba Integrated Warrant Apprehension Unit. This unit, with the RCMP and the Winnipeg Police Service, enhances public safety by targeting high-risk offenders, those who threaten our communities and who are wanted for serious crimes. This unit, in a short time, has already arrested over 450 individuals who were failing to comply with court orders.

The implementation of Manitoba's new Police Services Act is advancing and will modernize policing and police governance in Manitoba. The Manitoba Police Commission has been hard at work over the last year with respect to its obligations under the new act. The department's been working collaboratively with the police commission to ensure the necessary infrastructure's in place for the successful creation of police boards for all municipal police services in the province.

The process to hire the director of the independent investigation unit under the new Police Services Act has commenced. This position, by law, must be filled by a civilian who will oversee the work of the unit.

Another critical objective in the priority area of safer communities is taking action on gangs and organized crime. This budget continues our investment in GRASP, the Gang Response and Suppression Plan, with \$178,000 in new funding. This project brings the Winnipeg Police Service and Manitoba Justice together to intensively monitor high-risk offenders and known gang members, lessening opportunities for offenders to engage in criminal activity.

This year, we're expanding the capacity of the Public Safety Investigations Unit with the addition of one investigator. This unit is a national leader in civil measures to enhance public safety by targeting properties that adversely affect the safety and security of neighbourhoods. Since being established in 2012, this—rather, 2002, the Public Safety Investigations Unit has successfully shut down over

540 drug, sniff, prostitution, and other related operations in problem properties across the province.

The unit's also responsible for The Fortified Buildings Act and the successful removal of unlawful fortifications in 57 cases and the body armour and fortified vehicles control act. On April 1 new rules restricting the sale and use of body armour and the ownership and use of fortified vehicles came into force. The use of such equipment by gang members and other criminals is an unacceptable threat to public safety. This legislation acts decisively to make it more difficult for them to have this equipment.

The department's Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit has been very active in pursuing court applications against properties believed to be instruments or proceeds of unlawful activity. Since it began operating in 2009 the unit has filed 94 statements of claim or applications in the Court of Queen's Bench against properties believed to be instruments or proceeds of unlawful activity.

We've started to reinvest the proceeds of crime collected by the unit. Last year over \$150,000 was committed to law enforcement for programs and initiatives related to public safety. The RCMP, Winnipeg Police Service, Brandon Police Service and Winkler Police Service received funds to purchase equipment and tools to detect crime and protect officers.

Building these successes, we recently tabled amendments to The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act. Based on our experience in using legislation over the past two and a half years, legislative changes that have been made in other provinces, developing Canadian case law and extensive consultations with other jurisdictions and the police and our Crown attorneys, we introduced amendments to establish and administer a forfeiture process, enhance the protection of victims and provide the ability to distribute money to the Victims Assistance Fund under the Victims' Bill of Rights.

These amendments also advance our third key objective in the priority area of safer communities: improving supports for children and victims of organized crime.

In addition, ground-breaking legislation allowing protection orders to keep abusers away from victims of human trafficking and sexually exploited children and allowing victims of human trafficking to sue for compensation is now law in Manitoba.

This budget also addresses the objective of strengthening prosecutions within the safer communities priority area. The department's budget adds 17 new FTEs to the Manitoba Prosecution Service, a total comprised of 11 new prosecutors and six support staff. This is a key step in meeting our government's commitment to add 82 new staff to the prosecution's function by 2016.

Important work is also under way to strengthen the ability of the courts to provide fair and effective dispositions in the safer communities priority area. This week the mental-health court will begin its work. This innovative new court will be supported by mental health services and will work with accused whose mental health issues are the likely cause of the criminal behaviour.

Problem-solving courts like this and the Winnipeg Drug Treatment Court help make our community safer by recognizing and addressing the core reasons people come into conflict with the law in the first place.

Budget 2012 also dedicates \$394,000 and 7.5 court clerk positions. Court clerks play a key role in managing and processing court documents, and additional staff will help support the work of the court in reducing the risk of accidental releases. Additional staff was a key recommendation by an independent review of Manitoba's procedures and systems.

Offender accountability is another core priority area of the department. Budget 2012 will address the important objective of maintaining the physical infrastructure needed to safely house inmates.

The independent Adult Corrections Capacity Review Committee will provide advice soon on how much additional bed space should be added to Manitoba's provincial correctional facilities in the next 10 years and will advise what services and retraining should be available to inmates at provincial correctional centres to reduce repeat offenses and ensure inmates are more prepared for life outside of jail.

The committee's expected to provide its report this spring, and I look forward to receiving its advice and recommendations.

While we await their advice, we're moving forward on short-term solutions, including a further 160-bed expansion at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre in Beausejour to help alleviate immediate

pressures caused by high inmate counts across the adult system.

This budget provides for 75.5 additional positions in Corrections and four positions in Courts with \$4.7 million to support the new unit at MRCC opening later this year.

The conversion of capacity at Headingley Correctional Centre will add an additional 64 beds to the adult correctional system. To open these beds this winter, we're dedicating \$861,000 and adding 26 full-time positions.

This budget also includes \$868,000 in new resources to support the restructuring of existing space at the Headingley Correctional Centre into therapeutic community units. The units will be dedicated to longer-term alcohol and drug treatment programs. The units will house up to 156 remanded and sentenced offenders who'll be able to access programming, centered on fundamental addictions, that can, in turn, help to address criminal behaviour.

Earlier this year, the new Women's Correctional Centre opened, providing additional bed capacity across the province and the opportunity for female offenders to be closer to the courts, legal counsel and other supports. The opening of this new facility brings the total number of new beds added by this government since 1999 to 717. Construction projects currently under way will result in 289 additional beds coming online in 2012-13.

The department's capital budget includes funding for a number of security-related upgrades, such as enhancements to closed-circuit television monitoring in court and corrections sites and funding for capital aspects of the new Maintenance Enforcement information management system known as M3P.

The third core priority for the department is maintaining the integrity of the justice system. Under this priority, the budget targets three major objectives. The first objective is investing in technology. The second is strengthening corporate planning and accountability functions. The third objective is to undertake justice innovation analysis and change management initiatives to streamline processes within the justice system while ensuring it remains fair and effective. Working with the stakeholders in the criminal justice system, staff from across the department are committed to continuous improvement in maximizing the value of our investments.

In terms of technology, a major initiative over the last number of years has been the Co-operative Justice Initiative. This budget ensures continuing development of the co-operative justice project. This initiative will ultimately enable the computer systems of the Provincial Court, Corrections, Prosecutions and Victim Services to exchange information. It will significantly enhance inter-divisional processes and co-operation and enable the electronic exchange of information with external partners, particularly policing agencies. This initiative aims to develop greater integration and communication between the various information systems used in the justice system. This will enable Justice officials to make decisions more swiftly and confidently and thus improve the administration of justice. The department's taken critical steps this year in moving this initiative forward with the resources that have been allocated to it.

M3P, the new Maintenance Enforcement information management system recently launched, together with an interactive telephone system that allows clients of the Maintenance Enforcement Program to access their file information 24-7. This budget provides \$326,000 for the ongoing operation of the new computer system and an additional FTE to provide technical support to staff in the program. This new computer system provides the Maintenance Enforcement Program with greater capacity to enforce court orders and separation agreements—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The time for his opening statement has expired. Does—we thank the member for his comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Steinbach, have any opening comments?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Well, first of all, I want to thank you, Mr. Chairperson, for putting an end to that. We have a number of questions that we want to ask in relation to the department.

All I would say on my opening statement, as I do every year, I want to thank the Minister of Justice or the—sorry. I don't want to thank the minister. You know, he's a good man, but I would thank the deputy minister, the assistant deputy ministers, the directors and all the staff of the Department of Justice. I know they work hard every day and in a—with a tough role sometimes, and I will say graciously, even the minister. I would not always agree with how things are done, but I have often said in this Chamber, I think we all do our best and we have differences of

opinion about how things should be done, but I think everybody is here trying to do their best. And I'm going to do my best in these Estimates. I—even though, I think it's the sixth time that I've done the Justice Estimates, so I don't think there's any fresh material that—for the minister, but I'll do my best.

* (16:20)

So, with that, we're willing to proceed. I will note that, in speaking with the Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu), she indicated that I would have leave to allow one staff person of my own to—*[interjection]* I'm told the House has to give leave and not the committee. We were corrected by the Clerk, so perhaps the House leader and I can have that discussion at a future time about how things will work in the Chamber. I can probably survive on my own for the next 40 minutes, but, if not, we might just have to go ahead and vote on everything, so. But—*[interjection]* Well, okay, if worse comes to worse, then the Opposition House Leader's offered to come and give me a hand, so I will certainly take her up on that.

But, with that, I think we're willing to proceed with questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber and, once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

I would ask the minister to introduce his staff.

Mr. Swan: And, of course, since we are in the Chamber, we've only got four slots. So you'll get to meet more of my staff in the course of Estimates. With me: Jeff Schnoor, who's the deputy minister of Justice and deputy attorney general; Dave Brickwood, who's the assistant deputy minister of finance, administration and innovation; as well, Greg Graceffo, who's the assistant deputy minister of Corrections.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Goertzen: I think in the previous six times we've done this, we've done them with different ministers in a global fashion. That's always seemed

to work fairly well, recognizing that in the Chamber that might be a little bit more challenging because there's staffing issues in terms of how many staff can be nearby the minister.

And so I would try as best I can to group these. Sometimes, I always—I often forget where things fall in the department. So the extent that I fall in error there, you'll forgive me, and we might have a bit of a shuffle, but I would do my best to try to keep the questions in relation to specific parts of the department and specific times.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no objection, we'll proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm going to ask some questions about the department or the—yes, the Department of Corrections within Justice. I think I indicated that to the minister yesterday, so that's why he has the appropriate staff here and I appreciate that.

Can he indicate for me just, in terms of—and we asked and we talked about this last year a bit, the, sort of, things that prisoners, in the Manitoba context, in the Manitoba jails, in terms of what they have for recreation. We had some discussions last year about whether they had access to video games, and their television access, and all those sort of things. Can he sort of give me an update on the sort of things that prisoners are able to access for leisure time in the Manitoba jails?

Mr. Swan: I assume the member's not asking about the specific programming that's provided: educational programming, addictions programing, life-skills programming. I take it that's not what the member is asking by his question and maybe he can just clarify.

Mr. Goertzen: Right, that's correct. I do have a series of questions about that, sort of, under Corrections, at a later point. But more—now is more the specific, sort of, leisure activities that inmates might partake in: recreation, TV, video games, those sort of things.

Mr. Swan: Sure. Well, of course, every correctional centre is different but, generally speaking, some of the examples of the kind of recreational opportunities that are provided would be outside fresh air in a yard. That may look different in different facilities depending on the physical layout. In many facilities that would include access, as is possible, to a gymnasium or access to exercise equipment.

Another example would be access to television in various ranges, and we can discuss in some detail, if the member wants, about exactly how any television programming is paid for and provided.

Those are just some examples of some of the recreational activities that are available. Obviously, because of some of the pressures on numbers and some of the issues on ensuring the safety of inmates and our staff, the time may be limited in some facilities, especially when it comes to using gyms and yards. But those are just some examples of recreational opportunities available to inmates.

Mr. Goertzen: And I gather, then, that's not an exhaustive list; it's a representation of what is available.

Would video games be included in terms of things that prisoners could access?

* (16:30)

Mr. Swan: Well, yes, those video games are available in some facilities at some times. It's subject to supervision and other things.

Because I know the next question that the member is going to ask, I can also put on the record that things like recreation equipment, which would include video game consoles, video games are paid by the profits generated from canteens that are operated in correctional centres, as are things like inmate pay phones, the inmate television services that we were talking about a minute ago, books and spiritual care items like medicine pouches.

So, yes, in some facilities there would be access to that paid out of canteen profits.

Mr. Goertzen: I've been here too long because the minister can already tell me what my questions are going to be. So it sort of takes the fun out of some of the process, but I'll do my best.

In terms of—and he mentioned it earlier on that I may have questions on the television service. I mean, the times and the different places that I have toured in the system. There's often a television that's sort of common to a range or to a block of cells.

Are you saying that the prisoners pay, then, for their ability to watch the TV in that cellblock? So, for example, at Milner Ridge there was, in the high security portion, a TV sort of mounted near the end of one of the pods and then prisoners can watch—they can watch it—they pay for that on a daily basis, or how does that work?

Mr. Swan: Yes, as the member indicates, it's common that there'd be a television set on a particular range or in a particular pod that's communally available for the inmates. And my understanding is that the cost of that basic cable coverage which is provided is what comes out of the canteen profits.

Mr. Goertzen: I think I heard the minister indicate that it's basic cable, or is it satellite, or what is the package of channels that inmates get to watch?

Mr. Swan: Well, yes, that's right. Where possible, where available, it would be basic cable service. Where basic cable service isn't available or isn't available at a reasonable cost, it would be a basic satellite package to the facility.

Mr. Goertzen: Would that basic satellite package include any pornographic channels?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I'm aware of the issue coming up federally, and I know that Minister Toews moved quickly and appropriately, I think, to say that wouldn't be happening anymore. To the best of our knowledge, no, there would be no access and if, for some reason, something inappropriate was on, we would expect our correctional officials to advise immediately and we would not allow access to that kind of programming.

Mr. Goertzen: Is the minister aware of any instances where prisoners within the provincial jail system were viewing pornographic material on TV?

Mr. Swan: No, I'm not aware of any such examples and I don't know if the member's asking this hypothetically. If there are any facts that the member is aware of that would be a concern to my—I would appreciate him bringing that to me as soon as possible.

We would consider that to be inappropriate in any Manitoba correctional facility and we would take steps to make sure it doesn't occur.

Mr. Goertzen: In fact, Mr. Minister, on January 9th of this year, I was touring Milner correctional centre—Milner Ridge, and had with me another member of the Legislature, a member of our staff. And, in the high-security portion of Milner Ridge, I did observe prisoners, a group of prisoners in one of the pods, for lack of better terminology, huddled together and watching pornographic material. I don't know how else to describe it.

I did point that out, in fact, to the superintendent, and I want to make this clear, I don't in any way

believe that this is, at all, a reflection on correctional staff, who I have nothing but the highest admiration for. In the times that I've toured the different facilities in the province, I've just been amazed at the kind of person it takes to do that job each and every day.

But I did observe a group of prisoners in the high security area of Milner Ridge, I assume they're gang members, watching pornography. I pointed this out to the superintendent at the time. He tried to take pretty quick action in terms of shutting down the TV. Didn't have great success. It sort of turned off for a bit and then the prisoners sort of looked back with surprise that the TV was turned off. They didn't seem to be surprised they were watching pornography, but they were surprised the TV was turned off, and then turned it back on because they had the remote control.

At which point the superintendent acted pretty quickly to try to shut it down again, and I think that they were able to shut down the TV in some fashion; maybe the corrections officer on that range, that pod, did it himself then. I did ask the superintendent about it; he sort of huddled with the other individual who was working the security portion there and indicated that he thought there may have been some issues in trying to block channels, wasn't sure.

I asked whether I could have his assurance that the issue would be fixed. He was quite gracious in indicating that, yes, the issue would be fixed. That's why I'm asking the minister, was it fixed?

Mr. Swan: Well, as I've indicated I had no knowledge of anything that occurring. That was four months ago that the member visited the Milner Ridge Correctional Centre. I—the member, obviously and we have a good enough relationship, if it was a concern, he could have asked me at some point in the four months before today, but that's his choice.

As I've said, in the federal system, I understand Minister Toews very recently became aware of a concern and, again, I think he moved swiftly and appropriately to take steps to make sure it didn't recur. So I will look into this, but I can advise the member that that would not be acceptable conduct in a correctional centre.

* (16:40)

Mr. Goertzen: And, as I indicated, we had an assurance from the superintendent that it would be corrected. I took him at his word.

Again, I think, I've had nothing but good experiences in dealing with the different people in the Manitoba jails. I've been very, very pleased with what I've seen generally from them.

I was shocked to see gang members in a high-risk facility watching pornography. I think I was most shocked that they weren't shocked, that it didn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary for them. In fact, the only thing that surprised them was that it was turned off. And that was probably the most—or as troubling to me as anything else.

I wonder if the minister could indicate, has he not had any sort of advisories come up through the department about issues related to the satellite portion of programming that's happening within our jails and the ability to block certain channels, which are clearly inappropriate for inmates to be watching?

Mr. Swan: No, I have not. And, again, as Minister Toews, you know, announced—I believe, it was just today or yesterday—certainly, if situations come to my attention, we will move swiftly to make sure that it doesn't recur. So I thank the member for bringing that information forward four months after he noted it, and we'll take steps to make sure that it doesn't recur.

Mr. Goertzen: Is the minister confident that he'll be able to report back for tomorrow's Estimates whether or not the problem that existed, whether it was as it was presented, perhaps how long it was going on for to that point and what was done to rectify it?

Mr. Swan: Well, certainly, I mean the member raises a concern, and I'm very concerned to hear what he is suggesting. So I will do my very best to be back here tomorrow with more details and what steps we've taken to make sure this doesn't occur.

Mr. Goertzen: I expect that I'll have more questions along this line either later today or tomorrow, but I understand the member for Charleswood has a fairly emergent issue that she needs to raise.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Chair, I would like to follow up on my question with the minister that I asked yesterday. And he's also aware of it where I have a constituent who is a single mom, two small children. It is a divorce situation or a separated marriage situation, and what has ended up happening with that, it all started in about 2010. There was some payment of spousal and child support and, then, for some reason, the ex-husband decided he didn't want to pay any more.

There were some lawyers involved earlier on and lawyers quit. And, now, this woman, because she has no money, she's been trying to get a lawyer through Legal Aid. And she's having trouble getting hold of anybody at Legal Aid and trying to get a lawyer. So she can't move this situation forward. She needs to have a lawyer involved.

On April 30th, a lawyer representing somebody that wants to foreclose on the house because the husband is not paying the mortgage—so a lawyer sent a foreclosure letter. It was sent April 30th, giving her 10 days to pay up several hundreds of thousands of dollars or she will be evicted.

The 10 days comes up today or tomorrow. She's tried to talk to this lawyer who sent the foreclosure letter, but he doesn't seem to be very willing to extend the deadline. And she's just asking, you know, please extend the deadline of this until I can get a Legal Aid lawyer that can come in and help me with this process.

After the minister, yesterday, was asked the question, he did indicate that a lawyer from Legal Aid was assigned to her. She didn't hear anything. She got no phone call, no email.

Today, around noon, she went home just to double-check. She is a university student. So she thought she'd better go home just to check, and she got a letter from Legal Aid saying that the lawyer, a lawyer with no name, would be in touch with her in a week or so.

Well, her foreclosure happens today or tomorrow, which means she could be kicked out on the street. And Legal Aid didn't seem to be taking this seriously.

So she called an emergency number at Legal Aid, and she was put through to voice mail. Needless to say, she's extremely frightened, she's very frustrated. She feels that Legal Aid doesn't seem to understand the urgency of this, and she's saying, I'm going to lose my house. What do I need to do?

She has no family here. Her ex-husband is giving her no money, although she knows where he is, she knows where he works, she knows how much money he makes, and he's just chosen not to provide support for the kids or for her. There are some very serious health issues with one child, and both children are also now going through some very serious emotional problems.

And then she let me know today that her Legal Aid certificate is no longer valid, and she needs to appeal it. So she's very confused. She's had three different people at Legal Aid tell her that they cannot help her. Then she's transferred to someone else's voice mail and there's nobody there, and they will not guarantee they will call her back. So she's really stuck in limbo. She sounds like she's falling through the cracks of Legal Aid. She really does not know what to do.

And—but after yesterday, it—she got a letter, at least, but it's saying a lawyer would be in touch within a week or so, so I guess I need to ask the minister, seeing as her foreclosure date, if it was 10 days from April 30th, I guess, could be tomorrow: Is there no ability at Legal Aid to look at the urgency of the situation and for somebody to step up and help her, because it sounds like this lawyer from the law firm that is, accordingly to her, breathing down her neck and she feels like she's being steamrolled? She doesn't know what to do. She's sitting on pins and needles right now, thinking her and her kids are not going to have a home. She's got no family here; she's got nothing.

Is there a process, or is there an emergency ability at Legal Aid to help her out?

Mr. Swan: I thank the member for Charleswood for raising this, and I know we've had some email correspondence and, of course, the question was asked yesterday. And, obviously, when family law situations arise, I mean, there's a wide range of things that can occur in situations where somebody chooses not to co-operate with the process and refuses to pay support. I realize it can create hardship for the—for one parent who may have responsibility for children, which is why, of course, we do provide funding for civil Legal Aid, Legal Aid funding, which has been slashed in a number of other provinces.

* (16:50)

I can't really get into the specifics of this case. In any event, I'd—I'm not really going to respond to the particular facts that the member for Charleswood raises. Generally speaking, of course, Legal Aid will provide assistance to people who fit within the eligibility guidelines. It sounds like that is the case, as Legal Aid has approved a new lawyer for this person. If—what I suppose I can do is that if there hasn't been contact made yet, I'll do my very best to have someone over at Legal Aid to see this individual tomorrow. I can't suggest what advice that lawyer could provide. I can't suggest what steps the

lawyer can take immediately. If somebody is moving on a foreclosure, it's a bank or credit union which is taking up its private right to pursue somebody, or two people, in this case, who haven't paid the mortgage and, again, I can't interfere in a foreclosure matter, but if it would assist, I will do my best to make sure that this constituent of the member for Charleswood has the chance to consult with a Legal Aid lawyer tomorrow.

Mrs. Driedger: And I thank the minister for that very much on her behalf. I am waiting to get the letter that she did receive from Legal Aid, and I would share it with the minister as soon as I can get it. And, you know, certainly, if she could speak with somebody tomorrow, because it sounds like the lawyer for the bank doesn't seem to want to give her an extension, and this is where, maybe, a Legal Aid lawyer could at least be talking to them and, you know, helping to resolve the issue, otherwise, these people are going to be out on the streets, and it is going to cause a lot of issues.

She didn't know that the mortgage wasn't being paid because, in initial stages of separation, they had agreed that the husband would make those payments, and he was for a while and then he decided not to. So she just found out that for six months he hasn't been making any payments, but nobody got hold of her to tell her that. So this came out of the blue on April 30th that these payments weren't made. So she was caught totally off guard because the original arrangement, through collaboration initially with her husband and other lawyers, they had agreed to that. So she's, you know—he's getting away scot free. He's not paying anything and, you know, she can't even apply—or get involved with Maintenance, you know, Enforcement because she can't even get that far because they don't even have a separation agreement because everything fell apart.

She also has no money. She's a university student. She was going to drop out of university to try to get a job and do what she could with the kids, but she was told that she'd have to repay an \$11,000 student loan right away if she quit or even went part time, I think. She had to stay in university because she couldn't even afford to pay that. So she's got no money. She went to welfare on—to the welfare office on Friday, and I'm glad the Minister for Family Services is there, you know, because maybe she might be able to help in this way too. She wasn't allowed to apply for welfare until she saw a slide show, and so she had to go back today. She had to miss an hour and a half of class this afternoon in

order to watch a slide show before she could apply for welfare, and then nothing can kick in for, I'm told, three weeks or something. So she's got no food.

We've referred her just today to some food banks that were recently set up in Charleswood, but here you've got a dire situation, and I don't even understand how, you know—and, I'm sorry, I don't understand how the welfare system works, but they—and I'm sure there has to be some kind of an emergency crisis situation. And I'm sure they were told because this woman is very articulate. She couldn't, you know—she couldn't do anything until the end of the month so she's got now three weeks of not knowing where any food or anything is coming from.

So I guess I'm feeling, you know, grateful that the minister has indicated that tomorrow he will ensure that somebody will get hold of her, and they can maybe try to work something out. Her and I are in frequent touch, so I will pass this information on, and I'll let the minister know tomorrow whether things are working out then for the family.

Mr. Swan: One other thing. I can't give legal advice, but I would suggest you can help your constituent, perhaps, by speaking to—and I know you've got some good lawyers out in your end of the city who, I'm sure, would give a very brief consultation on how the foreclosure process works. I would expect that a lawyer'd be prepared to provide that to your constituent or to you just so that she has a better idea of the timelines and what steps actually have to be taken in a foreclosure. But I can't give you that advice. But I know some folks out your way who I am sure would be prepared to at least give you a few minutes of their time so you can pass on some advice.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm not sure advice on foreclosure is going to do her any good. I mean she needs a Legal Aid lawyer to work with her on her side of the issue. She could get all the advice that there is out there, that's not going to help her much. She needs a Legal Aid lawyer that is working on her behalf.

Mr. Swan: Well, as Legal Aid has confirmed, they've approved the transfer for file from the private lawyer who was handing the file to a staff lawyer within Legal Aid Manitoba.

What I was getting at is that I think it would be helpful for her peace of mind to get a better idea of how the foreclosure process works because there are certain steps that must be taken by the bank or credit

union to foreclose, and I think it would be helpful to her if there's anything you can do to try and get that information to her. I think it would give her more peace of mind. That's all I'm saying.

Mrs. Driedger: Now, outside of this case, then, because the minister is familiar with family law, can she be kicked—or can a person be kicked out of their home if they get a foreclosure letter saying that she has 10 days, or anybody? Is there—like, will she get kicked out of her home or is there some other mechanism that happens here when you're given this letter threatening that you're going to be booted out then? Is the minister trying to indicate that there is a process that the letter comes, but then it might take longer than the 10 days, or how does this work?

Mr. Swan: Okay, I don't want to be cute. I can't give your constituent legal advice. In fact, to do that would be in breach. I'm an inactive member of the Law Society. All I'm saying is that I think it would be helpful, if there's anything that you could do, to have a quick conversation with a lawyer who is licensed to practise and insured right now to—who, I think, would give a little bit more comfort to your constituent. That's all I'm suggesting.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister just indicate, and I'm not that familiar with Legal Aid, why would she be falling through the cracks there? When a person has such a crisis situation, why is she being punted around to three different phone calls, getting voice mails, nobody's returning her calls. She's feeling extremely frustrated and doesn't feel that there's anybody really acting on her behalf or that they even care.

So can the minister say or tell me, is there a crisis going on at Legal Aid or what is happening that—particularly she's had three different people at Legal Aid tell her they cannot help her, so can Legal Aid help her? Like, is there going to be somebody there that will be able to talk to her tomorrow and will be able to help her when three people today said they can't help her and that she also needs—her Legal Aid certificate is no longer valid. Like, what does she need to do?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Attorney General, five seconds.

Mr. Swan: Okay, well, thank you. Have your client show up at the Legal Aid office at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning, and Legal Aid will attempt to give—on Broadway—and Legal Aid will attempt to give any advice they can to help her. Without

knowing all the facts, I can't offer more than that, but, hopefully, that will be of assistance.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

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