

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

Vol. LXVI No. 39B - 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 8, 2014

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Reversal and Referendum Rights

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act is a law that guarantees Manitobans the right to vote in a referendum to either approve or reject increases to the PST and other taxes.

(2) Despite the fact that the right to vote is enshrined in this legislation, the provincial government hiked the PST to 8 per cent as of July 1st, 2013.

(3) The Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba has asked the courts to rule on whether or not the government broke the law failing to address the referendum requirement before imposing the PST tax increase on Manitoban families.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse the PST increase.

To urge the provincial government to restore the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on increases to the PST.

And this petition is signed by D. Patterson, B. Wiens, J. Wiebe and many other fine Manitobans.

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

Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by M. Stobert, M. Kaatz, P. Zanewich and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Government Services Offices Closures— Public Consultations

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

And this is the background to this petition:

Since April 1st, 2012, the provincial government has closed at least 20 government services offices in communities throughout Manitoba.

The closures of these offices create job losses and reduce economic activity within the community and decrease the accessibility and quality of services for local citizens.

The provincial government did not consult the communities impacted by these office closures before deciding to close, merge or consolidate the offices.

These office closures unnecessarily increase the financial cost and time commitment required by citizens to access government services that were previously offered in their community.

Manitobans have a right to access provincial programs and services in a timely manner within a reasonable distance from their community regardless of their location.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government restore the services provided to the affected communities until the provincial government conducts public consultations and provides an alternative solution that maintains or increases the level of service provided in the local area.

This petition is signed by M. Snedden, L. Morrell, M. Nicholson and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions? Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I'd like to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review of the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund and Conservation and Water Stewardship.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Manitoba Justice Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2014-2015 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I'd like to table The Public

Schools Finance Board Annual Report the year ending June 30, 2013.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, prior to oral questions I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Dr. Alan and Judy Lagimodiere and Donna Wilson, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton).

And also seated in the public gallery we have from Réal-Bérard community school 14 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Brian Martel. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Program Apology Request—Minister of Health

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Almost two weeks ago the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) opened up old wounds for families who tragically lost their babies. She accused members of this side of the House of wilfully allowing babies to die.

And yesterday when this minister was asked repeatedly to apologize to these families, she refused, and the Premier accepted her answers in this House. He even clapped for them, endorsing the behaviour of this minister. The Premier should have shown some leadership on this issue and demand that his minister apologize immediately for her egregious comments.

Why didn't he do that? Why did he allow her to play politics with the deaths of these babies?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): As we know, the tragic death in the pediatric situation at the Health Sciences Centre was one that everybody in this House regrets happened and sorry it occurred—sorry that it occurred.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe the current Minister of Health is very committed to proper health care for Manitobans and the safety of all Manitobans in the health-care system, and I know—and I know—that she spends all of her waking hours making sure that our health-care system provides those essential services

to Manitobans, including proper and adequate funding through our budgets.

Mr. Speaker, the critical incident legislation that this government brought forward was in part—large part—inspired by this tragedy and motivated by this tragedy to change the culture in the health-care system to a culture where these incidents are properly investigated, corrective measures are taken so that these incidents won't occur again. Any time a horrible tragedy like this occurs, we want to make sure that there is an outcome of that that will prevent it from happening from anybody in the future.

And I know this Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) operates with integrity and I know this Minister of Health always will try to do the right thing for Manitobans and any Manitoban that is involved and engaged in the health-care system.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health should have apologized immediately to the families who tragically lost their loved ones, but she refused. In fact, nearly two weeks later she's still refusing to apologize.

And the Premier seems to think that that's okay. Well, I don't think that's okay and members on this side of the House don't think that that's okay.

Mr. Speaker, why did he not demand that she apologize immediately to those families for her outrageous comments?

Mr. Selinger: I heard the minister yesterday express her profound regret and her—the fact that she was sorry that any family had to go through a tragedy like this in Manitoba or, indeed, anywhere. I heard the minister express her feelings about what it's like to have a member of her family with a child in a similar situation where the outcome was much more positive.

* (13:40)

And, Mr. Speaker, I heard us discuss yesterday how this government brought in the first legislation in the history of this province to report critical incidents so that we can get to the bottom of anything that occurs, any malpractice that occurs, particularly a malpractice that results in the loss of life, particularly a malpractice that results in the loss of life of an infant, that this legislation was brought in to make sure that we change the way the health-care system operates to a system where things are investigated, where corrective measures are taken and measures are put in place to prevent these

incidents from happening in the future. That's what was done by this government. The minister supports that.

The minister is operating with every ounce of her energy to make sure that these things don't happen in the future, and this government has been very committed through a period where we've had continuous demands for cuts to ensuring that there's proper financing for health care in Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: Almost two weeks later and still no action has been demanded by this Premier for the egregious comments made by the Minister of Health. There is a culture under this NDP Premier of a government that doesn't seem to care who they hurt, Mr. Speaker, as long as they can forward their own political agenda. One word comes to mind, and it's disgusting.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier should have shown some leadership two weeks ago and demanded an apology of his minister immediately, but he didn't, and now he continues to endorse her comments.

Why has he refused to show leadership and demand that his minister apologize immediately for playing politics with the tragic deaths of these babies?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this—when this tragedy occurred, there were several years where the opportunity to change the culture in the health-care system was available to members opposite when they were in government and they had an opportunity to do something about that.

Immediately upon us having the opportunity to and the privilege of serving the people of Manitoba, our Health minister of the day moved on legislation to put critical incident legislation in place, and that legislation has provided us with the legal tools and the cultural change in the health-care system where matters like this are properly reviewed and investigated.

The minister expressed her profound regret yesterday and the fact that she was sorry that this tragedy occurred to anybody in Manitoba, particularly a child in the health-care system.

I know the minister operates with integrity. I know the minister will do whatever she can to ensure that nobody is hurt as the result of the kinds of debates we have in the legislation and that, in fact, we use our time in this Legislature to make the quality of life better for Manitobans, to make life

safer for Manitobans, to make life safer for anybody that engages in the health-care system, because they go to the health-care system for life-saving support, and that's what we want the health-care system for.

**Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Program
Apology Request—Minister of Health**

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, it was offensive when this NDP Minister of Health accused us of wilfully allowing babies to die. It was more shocking and appalling yesterday when this Minister of Health refused to apologize to the families for tearing opened a 20-year-old painful wound.

So I'm going to ask the Minister of Health and give her one more chance today: Will she stand in her place in this House and apologize to those families for doing what she did?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, upon reflection, and hearing the words of the family, I can see that my words did hurt them. We must always remember that the words that we choose in this House and when we speak have impact and those words can hurt. It is never my intention for these families to relieve—to relive this tragedy, and I am sorry.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, it's disturbing that it's taken the Minister of Health two weeks to come to this realization. It was only because of public pressure that she has stood in this House, and it does not come from an honest feeling in her heart.

I would like to ask this Minister of Health: If she's truly ashamed of her own behaviour, why did it take her two weeks to come to that conclusion?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Speaker, I spoke yesterday of the experience that my own family has in this situation and the fact that our family has had a more positive experience. But as a mother, I cannot imagine what other families have faced. I think everyone in this House can agree that what happened to these families should never happen to any parent, to any family. They should never have to deal with it.

And I do think that words can hurt and words can cause pain, and we must be very careful when we choose them.

But we have always sought to honour these families. We have always sought to improve our

health-care system, to face up to errors, to not hide them, to make sure we learn from them, and I will keep doing that.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: Yesterday when the Minister of Health left this House and sought out Mrs. Feakes, she did not apologize to Mrs. Feakes, the grandmother of 15-year-old Ashton—15-month-old Ashton. If she was truly sincere about being sorry for her words, she had the chance yesterday to say to Mrs. Feakes, to her face, that she was sorry.

Now she's caught in a two-week hurricane here of her own creation, and now because of public pressure she is standing here and saying she's sorry.

Mr. Speaker, why did she not, then, apologize to Mrs. Feakes yesterday when Mrs. Feakes was here?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I saw the pain that my words caused, and that was never my intention to hurt that family or any family. Things get passionate in here. We debate and sometimes don't always choose our words as carefully. I think it's important that we speak passionately in this House. We shouldn't be here if we don't believe in the things that we're standing up in. But we do have to remember that those words have impact not just in this room but outside this room, and we need to be aware of that and I am aware of that.

I'm aware that we have a responsibility to families and I'm aware that our medical system has a responsibility to be responsive to families, and that I will make sure we do.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

**Non-Residential Construction
Manitoba Ranking**

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada today released the figures for value of new building construction in Canada by province, and the data shows that there was more than a 37 per cent decline in the value of new building permits this February over last year and, once again, Manitoba is dead last among Canadian provinces.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister for Jobs and the Economy just admit that her high-tax-and-spend NDP government policies are once again putting Manitoba dead last?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): I thank the member for the question.

Certainly we know that viewing reports from Stats Canada month over month are indeed instructive. I can certainly say to the member, though, when we take a wider view, particularly during a time of economic downturn, I can report to the House, Mr. Speaker, that since 2011 Manitoba's building permits have actually increased by over 41 per cent. I can report to the member that that is the best increase of any province and more than four times the national average.

Mrs. Stefanson: Once again, it must be NDP math.

The Minister for Jobs and the Economy should know that non-residential construction is a key factor of a growing economy, yet the report indicates that the value of non-residential building permits fell by 50 per cent this February over last February. This is not a good sign for the Manitoba economy.

Why is this NDP government content with Manitoba once again being dead last?

*(13:50)

Ms. Oswald: I do take the nature of the question in the context that it is coming from the member, who is in abject denial that there was a global economic downturn.

That being the case, Mr. Speaker, I will say to the member that because of the investments that we have made with industry, because of the incredible people that we have here in Manitoba that are continuing to grow their businesses and build their businesses, during that time of economic downturn, best in the nation, increased by over 41 per cent and four times ahead of the national increase of 9.3.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Speaker, it must be boom Tuesday, yes.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's building growth declined more than any other province and hasn't been this low for almost three years. Yet again, this NDP government has brought Manitoba to the bottom of the barrel in this country.

Does the minister not understand that being dead last is not a good thing? In fact, it's harmful for job growth and it is not a good sign for the economy here in Manitoba.

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you would not be a good sign for the economy in

Manitoba is to have a group of people that don't believe that there was a global economic downturn.

And, Mr. Speaker, I took the member at her word after our discussion in Estimates. And I spoke to members of the Canadian manufacturing and exporters industry when I attended their awards gala that night, and I put to them the fact that the members opposite don't believe that there was a global recession. And do you know what the head award winner of the event said to me? He said, well, that is absolute Beauchesne.

PST Increase Ombudsman's Report

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this NDP government has a real problem with integrity.

They claimed before the last election that they weren't thinking about raising taxes, and then they did. They claimed that they wouldn't raise taxes during the last election, and then they did.

Mr. Speaker, they claimed that they weren't contemplating a 9 per cent PST, and the Ombudsman's office makes it clear that they did, even though the Finance Minister denies it. When asked last fall about discussions or documents regarding a 9 per cent PST, the former Finance minister answered, no, that was not something we considered.

Mr. Speaker, will the Finance Minister admit today that this is just another in a long line of deceptions perpetrated by this government on Manitobans?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): I do want to draw the member's attention to what the Ombudsman's report actually says. What it actually says is that Manitoba Finance has no records of a 9 per cent RST proposal being requested or put forward as part of the budget process. That was the finding of the Ombudsman's report.

Now, does that mean that somebody with a calculator was probably able to figure it out and write it down? Yes, probably somebody was able to do that. I probably know how long it would take me to walk to Brandon, but I'm not considering it.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, this Finance Minister knows that our party filed information requests that show that the NDP sought information about the economic viability of a 9 per cent PST in 2009, 2010, 2011, before the last election. When the

Premier (Mr. Selinger) stood and said that the suggestions that his government were going to raise taxes were nonsense, he was deceiving Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance said, well, if the former Finance minister said it wasn't considered, it wasn't considered. But that former Finance minister also said we'd arrive in surplus this year, and we're at a \$400-million deficit.

Will the minister admit that in the same way the NDP government has misled Manitobans before, they are misleading this House and Manitobans now about the fact that they did contemplate a 9 per cent PST?

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I will say for the member opposite what the Ombudsman's report actually found, and what it actually found is that Manitoba Finance has no records of a 9 per cent PST proposal being requested or put forward as part of the budget process. That was the actual finding.

Now, by his logic, am I to conclude that because they asked for a report by a former Tory Finance minister that recommended an increase to the PST, that recommended harmonization of the PST and GST, that recommended doing away with property tax credits, was that the plan had they been re-elected in 1999? I guess by his logic that was their plan.

Mr. Friesen: This minister knows very well that the former Finance minister is saying one thing and the Ombudsman's office is saying something completely different.

Mr. Speaker, instead of doing the hard work of managing your spending, like every other province is endeavouring to do, this spend government hikes the provincial sales tax to increase revenues, like no other province is endeavoring to do.

An 8 per cent PST cost the average Manitoba family of four more than \$1,600 a year. Imagine the effect of a 9 per cent PST on Manitoba families. Manitobans cannot afford this spend government's out-of-control spending and they won't tolerate this NDP's tax-and-spend-and-lie policies.

When will the minister just admit that the 9 per cent PST is a hidden agenda and she's going to get it done?

Ms. Howard: Well, it's so well hidden I don't even know that it exists. That's how well hidden it is.

But, yes, I could—you know, it's not the Da Vinci code to figure out what 1 point of the PST—I could

take him through how you figure that out if that's what he wants. The fact that somebody did a calculation is not the same as considering to make a decision about something.

The decision we made was to raise the PST by 1 cent on the dollar in order to invest in critical infrastructure while we protected the front-line services that Manitobans count on.

That is a different decision than they put forward to cut half a billion dollars out of the budget when the recession hit, which would have laid off people and caused pain to Manitoba families. That was their solution at the time; that is their solution today; that will be their solution tomorrow.

PST Increase Low-Income Manitobans

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, those on limited and fixed incomes are the most vulnerable in our society. Every time costs go up for them, there's a crisis to try and find the money to make sure they and their families have basic necessities, food, shelter and clothes.

The 14 per cent increase to the PST from 7 to 8 per cent hurt bad enough, but now we know that the NDP considered raising even further to 9 per cent.

Where does the minister suggest that those on limited and fixed incomes look for the money to pay for the increase?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): Well, I think the member for Portage la Prairie is actually better than this line of questioning, and I'm sorry that he's taken a lesson from his front bench that if you just say a mistruth over and over again eventually maybe people will believe you.

But the reality is that we took a decision to raise the PST in order to protect the services that vulnerable people rely on.

And what's more, Mr. Speaker, when that member had the opportunity to stand in his place and support a budget that puts a historic amount of money in the hands of vulnerable people so they can afford better places to live, he sat down. He did not stand up for people in those—in that moment. So it is a bit rich now for him to claim to be on the side of vulnerable Manitobans, because when he had his chance he abandoned them.

**Government Policies
Low-Income Manitobans**

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, the working poor in this province struggle to make ends meet, working hard every day to survive and provide opportunities for their children that they themselves probably never had, yet this government continues to reach into their pockets in order to feed the NDP's spending machine instead of letting those on limited incomes feed their children. On top of this, the government continues to add debt that these children will have to pay off sometime in the future.

Is there no limit to this spendDP government desire to tax the working poor?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): This government, Mr. Speaker, has raised the minimum wage every year it has been in office. When we came into office, the minimum wage was worth less at that time than it had been in the previous 20 years. People's ability to buy the things they needed with money they earned had been eroded because of that party's unwillingness to raise the minimum wage.

And even today they would not commit to increasing the minimum wage. When they've had their chance, they've spoken against it. And one of their most recent recruits made a career out of opposing every increase to the minimum wage that this government came in.

So we'll take no lessons from members opposite about how to make sure that people who work hard for their money get a fair paycheque at the end of the day.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know that this NDP government is always in a rush to raise taxes, like the PST. *[interjection]* You are.

But then programs like the EIA Rent Assist have to be phased in over years and years. Where's the rush to increase the housing allowance?

* (14:00)

Mr. Speaker, does this NDP government expect those on limited and fixed incomes to survive and thrive? They know they can't take an NDP promise to the bank.

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, in this budget there is additional money to support people who need help to afford better places to live. In this budget there is money to build better places to live for people. In this budget there is money to support people who

may have never had a job go to school, get training and get a good job. That's what was in this budget.

That's what the members opposite voted against, so I will hear nothing from them now about them being on the side of vulnerable Manitobans. When they had their chance, they sat down and they abandoned those people, just the way they abandoned them the last time they had their hands on the rudder.

**Member for Elmwood
Newspaper Advertisement**

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, I have a document to table for this House.

Mr. Speaker, MLAs publish photos communicating with constituents as an MLA all the time. The member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) has taken a new slant on this practice by publishing a photo in a local paper with constituents as, and I quote, MP Elmwood-Transcona. Nowhere, and I mean nowhere, does it say MLA.

So my question to the government: Is the member for Elmwood an MLA or is he now masquerading as an MP?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, isn't it a positive thing to have MLAs, including everyone on this side of the House, out actually knocking on doors, communicating with constituents? I'd suggest the member for Springfield and the members opposite, perhaps they should give it a try as well.

Mr. Schuler: The only thing is, when the member for Elmwood goes door to door, people don't know, is he coming as an MLA or an MP?

Mr. Speaker, in the photo advertisement of the NDP member for Elmwood, where he masquerades as an MP, nowhere does it say who paid for the ad. So the question is: Was it the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, was it the provincial NDP, was it the federal NDP, or was it some other entity? Besides not mentioning that the member for Elmwood is an MLA, it neglects to mention who paid for the ad.

So the question is very simple: Who paid for the ad?

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be on this side of the House where MLAs actually believe it's important to be out in their communities—out in their communities—speaking to people, getting their advice and being able to be a better government as a result.

And I know members opposite, boy, when the House isn't sitting, the members opposite, they're running to the plane to get out of the province because the last thing they want to do is hang around in Manitoba and actually listen to people. They're back now; most of them are back now. That's good.

But what's really important, Mr. Speaker, is I'm proud to be in a party which believes in communicating with people each and every day and being out on those doorsteps communicating with people and hearing what they have to say.

Mr. Schuler: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, they're communicating, but as members of Parliament. And I understand from the latest polls why they might want to do that.

The MLA for Elmwood, who now masquerades as an MP, used a photo taken at an official government function.

As nowhere does it state that he is an MLA, but rather as an MP, was any provincial government or any provincial legislative staff or any provincial legislative resource used to take the photo of the NDP MLA for Elmwood who is in the photo masquerading as an MP?

Mr. Swan: Now, there's many people in the province of Manitoba that wish they had an MP that actually stood up for Manitobans.

And, you know, Mr. Speaker, we had a debate in this House on immigration, and not only did every Conservative MLA sit on their hands and refuse to support immigrant services in Manitoba, the call they made for outreach was to call Conservative MPs to come into this House to try and intimidate individuals in this House.

And just this morning, Mr. Speaker, we had a key debate on protecting veteran services in the province of Manitoba, brought by the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), and, unfortunately, the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) decided to get up to make this a partisan political issue, to stand up for Stephen Harper instead of standing up for the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights. *[interjection]* Order, please. The honourable member for River Heights has the floor.

Employment Numbers Participation Rates

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier, sadly, was living in an imaginary world when he said the number of people working in Manitoba is at an historic high. Next he'll be saying his popularity is at an historic high.

Mr. Speaker, employment in Manitoba has been falling for the last eight months. The Labour Force Survey shows a real employment loss of about 20,000 jobs for Manitobans since July. As far back as June 2010, there was a higher unemployment than March of this year. The Premier is not being realistic about where Manitoba is.

Will the Premier acknowledge his error from yesterday and acknowledge that his present strategy is not working?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we have the third lowest unemployment rate in Canada; that is a very significant accomplishment.

Over the past five years, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba average economic growth was second best in Canada, ahead of Saskatchewan and only behind Alberta, second best average growth over the last five years, 25,000 jobs created in the private sector since the '08-09 recession, a program that moves us forward with steady economic growth and good jobs for the future of Manitoba, good jobs for young people in Manitoba.

Just this morning, Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of being in Steinbach, Manitoba. And in Steinbach, Manitoba, we partnered with the mayor and council on a \$6.9-million infrastructure project which will create good jobs, safer streets, safer roads in Steinbach, Manitoba, a good announcement for that part of Manitoba, a good announcement for all of Manitoba, a \$6-billion lift—a \$6-billion lift.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about today's employment.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier mentioned the participation rate. Did the Premier not realize that the participation rate has fallen considerably from March 2013 to today, enough that almost 14,000 Manitobans have practically given up looking for work in this province? They are discouraged about job prospects because the job situation is not good, as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and many businesses know. With falling

employment levels and decreasing participation rate, the situation in Manitoba is worrisome.

I ask: What is the Premier's plan to increase the low employment and low participation rate we have today in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I commend the member opposite to read *The Five-Year Plan to Build a Stronger Manitoba*, copies available to everybody in the Legislature.

That five-year plan has very significant employment growth in Manitoba, 58,900 jobs over the next five years. For every dollar invested in infrastructure, \$1.16 of return, Mr. Speaker, a \$6.3-billion growth in the Manitoba economy. New housing starts, 2,100, and the opportunity for businesses to acquire \$1.4 billion of new equipment and assets in the province of Manitoba.

Jobs, assets, economic growth, more training, more opportunities in Manitoba, and the only lamentable part, Mr. Speaker, the member asking the question voted against it.

Manitoba Hydro Office Closures Impact on Employees

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, and how many layoffs?

Mr. Speaker, when the Premier brought his hydro strategy into his illusion of historic employment grandeur yesterday, he failed to mention that the effect of shutting down 24 Hydro offices will have on Manitobans. Beyond power restoration delays, there are 94 Hydro employees in rural Manitoba who will be left with the option of relocating or being laid off. Saying no one is slated for termination is not exactly reassuring when you have to consider relocating your whole family to stay employed.

What would the Premier like to tell these 94 Manitobans and their families about how this government's hydro strategy will affect them?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I've actually had the opportunity to talk to the working people of Manitoba Hydro, and there are about 700 more linemen in Manitoba since we've come into office, 700 more linemen in Manitoba.

*(14:10)

Mr. Speaker, we've made it clear there will be—as Manitoba Hydro is dealing with demands by the Public Utilities Board to be more efficient—Public

Utilities Board made recommendations to be more efficient—Manitoba Hydro looked at how they could be more efficient without any additional layoffs.

And in the budget, which the member voted against, we are going to make linemen a real trade in Manitoba, a certifiable Red Seal trade in Manitoba. Good jobs, good skills, good qualifications, good opportunities to grow in the future of Manitoba.

As we build out Manitoba Hydro, there will be multi-billion dollar investments to allow us to have clean energy in this province, to export energy to our customers to the south of us, east and west of us. And those exports will pay down the cost of our new dams and keep the Manitoba economy one of the most competitive in North America.

Steinbach and Ste. Anne Highway Funding Announcement

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Yes, Mr. Speaker, last year before the budget, in petition after petition from the opposition, they demanded more spending on infrastructure, actually, equivalent to about 1 per cent of the PST.

On this side of the House we're committed to steady economic growth and good jobs.

And I'm sure that the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) would never ask about important investments in his community, so I'd like to ask the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation if he could update the House on how the \$5.5-billion infrastructure plan will help improve trade and travel in southeast Manitoba and in Steinbach.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, it's spring in Manitoba. There's an optimistic mood in the air, and actually nowhere was there more optimism than we saw this morning in Steinbach and Ste. Anne where I joined with the Premier, the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) to announce highway improvements in Steinbach, \$7 million partnering with Mayor Goertzen. They do have a good Goertzen there, the Mayor Goertzen. And I want to say that we also joined in Ste. Anne for \$28 million investment in Highway 12 and 302.

It was worth a trip today because we saw the steady growth and the good jobs in this province. We see it. We're part of it. We're investing in the future. I only hope the member for Steinbach and members opposite will get with us, get on the plan, because we have a plan to build this province.

Flooding (2011) Crop Insurance Coverage

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, in the aftermath of the 2011 Lake Manitoba flood, thousands of acres were left covered with debris and non-productive. These acres take years to revitalize.

The owners of these properties are now being denied crop insurance coverage. They were promised multi-year programs by this government that were quickly forgotten post-election.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture: If MASC crop insurance isn't going to cover ongoing crop losses, what other options are available to the flood victims?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): Without a doubt, 2011 flood has a historical level, 300-year flood of the century, so to speak. And we know the importance of the industry where we are in the cattle industry.

To the member's question is that the flood has left situations that our team has continued to work on and monitoring the importance of clearing up some of the debris that has been left behind and putting some of the land back into perspective. But it's going to take time to work forward to have that back in place, and we continue to work with the landowners for the betterment of the agriculture industry.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, I have documents showing one rancher's crop insurable made of hay acres being cut from 1,086 acres last year to 85 acres this year. And the minister is saying, oh, we're working with them. Well, that sure sounds like it.

The NDP misrepresented flood programs by including crop insurance and ag stab claims, and now they are further penalizing farmers and ranchers by reducing and refusing flooded acre and crop insurance coverage to flood victims.

I ask the Minister of Ag: Why are you revictimizing the flood victims?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I know the importance of the agriculture to beef industry because I spent 35 years in the beef industry myself. Let's be clear when we talk about the importance of the beef industry.

And to the members opposite, where were they when the community pasture was being somewhat released by the federal government? Where were they when they had to go to their cousins in the federal government and say the importance of the

grazing of the community pastures—where was the member opposite coming forward and saying we do not support the demise of the community pastures?

It took this government to invest \$1 million towards the importance of the community pastures to sustain the importance of the grazing of the animals. And we know the challenges that young producers face today, but we felt, this government felt, that community pastures is the most economical way to deal with grazing of cattle industry in—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, it appears not much sunk in in those 35 years on the farm for the minister. He's missing the whole issue here on the crop insurance coverage on these flooded acres.

The effects of the 2011 Lake Manitoba flood are long-term; they don't end once the election is over. Farmers and ranchers were promised that there would be compensation to get their properties back into production. The NDP lied to these farmers and ranchers. They broke their promises.

Will the Minister of Agriculture tell the Lake Manitoba producers today what options they have to address the costs of full flood recovery?

Mr. Kostyshyn: What we have to say today is that this government spent \$1.2 billion towards the flood to compensate, and we continue to work on that, Mr. Speaker. We continue to work on that.

What we do see is we're being proactive. We are looking at alternative mechanisms as far as the secondary control structure in Lake Manitoba so we don't have a reoccurrence. Where was that government when they were in power that they did not think ahead of the 'benefit' of the Portage Diversion to Lake Manitoba and having a secondary outlet?

What I want to say today to the members opposite, we've been proactive through crop insurance. We now have forage insurance programs. We do have livestock price insurance. That is the government that sat across from us. We have excess moisture programs we brought in for 10 years, and when they were in power, it was requested by the producers; they did not entertain it.

This government came into power, we brought it in, and today—to this day today, the producers—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

The time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It's time for members' statements.

Big Brothers Big Sisters Bowl for Kids Sake

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It's my pleasure to rise today and congratulate the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Morden-Winkler on an extraordinary Bowl for Kids Sake event just a few weekends ago.

This year's event had a record number of bowlers with 212 registered. An incredible \$39,000 was raised through registrations and donations for the local organization's programs. As Canada's leading child and youth mentoring charity, Big Brothers Big Sisters facilitates life-changing relationships that inspire and empower children and youth to reach their potential both as individuals and citizens.

Big Brothers of Morden-Winkler has been matching adults with kids from single-parent homes since 1976. The Big Sisters program started in 1984. The In-School Mentoring program began with a few mentors in 2000 and has expanded to six schools.

In the fall of 2005, a teen mentoring program was developed with grade 11 and 12 students mentoring elementary school students. And is it working, Mr. Speaker? Well, the executive director, Michael Penner, tells me that in a school in Winkler there is a boy in grade 3 that's always been in trouble and he visited the principal's office almost daily, and they matched him with a mentor who meets him every day in school for one hour. They play board games and sports, talk about life and have fun, and since that started he has not stepped foot into the principal's office.

This story shows just how much impact one can have on the life of a child even if it is just for a little while each week. Executive Director Michael Penner says 212 took—people took part this year. He says they raised \$39,000 in total, and I want to thank Michael and the volunteers for all their hard work and dedication with the kids. With them, these kids have a role model to look up to and a life-changing relationship to make a difference.

Thank you.

Governor General State Visit to India

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Past—just past February this year, I was fortunate to join an important event during the state visit to India by His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada.

Canada and India have a long-standing relationship that stems from our own strong economic ties and co-operation in the Commonwealth and shared belief in democracy and diversity. I'd like to thank Prime Minister Harper for continued building the strategic relationship with India.

During this past visit, the Governor General strengthened that relationship meeting with the heads of state, government officials and business leaders. On behalf of the people of Canada, the Governor General and the Canadian High Commissioner Stewart Beck presented to the people of India an inukshuk. Artists Bill Nasogaluak and Kuzy Curley created an incredible work of art using the armour stone from India and other regions, which has a brilliant purple-red colour.

The inukshuk stands 2.5 metres high and symbolizes the bond between the two countries. At its centre, the artists placed three stones—one from the Inuvialuit region in the western Arctic, one from the Qikiqtaaluk region in the eastern Arctic and a third red stone from India.

*(14:20)

Traditionally, one of the many purposes for the inukshuk was navigation. The gracefully balanced stone sculpture is installed in the centre of a roundabout near the Canadian High Commission in India, guiding traffic towards the important institution. With the arms extended northwest towards Canada, the inukshuk will be a lasting presentation of the connection between both countries.

I extend my sincere thanks to the High Commissioner and his staff for fantastic work. I'd also like to thank the Honourable Deepak Obhrai, parliamentary secretary to the Minister of External Affairs, for his continued efforts in the building the stronger relations with India and Canada. Our Government of Manitoba has been exactly doing the same, and it is benefitting both sides.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**All Seniors Care Games—
Shaftesbury Park Retirement Residence**

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I am honoured to rise in the House today to bring recognition to the All Seniors Care Games events that I attended on February 3rd at the Shaftesbury retirement residence in the Tuxedo constituency.

In the spirit of the Olympic Games, the staff and residents at 20 All Seniors Care Retirement Residences across Canada have participated in the All Seniors Care Games for the past five years. These games are an annual showcase of the healthy, active and dynamic lifestyle that residents enjoy. The games involve a week of friendly competitions, including hallway walking, Wii sports games such as bowling and golf, as well as bocce ball, billiards, shuffleboard and more.

I would like to take this opportunity to quote the Manitoba event planner for All Seniors Care, Ronna Goldberg, who is one of the most energetic, enthusiastic individuals I have had the pleasure of meeting. She states, and I quote: We, All Seniors Care, trace our success of thoughtful programming to the simple and enduring philosophy that aging is a gift. The wealth of knowledge and experience that comes with communities are designed to nurture this gift by providing residents with the innovative programs to maintain health and well-being in body, mind and spirit. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank the directors and staff at the Shaftesbury retirement residence for once again including me in this inspiring event and to congratulate both of them and the residents—both them and the residents for setting an example of making health and wellness an integral part of all of our lives.

Thank you very much.

Outstanding Principal—J. Wayne Marche

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, the charitable organization The Learning Partnership recognizes 40 outstanding principals across Canada each year. I'm delighted to say that this year, Wayne Marche, the principal of Oscar Blackburn School in South Indian Lake, was named one of those outstanding individuals.

Born in Newfoundland, Wayne has lived and worked in northern Manitoba for 13 years. Over the course of his time in the North, he has become a leader not just in the schools he serves but also in the

community where he lives. He has implemented dozens of programs that have helped countless Manitobans unlock their potential. Some of these programs include getting better support for special needs students in remote areas, establishing industrial arts programs in several northern schools, 'partnering' with business to train the next generation of local employees and implementing many community adult education programs.

Wayne has also helped bring the Cree language and local culture into everyday life at Oscar Blackburn School. He has brought local Cree artists into art and woodworking classes and introduced the use of traditional cooking in home economics. Along with other teachers, Wayne has also put up a social studies unit dedicated to local history.

Finally, Oscar Blackburn School now has active Cree speakers make the morning and afternoon announcements. Wayne has also come together with the chief, band council and other community members to plan the first ever South Indian Lake heritage day, a celebration of traditional culture, heritage and practices. This day will bring together the entire school, parents, grandparents and elders. They will make the journey across the lake to traditional land where traditional food will be prepared and elders will share their teachings.

Mr. Speaker, these are only a few of the dozens of examples of Wayne's contributions to public education. In his own words, educational leadership is about recognizing and nurturing the knowledge, talent and skill you have in the people around you. It is clear why Mr. Marche was named one of Canada's outstanding principals of 2014.

Congratulations, Wayne. Your incredible dedication to the communities you serve is extraordinary. Thank you.

Acadia Colony Farms—Carberry

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I rise today to congratulate Acadia Colony Farms of Carberry for being named the 2012-13 McCain Foods Champion Potato Grower at the annual McCain Growers' Banquet last fall on November 14th. More than 200 guests gathered to celebrate the top growers and their achievements.

Each year, McCain Foods acknowledges and awards growers that have delivered top-quality raw product. There is no higher priority for a food company than the safety of its products. McCain is

committed to providing its customers with food they can trust to be safe and nutritious.

The potato yields more nutritious food more quickly on less land and in harsher climates than any other major crop, prompting the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization to state that the potato is on the front line in the fight against world hunger.

Approximately 80 per cent of McCain's raw product is supplied by contract farmers. McCain shares its research knowledge and expertise with the grower partners to ensure their operations have the least impact on the environment and deliver quality product. Transfer of knowledge and expertise to their 3,200 grower partners has helped them to develop local economies around the world. More than 85 per cent of McCain's products are grown and processed within a short distance of their facilities and sold in the regional markets, reducing food miles and supporting local supplies.

Accepting the Champion Grower award was John Jr., Rankin and Isaiah Hofer. This is the first time they have won the award, but they have been in the top 10 category twice before. In addition to being awarded a keepsake trophy, a revolving trophy and a cheque for \$1,000, Acadia Colony Farms will also receive an all-expense-paid trip to a destination of their choice for their achievement.

Christine Wentworth, the vice-president of agriculture procurement for North America, extended personal congratulations, expressed her gratitude to the growers for their dedication to the potato industry. She thanked the Acadia Colony Farms for everything they do to ensure a reliable and safe supply of potatoes, stressing the importance of keeping consumers in mind.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the dedicated farmers of the Acadia colony and congratulate them on their award-winning achievement. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, we'll move into orders of the day, government business.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader): On House business, could you please canvass

the House to see if there is leave to set aside the Executive Council Estimates in the Chamber today and instead have the Estimates for Education and Advanced Learning considered, with this change to apply for today only?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to set aside the Executive Council Estimates in the Chamber today, instead have the Estimates for Education and Advanced Learning considered, and this change would apply only for today? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, could you please call Committee of Supply?

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)

HEALTH, HEALTHY LIVING AND SENIORS

* (14:40)

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 of the Department of Health, Healthy Living and Seniors. As previously agreed, questions for the department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Chair, before I go back and revisit the question I posed yesterday as the session was ending, I would like to ask the minister why it took her two weeks to come forward and make an apology and not have done it sooner. If there was sincerity in what she was doing, why did it take her two weeks to realize that she made some extremely inappropriate, offensive, unprofessional comments, and it took her two weeks to do anything about it?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Mr. Chair, I think it's important that we remember that the words that we choose have impact, that the words that we say in this House we often say in moments of debate, and sometimes the debate around here gets heated, absolutely, and at those times we say words that can hurt.

I saw yesterday the family was hurt by the words that I used, and that was not my intention. And I

think that our Speaker does a good job of trying to get us to all recognize that it's important to choose our words carefully and that I certainly think that's something that we should do, because our words do resonate outside of these walls, and it is very important that we choose them in a way to express ourselves, but not to cause pain.

Mrs. Driedger: So, if the minister really feels that way, and she saw that the family was hurt yesterday, she had ample time. The grandmother was extremely distressed yesterday. She was crying. The minister saw all of that because the minister approached her and basically tried to get her to come to the office and have a further conversation. The grandmother indicated that she wasn't open to hear more lies from anybody, and the minister actually, yesterday, told her that her comments were taken out of context.

I would say to the minister that what was taken out of context was her response to a question about how old the helicopter was, and following that question of age of helicopter, the minister is the one that went off context and started to accuse us of allowing babies to die. So, if there was anything out of context, it was this minister's comments right from the beginning.

Why didn't she, if she saw the pain in Mrs. Feakes' eyes yesterday—and Mrs. Feakes was the one that called the NDP office and a staff person was sent out to chat with her. Then she called us because she was getting very unsatisfactory comments by the NDP, and that was when she called me. So, if the minister saw the pain yesterday, why did she not apologize to Mrs. Feakes face to face yesterday?

*(14:50)

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, as I said in the House yesterday, I would welcome any opportunity to meet with any of the families. It was never my intention for these families to relieve—to relive the tragedy that they went through. I think we can all agree that what they went through should never have happened and should never have to face that pain. And I can see that my words did hurt them and I think we all must choose our words carefully knowing that they resonate outside of this office, outside of this building and that although we may say things sometimes in the heat of debate, they have impact. And I think that it is important to remember that.

Mrs. Driedger: So why did it take the minister two weeks to realize she made outrageous comments? She accused MLAs of killing babies and now she's

sitting here like she's reading from notes or has memorized this from last night. What happened two weeks later because this just isn't—this isn't all fitting together at all. If she was, indeed, contrite, if she realized her comments were unprofessional, horrible, horrible, why did she not realize that at the time she was saying it? Like, why does everything always have to be partisan potshots and now, two weeks later, she thinks she's apologizing when she's had two weeks and didn't do anything with it and didn't even say anything to the grandmother yesterday? Does she not realize how awful her comments were two weeks ago? Why did it take her two weeks?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, my family has had their own experience of the emotional toll that pediatric heart surgery can take and I would wish no family to experience that.

My nephew was born two months premature and at that time we thought, other than being very, very tiny, that he was okay. And he went home from the hospital after some time in pediatric ICU and we thought he was doing pretty good. He was awfully little, but he was awfully strong. And then he didn't do too well. He started to fail a little bit and they thought he had a lung condition, the virus that babies can get called RSV, I think it's called, and he was in the hospital for that. And I was there with my sister and he was in the intensive care unit at the Children's Hospital in Montreal where he was born. And this was a serious lung condition and we were nervous because he was pretty tiny but we still thought, he's got good care, he's got good doctors around him and he's got a very good team around him. He's going to be okay. I got a call one day from my sister saying that Sebastien had gone into cardiac arrest. And at that time Sebastien was still actually premature, he was still a month away from the date that he should have been born at so he was a very little guy. And he went into cardiac arrest and they brought in the crash cart and they had my sister leave the room and told her she should call family.

And she called me. I was in university at the time and she told me what was happening and said, I don't think I should call my husband because he's got a busy day at work today and I don't want to disturb him, because my sister was clearly in shock of what was going on. And I had to talk to her very calmly and tell her that I was quite sure that Sebastien's father would want to be disturbed for this. That he would want to know what's going on and that no matter how busy a day he's having, this is going to be more important. And I could hear in my sister's voice

that she wasn't quite computing what was going on. It was pretty hard for her but she did call Sebastien's father and the rest of the family that were in Montreal at the time and we were all down there. And we were asked if my sister wanted to have last rites performed on my nephew, and I don't know what her answer was. I honestly cannot remember what we said, but it didn't happen. Sebastien pulled through long enough for him to go to surgery and it was determined that he had a blocked valve that needed to be opened; it wasn't pumping enough blood for him. And Sebastien was a little guy, but they decided to do balloon angioplasty on him. And at that time, in 1993, in Montreal, Sebastien was the youngest and the smallest child in North America that had ever had that procedure done. And although the doctors were trying to figure out what was the best way to get that valve of his open—they had never done it on a premature baby before, and if you imagine how small those little hearts are and how tiny those little valves are—they made a guess. They made a good guess. They made an estimated guess of what size of balloon angioplasty they should use, and they were wrong and it blew out Sebastien's valve.

Now, my sister never blamed the doctors for the choice that they made because Sebastien was dying and they had no choice. So they tried something experimental and they tried something new. And we often tease Sebastien now that he's been the product of many, many scientific papers all the way from Montreal down to Boston—who also has a very strong pediatric program where they learned from some of the things that happened with Sebastien.

But they did blow out his valve, and in doing that they saved his life, but they knew they had to replace the valve. And then they did something again that they hadn't done on somebody that little before, is try to figure out where you find a valve for a person who's still premature and whose lungs were in pretty bad shape by that point. So he got a bovine valve. And I remember being there. We all took turns with Sebastien. We all took turns staying with him overnight. My sister had two other kids at home so we took turns with them as well. And Sebastien had that open heart surgery and he's had a few more since then because although they have been successful and Sebastien is now 21 years old—and I just heard yesterday that he got accepted into the daycare program at the CEGEP that he's interested to learn to be a daycare provider, which is such a fantastic choice for him. He's such an awesome kid.

But I digress for a moment. Because Sebastien had his heart valve replaced when he was still not actually supposed to be born yet and a few more times after that, although it's worked and he has lived and he has thrived and he has been a remarkable young man now—is a remarkable young man—he keeps outgrowing those heart valves. He keeps getting bigger and he keeps getting stronger and he keeps outgrowing the heart valves that don't grow with him, which means he's had several surgeries over his quite short life. And a couple of times in those surgeries my sister has been asked on more than one occasion if she wants last rites performed, and we are so lucky that we have never had to go there, that he has always pulled through. But there are times when I have held her hand and tried to convince her that he'd be okay when, honestly, I wasn't so sure. But she needed to hear that. There were Christmases where I had her other kids at my house because we were trying our best to make things normal; goodness knows, they weren't normal.

My sister had another child after Sebastien. She was nursing one while holding Sebastien after his surgery while I had kids at my house as we were trying to pretend that all was good and Santa would go to the hospital too—don't worry about that, he'll be there. He knows that Sebastien's in the hospital. He knows that Alexander's [*phonetic*] there. He'll be there.

And we were lucky. We're very, very lucky. I cannot imagine if I had not been able to reassure my sister. And now as a mother I cannot imagine what she went through because I've been even luckier. I've had three very, very healthy kids.

So to imagine what these families went through is heartbreaking, and I would never, ever want to put them through that again.

* (15:00)

Mrs. Driedger: It's certainly the concern that comes to my mind when I hear all of that, is if the minister is well aware of how families feel, as she's saying because she's lived the experience, why in God's name would she resurrect a 20-year-old nightmare for parents, because her words right now do not match what she did? So I would ask this minister: How could she say that with any degree of empathy and understanding? And it's almost like, you know, it just makes one wonder where was her thinking two weeks ago when she made accusations that MLAs killed babies. Did she not realize how those parents

might be, just like her sister, and go through those type of things? Like, where was her head at the time?

Mr. Chairperson: Before I ask honourable minister to—Honourable Minister? I would request are they not to start discussing with each other. Let be one person ask the question. Let the other person answer the question. If the honourable minister wants to ask a question, he can ask the question.

Ms. Selby: I would wish no family to experience what those families went through, and although my family experience has been very positive, I would not wish them to go through what my sister has been through.

Sebastien has graduated from the pediatric program. Sort of mixed feelings about it. Of course, it's a miracle. It is thanks to the intervention of an incredible team at the Montreal Children's Hospital that he is able to graduate from the children's pediatric program and move into the adult one. But there is also a sense of loss that we're leaving behind a team that has been part of our family for so long too.

Sebastien just found out very recently that he does have to go for another open heart surgery, and this guy knows the routine. He's been there enough times now he knows exactly what's coming. And he also just got accepted into the program that he wants to study at CEGEP in Montreal, and I sure hope that we can reconcile the two things and make sure that they can find a way for him to do both because, boy, he's worked hard to be there.

I think everyone in the House and everyone in this room can agree that what happened to these families is something that no parent and no family should ever have to deal with, that the words that we choose matter and can cause hurt. It was never my intention for families to relive this tragedy, and yesterday I met with a grandmother who was clearly in pain and my words contributed to that pain.

As a government, we have always sought to honour these families through our actions, including making sure that we move the health-care system away from this culture of secrecy and blame to a culture of learning, because when medical errors happen—and I wish I could say they never would but, tragically, sometimes they happen—we need to talk about it. We need to learn from it. We need to face it and we need to make sure it never happens again, and those families deserve answers.

Mrs. Driedger: There's a lot of rhetoric coming from the minister and I wish, I just wish—I can see she's reading notes and some words have been prepared for her, and I would ask that she even admits here now that the grandmother—that the grandmother was in pain, and I will ask one more time why, when she saw a grandma in pain, did she not express her regret.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. One moment. *[interjection]* Order, please. Order, please.

If you want to have discussion maybe you go on the side, and one person should ask the question and the other person should answer the question, and that's how debate is supposed to be. I will urge the members just to restrain yourself.

Ms. Selby: Hearing the words from the family, I can see that my words hurt them. I think we can all agree that we must all choose our words carefully because they have impact, because the things we say in these rooms in the moment resonate outside of these walls.

It was never my intention for these families to really—to go through these tragedies again. It was never my intention for them to relive it. And I think it is very important that we all remember that our words can hurt.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us who told her she had to make the apology?

Ms. Selby: Upon reflection—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order, please.

Ms. Selby: —and hearing the words from the family, I could see that my words hurt them, and I think it's important that we remember that the words that we choose have impact, that the words that all of us choose can hurt and is never my intention to hurt the family or any other family. And we must remember that the words that we choose matter and can cause real pain.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister didn't answer the question. Can she tell us who told her she had to apologize?

Ms. Selby: Upon reflection and hearing the words from the family, I could see that my words hurt them, which is why I say we must always remember that the words we choose have impact, that those words can hurt.

It is not my intention for the families to relive the tragedy, and we must choose our words carefully,

knowing that those words matter and that can cause hurt.

Mrs. Driedger: Can—I see that the minister isn't going to answer that particular question, but I wonder if she would also, as has been pointed out in an editorial today, also apologize to the official opposition for making the accusations—for making accusations that—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order, please. Minister, order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chair, if I could finish, if the minister would also go that step further and apologize to the opposition for making that accusation. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Order, please. I—order, please. Let the honourable member ask the question. Let the honourable minister answer the question. And if you want to step in, perhaps you can ask the question as well, but otherwise please keep silent.

*(15:10)

Ms. Selby: We have always sought to honour these families through our actions as a government, including moving the health-care system away from what was a culture of secrecy and individual blame to a culture of learning.

I think when medical errors happen—and they do, particularly in difficult, challenging situations like critical care—we need to see what went wrong. We were the second province to bring in critical incident legislation, and we have worked on a number of ways to strengthen it since then.

It will not be able to prevent every tragedy from happening; I wish I could say it could. But when it does happen, those families deserve to know what happened, they deserve to have answers, and they need to know that it won't happen again.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, there's certainly a lot of rhetoric from this minister. I see there's no apology coming for making the partisan comments, the very offensive ones, to the official opposition.

She talks, too, about moving away from secrecy. I just want to remind her what her government did when Brian Sinclair died after waiting for 34 hours in an ER, basically invisible. The minister of Health of the day went MIA for a week and didn't face the public. And, in fact, what we saw happen was a major cover-up by this government. So this minister

has absolutely no credibility when she talks about moving away from secrecy. And we could probably spend the next two hours about the lack of transparency and accountability by this government and we could use the word secrecy.

The minister hasn't answered any questions on STARS other than reading from her scripted notes. So, if we want to talk about, you know, transparency, then maybe the minister, as we go forward now with these questions, will answer them. I—you know, either she doesn't know the answers, which is concerning, or she doesn't want to answer them, which is concerning. So either way we've got a problem here. And considering the comments being made by the minister, her actions do not fit with the rhetoric that we are hearing from her. So, you know, day by day she's losing more and more credibility on a go-forward basis.

So, Mr. Chair, seeing as we will get no further with the minister on this one obviously, can she go back to the last question that was asked yesterday about the mediator that was brought into the department and who specifically that mediator was working with? Was it just certain people? Yesterday she gave some indication that it was medical issues that the mediator was brought in to manage. Can the minister be more clear on that and indicate who this mediator was and who decided to bring him in?

Ms. Selby: And just before I get to the mediator again, I know the member had a couple of questions that I said yesterday I would get back to her. I have some responses for her if she would like those now.

Mrs. Driedger: Yes, please, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Selby: In response to the member's request for the letters referred to in the OAG report dated May 22nd and May 28th, I've been advised that the letters contain significant personal health information. I am not at liberty to provide the member with these letters; however, I can confirm that the summaries provided by—in the OAG report are both complete and accurate, that these letters were discussed fully and completely with the Auditor General in her role as independent member of the Legislature.

As we talked about yesterday, a critical care environment is one of the most challenging and complex medical environments in the health system, and our different perspectives and medical opinions provided, and the department does rely on experts, both within the department and from external organizations to ensure quality care and patient

safety. We are pleased that the Auditor General's report notes that Health reacted with an adequate plan to address the quality of patient care concerns.

As noted in the Auditor General's report, our response to patient care concerns regarding STARS has been a critical review of medical circumstances, operational changes stemming from those reviews. I spoke of it yesterday. The Clinical Oversight Panel, under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl, is providing patient-focused guidance and oversight for helicopter air ambulance. This includes going—looking at the training, accreditation for personnel, quality assurance for clinical operations, guiding the eventual resumption of the inter-facility transfer by STARS in Manitoba. That's something that we know, particularly in rural Manitoba, families are counting on.

Manitoba Health has been taking steps to transfer STARS service to the WRHA. This will oversee the Province's arrangement with STARS. It will enable the medical crews to enhance their experience and training in Winnipeg's high-volume, emergency, and critical care medical system. We know that those folks with that very specialized training need the opportunity to keep those skills up, and this will provide the opportunity for them to do that.

As well, we are moving forward with establishing the office of the medical director to ensure consistency of medical training and practice across the EMS system in Manitoba, and, again, I will note that the mediator was a mediator brought in for medical advice agreed upon by both Manitoba Health and STARS.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the mediator still involved with the department?

Ms. Selby: No. He's concluded his work.

Mrs. Driedger: Was he hired on a contract basis to mediate the problems in this issue?

Ms. Selby: The medical mediator came on in a voluntary basis in July of 2013 and signalled that the process had concluded in January 2014.

Mrs. Driedger: Did it conclude because he reached success, or did it conclude because there wasn't full participation from everybody in the process?

Ms. Selby: That was the time when we brought in the Clinical Oversight Panel under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl, which, of course, is providing the patient focus guidance and oversight on our

helicopter air ambulance service. But, again, I will remind the member that the medical mediator was agreed upon by both Manitoba Health and STARS.

* (15:20)

Mrs. Driedger: It seems unusual, Mr. Chair, to have a mediator on board for seven months. The problems must've been quite serious for a mediator, a physician, to be part of this process for so long. Can she give us some indication of how the mediator went about trying to resolve some of these issues and what those issues were?

Ms. Selby: I can assure the member that patient safety is the top priority for STARS, for EMS, for Manitoba Health, that they are all working co-operatively, all represented at the Clinical Oversight Panel under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl where they are addressing patient safety to ensure that we are providing the highest level of care and working towards full resumption of STARS service.

Mrs. Driedger: I guess the minister must've missed the question. The question had been about the mediator being there for seven months, and I had asked her what the issues were that he had to deal with and how did he go about doing that.

Ms. Selby: As I said yesterday, the purpose of having the medical mediation was to seek a common understanding of the medical model used by Manitoba as well as STARS, options for medical model and the role—'organizational,' 'organational'—I'm stuck on that word—organizational structure played in the working relationship between STARS and Manitoba Health, and during that time he engaged in ongoing discussion with Manitoba Health and STARS. I think the member should recognize that this individual is also a critical-care physician, was balancing that as well, as well as the other schedules of people who work both at STARS and Manitoba Health.

Mrs. Driedger: I think the minister has probably given us just a tiny little bit of the answer.

Were there some other significant issues in there besides trying to get everybody to work under a medical model? I'm not even sure what she means by that. STARS has been around for a really long time and doesn't seem to have any problems understanding that in other provinces. What were the catches here? Like, what were the problems here in getting doctors to—and they are physicians, and she's saying that the mediator worked with physicians.

Was there some specific problem that doctors weren't getting along or weren't agreeing with each other, or what were the problems?

Ms. Selby: As we've discussed a number of times over the last couple of days, critical care is an incredibly complex and challenging area of medicine to work in. We know that the folks around the table talked through the complexities and that not everyone agrees. It's why we feel it's very important to get the opinions of both internal and external experts until they can reach consensus. That is what will happen, no doubt, around the table at the Clinical Oversight Panel under the support of and leadership of Brian Postl and with representation from STARS, EMS and Manitoba Health, all people with experience and expertise, but probably at times will not agree. And that is to be expected in critical care, but that's why we have them around the table talking, so that these people who—I know the STARS CEO calls the wise minds, the wise table—can discuss their various opinions and come to consensus.

The issues are the ones that were outlined in the OAG report, which is also discussed in the OAG report—that STARS is integrated differently here in Manitoba through MTCC in Brandon, which is different than how it's done in other provinces. And, again, that is also outlined in the OAG report.

Mrs. Driedger: Had the minister heard that the mediator had called a meeting and nobody showed up?

* (15:30)

Ms. Selby: No, I have not heard that. If this is the case, I would welcome that information. We expect everyone to behave professionally. STARS expects that, too, allowing that there may be a scheduling error, but otherwise it would be unacceptable. If the member has information, I would welcome that.

Mrs. Driedger: There were 600 missions, I understand, and only in 400 of them were patients transported. What happened in the other 200? That's quite a lot or a big number, and I probably don't have the exact numbers. It's—but it's in that ballpark. So why would there be 600 flights or missions but only 400 patients transported? For 200 missions there were no patients. Can the minister explain that?

Ms. Selby: Of course, the folks at the front line at MTCC make those decisions. They're the experts that make the call on whether it should be a land ambulance, air helicopter, Helijet. In some cases, more than one actually; sometimes they send them

out together. There can be times that STARS is dispatched, but for whatever reason on the ground, in that particular situation the EMS land ambulance ends up doing the transportation. It may be because it's preferred. It may be something that's happened on the front lines. And the folks in those incredibly challenging jobs make those decisions and have the expertise to make it.

There is times, of course, that an emergency call comes through and it's determined that STARS helicopter is the best thing to send there, and when they arrive at the scene that there may not need to be a transport. Honestly, that is probably one of the best situations we can hope for, is that we don't want anyone to have to be calling an emergency or having an emergency situation. But at times they get called out and perhaps the situation has been resolved.

We'd be happy to get the member a list of those missions. Certainly, it would be a case by case of why a decision is made. In one case it would be different from the next one of why it would be land or STARS or a Lifeflight. And, as I said, sometimes both are used in whatever the particular situation may be.

Mrs. Driedger: In fact, Mr. Chair, I did ask for copies of those mission reports. I understand that there are mission reports done on every trip, but the minister's office indicated that I wouldn't be able to get those. But the minister is offering now that that information is available, even though her department said they didn't have that and I—so therefore I couldn't have it?

Ms. Selby: We would be happy to talk about why a patient may or may not have been transported in a particular situation but the member should recognize that we can't release mission reports because those, of course, have personal health information on them.

Mrs. Driedger: And I am aware that they do have personal information but the minister just indicated that she would be able to provide them. Is she now saying that she can't because of personal information?

Ms. Selby: No, actually, Mr. Chair, what we said is that we could let the member know the reasons why a patient may not have been transported in a particular case but, clearly, we can't be giving out personal health information.

Mrs. Driedger: So, then, can the minister indicate—does her office track the number of missions, the type of patients that are transported, the outcome of

that transport? And why, then, 200 missions end up with no involvement with patients? Does her department track that then?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, the Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre is the dispatch. They maintain that information.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister indicated that she would be able to provide information about the 200 that were not—that did not have patients involved with them, even though STARS had been called out. Is she still saying that she can provide that information?

* (15:40)

Ms. Selby: We do track a range of information and we would be happy to compile it and see what can be provided.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you to the minister for that.

Now, when a contract with STARS was agreed upon, Treasury Board directed Manitoba Health that they could enter into this contract for five years, but Manitoba Health went and signed the contract for 10 years.

Can the minister tell us why Manitoba Health ignored the recommendation from Treasury Board that the contract be only five years in length?

Ms. Selby: I just want to go back to something the member was saying earlier when we were discussing the transport of patients and the missions that may not have involved the transport. There are a range of reasons why. It'd probably be simpler if we summarized why the patients may not have been transported. I wanted just to confirm that that would be okay with the member.

Mrs. Driedger: Yes, that would—that's certainly acceptable as long as there's some clear information that breaks down that number of 200 and the reasons behind patients not being transported in those 200 cases.

Ms. Selby: And then back to the other question that the member had just asked. We discussed this with Treasury Board in the Estimates process. They were aware of the 10-year time period. When they gave us approval to go to the 24-7 service, they were aware of the 10-year contract at that time.

Mrs. Driedger: So they were—was it part of signing the contract that there was an obligation, then, by STARS, that it be a 10-year contract, which is twice

the length of what Treasury Board initially approved?

Ms. Selby: Certainly, we wanted the stability of the long-term contract, but the 10-year contract was approved by a Treasury Board at the time that we went to the 24-7 coverage.

Mrs. Driedger: A lot of people out there in this industry were quite surprised that the government would enter into a five-year contract because—or pardon me, into a 10-year contract because most contracts for technology reasons and a lot of other reasons rarely go beyond five years. So what was it that compelled the government to do a 10-year contract when it actually goes against sort of, you know, more industry standards that would only be five years?

Ms. Selby: We, as I said earlier, wanted the stability of a long-term contract. We'd seen the work that STARS had done during the major floods in 2009 and 2011; certainly would hope that we don't need to use them in such circumstances again but it's hard to say in Manitoba that we will never have a circumstance where we'll need helicopter ambulance on that kind of a massive scale.

This is the decision that we made. We know that everyone doesn't agree but we thought it was important to continue providing this life-saving service. We know that getting a highly skilled medical team to a patient as quickly as possible can make all the difference and a modern EMS service includes air helicopter ambulance service, it includes land service, it includes having the life jet as well.

Our focus, of course, is providing the best patient care that we can. We know that families depend on it and we know how important STARS had been during some very trying times in Manitoba when we faced unbelievable flood situations. And we wanted to be able to continue having a full, modern EMS service in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: In the feasibility study there was a recommendation to expand the Lifeflight program; has that happened based on that recommendation from the feasibility study?

* (15:50)

Ms. Selby: Well, we certainly know that any modern EMS service includes all three, that all three are necessary. All three have strengths in different areas and all three work co-operatively to get medical care to people wherever they are. Whether that be

helicopter, jet, land, we know that it can sometimes make all the difference that you can get the right medical professionals to somebody in an emergency and get somebody out of that situation and to a hospital as well.

Lifelight is a very successful program. It is something we're very proud of, the work that the folks do there. We know they respond to a range of critical-care needs and they were a very important part—of course they are an important part of our EMS system, but during the time that STARS was suspended, they were an important part of the contingency plan as well. And we know that they do respond regularly to a number of calls.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister didn't answer the question. It had been asked of her whether or not the Lifelight program was expanded as per the recommendation from the feasibility study. That was the question.

Ms. Selby: We would be happy to provide the member with any expansion to the program that's happened since 2009, but we don't have that information on hand right now. We have to get back to her.

Mrs. Driedger: That's fine, Mr. Chair.

Can the minister tell us how many trips STARS has been on or how many missions STARS has been on since the grounding was partially lifted?

Ms. Selby: As the member said, STARS is not back on full service at this time, but they are available for that scene emergency service in those situations, whether it be a remote area that only the helicopter can get to or just a particular situation where land or jet is unable to reach it. So, since that time, since the resumption of scene calls, STARS has flown on four missions.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate over what period of time those four missions took place?

Ms. Selby: Those missions would have occurred between March 7th and April 3rd—but also to mention that the Clinical Oversight Panel, under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl, is looking at a number of things, including dispatch and expanding the role and, of course, working towards full resumption of the STARS service as well.

Mrs. Driedger: So, if we look at that right now, four missions over a period of about a month, and if we're spending about a million dollars a month on this, am

I accurate in understanding that each mission then costs about \$250,000?

Ms. Selby: Of course during this time and at the time when STARS was suspended, folks were training, working to get it back to full service. We've talked about it before here, that those skills that people have who work in critical care, who work in emergency medicine, it's very important that they're able to keep those skills up and so, of course, have been training and working with the Clinical Oversight Panel to address concerns to make sure that we can return to full service.

I think it's important to recognize the work that STARS does do. We certainly saw in the floods of 2009 and 2011 the important work that they did, that they were able to get to people that could not have been reached, that we did not have to interrupt our EMS service because we were able to go places where there was no—literally, no roads, and to recognize that air ambulance is front-line health care, particularly for families in rural Manitoba. The folks at MTCC, they make the call of who should go, whether that be land ambulance, helicopter ambulance or a jet. They're the folks with the expertise to make those decisions, but there are times when there is no other choice but a helicopter, whether it be a remote location, whether it just be another scene call where nothing else can get through.

* (16:00)

So I think it's important to remember that air ambulance is front-line health care and particularly for families in rural Manitoba who—we've heard from them—that depend on it, that want to see it back to full service.

Mrs. Driedger: And, certainly, I think everybody recognizes the importance and need for a helicopter EMS. Especially when we see 19 ERs closed in rural Manitoba, there is particularly a greater need for having this service. And, certainly, people that are in rural Manitoba or people travelling the highways, I think, appreciate that we have helicopter EMS. So nobody disputes that it is a very valuable service.

When the contract with STARS was first signed, was it an agreement just for STARS to pick up just scene calls, or were interfacility transfers always part of the picture?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, our focus—we know that STARS' focus is to make sure that we're providing the best patient care. We know that that is what

matters to families. We know that rural families, in particular, depend on the STARS service.

We saw that in the major floods of 2009 and 2011. We partnered with STARS to offer helicopter ambulance service in rural Manitoba in areas that could not be reached any other way. Certainly, we saw the good work that they did during that time.

In the flooding of 2011 alone, 50 patients—more than 50 patients were transported during that time. They were able to get to places where there was significant road closures and were also able to keep our EMS response time within the benchmark, which is remarkable when you think of the dedication that that shows of all the people at every level working to provide that care.

At that time, of course, they were brought in to do the emergency, sort of, work that needs to be done during flooding, but our contract, when we started with them, was for both scene and interfacility transports.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what is happening right now in order to get STARS back up and fully functioning?

Ms. Selby: Again, I would direct the member to the Clinical Oversight Panel under the leadership of Dr. Brian Postl. We know that critical-care environment is one of the most challenging. It is one of the most complex medical environments in the health-care system. And we know that there are different perspectives, different opinions, which is why we do rely on experts both within the department and external organizations to make sure that we are providing quality care and patient safety.

The Clinical Oversight Panel, under Dr. Brian Postl, is providing that patient-focused guidance and oversight for helicopter air ambulance service. This includes training, accreditation for personnel, quality assurance for clinical operations. And, of course, that is all working towards guiding the eventual resumption of interfacility transfers by STARS in Manitoba or, as we've been saying, full service in Manitoba beyond just the scene calls that they're doing right now.

But I should also add that Manitoba Health, of course, has also taken the steps to transfer the STARS service to the WRHA which will oversee the Province's arrangement with STARS. This is important. We've discussed it a couple of times already. The importance of—people who work in critical care and emergency have very, very

specialized skills, and they need to keep them up, and this will include the ability for the medical crew to enhance their experience and training in Winnipeg's high-volume emergency care and critical-care system. As well, moving forward with establishing the office of medical direction to ensure that we have consistency of medical training and practice across the EMS system in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm certainly aware of the complexity and the challenges that people in ICU face. I was a—certainly, an ICU nursing supervisor for a number of years. So I had to deal with both intensive-care medicine and intensive-care surgery as well as being a nursing supervisor in emergency. So I'm very well aware of the environments under which they work and the challenges that they face in those environments.

I'm curious, why was the decision made to remove the program, the helicopter EMS program, from Manitoba Health and put it in with the WRHA?

Ms. Selby: So, well—I mean, of course, the member would know well, then, the specialized skills of people who work in critical care and the importance that they keep those skills up. It's important that they have the opportunity to continue working under those kind of high volumes to maintain those skills. By bringing STARS service to the WRHA, it will allow the medical crews to have access to train and have the ability to keep those skills up, to hone those skills in Winnipeg's high-volume emergency and critical care system. It's a good opportunity for people to be able to continue to have the volume of cases that can—that they need in order to keep up those specialized skills.

Mrs. Driedger: But those people that are working on the helicopter already had access to all of that. They did go into ERs. They work elsewhere. So that answer really doesn't make sense because that was already happening.

Was the WRHA given the management of the helicopter EMS program because of all the problems that were happening within the department itself and the, you know, the fact a mediator had to be brought in for seven months, which tells us that there was a dynamic going on within the department that was, in some people's words, toxic. Is that why it was put over to the WRHA to manage a program, because the minister's department was having problems running it herself?

* (16:10)

Ms. Selby: No, that wasn't the reason, Mr. Chair. Medical consensus of our experts agreed that access to the WRHA's resources like the neonatal transport, respiratory therapy and all of the training was very important for people to be able to maintain those skills. It was a good link. Certainly note that the WRHA is eager and willing to work with STARS, everyone sitting around the table right now at the Clinical Oversight Panel with Dr. Postl, representation from all parties, talking about moving forward. Same thing in Alberta, as well, actually, that the STARS had moved from the Department of Health in Alberta to an RHA.

I think that certainly in our case, we know that it will enable our medical crews to enhance their experience training. We know that Winnipeg, of course, is the place where we see the highest volume of emergency in critical care, and that is a good opportunity for people to better hone those skills and keep up that training. Certainly something that STARS and the WRHA are both agreed upon is a good step forward in doing what we can to make sure that people are able to get that training that is so essential and goes towards ensuring that we do have the best patient care and the best patient safety that we can provide.

Mrs. Driedger: It's a little troublesome that this is coming well after the fact of the government's rush to set up the program and then experience all these problems. Maybe if they'd taken more time at the beginning and had that clinical oversight in place at the beginning and set up a proper program instead of mismanaging it, then maybe we might be in a different place and might not have seen so many patients fall through the holes.

And, speaking of patients, with the third critical incident, I understand it was labelled that and then it was determined that it wasn't a critical incident. Has it been formally—has a decision been formally made that that death of that third patient was not a critical incident? I understand that somebody from—and it might have been the minister that indicated that evidence showed that her passing had nothing to do with what happened on STARS—so is the critical incident—the fact it was called a critical incident going to be removed and then not seen as a critical incident?

Ms. Selby: Mr. Chair, the third incident that the member's referring to is still a critical incident, but it was determined that the patient involved had an underlying condition that led to the patient's demise.

But, because it was a critical incident, it certainly has led to changes, including changes in equipment, in training. But, again, I think the thing we need to go back to is the Clinical Oversight Panel that will be looking at all aspects of patient safety, that will be patient focused and looking at those things, but also, you know, training, accreditation, quality assurance and working towards guiding full resumption of STARS service in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: When the STARS contract was being talked about at the beginning, the \$100-million cost was always what was—the contract was pegged at, so that was all that the government talked about, was \$100 million over 10 years. And when the auditor's report came out, it indicated \$159 million, which is quite a bit different.

Can the minister explain what those—or why there's a \$59-million difference?

* (16:20)

Ms. Selby: The OAG report was the total program, which includes STARS, MTCC and the EMS branch.

Mrs. Driedger: Is—did the minister just indicate that within that price tag is her department—the EMS department's spending allocation?

Ms. Selby: So the OAG reports costs included for MTCC and Brandon—and the branch specifically related to STARS, not the whole branch, not all of MTCC.

Mrs. Driedger: So what I am wanting to know is if we are looking at this on a monthly basis and we are looking at a breakdown—can the minister provide for us a break down of all of the costs that occur every month for the next 10 years and where specifically those costs, you know, whether it's related to staffing or whether it's related to maintenance or new parts or—I think it's important that we see—and I know there is a lot of interest amongst many out there to know where exactly that money is being spent.

So would the minister be able to tell us what that breakdown would be on a monthly basis?

Ms. Selby: Of course, well, we know how important STARS service is for Manitobans. We know that STARS is able to get to places that land ambulance or a jet just cannot get to. We know that STARS is front-line service for many rural families.

We can get back to the member more specifically on her question. We can see what we can

compile, recognizing that some people have more than one role for more than one task. But we will do our best to get back to the member with that.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the—and I appreciate that. Can the minister indicate when that might happen?

Ms. Selby: We'll have to get back to her.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate, is the hangar something that is rented or is it something that was purchased? I've seen a number of \$220,000 a year. Would that be a rental or does the—did the government buy its own hangar?

* (16:30)

Ms. Selby: We are currently renting the hangar.

Mrs. Driedger: And would the \$220,000 a year be the amount that is being spent on the rental?

Ms. Selby: We would have to confirm and get back to the member on that.

Mrs. Driedger: When the contract was signed, the—there was supposed to be a certain amount of the cost covered by fundraising. Can the minister confirm what the contract indicated would be the amount that had to be raised through fundraising to pay for the costs? Was it \$2 million or 50-50?

Ms. Selby: During his Estimates, I understand that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) did table a copy of the service purchase agreement with STARS, and the section on fundraising is in section 4. But I will say that the STARS foundation model allows for patients, communities, corporations to participate in the program, help them improve services and build infrastructure as well as offset costs to government. We believe, and STARS believes, that they will be able to increase their fundraising in Manitoba and begin to develop the same model of corporate sponsorship that they see in other provinces. But STARS has acknowledged that the fundraising efforts have not been what they've hoped. They've also indicated that they have had some successes, like their CEO rescue on an island, which they were able to raise over \$300,000 in one day.

My understanding is that in 2012-2013, STARS experienced losses of \$496,000 on their fundraising, but the results for 2013-14 are disclosed in the year-end statement, which I believe their year-end was March 31st.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister have the numbers for '13-14?

Ms. Selby: We don't have the numbers yet for 2013-2014, but they will be public, likely in June with the annual statement. I can tell the member that the target was—for fundraising was \$2 million. We are expecting it to be below that.

But, to be very clear, we expect STARS to fundraise, and Manitoba Health will not be covering any financial shortfalls or losses that may have occurred in the STARS Lottery or any fundraising activities in 2013-2014.

Mrs. Driedger: So, when the minister indicates that there was in 2012-13 a \$496,000 loss, can she explain exactly what she means by that?

Ms. Selby: Yes, it is my understanding that in 2012-2013 STARS experienced losses of \$496,000 on their fundraising. We knew that 2012-2013 would be difficult for STARS, as they were, of course, just building their infrastructure, fundraising infrastructure, and at that time the losses were covered.

But we do expect STARS to fundraise, as in our agreement, and we have been very clear that Manitoba Health will not be covering any financial shortfalls or losses of any fundraising activities in 2013-2014.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us, in 2012-13, how much STARS made in their fundraising or how much they raised at that time in their actual fundraising? And I guess I would ask, could she confirm that it was \$177,000?

* (16:40)

Ms. Selby: So in 2012-2013, STARS raised \$177,000. We expected it would be difficult for them as they were building their funding infrastructure and becoming more well-known by Manitobans. But I can double-check and confirm that that is accurate.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister tell us, was their target of fundraising \$2 million for that year?

Ms. Selby: Yes, the fundraising is an annual target of \$2 million.

Mrs. Driedger: And then when the minister says there was a loss of \$496,000, does that mean that the prizes then—and I understand that there might have been a house, I don't know if there was a car—that all of that then had to be bought, but because there was only \$177,000, that \$177,000 was put against the prizes plus another \$496,000. Would that be accurate?

Ms. Selby: So we can ask STARS to provide that level of detail of their prize costs. But we can confirm that the fundraising revenue was \$177,000, their expenses were \$626,000, so the loss was the net between those.

Mrs. Driedger: And the expenses, would the minister be able to break that down and indicate of the \$626,000 in expenses, how much of that was for prizes and how much of that was for administrative costs that would have been paid to STARS' fundraising costs?

Ms. Selby: Yes, we can ask STARS to provide that information but, again, I should say we expect STARS to fundraise as per our agreement, and Manitoba Health will not be covering any financial shortfalls or losses that may have occurred in 2013-2014 with either the lottery or any other fundraising activities. We expected that there would be losses in the first year, as they were building their fundraising infrastructure, but we do expect them to fundraise as per the agreement that we have.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the minister, then, also by what she's not saying actually saying that the \$496,000 loss for 2012-13 was actually a loss that needed to be covered then by the Manitoba government?

Ms. Selby: We knew, again, that 2012-2013 would be difficult. We knew that STARS was just building their fundraising infrastructure, and those losses were covered by Manitoba Health as per agreement. But we expect STARS to fundraise. That's the agreement that we have with them, and we have been very clear that Manitoba Health will not cover any financial shortfalls for losses that may have occurred in 2013-2014.

Mrs. Driedger: So, in the contract then, has there been a new clause put in the agreement because she's saying, per the agreement, Manitoba Health won't be covering any losses. Was that not part of the agreement in 2012-13?

* (16:50)

Ms. Selby: We expect STARS to fundraise. That is our agreement. They are expected to raise \$2 million annually in fundraising. STARS does believe that they will be able to increase their fundraising here in Manitoba, as they do a model of corporate fundraising in sponsorship that exists in other provinces. They are confident that they will be able to do that here in Manitoba, and they have acknowledged that their fundraising has not been

what they had hoped as well. And we have also acknowledged that we will not cover losses for 2013-2014.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm just looking at the prizes they offered, which were actually very, very nice. A grand prize was a Winnipeg show home worth over \$1.1 million. Grand prize No. 2 was \$200,000 cash. Grand prize No. 3 was a fifth wheel worth about \$154,000. There's an early bird prize package worth over \$78,000; it was a Mercedes plus a Vegas vacation. Then there are six vehicles worth retail \$213,000. And then, whoa, there's lots of vacations worth over \$50,000 worth of vacations. Then there's 2,868 electronics prizes and more, worth over \$553,000. And then there's some kind of a furniture package worth \$30,000, a travel anywhere package worth \$30,000, plus 350 more prizes worth over \$362,000. And then you can also get a STARS helicopter ride, two STARS helicopter rides for two. And there's jewellery and there's cash.

This all seems like a very, very ambitious fundraising effort. And the minister just then indicated that they only raised \$177,000, that government is paying for a \$496,000 loss on this. There must be a bigger loss than this, too, because if we were to add up the value of every one of those prizes, it would be very, very high.

Is the minister indicating then that if Manitoba taxpayers are only paying for \$496,000 of this—and I shouldn't say only—who—or did STARS cover the other prizes then? And did it have to come out of their own bank account to cover off these prizes?

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Charleswood, finished her question?

Mrs. Driedger: Oh, I had already asked it.

Ms. Selby: Yes, we can ask STARS to provide that level of detail of their prize costs. But I can also say that I know that STARS has had a very—has a lot of experience organizing fundraising. They've done a lot of fundraising in their history in Alberta in particular. Their model allows for patients, communities, corporations to participate in the program. The program, through fundraising, is able to improve services and build infrastructure and offset cost to government.

We believe, STARS believes, that they will be able to increase their fundraising in Manitoba and develop that same model of corporate sponsorship that exists in other provinces. They've acknowledged that their fundraising efforts have not been what

they've hoped. We do expect them to fundraise. They've indicated that they have had some successes. Their CFO rescue on the island was able to raise over \$300,000 in just one day. We thought 2012-2013 would be difficult. They were just building their infrastructure at that time, and as I've said, we expect them to fundraise. It's part of the agreement, and we will not be covering any financial shortfalls or losses that may have occurred with the STARS lottery or any fundraising activities for 2013-2014.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm a bit concerned that there wasn't any protection for taxpayers in 2012-13, that it took a loss—almost, well, it was \$496,000, so it looks like taxpayers in Manitoba bought half a house for somebody, a show home, worth \$1.1 million, I guess.

I know in Alberta they do fundraise for about 80 per cent. In Saskatchewan, before Saskatchewan launched their program there, they had all their ducks in a row, they had their corporate sponsors and they didn't rely on taxpayers to pick up the whole cost.

Here what we've seen in Manitoba was the government rushing to hurry up and get this STARS contract in place before an election and they didn't get their ducks in a row, and we knew that right at the beginning that there were going to be some problems and that taxpayers were going to be the ones on the hook for some of this. So very concerned that, you know, the more we just delve into this, the more it sounds like the government has mismanaged this whole contract right from the very beginning and, you know, didn't see clearly to even put in some kind of protection for taxpayers in terms of loss on the lottery.

Can the minister tell us were there winners actually for every one of those prizes that was available in that lottery?

Ms. Selby: We will ask STARS to provide the detail—the level of detail of their prizes for the member.

But I would just like to add to that that we saw what STARS was able to do during the flooding of 2009 and 2011. We know how important the service is that they provide, and we wanted to be able to offer a full modern complete EMS service to Manitobans. I've heard from rural Manitoba that this is an important service. It's a service that families depend on and there are times when no other EMS is able to get there. Land is not able to. Jet may not be able to. We knew that going and looking at another

option, trying to build one from the ground up was going to mean a gap in service. STARS was here for the 2011 flood, we wanted to be able to maintain that service so we believed that by contracting with STARS that it was the right call on this life-saving service.

We know the opposition doesn't agree with this, but this is the path we chose.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, I'm not sure where the minister got off saying we didn't agree with it. We don't agree with how she managed this contract. We've certainly always been in favour of a helicopter EMS program, but it was important that it be done right and done well. Instead, we're seeing some major challenges.

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

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

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

(14:40)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. Wouldn't you know it, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Just wondering if the minister has found out about my question, couple of questions, pertaining to yesterday: the vacancy rate of the GO offices and GO centres specifically. I'll start with that.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): So what we have tabulated—and maybe, to the member opposite, maybe we'll elaborate if need be, but basically we'll—in the GO—some of the offices—or—GO Centres where we've got a total vacancy of 14.62, or 20.1 staff members that that's equivalent to, an adequate description.

Mr. Pedersen: And how many GO offices are there currently then?

Mr. Kostyshyn: There is 31 offices.

Mr. Pedersen: The other question I had from yesterday was the issue about whether potatoes—seed potatoes were included in the—under the temporary rules for weight restrictions that's pertaining to grain movement. Does the minister have an update for that?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The following essential commodities do not need a permit: livestock feed in transit as follows, grain en route from producer to processor, unprocessed grain required for feed and processed livestock feed; also, seed in transit to supplier, farm or field, fertilizer, grain to satisfy grain quotas or contracts this year only. Potatoes or vegetables from producer to processors are essential commodities but will still need a permit.

The change to the SRR, which—let me just find that, okay—I guess maybe more in define—to apply for a permit for potato carriers through motor carrier permits and development—MCPD—there is a phone number, and they must provide a licence plate number and the information en route they are planning to take and how much they will be moving. They must pay a \$20 fee unless they are a farmer, then they are exempt. Motor carrier permit development is unlikely to be turned down, but, I guess, maybe specific situation, depending on the highway conditions, may be turned down simply for safety purposes. So, hopefully, that answers the question.

Mr. Pedersen: Right. So what you're—if I understand, then, correctly, if a farmer is getting seed potatoes delivered or picking up seed potatoes for his own use, he does not need a permit. Is that correct?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Potatoes or vegetables from producers to process are essential commodities but still will need a permit. So you're correct in your question. They do need a permit to go pick up the seed potatoes from the appropriate locations to their home destination.

Mr. Pedersen: And my constituent has sent me an email saying they are not able to get a permit to move seed potatoes on 34 Highway. They have issued them in the past but say the highway is in too bad of shape. So what you're telling me is—what he is telling me is that he cannot—that MIT will not issue a permit, and you're saying that they can get a permit.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I think—to the member opposite—and I'm sure he can appreciate the circumstances. If the highway conditions are in a situation where I think they feel it might be a safety hazard to the car

and truck traffic that may jeopardize safety, I think there needs to be common-sense thinking about that.

To the producer that you're referring to that is in a situation where he has no other means of access to his designation location, which I don't know what's at, I will definitely follow up with MIT minister and see how we can accommodate that. But at this point in time, I don't know if we want to get into a—finer details to the member opposite, but I will relay the message and we'll try and work with MIT and the producer that is affected by this highway closure to somewhat find a appropriate means of transporting the product.

Mr. Pedersen: All right. When we're done here this afternoon, I will give you the name of the producer and you will make sure that they get a permit, because this is about seed potatoes. This is an industry that I know that the minister should be aware of the importance of this industry. They've issued permits in the past, but there seems to be a miscommunication between your department and MIT. So I want you to fix that miscommunication and make sure that these producers can get a permit to deliver—to have their seed potatoes delivered.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me be clear to the member opposite—I realize the importance of the potato industry, and I'm sure that the member opposite understands my sincerity about that. I will relay the message to the MIT minister, and I'm assuming the MIT staff will be talking to the producer that is affected by this. At the end of the day, as Minister of Agriculture, I will do my due diligence to talk to the MIT minister.

But I think it would be pretty uncharacteristic for me to go to the highways minister and tell him what he has to do. I think there is the true reality that the minister of highways sees the importance, the value of economic development in the province of the potato industry, but I'm sure that there are other circumstances. And at this point in time, I'm hoping the minister opposite can appreciate—or the member opposite can appreciate that there is some due diligence. Because historically, without a doubt, the member opposite was well aware that permits have been issued for years, and I—given the circumstances on this particular piece of highway today, you know, I think it's unfair for me to make a commentary and assure the member opposite that I'm going to have it processed. I will leave it up to the minister responsible for MIT to make the decision at the end of the day.

Mr. Pedersen: So when will I be getting an answer back, and when will this—the minister assure me that there is an answer one way or the other in terms of whether he can get a permit or not, because every day is wasting? These potatoes, seed potatoes, need to be delivered on time. This is not something that can be delivered three, four months down the road. They need to be in position today.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Well, I want to assure the member opposite—as I indicated to some of the questions that were brought forward yesterday, my staff have brought forward the answers in appropriate time fashion. I want to assure the member opposite I will have staff or myself talk to the MIT Minister directly and get the answer back to the producer or to yourself as soon as I can.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm going to move on to a different subject, and that's the local food producers. I know the minister received a letter from the Harvest Moon Society about their—the issues that they're facing in here. You can sell products at the farm gate, but you cannot sell them, advertise them on the Internet or have a communal delivery to consumers' doors. What is the minister going to do about this?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I'd like to thank the member opposite for bringing the question forward. And, obviously, as the minister sitting at the table with us for Jobs and Economy and other ministers that—when we talk about jobs and economy and we talk about the value added in the food industry in the province of Manitoba, I want to assure the member opposite, as he has brought forward to us, that we see the importance.

But I think the member opposite has to accept the fact that when we talk about food safety, that is the No. 1 topic of conversation as we move forward. When we talk about selling products at the farmers' market and then we talk about moving products via the website, the perfect scenario is when you're able to purchase a product at the farmers' market and it's a direct contact with the person that is marketing the product, and there's a true understanding of where their product's coming from and where it's going to be picked up and delivered to their home yard.

We may get into a situation—if the product is ordered online, there is the possibility of the product having being in certain storage capacity—maybe have the risk of possibly some damage being done to the finished product, so I think we need to have further discussions.

I want to assure the member opposite that we've—we are—continues to have discussions regarding reviewing some of the policies pertaining to that, and we will continue to work for the betterment of the industry, as far as the food development.

And I want to assure the member opposite—if the circumstances should arise and we have a situation where someone should become sick in event of some of the products, I want to assure the member that we would be the first to be held accountable.

Our intention here is not to make life challenging for the people that are moving the product. Our No. 1 priority is that when the people pick up a product, whether it's on the website—by ordering on the website—that when the family sits at the kitchen table and consumes the product that they have purchased, they have a peace of mind knowing that none of the family members are going to get ill by consuming that product. And I think the member opposite would appreciate the commentary that that would be one of the last things that they would like to see done if it was his family sitting at the table, if they pick up a product and order on the website. So, we want to maintain the food safety as best as we can to minimize any risk.

* (14:50)

Mr. Pedersen: Well, the minister talks about perfect solutions. What I'm more interested in is workable solutions. And, yes, we all want safe food, but, specifically, what I'm asking is what regulations need to be changed in order to accommodate this? You have products that can be sold at the farm gate, but you can't put those same products for sale on a website. So what needs to be changed in the regulations to allow this?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As we all aware of the importance of having safe food and I'd like to acknowledge the member opposite agreeing with me that food safety is the top priority regardless where the product is purchased. MAFRD is developing outcome and risk-based food safety legislation designed to—for provincial licensing food-processing premises that will increase food safety standards in the province and will be flexible through encouragement of innovation and creative in the food processing.

We're also going to be having some consultation with the food processors organization. And how do we put together the opportunity, much to member opposite's question being is that ordering online—I

think there's a key component that's needed here is that the delivery—for an example, delivery of the product from a designated location 25, 30 miles away, if I can use that for an example, do we have the necessary information that we minimize the risk, example being of the transportation of the product from the farm? Whereas you go to the farmers' market and you can buy the product at the farmers' market and have a conversation with the individual. That, to me, is a sign.

I want to ensure the member opposite that we are continuing to have conversations with various organizations and we will continue to have conversations with—you know, we—you know we're well aware of certain restaurants that are asking—I've—we've made preparations to meet with some of the chefs and have an open dialogue conversation with the individuals to see how we could find the appropriate—I have to, you know, respect their request, but as far as changing regulations, maybe there's an opportunity to change some of the regulations, but until we have kind of an understanding of the communication to move forward, to minimize the food safety, that is the No. 1 priority for this department, for the Department of Health, that we do still leave the imagery that when people pick up a product that they're at peace of mind knowing that the food is safe to consume at the kitchen table.

Mr. Pedersen: Just a point of clarification, if a producer is selling from the farm gate—and I'm not talking about farmers' market, I'm talking about farm gate—so a consumer goes to the farm gate, so to speak, buys the product and can take it home. Can—if the consumer buys that product at the farm gate, can the seller, the farm, deliver it to the consumer's door? Is that allowed under current legislation, regulations?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The example that has been set forward—the government legislation does not say—or does not have restrictions whether it's delivered or not delivered; it's basically is saying is that if the producer chooses to buy the product at the farm gate, so be it. If they make alternative arrangements, so be it. But that is something that the government does not get involved, as far as how the transportation of the product is done.

Mr. Pedersen: But that's a contradiction of what your inspectors, your regulations are saying because Harvest Moon has been told that they cannot deliver the products in a communal van. So, in other words, products from three different farms delivered by a—by one van not belonging to those—or belonging to

one of the three, but not all the three. That's what your regulations are saying and what Harvest Moon has been told. So somewhere in here, there's a contradiction.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess, at this point in time, I would just as soon not refer to any particular farm organization or some marketing industry, but I do appreciate the commentary from the member opposite. You know, we're working with various organizations to modernize a regulation that's probably been around for a number of years. And, to the member opposite, we will continue to have that discussion, and I want to ensure, as we've been talking to various organizations, such as the food processors of the world, and we want to continue to provide an opportunity in the future of businesses developing in the province of Manitoba.

Last, but not least, food safety still plays a very key component at the end of the day, and regardless whether it's transported by what means, but we need to have an understanding, and I want to ensure the member opposite we will continue to work with industry, regardless where they're geographically located in the province of Manitoba, and we will be having some meetings in the near future.

Mr. Pedersen: The minister mentioned legislation, and then he mentioned consultation. So is there legislation being prepared currently?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I mentioned legislation because obviously there is legislation that's historical legislation, so we're talking about reviewing present legislation and having an open round table discussion with the producers or industry as far as the fruit processors, as far as the Health Department, as far as the MAFRI-staffed department, we need to have a round table discussion to figure out is the mechanism that we can approve upon of delivery of what we're talking about today without providing any jeopardy of food safety to the people that are buying the product at the end of the day and assure the general public, when they buy a product, regardless where it comes from, that we've minimized any risk whatsoever of someone becoming ill. Whether there's a risk of transportation of the product, is there a risk of storage of the product, we need to have a clear understanding, as we move forward, in the new means of marketing of food products.

* (15:00)

Mr. Pedersen: So, then, nothing will be changed for this coming growing season?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I want to ensure the member opposite that we are having a meeting next Monday with some restaurant owners regarding their opinions. I want to ensure that we will be having consultation.

I think it's somewhat difficult for me to say that there's going to be a solution at the end of the day, but I want to ensure the member opposite that we will be having consultation with a number of agencies or individuals that are in the discussion as we move forward.

Mr. Pedersen: So is there a—you're having a meeting next Monday with the restaurant owners, and that's good.

Is there—you've talked about MAFRD, the Health Department, the food processors. I assume you're going to include the local producers in here. You've got restaurant owners, so is there any sort of timeline?

And I'm—the reason I'm asking is because you can give me all these platitudes about food safety and we don't want to do anything wrong. We don't want to be responsible. Of course no one wants to be responsible and no one wants to have unsafe food.

But, at the same time, what you're telling me is the bureaucracy is going to get in the way, and there's not going to be any changes in here. That's what I'm reading out of what your answers are here because you are—you have issues here that have been raised. You can sell food at your farm gate but you cannot advertise it on the Internet.

Does it take that much bureaucracy, really, to make some changes in here? So I really wonder, what I'm questioning is your will to change anything in this. Or are we just going to get bogged down in the bureaucracy and not see any change?

You've got a tremendous potential here for local food producers, and I'm talking about producers, local producers. And everyone wants to be attached to the local, buy local, eat local and all the rest of it. Yes, we all want it to be safe and healthy and all the rest of it.

But there is no—I'm not hearing anything out of any of these comments coming from you saying that there is a will to change anything at all in here. All you're telling me is you're going to study it and you're going to—which would be great if you actually did consult, but I—that's been a problem in the past of consulting.

But what does it take for a local food producer to be able to advertise his products on the Internet?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I didn't realize the member opposite was a mind reader or somebody that could interpret that he suspects that I'm not going to move forward with moving forward with this legislation. I didn't know that you had such talents, that you are anticipating that I'm not serious about this.

I want to ensure the member opposite I am very serious. There is an opportunity to enhance. And I guess if the bureaucracy or the people that are involved don't take offense to their slowness, I guess I'll leave that up to them to interpret the language that was presented.

But I want to assure you that I see the importance. And I think one example to the member opposite, when we talk about this government, when we talked about providing local, let's go back three years.

Why was this government so adamant about advertising and partnering with Safeway—and there was other grocery chains that are part of it. When we brought forward the opportunity to buy local and really seen the importance of the support from the consumers to buy local, in fact, an increase where people actually made a choice at the grocery store to buy a product that's probably priced 15, 20 per cent higher, maybe, at that—and they chose to buy that product because they believe in supporting—so I think for the member opposite to assume that I'm not serious or this government's not serious, I think that's kind of a misstatement. And I want to ensure my staff and Department of Health will be working, but we just can't put a timeline on it to assume that by June 25 we're going to have all the answers and it's all going to be said and done.

I think that's very unprofessional, first of all, for me to put a timeline on it and the importance of it when we move forward. We talk about products that are brought to the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie. A lot of those products are not—within a month you can honestly say that it's labelled and it's ready to go. I think it's very inappropriate to put a timeline on food processing. And you know what? Even if it took an extra month longer for that to happen, at the end of the day it's all worth it if one person's likelihood of not getting sick—and we've covered all basis—then I feel very comfortable that we've taken that extra month.

But, to put the member's mind at ease, I want to ensure you as Agriculture Minister and as far as Department of Health and anybody else involved in making this consultation happen, we will continue to have the consultation. But I'm not prepared to go out there and—at liberty to say that we're going to have this completed in a month simply because the premise or the imagery is being set that we don't care. I think that's very inappropriate for that comment there to be brought forward. We've been proactive for the last couple years of Buy Manitoba and we continue to be proactive to work with local producers. And I want to ensure to the member opposite we will continue to work, but we will do it in an appropriate fashion so we minimize any risk and we will continue to have this discussion. I'm sure later on this year we could be talking about an opportunity of certain changes of—we've had some discussions and we've come to a compromise of maybe moving forward to help the local producers market their products regardless where it is.

Mr. Pedersen: You do realize, of course, there is a difference between suggesting farmers can sell local produce through Safeway and—versus the farm gate. There is quite a difference in terms of margins for those farmers. So, while it's good to promote local products in our chain grocery stores, if I can categorize them as that, there is a difference between the margins obtained through that versus selling at the farm gate. So—but I'm—I still have not got an answer, is why there is a problem putting the Motley's [*phonetic*] products on a website. What is the health concern about listing your farm products on a website?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Point of clarification to the member opposite's commentary. I was not insinuating that all products have to go through a certain grocery chain. All I'm saying is the provincial government's visionary was to see products that are produced in the province of Manitoba can be marketed regardless where it is, okay? And I'm not saying it has to be commercialized through a particular grocery chain. But we see the importance of the consumer awareness and the consumer demand of the product that's growing locally, and we see that at the farmer's market.

* (15:10)

When we refer to the website there is nothing wrong with people advertising a product—advertising on the website. The situation becomes a little bit more difficult when you start to promote selling of

the product, where you could order online the product being delivered. That's where there is a difficulty.

I want to share the information, also, is the fact that in 2013-2014, we have spent \$1.4 million on small processors and on-farm food safety. So our commitment is to help out the small processors, on farm or off farm. So we will continue to invest in that as we move forward in Growing Forward 2 dollars. And an opportunity to have dollars available to small processors and on-farm food safety is a very key component.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm confused. You can have a product on your website. But does that not mean you have it for—are you just putting it out there, in the public, that I grow this but I won't sell it to you, but I'll—I—you come to my farm gate and I'll sell it to you? Like, what would be the purpose of putting this product on a website if it wasn't to sell it?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The advertisements on the website is that they're advertising at their retail location. So the potential consumer can drive out to the designated location and purchase the product at the place that the product is being sold through. It's not intended to have it marketed by any other means. It's treated as a similar situation as a farmers' market.

So, when we talk about a certain businesses in different geographical areas, if they choose to advertise on the website, it's simply advertising their designated location and the products that are available. Then the consumer makes the choice to travel to that location to purchase the product.

Mr. Pedersen: And why did Manitoba Agriculture—the Department of Agriculture close down a Winnipeg charity that had been making spring rolls for 20 years?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I think that that question that has been brought forward by the member opposite, I think it's a—it was a question that maybe Manitoba Health could probably answer the question.

Mr. Pedersen: So, just going back to one more shot at the website here. A consumer phones the farm, and then they have to come and pick it up at the farm. They can't have it delivered by anybody else. It's the same as the website then?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Mr. Chair, I'm asking the member opposite to rephrase that question, please, just for clarification.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, they can't order online. Most websites have a place where you could—if they're selling a product on a website, you can order this product. And you're telling me that they can't deliver it. They can sell it at their farm gate but they can't deliver it. So if there is a phone number where they can phone, that is the same scenario then. They can phone and order it, but they cannot have it delivered by anyone else?

Mr. Kostyshyn: So, if they have a permit and a licence, then they can advertise on the website and sell.

Mr. Pedersen: How much is the permit?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Can we get back to you on that? We don't have an exact total.

Mr. Pedersen: The licence required, is that—what is the licence required? Is it HACCP standards? Is it—what is involved in obtaining a licence from the Province to sell food products directly to consumers?

Mr. Kostyshyn: And I think—I'm hoping the member opposite can appreciate—depending upon the commodity that's, you know, being prepared for retail, there is somewhat more challenging as far as descriptions of the commodities—if we were take, for an example, a chicken versus a vegetable product, I think the member opposite can appreciate the importance of having regulations or licensing or permits that address those issues.

So I don't mean to skirt the question brought forward by the member opposite, but I think in order to save time if you wanted to be a little bit more descriptive of what we're referring to I'd gladly share that information. But judging by my staff's commentary, there are somewhat different means of minimizing health risk or food safety risk depending upon what commodity is being processed or being prepared to be processed for retail.

Mr. Pedersen: So where does the producer find these regulations—the—what it takes to become licensed? There must be somewhere that a producer can go to, and I understand very well there's a lot of difference between vegetables and chickens or eggs, but there must be some place they can go to find this.

* (15:20)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Yes, we have a number of opportunities for individuals choosing to explore what's required as far as the permit and licensing. Obviously, the website is the common one used today to go online through MAFRD or through the

Health Department, there will be a connecting link. So that is one of them. We also have staff that's available at the various GO office that can assist of finding the website and moving. And then we have the Food Development Centre that also will be able to accommodate the request to educate or provide information to the parties interested on finding out what's required on the permitting or the licensing of the product.

Mr. Pedersen: Are participants at farmers' markets required to be licensed and have a permit?

Mr. Kostyshyn: In regards to the farmers' market, the jurisdiction theoretically falls under Manitoba Health in observation of the products that's being sold at the farmers' markets.

Mr. Pedersen: Are meat products able to be sold at farmers' markets? Surely, your department keeps track of this. I don't need to go to the Health Department for this.

Mr. Kostyshyn: When we talk about a certain commodity you refer to—the member opposite referred to meat process. The criteria is that providing the meat is inspected and is processed at a licensed facility then the criteria has been met in order to market that type of a commodity at farmers' markets.

Mr. Pedersen: So the Health Department monitors farmers' markets and the Department of Agriculture, MAFRD, inspects farm gate sales. Is that correct?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just to—I needed to get exact clarification from staff, so—and then this is one of the, I guess, one of the circumstances that CFIA—as the member opposite is quite familiar with, CFIA was quite involved in a number of these programs for a number of years. And as of last year, the responsibility has now been shifted to the provincial government as far as inspections in various 'arbattoirs.'

So, to get to the question that's been brought forward, MAFRD shares food safety inspections responsibility of provincial permitted food processing facilities in Manitoba—with Manitoba Health, pardon me. Manitoba Health inspects food in sites where consumers interface with food, such as restaurants, health facilities and grocery stores. Manitoba Health also is responsible for Internet sales direct to the consumers. MAFRD's inspection of facilities do—who distribute to a majority of their products to—over permitted facilities and not directly to consumers.

So what we're saying here to the member opposite is MAFRD is involved in inspections and 'arbattoirs,' okay, prior to it being—hitting the consumer market, to the face of the stores, okay, where—behind the scenes of consumer distribution of product. Then the responsibility goes into Manitoba Health.

Mr. Pedersen: I guess if the minister and his staff would just provide me, at a later date, not necessarily right now, with the place on the website where I can find where the permits and licence that—covered under their department. I realize, then, there's the Health Department, which is another department, but if he can provide that, then we'll—and I would just encourage the minister to get with the times on this. There is a great potential out there for some farm-direct sales, but, obviously, the regulations and the department has not kept up with the times on there, so I certainly encourage him to do that.

So I just—I want to move on to a couple other small—not necessarily small issues, different issues. Now that the minister is sitting across the table from me, there's a transfer to jobs and economy for \$162,000. What is that for?

*(15:30)

Mr. Kostyshyn: Every day is a learning curve when we talk about the great job we have today.

The—one of the questions brought forward—the \$162,000 is—an—'amperlantization' of the SAP accounting system that every department puts towards the Jobs and Economy.

It's IT—basically if I can re-explain it in another context to the member opposite, basically every department contributes to the Jobs and Economy because obviously there's a link from a number of departments, and MAFRD being one of them, that we cost share of the \$162,000 towards the department looking after Jobs and Economy, not only from Agriculture but other departments. So that is our dollar amount that's been allocated.

Mr. Pedersen: So, if I understand, Jobs and Economy Department is responsible for all the IT within government, and this \$162,000 is MAFRD's contribution to IT that Jobs and Economy's looking after?

Mr. Kostyshyn: So, to answer the member's opposite question, it is a form of an accounting system that is put into play.

Mr. Pedersen: Where—because I had so much lead time on this Estimates book, I haven't been able to find ag societies' funding. Where is it in this—what is the ag societies' funding for this coming year?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Basically, if you're looking for the dollar amount to the member opposite—base it has been no change of funding; 332 which was provided the previous year, the same dollar amount is available this year. It's 332, yes, \$332,000, right.

Mr. Pedersen: So where is it in the Estimates book?

Mr. Kostyshyn: It's located on page 107 and it's—the title being grant assistance, and grants and transfer payments of \$376,000. So that's part of the dollar amount that I was indicating.

Mr. Pedersen: And you mentioned that the dollar figure is 336. Did I hear you correctly on that? Of the \$376,000, what is the Ag societies' share?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The Ag societies' share is \$332,000.

Mr. Pedersen: The Chief Veterinary Officer is still vacant at this time; is that correct?

Mr. Kostyshyn: That is correct.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Chairman, I hope we're not interfering with your work.

Mr. Chairperson: No more than usual.

Mr. Pedersen: The—when does—when do you expect this position to be filled?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Opportunity knocks, and if the member opposite doesn't mind, I'd like to publicly acknowledge Dr. Wayne Lees's services for a number of years with the Chief Veterinary Officer and truly had done a fine job, and I want to acknowledge that publicly in our discussion today in Hansard. And it's one of those circumstances that, as the previous DM, opportunity knocks of entertaining retirement, and we choose to go down that path. It's—I just want to publicly acknowledge his involvement, Chief Veterinarian Dr. Wayne Lees, and his valued input, as agriculture changes in a number of situations.

But—so—but to answer your question, member opposite, is that we are advertising the position right now, and our wishes are to have a person in place as of June 1st of this year.

Mr. Pedersen: Where is the advertisement?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Presently, we're advertising in a number of locations: government website, Province

of Manitoba; the Province of Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta; and the Manitoba veterinarian and medical association—acronyms just drive me crazy—MVMA.

Mr. Pedersen: On page 85 of your Estimates book, under pest management, surveillance—excuse me—the—under activities, it says: "Oversee inspection of bees and beekeeping equipment. Diagnose bee samples."

Do you have a provincial apiarist?

* (15:40)

Mr. Kostyshyn: We have in place presently two people involved in the apiaries supervision, and one is a provincial apiary representative, representing all the apiaries in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: Is that any change from last year?

Mr. Kostyshyn: No, that's—that number of staff people has remained two from last year, and remains this year as well—two individuals.

Mr. Pedersen: On page—just a minute—just a minute. Just give me a minute.

Mr. Chairperson: Go ahead. Whatever you need.

Mr. Pedersen: Then I've seemed to have written down the wrong page number. Perhaps your staff can help me find the right page. It talks about school tax rebates and it compares last year with this year. [*interjection*] Oh, it is. Sorry. Am I—do I still have the—thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is page 59 of the Estimates book. And last year Estimates were \$34 million; this year is estimated at \$36 million. Can the minister explain how—why it would be higher this year, in terms of rebates, than last year?

Mr. Kostyshyn: If I may make a suggestion, you may want to turn to page 67. I believe that may answer the question.

But—and I think, if I may also make a suggestion to the member opposite, our MASC team is—I believe, is scheduled to come tomorrow to have a discussion regarding—because they reckon this falls under MASC, under Manitoba Agricultural Services Corp, so.

Mr. Pedersen: Then we shall do that tomorrow. We'll bring that up tomorrow when the MASC staff is here.

I would like now to move to Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. Can the minister give me an

update on the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As I'm sure the member opposite is quite familiar with—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I apologize to the member opposite. Just to get an update on the MCEC situation, as the member opposite is quite familiar that the government—the department had made a choice to cease a \$2 levy through the check-off at the local—appropriate locations. So with that being said, the levy refund and operational expenses still continue. We've been quite diligent in returning the levy contribution that producers are entitled to and that's within the one-year calendar year of when the money was being checked off. We continue to look at alternative means of shutting down the official operation of the MCEC. Today we have two individuals that are basically running the shutting down of the MCE organization. We've been able to sublet the Wellington office in March of '14 and the office is now located at unit H, 2450 Main Street in Winnipeg here. And as you may know, the property on Marion Street is being advertised for sale and awaiting offers of the property to be sold.

Mr. Pedersen: So how long do producers have, what is the cut-off time for the rebates on levies collected 'til MCEC officially shuts down.

Mr. Kostyshyn: As the constitution or the policy was in place that producers have up to one year, to go back one year on the levies that they have, the \$2 that they contributed, they have up to September, I believe, or August 31st of 2014 to ask for a refund of their contribution.

Mr. Pedersen: So the last financial statement that I can find for the MCEC is done by Lazer Grant dated March 15th, 2013. So that would be for the 2012 fiscal year. Has there been an audit done on the 2013 fiscal year?

Mr. Kostyshyn: We are—they are presently doing a summarization of the audit for 2013 and they are anticipating of having an AGM on May the 9th, and if appropriate information is collected they're hoping to provide that audited statement at that point in time for 2014—or '13, pardon me.

Mr. Pedersen: So who is doing this review that you talk about?

Mr. Kostyshyn: We don't have a name of the auditing firm or the accounting firm that's doing it, but if there's a request we will definitely find the company name that—if it's of importance. So we'll gladly provide that information.

* (15:50)

Mr. Pedersen: Well, yes, I would. Lazer Grant has done it for the last number of years. I need to know which accounting firm is doing it. Are they doing an audit of the 2013 fiscal year or is there is going—what happens in the phase out here? You have a company that's going out of business but they have a 2013 full year and they'll have theoretically a partial fiscal year where they should be wrapping up everything. If your rebates are due by August 31st, by September, October you will—the company will cease to exist. So what is happening? Is it a 2013 audit happening? And what will happen in—for the 2014 fiscal year?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me be clear, the MCEC individuals that are involved of the wind down have made the choice of who the auditing firm should be, and it's definitely, I would assure you that it is an accredited firm to do it.

Just to set the record straight, what we're doing today, or they're doing today, is an audited financial statement for 2013. Without a doubt, regardless whether the check off terminates in August of 2014, and the final wind down of the MCEC does exist, I would assume you still need to do a final audit, so it's really irrelevant at this point in time to categorize 2013 being an audited financial year. And then the final closure of 2014, regardless what it may be, depending upon how the potential sale of property, the wind down completely—you're still going to need another shut down of the audit in 2014 regardless.

I think to put the member's mind at ease, I don't think he has to be worried that the MCEC is going to be shutting its doors before producers have an opportunity to ask for a rebate. I think I'm pretty safe in making that commentary. And I want to assure you, the MCEC has made a public statement saying that producers that are entitled to their rebate are entitled to have a request for their rebate by August of 2014.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I can assure the minister I have lots of worries about MCEC and it goes far beyond the rebates.

There—who is paying for the audit? You no longer have income because you're no longer collecting rebates. There—I'm—I have only have a

December 31st, 2012 balance, so I have no idea of what the 2013–December 31st, 2013 balance is. Who is paying for the audit that's currently happening?

Mr. Kostyshyn: With the wind down of the MCEC, the Province has provided the MCEC with \$500,000 to assist in the wind down of the MCEC and recognizing assets that are in place right now and providing them with some operation cash flow—that is why the \$500,000 was.

So, with the ending of the voluntary cattle enhancement levy collection, the organization obviously was, you know, trying to find sources within. But also I think there needs to be a recognition that there are some assets that a pending sale will somewhat be brought back into the closure of the MCEC and do a final supplement of dollars owing.

Mr. Pedersen: On the 2012 financial statement, it shows internally restricted and it's note 9, and in—December 31st, 2012, it's \$200,000, and in December 31st, 2011, it's \$410,000. And if I go to note 9, it says the board of directors established a restricted fund for organizational closure costs and future investments. The organization calculates the amount on a yearly basis and restricts available current assets. For 2012, the organizational closure costs amount is \$2,000–\$200,000 and makes note of \$410,000 in December of 2011.

Now that tells me that they were already setting money aside for a closure. Now you've told me that they put in an additional \$500,000 to close down MCEC, so there's \$610,000 that's been set aside. Now you're adding another \$500,000. How much does it cost to close down this organization?

Mr. Kostyshyn: To the questions brought forward and I think it's appropriate to say that the investment has been made in the MCEC and we move forward, as we wind down the operation and the value of the property and a number of other assets, as we move forward, to structure the MCEC, the question being brought forward obviously is that there is the audited statement to come and then I think at that point in time, I'm sure the member opposite, as he refers to in his commentary right now is that we'll be able to answer some of his questions as he refers to, or assumption of the dollars being spent.

Decisions are traditionally made by the board of directors as the MCEC, the government, you know, instituted that the board of directors are responsible for the decision making and move forward with that.

So with the wind down, we see where it's going and simply, as I am sure the member opposite is quite aware of the circumstance that happened in Aberdeen, South Dakota, where there was a processing plant that was set up and went into receivership in short order. We know where the cattle numbers are. We know that it's challenging when we talk about slaughter facilities in the province of Manitoba.

But I want to ensure to the member opposite that when the audited statement, as he's bringing forward some questions at this point in time, we will have some—we'll have the answers for you. The MCEC will have answers for you when the audit is done in 2013 and clarify some of the questions he's bringing forward at this point in time.

* (16:00)

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): As I understand it, with this organization, there's some ongoing costs for filing returns and such over the ensuing years.

Has the government considered selling the company for its losses? Other companies do buy companies that have losses. Has that ever been a consideration?

Mr. Kostyshyn: So are you suggesting that the MCEC company—is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Helwer: You have an organization—I understand it—that is incorporated. You're filing income tax returns. It is an entity. You could sell this entity, I assume. As I said, other companies that operate in Manitoba and elsewhere do buy companies that have a loss, and I don't want to give you the education on how you plan your tax returns but there—is there not an opportunity there to sell this company rather than the Province be responsible—on the hook—for ongoing operations and windup?

Mr. Kostyshyn: The establishment of the MCEC was under the guidance of The Farm Product Marketing Act, so, theoretically, I think what the member opposite is asking—it's—it can't be labeled as a private company, so to speak—all right—

An Honourable Member: No. I did not say it was.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Okay, but it's under the counsel of direction from the farm product marketing council act. It's somewhat difficult to segregate that and establish it as a separate identity and classify it as a private company.

Mr. Helwer: Well, the government did find an opportunity to sell Land Titles. It was not a private company. Government-owned entities are not private. They are corporations. They're incorporated—

An Honourable Member: We did not sell Land Titles.

Mr. Helwer: I'm hearing some buzzing over in the corner here. But, nonetheless, you've managed to sell other assets. Is this not something that could be sold?

Mr. Kostyshyn: In the legal interpretation, when we talk about the MCE—the MCEC was formed under the order-in-council, so getting into the legal interpretation, I think that's where we need to kind of share information, but, theoretically speaking, it's not possible to do the 'sellure' of the MCE as a segregated identifiable body because through the order of council and through the farm production marketing act, it is not designated as something that could be actually sold online.

Mr. Pedersen: Can the minister inform me when Kate Butler was no longer employed by the MCEC?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess we're trying to find the date, but we don't have a definite—but if it's of an importance, we'll definitely research that and get back to you on—of the date that—when Kate left her employment to the MCEC.

Mr. Pedersen: So included in the date of termination of employment, I guess, is what you would call it with the MCEC, can the minister also provide me with the amount of the payout, if there was one, to Kate Butler?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I think for the record, to my understanding, and this was definitely a decision within the board at that point in time with Kate, Mrs.—Ms. Butler chose to pursue other careers so I think the terminology of termination is inappropriate, for the record. And whatever decisions were made it was strictly made through the board's decision and—at that point in time. I was under the impression she was pursuing other careers or potentially extending her education.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, if you don't want to call it termination, then we can call it cease to be employed by the MCEC. But the MCEC is under the arm of this—of your department, so will you tell me what—if there was, the MCEC made on behalf of the department because they are—MCEC is under your department, if there was a payout to Ms. Butler when she was no longer employed by the MCEC?

Mr. Kostyshyn: In all due respect to the member opposite, and I think when we talk about the confidentiality and when we move forward with this, I think that would be probably more appropriately at a different time to be asking the questions or maybe somewhat when the auditor's report comes out, I think that might be appropriate but I think the confidentiality is pretty key at this point and time we're dealing with—and I think a FIPPA request might be very appropriate.

*(16:10)

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I disagree with that statement. This is a department of government. This is an entity within that department, and I think we have every right to know this and you should have this information.

The board of directors was appointed at your discretion, and, therefore, they are accountable to you and to your department, so you should be able to provide those numbers. And, if you're not, then I guess we'll have to try and find them other ways.

Moving on, under other income—pardon me—expenses, December 31st, 2012, there's a writeoff of loans and notes receivable for \$6,400,375. And under note 5, it says a guarantee by the debtor, amongst other things that it says, and that you wrote off impairment in value of loans and notes receivable, \$6,400,375. So what happened there? Can you explain that to me?

Mr. Kostyshyn: With the involvement of the MCEC board and in the question brought forward by the member opposite, and I guess we really don't have that information in front us but I would highly recommend that if the questions need to be addressed as soon as possible, we'll be addressing the issue if so chosen. We can definitely contact the farm production marketing council and the present MCEC board and get the answers for you if you so wish.

Mr. Pedersen: There's a further writedown of long-term investments for \$450,900, with a writedown of provincial levy match receivable, because the province didn't put their—match the levy for \$515,000. So—it's the total writeoff is \$7,363,052. Are you telling me that you have no idea where this money went? There was—there had to be assets or cash or both totalling seven—over \$7.3 million, and you've suddenly written these off and the department has no idea where this money has gone?

Mr. Kostyshyn: In all fairness to the staff and us involved is that we don't have that information in

front of me, and I strongly encourage the member opposite that bring forward the questions as you're asking today and we will somewhat forward it to the acting chair of the MCEC and get back to the questions being brought forward because in all fairness we don't have the information to give you a complete breakdown, but we'll definitely contact the Farm Products Marketing Council and also to the present board of the MCEC that we can find the appropriate answers to your questions. And also keeping in mind that the AGM, which is to be held on May the 9th, I think, is also an opportunity to address some of the questions as well.

Mr. Pedersen: How does the MCEC fit under the Farm Products Marketing Council?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I guess, referring to page 8, there's kind of a chart that indicates where the farm—Manitoba farm production marketing council falls into the jurisdiction, so that's the start of the description. So in the outcome of their programs, the farm marketing council, the following boards' commissions are supervised by the farm marketing council, and there's a total of nine, I believe: Manitoba Dairy Farmers of Manitoba, Keystone Potato Producers Association, Manitoba Beekeepers' Association, Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council, Manitoba Chicken Producers, Manitoba Egg Farmers, Manitoba Pork Council, Manitoba Turkey Producers, and Peak of the Market.

*(16:20)

And I think one thing that's important to maybe bring forward to the member opposite of clarification of the powers and the authority the farm marketing council has is that a Lieutenant Governor-in-Council authorized the nine marketing plan regulations that empowers the nine boards with specific authorities and responsibilities. So the powers are set forward to the Manitoba council to bring forward the appropriate documentation on ad-need basis.

Mr. Pedersen: But, according to this chart on page 8, ultimately, you, as minister, are responsible for this. And now you're telling me you have no answers? You don't have no idea where \$7 million has disappeared in the Cattle Enhancement Council? Does that not concern you?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I want to assure the member opposite that definitely, when we talk about the industry and the importance of agriculture in the province of Manitoba—and I suppose we can get into

a—kind of a discussion, if I may, of the importance of agriculture in the province of Manitoba.

When we talked about the MCEC and the farm marketing council and their authorization to provide information to the minister, and, as I said to the member opposite, it was that the wind down in the farm marketing council, as we're in a position of clarifying the documentation. I am asking for the member opposite to bring forward the questions that we can—unfortunately, today, I don't have that information in front of me. But if the member opposite chooses to want to continue this discussion, I will gladly entertain the discussion with him. But right about now, I think I would respect his opinion of me saying, I don't have the information in front of me, and if we want to make a mockery of the situation, I'll gladly entertain it, and I'll entertain some other discussion down the road, so.

But, at this point in time, the information is not prevalent to me, but I'll gladly share it with you in the appropriate manner. So right about now, I'm sensing that—being repetitious in my answer to you. I'll gladly entertain the questions and have some information. And I'll gladly talk to the acting board and the MCE board to fulfill your questions.

Mr. Pedersen: A year ago in Estimates, Mr. Barry Todd was the deputy minister, and he was also chair of the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. And we asked many of the same questions a year ago as to what happened to the money that was collected, and the minister's answer at that time was that—I just find it in here—was that he would gladly set up a meeting with the MCEC so we could get—have a meeting together with them to understand. That meeting never took place despite our continuing to ask for it.

The minister has not provided any information. This is cattle producers' money that has disappeared. And they're—they were claiming \$6 million in unrestricted assets a year ago, and then when we finally get a financial statement out of them, it's written off. So where'd the money go? Are you not concerned as the minister responsible for the Cattle Enhancement Council? It was your own deputy minister that was chairing this, and now, fortunately for him, he is retired. I wish him well. Where'd the money go?

Mr. Kostyshyn: No, I guess first and foremost I know that I had the pleasure of having yourself and your fellow MLA for Emerson in my office. We had

an opportunity to meet with Kate Butler and a few of the representatives.

So, unless there was another meeting that was required, I sense to remember that meeting in my office. Maybe there was a request for another meeting, but I do distinctly remember that meeting. So, for the record, I think I would be somewhat very informative to let the people know that there was a meeting that took place.

I also want to inform the member opposite that the MCEC have been in discussions with the Manitoba Beef Producers on a regular basis, historically and moving forward on the subject [*inaudible*]

I think being repetitious in my commentary to the member opposite is that, with the dollar figures that he's asking, I am asking for the opportunity to bring the questions forward to me, and I will forward to the questions to the present board of the MCEC to get some answers for you as we had this continued discussion on the MCEC.

Mr. Pedersen: There was net assets end of the year of \$434,190, the end of 2012.

Does the minister have any idea what the net assets were at the end of the year, December 2013?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I'm trying to be as polite as I can, but I'm telling the member opposite I don't have that information in front of me. And I would gladly entertain a discussion with you. But I am at the opportunity to have a discussion with the board, the MCEC board. If that's what it takes to answer some of these questions, I'll gladly provide that information. If you're prepared to bring forward some questions and we'll relay it to the board of the MCEC, I'll gladly entertain that thought.

* (16:30)

Mr. Pedersen: The property at 663 Marion St. is currently listed with a realtor right now for \$1,015,000. Is the minister aware of that?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I'm aware the property is up for sale.

Mr. Pedersen: Is the minister also aware that his predecessor minister of Agriculture has stated—and I can find it if he likes—in previous Estimates that he claimed that that property was worth two and half to three million dollars? What happened to the value?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I can't speak for the previous Agriculture minister's opinion.

Mr. Pedersen: That's probably a good thing.

The—talks about the annual general meeting. When was the last annual general meeting of the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me be repetitious again. The Manitoba council is responsible for the five or seven or nine organizations. Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council is one of them.

You may ask me when the Dairy Farmers of Manitoba have had their last AGM meeting or last board meeting. You may ask me when the Peak of the Market had their last meetings. There's a number of other organizations similar to the MCEC, so I think it's very inappropriate for the member opposite to bring forward a question that I really don't see—that is irrelevant at this point and when you compare it to other organizations similar to the MCEC. So, for the record, I think we need to set that record. I am not there to babysit or have the opportunity to babysit what they do as far the organization. That is part of the Manitoba 'councillings'—or production marketing council.

Mr. Pedersen: Seven-million-dollar loss—you should have some responsibility here.

When—where in this Estimates book—you were quoting under the Farm Products Marketing Council the agencies listed. Is it in the Estimates book and where?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Page 49, to the member opposite. And I think we can—back to your early commentary, to the member opposite, I'm sure the member opposite can really have some shining stars of decisions that their government made years ago as well, so I'd be—so I'm sure there's a lot of people in cellphone service would love to have the opportunity to have cellphone service in appropriate locations. So I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Pedersen: All right. So it's in the Estimates book. It's under boards, commissions and agencies, under the Farm Products Marketing Council. How do I find out where the annual general meeting is? You've told me it's May 9th. You must have some other information. Where is it, who is eligible to attend and who is eligible to ask questions of the directors who will be running the meeting?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Staff was able to research some prior questions. The last MCEC AGM was April the 4th, 2013. And, as far as the upcoming meeting, is on the MCEC website. It's advertising it as far as

May the 9th, I believe is what's indicated. So—and I think in collaboration with the Manitoba Beef Producers—I think there is a—[*interjection*—]Manitoba Cattle Enhancement—I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, keep going. You have the floor.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council, MCEC, will be holding its annual meeting on May the 9th, 2014, at one—yes—time 1 p.m., location Dairy Farmers of Manitoba board room, 4055 Portage Avenue.

Mr. Pedersen: So who is eligible to attend and partake in the meeting?

Mr. Kostyshyn: It's open to the public.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I don't mean to belabour the situation, but I'm going to anyway because annual general meetings tend to be for members only. So there is no requirement that you have contributed to the levy of this, this is open to the general public for anybody's participation?

Mr. Kostyshyn: To appease the member opposite—I thought he doesn't want to spend any more time with me like Friday that it's appropriate, but I'll accommodate his wishes by all means. But I appreciate your sense of humour, member opposite.

I do want to say the public meeting that's being called by the MCEC a long—it's open to the public, the people that aren't—can't vote on decisions at that AGM. It's open to the public, right? But as far as whether you're a paid member that paid into the MCEC check op, those are the people that are—have the opportunity to vote on circumstances at the AGM. But it doesn't mean it's restricted to only the AGM public.

Mr. Pedersen: What about a—so it's open to any cattle producer who has contributed a levy to the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. What if that producer has taken his refund out?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I think it would be only be appropriate that if we wanted to get into the details that we could get into the MCEC bylaws or policies and get clarification. If it's a concern who should be at the AGM meeting or not, we'll gladly try and find out the necessary documentation and share that with the member.

* (16:40)

Mr. Pedersen: Well, perhaps the minister can understand my concern about this, because there is

\$7 million missing. There's a piece of property that's for sale, not nearly anywhere near that \$7 million to recoup.

The minister's told me you've kicked a further \$500,000 into this organization. So I want to make sure that cattle producers are aware of this annual general meeting and that they are, indeed, able to ask the questions that the minister either refuses to answer or is unable to answer.

So I—to—I will also check the bylaws on this. I will make sure that there are cattle producers there because there's a lot of money has disappeared in this organization.

But I have just one final question then about the MCEC: What is happening with Plains Processors and the \$920,000 that was promised to Plains Processors? What has happened to that?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Just to go back to the commentary by the member opposite of the \$7 million, and I guess I've been somewhat patient and understanding, but I think needs—this needs to be said for the record.

The seven point some-odd million dollars the member opposite is making forward in the statement—and for the record, let's get this clarified. The \$7 million, when you take off the previous collection—or the request for producers asking for their rebate, the net amount was \$5.6 million, not to seven two point five million dollars.

An Honourable Member: So, really, there's only \$5.6 million missing.

Mr. Kostyshyn: I thought that you would be happy.

But council also invested about six point eight point million dollars into development of the project. And maybe go down the memory lane where, as you may recall, the federal government had made a commitment of a \$10 million toward the project and chose to rescind their commitment of moving forward with the MCEC, at which point in time made it so challenging for the MCE organization to move forward with the Marion Street project.

So I just wanted to make that commentary is that obviously the member opposite is—seems to be echoing the dollar. Maybe for the record, we need to clarify that this \$5.6 million was the dollars that's outstanding, not the seven some-odd million dollars.

So there was a purchase of property that also was part of that, as well, when we have a breakdown of the assets. And we do have some asset values that

we're moving on, but I think we need to share the investments that were made. And I'll gladly share some of those additional breakdowns of cost and move forward on the challenges.

As we all know, the MCEC—the BSE, without any doubt in my mind, was the most challenging thing in the cattle industry. And, unfortunately, today we are still dealing with the hangover of the BSE crisis in the province of Manitoba. And I think being—whether you're a feedlot operator and dealing with your financial hardships being a feedlot operator or whether you're a cow-calf producer, I think we've all witnessed it, in our own backyards, of the challenges of the BSE scenario. And it's not—and we continue to struggle with that and—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Midland.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I had my researcher check, and I certainly believe he is far more skilled on the Internet than I ever will be, and there is no mention on MCEC's website about an AGM coming up on May 9th.

So where is this information coming from? And how are cattle producers across the province who have put money into this organization—where are they supposed to find this? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Sorry, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Quite all right.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Staff has just informed me, as their discussion with the appropriate staff, of the MCE AGM is online or will be very shortly so it's in the process.

Mr. Pedersen: So the other question was Plains Processors.

Mr. Kostyshyn: To bring up the dollar figure the member opposite is asking, the Manitoba government contributed \$390,000 to the plains processing while under the construction. So it was based at \$390,000 grant that was provided to the Plains Processors.

Mr. Pedersen: Is it a grant, a loan, a forgivable loan? And the minister said government of Manitoba; was it the government of Manitoba or is it the cattle—Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Infrastructure grant from the Province of Manitoba.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The minister, I think, probably about two years ago, oversaw some pretty steep productions in funding for the regional economic development agencies and I wonder if the minister can provide an update on what's the status of the agencies which still exist and what the funding is.

Mr. Kostyshyn: As the staff are having some discussion, but I'm—I'd like to acknowledge the member. Partner 4 Growth is probably one of the new tools that we've [*inaudible*] yesterday or last week at the royal winter fair, we traditionally had dollars that were Partner 4 Growth was \$130,000 this year. The government has doubled that opportunity for communities and to provide regional economic growth in the province of Manitoba. So if you may recall the news announcement, deals with a breakdown of—and this being one of many. The \$260,000 as you were to break down in the particular community, \$8,000 is available in a matching grant, 50-50 dollar per cent matching grant to do a feasibility study to—in various locations throughout the province of Manitoba. And the secondary grant has a dollar amount of \$15,000, which is also a matching grant. And this is all structured to developments—rural development but provide new businesses or economic growth in the province of Manitoba. And there's a number of other ones, too, to the member opposite and I'll gladly share some of that if so need be.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I asked—there were, I think it was something like seven regional economic development corporations. What is the status of those corporations currently and what's the status of their funding?

* (16:50)

Mr. Kostyshyn: As the member opposite, I'm sure, is aware of the fact that some of the regional economic development corps are still maintaining their own existence with, you know, support of the local municipal governments. But as the Province has chosen to refocus and brought out other programs similar to the Partner 4 Growth is the new way of thinking and I don't have the information from you—which boards are still in existence and which ones are non-existent—but, you know, the value of the organization was greatly appreciated but I think what we're looking at is the Partner 4 Growth being the replacement of an opportunity for economic development in appropriate areas.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for the clarification and I'm a little surprised that he's not

even aware of which ones are still alive and which are not but we'll just take that as it may be.

One of the areas which is covered in the departmental expenditures Estimates is the area of addressing climate change and one of the significant greenhouse gases that's produced is nitrous oxide so I'm asking the minister, one of the problems with the government not meeting its target in terms of climate change reduction, in fact a major one, was the fact that agricultural greenhouse gases continue to go up instead of being properly addressed, you know, reductions being achieved. What's the current status of the nitrous oxide production by agriculture in Manitoba? What measurements does the department have of what's happening and what are the department's plans in terms of achieving reductions of nitrous oxide production?

Mr. Kostyshyn: I apologize for the time delay in getting educated on the greenhouse gas emissions.

Without a doubt, you know, climate change is something that I think, within Canada, within the world, we realize the—what climate change is. And I want to ensure the member opposite that Department of Agriculture is in tune with the importance of dealing with greenhouse and climate change.

And I guess, how do we show our importance? I think that, without a doubt, that we've invested, through Growing Forward 2, an estimated \$3.2 million of working with alternative mechanisms to deal with the situation. And also, through Manitoba—that's 1.2 with the manure management program—\$1.5 million is going to that. And the 'biomask,' we've allocated about \$1 million. It's a number of factions as we've set our sights on it and we continue to work with it.

And, with agriculture, Environment Canada's national inventory reports show that, for 2011, Manitoba agriculture greenhouse gas emissions dropped to the lowest level since 1993. So I'm sensing that we are doing something right, but it depends a lot on the environment that it occurs.

And, however, this was largely result of flooding and extremely wet conditions, which the province was prevented from seeding and fertilizing, so obviously that was a—it's kind of one of the worst and in the best of the scenarios, so you deal with it.

But I just want to acknowledge the importance that we're well aware of it through Department of Agriculture, and we will continue to find, hopefully, some sweet spot to deal with the mechanisms.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister. I hope that the minister's not proposing that floods are an answer to anything agriculture or greenhouse gas production. And I look forward to further commitments and plans and targets and so on from the minister.

We have an epidemic in diabetes going on in this province since 1996 and about 100,000 people affected with diabetes.

Does the minister sit on an interdepartmental working committee because agriculture and food is really a critical issue in terms of diabetes?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you for, I think, which is a very important question, as the member opposite is quite familiar with the 'northy' healthy food initiatives. And we talk about creating opportunities to grow food in greenhouses in designated locations, I think, is a start because obviously proper food and proper diet minimizes the risk as when we talk about diabetes.

And also the other thing is that they are—MAFRD is committed to the Canadian centre for ag food research and medicine. And I know that I don't need to educate the member opposite about the importance of the St. Boniface centre and the research that's done through the pharmaceutical and 'neuroceutical' application.

And the great stories of the products we grow in the province of Manitoba and how we can create added value towards that, such as the flax seed of the worlds or the hemp of the seeds of the world and—

Mr. Chairperson: Regrettably, the hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

EDUCATION AND ADVANCED LEARNING

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Tom Nevakshonoff): Order. 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 Education and Advanced Learning.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I do, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Chair recognizes the honourable minister.

Mr. Allum: I'm honoured to be doing my very first Estimates process as the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, and I'm very proud to be doing it right here in the Chamber. It strikes as a moment of—to reflect on how great it is to work in this Legislature, how important it is to be part of a great democratic society and certainly, Mr. Chair, to be a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba. It's a great honour and a great privilege for me personally.

And to be appointed the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, as I say, an incredible privilege and incredible honour, and I look forward to a good dialogue with my friend across the floor. And I'm certainly proud of the work that the Department of Education and Advanced Learning has done over the years. I'm extraordinarily proud of the work that my predecessors have done, and I feel extremely honoured to be a part of this process.

Mr. Chair, as you know, our government is committed to investing in Manitoba and ensuring that we grow our economy, invest in infrastructure and create good jobs for Manitobans. To fulfill this commitment, we have to ensure that Manitobans have the skills and training they need to get a good job. This means that Manitoba's education system has a key role to play in ensuring that our province is able to grow and to prosper.

Our province, like other provinces across the country, has weathered some difficult economic times over the last number of years. Our government remains committed to serving all Manitobans, and we know that challenging times are not the time to make reckless cuts, as our critics would have us do. We also know that funding for education is an investment in our shared future, and this is why we are investing in education and training so our kids will have every opportunity to learn the skills they need to get good jobs and stay in Manitoba to raise their families.

With Budget 2014, our government renewed its commitment to public education funding. In January, we announced an additional \$24.4-million investment, bringing our total funding for public education to \$1.24 billion. This means that since we first formed government, overall funding has increased to four—by \$470 million, or 61 per cent, a record that meets or exceeds economic growth every single year. Our funding to schools ensures that no school division receives less money than they did the previous year, even in the face of declining

enrolment in some cases. Our education system is well funded, and school divisions have been given the tools they need to ensure that funding goes into the classrooms, not the boardrooms, and provide for the highest quality of education possible for our students.

Budget 2014 also confirmed our commitment to Manitoba's post-secondary sector. While other provinces are freezing and cutting funding to colleges and universities, we invested a further 2.5 per cent in universities and 2 per cent in colleges. Funding for universities and colleges has more than doubled since we've formed government. We are proud of our record of keeping university affordable and accessible for students. Our government has frozen university tuition fees to the rate of inflation, and this means our students enjoy the third lowest university and second lowest college tuition fees in the country. Our plan for post-secondary is working. Since we've formed government, enrolment at colleges and universities has increased by more than 44 per cent. We have made substantial investments in supports for students, including more than \$240 million in grants, scholarships and bursaries for this year alone, providing over \$90 million in tax rebates to students who stay and work in Manitoba and reducing interest rates on Manitoba student loans to prime. Our post-secondary system in Manitoba is strong, accessible and provides a quality, affordable education for Manitoba students.

We are also making investments into our public schools infrastructure. We've invested over \$1 billion since forming government in public school capital projects, including 21 new schools and 14 replacement schools. We have also completed extensive renovations and additions to dozens of existing schools and made significant investments in new gyms, science labs and shop classes. As I speak, we are building and expanding schools in Amber Trails, Thompson, St. Boniface, Waverley Heights, Brandon, Steinbach, Sage Creek and Waverley West, not to mention the new school we recently opened in Winkler.

In 2011, our government announced that kindergarten to grade 3 classes throughout Manitoba will be limited to 20 students by September 2017. Parents know that the more one-on-one time their children have with their teacher in these crucial early years, the better equipped they will be to become lifelong learners. That is why this year we are invested—we invested a further \$12.4 million to build or renovate 21 new classrooms in eight schools

across the province. We also invested an additional \$3 million to hire at least 50 new teachers for the upcoming school year. This brings our commitment for smaller class sizes to \$39 million—\$29 million for capital spending, \$10 million for operating. To date, we have worked with our school division partners to hire 213 new teachers and have reduced the number of K-to-3 classes with more than 24 students by 41 per cent.

Our government has worked to make our schools stronger, safer and more inclusive. After a long process, we were able to proclaim Bill 18, The Safe and Inclusive Schools Act, to give Manitoba more tools to fight bullying and cyber-bullying. We know that students can't learn when they don't feel safe, and this legislation will help ensure that schools have appropriate policies and consequences in place for bullying and other serious incidents. Schools will also have to accommodate school groups that seek to promote diversity and create human diversity policies that will help create safe and inclusive learning environments.

Our government believes that all students, regardless of the background or their sexual orientation, deserve to be safe in Manitoba schools, and we will continue to work with our partners to make this the everyday reality in all our schools.

We are also making it easier for parents to be informed about their children's progress in school. We have now rolled out a parent-friendly report card and are in the process of launching a parent-friendly curriculum website. Currently, parent-friendly kindergarten to grade 8 curriculum is online so that the parents have an easier time understanding what learning outcomes are expected for their child. By giving parents the tools they need to see their child's progress and their expected learning outcomes, parents can become partners in their child's education.

Our government also brought in The International Education Act to regulate the international education industry in Manitoba and protect international students. The first-of-its-kind legislation will promote Manitoba's reputation as a destination choice for study, by putting in safeguards to protect against unscrupulous recruiters and practices in international education. This builds on our pioneering work to establish an off-campus program for international students, introducing an international student's dream into the Provincial Nominee Program, extended health-care benefits to

international students, and provide tuition tax rebates to help attract students to study, work and stay in Manitoba.

Mr. Chair, our government's record is clear when it comes to ensuring our school system is well resourced, but we're also committed to ensuring our students are equipped to enter the 21st century workplace. At the heart of this are three important components: quality, skills training and career training. Parents expect that when their child is in school they are receiving the best education they can. The education system must ensure that it lives up to this trust by ensuring that we give our students every opportunity for good jobs and a bright future, based on a high-quality education. This is why we are ensuring that schools focus on the fundamentals to make sure the students have the foundational skills in math, reading, writing and science they need to take advantage of future opportunities.

Our government knows that training options are only one of a part of ensuring our students have a bright and rewarding future. Students will 'lead' to know and understand that their—what their options are while they are still in high school. That is why our government announced a new \$1-million fund for career development in schools to help students develop clear paths—career paths. This is in addition to the \$1-million fund we announced on quality and the \$1 million we announced for skills training related to equipment in schools.

Our government is working to ensure that our education system at all levels is well resourced and provides a quality education for our students. We want to ensure that there are no wrong doors in the education system, and that as students transition from the K-to-12 system to higher learning or the workplace, they have the training and the knowledge they need to reach their full potential to stay here and live in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Does the critic for the official opposition, the member for Lac du Bonnet, have any opening remarks? Seeing that he does, the Chair recognizes the member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I thank the minister for bringing his opening statement, and congratulate him on his appointment to Cabinet in such a very, very, very important role we play as

legislators. And to be in charge of a department for Education and Advanced Learning is quite the important role in our democratic system.

I would like to, at this time, thank the staff of the department for putting in their time and efforts getting ready for this upcoming budgetary year, and all the efforts that they put in to try to bring our levels, I guess, of—whether it's literacy or numeracy levels, up to standards, as opposed to where we sit now, near the bottom, within Canada. I know that they are—a lot of the teachers and staff—that goes from absolutely everybody: bus drivers, custodians, administration staff, superintendents, principals, EAs, therapists—I know from first-hand that people are working very, very hard to try to give our kids in this wonderful province of ours the best education that they possibly can, but that being said, Mr. Chair, that it doesn't mean that we don't have a ways to go.

As the minister failed to mention, we are near the bottom in numeracy and literacy within this great country of ours, and I don't think, this day and age, Mr. Chair, that we should be there. We should be one of the leading provinces in this great nation, and I know that I, too, am going to enjoy the many, many hours that we have slated in this Chamber to talk about those various issues and also hear from the minister some of their plans moving forward.

That being said, as far as advanced learning, post-secondary education, we have many, many, many different opportunities and options for students, as the minister has alluded to in his opening statement and couple questions that I'll have as we move forward through the Estimates process. I'm sure I will get a lot of answers out of this new minister. I know that him and I have shared a few chats, and I'm looking forward to the process, going through the process, and as I said, getting some answers to some very tough questions that I don't believe that we've received answers in the past, but I do have faith in this minister, and, hopefully, we will be able to get this to the bottom of some of the questions that we've been having for the past few years.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I thank you for a few minutes and we'll get under way.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the official opposition critic.

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

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

At this time, we invite the minister's staff and staff from the official opposition to join us in the Chamber, and once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Honourable Minister, to introduce his staff, please.

* (14:50)

Mr. Allum: To my right, Lynne Mavins, director of Schools' Finance Branch; Ray Karasevich, secretary, Council on Post-Secondary Education; to my left, David Yeo, Education Administration Services; and beside him, Claude Fortier, executive financial officer, finance and administration.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

The official opposition critic, to introduce his staff.

Mr. Ewasko: I have Mr. Spencer Fernando, one of our policy analysts. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Ewasko: We'll do global.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreeable to the honourable minister?

Mr. Allum: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Chairperson: On that note, the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ewasko: Minister, if you could go through the—because the department is now amalgamated with Advanced Learning—or Advanced Learning and Education, can you go through your organizational chart and let us know, sort of, who has come over from which department and also if there's either—any vacancies. Just the names of the people and their positions.

Mr. Allum: I thank the member for the question. We'll get this right as we go along, so he'll—ask for his patience as we go forward as I try to do this in the proper fashion, so.

Of course, Gerald Farthing is the deputy minister of the department, and we have a School Programs Division in the Department of Education and Advanced Learning. The assistant deputy minister is

Aileen Najduch. We have the Bureau de l'éducation française division, and the assistant deputy minister there is Monsieur Jean-Vianney Auclair. In addition to that, we have the Financial and Administrative Services branch, and the executive financial officer there is Claude Fortier.

We have Education Administration Services, and the director there is Dave Yeo. We have the Schools' Finance Branch as well, and the director is Lynne Mavins. And then we have Manitoba Student Aid, executive director is Kim Huebner.

In addition to that, we had the Council on Post-Secondary Education, and Mr. Karasevich is here with me today, and he's the secretary. It became part of the new department, as did International Education, and the director there is Cheryl Prokopanko. And I think the member is probably looking at the organizational chart, he'll see that we also have an Aboriginal Education Directorate, and there the director is Helen Robinson-Settee.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you. Could the minister also provide the names of all staff within his office and the deputy minister's office as well?

Mr. Allum: I am pleased to say that I am surrounded by extraordinary people both in the department and, in particular, in terms of personal support to me, the people in my office as well as the people that are in the office of the deputy minister.

The administrative secretary to the minister is Pearl Domienik. The administrative secretary in my office is Debbie Milani. The—executive—my executive assistant is Linda Wilson [*phonetic*]. The special assistant—my special assistant is Tim Johnson. The administrative secretary in the office is Melissa Friesen, and my special adviser is Carolina Stecher.

In addition, in the deputy minister's office, as I said earlier, Dr. Gerald Farthing is the deputy minister. Debbie Joynt is the administration—administrative secretary to the deputy minister; and Leezann Freed-Lobchuk is the executive assistant to the deputy minister.

Mr. Ewasko: Some of the members that were of the staff of Advanced Learning and also with Education, was there anybody that had to be repositioned within other departments, or did everybody pretty much find a spot within the new Department of Education and Advanced Learning?

Mr. Allum: I understand that there were a couple of repositionings. One staff member went to Health and one to Multiculturalism and Literacy. And I didn't properly probably clarify previously that when the Cabinet shuffle occurred and the department was joined two into one, Adult Learning was transferred to Multiculturalism and Literacy, just for clarification purposes.

Mr. Ewasko: Who are those people that transferred over to Health and to the other department that you mentioned?

Mr. Allum: Both were administrative secretary positions, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ewasko: Is there any vacancy rate within the department right now? Are all positions filled?

Mr. Allum: Yes, there are 42.18 vacant positions, and that's a vacancy rate of 8.63 per cent.

Mr. Ewasko: And so whenever we do have—whenever we see amalgamations I know that there's always the hopes and dreams of finding efficiencies and so forth, but with the merger of the two departments, have there been any staffing reductions and what were those positions and where have those people gone if there has been, and names of them as well, please?

* (15:00)

Mr. Allum: Yes, I would, and I'm sure the member's looking at the Estimates book now. If you were to turn to page 12 at the bottom, he would see that we have gone from a staff total of 490 to 479.

Mr. Ewasko: I—yes, I did see that, minister, thank you. But part of the question also was in regards to where did these people go? Has there been absolute layoffs? Have they been transferred within other departments?

Mr. Allum: The answer that—is that these were just a reduction in vacant positions; no job losses, no layoffs, nothing of that kind.

Mr. Ewasko: So a reduction in positions that were actually vacant—so we must have actually saved quite a bit of money in regards to salaries and that. Can you tell me exactly what the savings were?

Mr. Allum: Believe the total savings were \$290,000.

Mr. Ewasko: And how many positions were vacant?

Mr. Allum: There were 42 vacant positions and as a—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Would the minister repeat that number. I didn't hear it on my microphone.

Mr. Allum: Yes, there were 42 vacant positions and I believe that sits at 32 now, following some positions being filled.

Mr. Ewasko: So, there were 42 vacant positions; now there's 32 vacant positions and you had said how many jobs were not lost, you said, just not filled. There were no job losses. So are you telling me that there was only 10 with the amalgamation of the two departments, there was only 10 positions that were not then filled?

Mr. Allum: Just to clarify, we've reduced by 10 positions.

Mr. Ewasko: So the Department of Education and the department for Advanced Education and Literacy from before, combined, had 42 vacant positions, and now with the amalgamation, we've got 32 vacant positions. So with the combination of the two departments, all we're really saving is 10 positions which are technically vacant, and you're coming up with a savings of \$290,000. Is that math making sense to the minister?

Mr. Allum: I compliment the member on his math skills off the top of his head; I don't see a calculator over there anywhere.

Not all of the positions that I just referred to had actual dollars attached to them. Consequently, there was an overall savings of \$290,000. Some money during that time was shifted around to priority areas in order to fulfill positions there.

Mr. Ewasko: So, can the minister and his department tell me where those dollars have gone? Have they gone within the department? Have they been transferred outside of the department? And what are the values of those?

Mr. Allum: I think, because of the nature and technical character of the questions, we'll take that under notice. We'll do—provide a proper reconciliation for you so that you have that full information—so that the member has that full information.

Mr. Ewasko: I thank the minister for the answer, and I'd like to ask him what he sees as a timeline when I could possibly get that. Would it be before the end of Estimates?

Mr. Allum: Yes, I'd advise the member that we will do everything in our power to get them before the end of Estimates, yes.

Mr. Ewasko: Just for clarification of my question; Education Estimates? Could we get it before the end of Education Estimates?

Mr. Allum: Well, of course, we're in a bit of a start-stop kind of a mode, as my honourable friend knows, in terms of our scheduling, so it's hard to understand when we'll be ending, but I certainly make that commitment to him.

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate that and thank the minister.

The minister, in his opening statement, and as well as the news releases, has said that the—that he's dedicating \$12.4 million to capital program. I would just like to know if he has those projects itemized and how many have already gone to tender? How many have been—you know, are these new projects? Are these ones that have been announced in the past? What are we looking towards?

*(15:10)

Mr. Allum: I just wanted to clarify that when we refer to the \$12.4 million in capital we're referring to the small class size initiative. So—[interjection] Well, I didn't hear that in—[interjection] Okay—just I'll—[interjection] Okay—our mic is now back in order we—all systems to go.

Again, I just want to clarify for the member that when I refer to \$12.4 million in capital in the opening statement we were referring only to the small class size initiative. And so he asked for details and specifics around the specific projects for this year.

In the River East Transcona division we're—at the Harold Hatcher School we're making renovations to the two kindergarten rooms and a grade 5 classroom that will provide two additional kindergarten to grade 3 classrooms at a total cost of \$0.4 million—\$400,000, right.

Next, in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, at Assiniboine school kindergarten renovation including a new washroom and that also is \$400,000. And then also at Crestview School, again, kindergarten renovation including a new washroom costed at \$400,000.

In the Hanover School Division in the Blumenort School it's a two-classroom addition

costed at \$1.6 million. In the Niverville school it's a five-classroom addition costed at \$2.5 million. Also in Hanover is the South Oaks school, this is a four-classroom addition at a total cost of \$3.2 million.

In River East Transcona, this is at École Centrale, a three-classroom addition at two—costed at \$2.4 million.

In the Seven Oaks School Division at the R.F. Morrison School a three-classroom addition costed at \$2.4 million.

So, Mr. Chair, for the members benefit: total number of divisions, four; total number of schools for this \$12.4 million this year is eight; a total number of classroom renovations and additions is 21; total for 2014-15 capital, an investment of over \$12.4 million. I think those are all the details.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, the minister, for the tidbit of information.

In regards to the K-to-3 class sizes, and you're talking the \$12.4 million in renos or new builds or renovations, I guess, or pods, or—what's the proper term for them, modular classrooms? Are we seeing that that is it as far as renovations go to meet the standards put out by the department to lower class sizes to 20 in the K to 3, or is there more to come? Is this a gradual thing over the next few years or, you know, how are we expecting schools to meet that level, you know, on a gradual basis, when the mandate has come down from the department as of now?

Mr. Allum: Well, I thank the member for the question. I thank him for his interest in the small class size initiative, because it is one of the signature pieces of the educational agenda for the government of Manitoba going forward. He'll know that it's a five-year commitment that we've made to reduce K-to-3 class sizes. We want to put more teachers in more classrooms, to ensure that kids get that individual attention that they need. And I know he's a teacher himself, so he'll appreciate the value of one-on-one time between a teacher and a student.

As I said, the K-3 Class Size Initiative is a five-year undertaking. On the capital side, we're taking a phased approach to it. We have made some progress to date on renovations or new classrooms as required. This is—this being, I guess, phase 2, we would characterize it as it is. And I would suggest to the member that there is, indeed,

more to come, as we fill out the completion of that initiative in the next couple of years.

And so, yes, there'll be—there will be more to come and more analysis undertaken by the department to ensure that the right schools in the right school divisions are being examined and appropriately renovated, or if we need to build new, then so be it. As I say, it's a phased-in approach. I think it has gone really, fabulously well to date. And everywhere I've been in my new portfolio, in my new position, as I talk to schools, as I talk to parents, as I talk to teachers, I certainly appreciate that there is a widespread consensus across the province, that we—our K-to-3 initiative is on track, it is serving our students extraordinarily well and our parents are extremely pleased with the progress that we've made to date.

Mr. Ewasko: It was an interesting announcement, to reduce those class sizes or have them mandated. What was the percentage of classes that—where school divisions and schools that actually were the K to 3 that already were at that number, if not exceeding that number, within the province of Manitoba?

*(15:20)

Mr. Allum: Yes, and I would again want to reiterate the incredible progress that has been made to date with respect to the K-3 Class Size Initiative. There are 225 more K-to-3 classes since the onset of the smaller class size initiative; 87 per cent of the K-to-3 classes have 23 or fewer students. There are 484 more classes in this category than prior to the initiative; 59.5 per cent of K-to-3 classes have 20 or fewer students. There are 438 more classes in this category than prior to the initiative; 12.9 per cent of K-to-3 classes have more than 24 students. There are 263 fewer K-to-3 classes in this category than prior to the initiative; this represents a 41 per cent decrease.

I want to just reiterate again that when we visit schools, when we talk to principals, when we talk to teachers, talk to parents, and, in fact, Mr. Chair, because I do wade in and talk to students more often than not when I'm there, I think there's an across-the-board consensus that the class-size initiative providing more one-on-one time between teacher and student and the progress we've made to date across the province is something that has been singularly well-received. And I'm very proud of the initiative and progress that we've made to date.

Mr. Ewasko: How many of those, once the announcement had come down to mandate the class sizes—the K-to-3 class sizes under the magic number of 20—how many schools in total throughout the province actually needed either renovations, additions or anything to basically to accommodate the additional classes?

Mr. Allum: We'll endeavour to find you—the member the precise information that he's asking for in that regard. I would just add that, of course, there were some schools that required no renovation or reconstruction or additions when the initiative was undertaken. Consequently, it's a bit of a moving target and has been, but we will endeavour to provide the precise information that he's looking for to the very best of our ability, and, again, within the time that we have previously agreed on if at all possible. And, if it's not possible to meet that particular timeline, I will certainly make a point of indicating so to the member and make sure that I'm on top of it on his behalf. I think I owe him that much.

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate that, Mr. Minister.

Due to the class-size initiative, is it not going to then be an issue when we do get to the grade 4 level? And what do we see coming down from the department? Is this going to be something that's going to be expanded as the years go on to 4, 5, 6?

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Chair, in answer to the member's question, to date, in the short time period that this initiative has been under way—and so I can only say to date—we have not seen a ballooning of class sizes in grades 4, 5 and 6. I think he can appreciate that we'll need to continue to monitor the impact as we go forward, and we will certainly intend to do so, but I remind him that the objective here, at least in its initial inspiration, was to make sure that we have the highest quality learning environment and highest quality learning outcomes for students in the K-to-3 grade range.

And he might find this interesting; I certainly had. Manitoba Teachers' Society provided—did undertake—undertook a survey and shared some results with our department. In terms of the opportunity for more individualized attention, nine out of 10 teachers believe that there has been a positive impact of the initiative. Seventy-five per cent of those surveyed found that it was a significant positive impact of the initiative to date.

When it came to student engagement in learning, again, nine out of 10 teachers believed that there had been a positive impact, and in this case 64 per cent had said that there was a significant positive impact.

When measuring student behaviour in the context of the K-to-3 small-class-size initiative, eight out of 10 teachers believed that there had been a positive impact on student behaviour; 58 per cent a significant positive impact.

And then, in terms of that critical relationship between a teacher and the parent and/or guardian of a child in a K-to-3 grade setting, seven out of 10 teachers believed that there had been a positive impact in terms of that relationship between the parents and the teacher and/or guardian.

And I know—Mr. Chair, I'm a parent. I know how critical that small-class-size initiative would've been for my children when they were—sadly, it's a long time ago now, but when they were in those K to 3 years. And I am particularly impressed that it's actually gone so far as to improve relationships between, not only teacher and student, but teacher and parent, which you know is a critical part of any educational undertaking. And if we are to have successful students in the future, then we want to make sure that that's inclusive of students with full 'partation'—participation of the teachers and parents.

Mr. Ewasko: So, with the class size initiative and understanding that K to 3 is the most critical time of any youth or early childhood development, you mentioned behaviour has reduced quite significantly due to the initiative, and this is the survey put out by the Manitoba Teachers' Society. How is the minister and his department taking a look at that? How are you possibly even tracking that? Is it on their new report cards at the K-to-3 level? How are—how is the minister getting this data besides the Manitoba Teachers' Society?

Mr. Allum: Of course, in the first instance, as we talk about the survey undertaken by the Manitoba Teachers' Society, we would want that first-hand account, that first-hand information provided by the very people who are in the classroom, who are working with our K-to-3 students in the class—small-class-size setting. So, in the first instance, we take seriously the survey that was undertaken by MTS.

* (15:30)

Needless to say, the department is in ongoing conversation with school divisions. We're in ongoing

conversations with superintendents, with principals, with teachers, of course, with parents as well. We've spent an extraordinary amount of time trying to engage with parents, because, as I said earlier, it's essential that student—for student success that a parent be just as engaged as anyone else. Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, MAPC, is a very, very strong supporter and advocate of the class-size initiative, and so I think that we undertake to monitor—and it's always a good question to see how you're doing—undertake to monitor the progress of the initiative in the classroom in a variety of ways. But, as I said in the first instance, that first-hand account of teachers in the classroom setting, I think—and he would agree with this as a teacher himself—is a very, very significant indication of the progress and success of the initiative to date.

Mr. Ewasko: How many teachers—the minister references the Manitoba Teachers' Society survey—how many teachers were actually surveyed, and does he have a copy of that survey?

Mr. Allum: The survey that we were—I was just referring to is the annual teacher workload survey undertaken by MTS annually, as the title would suggest. This particular survey was undertaken in the fall of 2013. It surveyed specifically the teachers teaching in a kindergarten to grade 3 setting, so not just all teachers and how they felt about, but actually teachers who were engaged in the classroom from kindergarten through grades 1, 2 and 3.

I should have added earlier, Mr. Chair, in terms of monitoring and measuring—and the member may well know this—that the new report card does in fact include an analysis of behaviour in addition to other elements of it. So there is some analysis being done by teachers in the classroom that's recorded on the report card for the information of the parents.

Mr. Ewasko: So how many teachers actually had filled out the survey and had handed it in?

Mr. Allum: We'll need to take that under advisement, see if we can obtain the figures that the member is asking for, and we'll endeavour to do so.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for getting me that information before the Education Estimates are up.

But he did state that 75 per cent of the teachers were absolutely thrilled with the new class sizes. And so, of course, as he knows as well as I know, 75 per cent could, you know, be three of four teachers. You know, a hundred per cent could be

four of four teachers. So, as he's getting those figures for me, I'd also appreciate a copy of the questions and the survey that actually was asked, and, also, did the department have a say into what that survey looked like, what the questions were, all of that jazz?

Mr. Allum: I thank the member for that. We'll endeavour to provide him with the very specific information that we can in terms of the number involved. I don't need to remind him, of course, that although I take his example of three of four teachers and what not, he should remember that in this initiative, we've hired 213 more teachers than were previously in place, and so, consequently, I'm pretty confident that we'll have a larger sample than his example indicated, but I take him at his point and we'll endeavour to do to the best of our ability.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Minister, and I look forward to getting the sample of the survey as well as the numbers of teachers who filled those out and the breakdown. I don't need any specific names, of course, and I know that the minister is not asking for that as well.

So did—he didn't answer one part of the question, though. Did his department have any say in the questions that went out to those teachers?

Mr. Allum: And it's a good question, Mr. Chair, that the member asks. In no way did we frame any of the questions that were undertaken in the survey, but we did reach out to MTS, Manitoba Teachers' Society, to ask them to help us to gather information on how things were going in the classroom in the K-3 Class Size Initiative. So no questions came from us; none were framed by the department, but the department did request the Manitoba Teachers' Society to gather some information from teachers' perspectives on how things were indeed going in the classroom. And, as the results of the survey that I just provided to the member suggest, there's a high level of satisfaction with the initiative to date by teachers in the classroom who are seeing the positive impact that that one-on-one relationship—more time for one-on-one relationships—can have between a student and a teacher. So that's my understanding of where things stand in relation to that specific survey.

Mr. Ewasko: Does the Manitoba Teachers' Society get any funding from the Department of Education?

Mr. Allum: With respect, ask the member to repeat the question, if at all possible.

Mr. Ewasko: Does the Manitoba Teachers' Society get any funding from the Department of Education?

Mr. Allum: No, but let me add in relation to the earlier question that the member asked; it's our understanding that 800 teachers were polled in the survey. It was a phone survey, as I understand, just to add some additional detail and context, if that's at all helpful to the member.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister for Lac du Bonnet.

* (15:40)

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Not quite yet, but hopefully in a couple years or in the next election, and if the minister, as of today, is so lucky, he'll be on this side asking questions. But thanks for that, Mr. Chair.

When we're looking at—so back to the question about does the Manitoba Teachers' Society get any funding from the department. So, basically, the Department of Education has an initiative, and they approach the Manitoba Teachers' Society to do a survey with their teachers on how the Department of Education is doing on a class-size initiative. Do I pretty much have that correct?

Mr. Ted Marcelino, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair.

Mr. Allum: Thank you, Mr. Acting—Acting—Deputy Acting Chair. Good to see you in the Chair, my friend.

First of all, let me say, in response to the member's question is that it's always careful to—wise to be cautious midway through a mandate as to who will be sitting where in the Legislature a few years from now. I would certainly respect the fact that if the people of Manitoba so desired me, personally, or other members to be on that side asking questions, I certainly respect the wisdom and the judgment of the people of Manitoba to place me where I properly belong, in this—either in this House or, if they desire, outside the House too. And I fully respect the, as I know the member does and all members of the House do, the democratic process.

In relation to his specific question, as I said earlier, it's my understanding that this is an annual workload survey undertaken by MTS. In this case, the department wanting to get an impression of the actual impact in classrooms as reflected by teachers themselves. This seemed to be a smart and efficient and effective way in which to poll teachers actually in the classroom dealing with the K-to-3 initiative.

I'm not sure if the member's suggesting that we should've retained an expensive consultant and spent lots of money in order to do it. In our view, and in the view of the department, this was a smart and efficient and effective way to get it done. It really cost us nothing, and we learned a great deal, and I believe he has, too, now.

Mr. Ewasko: Just to sort of add to my previous question, is there any other surveys or any other duties that the Department of Education has asked the Manitoba Teachers' Society to do?

And, again, just so that the minister's not putting any words in my mouth, I'm not necessarily saying that they should go about hiring a consultant to go ahead with expensive surveys. But we're looking at 800 teachers were polled in a phone survey. And the minister's okay with taking that—those polling results to the bank and patting himself on the back for a job well done, which, again, K-to-3 class sizes, classes under the number of 20, fantastic. But we'll see how we're doing.

And then I also know that when we do hit the grade 4, grade 5, grade 6 years, there's definitely going to be a ballooning effect, I'm sure. And I'd like to also—you know what? I'll stop there and repeat my original question so that he can answer it so that I don't have to repeat the whole thing again.

What other initiatives has the Manitoba Teachers' Society done au gratis to the Department of Education in regards to surveys or any other activities?

Mr. Allum: You know, I've been in the job a pretty short time. So, to my knowledge, and based on the information that I have, no other of that kind of survey work has been undertaken with MTS—and really not patting myself on the back. The K-to-3 initiative occurred long—had its genesis long before I arrived here in—on Broadway, and I really think it's a reflection of some really progressive thinking on the part of the department, some effective outreach with parents and schools, school divisions, principals, teachers, as to the most effective way to ensure quality education for our youngest students.

And so where credit belongs, really, is with the government, my former—my predecessor—the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) in Education who was part and parcel of that—origins of that—of this initiative. The folks in the department—who, I know, you complimented in your opening statement, and were quite right to do so, they're very skilled, very

smart people that work in Education and Advanced Learning.

So where credit belongs really lies with the great relationship that exists between the department and the participants in the education system, broadly defined, from the school divisions all the way down to life in the classroom with individual teachers.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Acting Chair, I appreciate the Minister of Education putting on the record that he's relatively new, but I do know that he has some staff with him today that has been with the department, or one of the departments, for a while, and I'm just wondering if he could maybe ask them how many other initiatives or surveys or any other type of duties that Manitoba Teachers' Society has provided, au gratis, to the Department of Education—or Advanced Learning, for that matter.

Mr. Allum: Again, I'd just reiterate that based on the information that I've received, there is no other kind of work that's been done in the relation to the survey that we've been talking about. But, in fairness, we'll go back. We'll check the records and make sure that if for some reason that I don't have it right as a new minister, I will make sure to correct the record. But I believe that what I'm suggesting to him at this point is our genuine belief, but we'll endeavour to make sure that that's as accurate as possible.

As I say, the class size initiative has shown to be successful. To date, his observation, with respect to what happens with class sizes from grades 4 to 6, has yet to proven to be true. But he's right that we need to monitor and make sure, but to date, that hasn't proven to be true.

Again, I would reiterate that as far as I can understand, based on all of the information that's available to us, from anecdotal to surveys taken, students appreciate the smaller class sizes. Parents certainly do. Teachers obviously do. And I believe that we have the full support of schools and school boards in the undertaking of this initiative. I have to say that in getting out and about and meeting with those folks across the province, I am routinely thanked—although, as I said earlier, no thanks are really for me—routinely thanked for the work that the Province and government has done with this most important initiative.

* (15:50)

Mr. Ewasko: And, again, I'll wait for that information, Mr. Minister, so I appreciate that.

If we can, since we are in Estimates and we're looking at various things that are costing money and at different expenditures throughout the province, I know that I had an opportunity to sit with you and do a briefing note on Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Connecting Schools to the Internet). Question in there, and then I was wondering if the minister would be able to put it on the record. The whole point of the bill is to be able to give school divisions enough autonomy to be able to select partners to be able to go into either cost sharing or the partners being able to provide Internet service to the schools. Is that correct?

The Acting Chairperson (Ted Marcelino): Order. This question is about a certain component of the bill not before Estimates, so I may have to ask the member from Lac du Bonnet to rephrase the question.

Mr. Ewasko: I apologize, I guess, to a point for that assumption, but I'd like to ask for leave because it's relevant. It does get into costs with the upcoming year.

The Acting Chairperson (Ted Marcelino): There's a motion for leave—or request for leave to ask the question in this proceeding. Is there leave on the part of the House?

An Honourable Member: Leave.

The Acting Chairperson (Ted Marcelino): The honourable Minister of Education and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Allum: Certainly. I try to be as helpful as humanly possible.

The Acting Chairperson (Ted Marcelino): Just for the record, leave has been granted. Please ask the question.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay. So, if we can recheck Hansard—no, no, I'm just joking, Acting Chair.

So the question was Bill 37, The Public Schools Amendment Act, we had the chance to sit down and go over it a little bit, but I just wanted—want the minister to put on the record the point of the bill is so that school divisions can go and actually, throughout their own autonomy, select partners or service providers to be able to have Internet into various schools throughout the province. And I guess, is that more—does he see that more so being rurally or does it really matter? Is that a carte blanche type thing for the city as well?

Mr. Allum: Yes, from the—from my earliest moments sitting in my privileged seat as the new Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, we were approached routinely primarily by rural and northern school divisions about the need to extend 'broadband' in—broadband into their areas so that children across the province would have access to the same tools, Internet tools, Web-based tools, that we want, of course, all students to have access to. Manitoba Association of School Superintendents were—made a request as well. So it was our understanding that this was something that was needed, required, desired, primarily in rural and northern areas; although, the member is quite right to suggest that it could work in an urban setting, I suppose. But the need, clearly, is in the rural and northern areas.

And then, because The Public Schools Act didn't permit partnerships and because the specific request of organizations like MASS as well as others who made that request directly of me in my going around the province, we decided that the most effective means was to put the bill before the House. That would give school divisions the opportunity to enter, first of all, into partnership with other public sector dollars, so that you could get an economy of scale and an economy of service; in relation, save valuable dollars in doing so. In the event that that kind of public sector partnership wouldn't be available, then the bill does—also provides school divisions with the authority to canvass the private sector to see if there is a partnership that would work to provide broadband services to those places in Manitoba, rural and northern primarily. But, again, reiterate it could work in an urban setting, if needed, so that all children in our province are equipped and have access to the very kind of learning tools that I think we would expect our children would have access to in the 21st century.

Mr. Ewasko: Does the minister or the department know of any school divisions that this has happened already to before this bill or amendment has been instated?

Mr. Allum: In the absence of that ability to enter into partnerships, in the past, a school division would've had to dig into their surpluses or other resources in order to go it alone and then absorb a significant cost on their own in order to provide the broadband service to the school. The great attribute of the bill, of course, is that it provides divisions now with the authority to enter into partnerships, first of all, requiring them to canvass the public sector

organizations, whether that's regional health authority, whether it's Manitoba Hydro, city council [*interjection*]-municipal councils, quite right-and so enjoy those kind of economies of scale that partnerships typically provide, reducing costs for both partners while ensuring that services of utmost importance are provided.

Ms. Melanie Wight, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

You know, I say-*parenthetically only*-to the member, that would that we still had a phone company that was a Crown corporation, we might have been able to use that method in order to extend broadband into rural and northern areas. Of course, the plain fact of it is that we no longer have the phone company as a Crown corporation. Consequently, the bill really is intended to encourage those kinds of partnerships to ensure the very kind of services that I know that he values, he would value for students in the classrooms he was teaching, he would value for his own kids, as I would value for my own kids in the classroom.

* (16:00)

And so the great benefit of the bill is to promote not only access to broadband but economies of scale at the same time by linking up with other public sector partners, and if that doesn't work, then also canvassing the private sector as well.

Mr. Ewasko: Madam Acting Chairperson, I know that-and it's interesting that the minister, this early in Estimates, would put something like that on the record, but it is very-I'm very fortunate, as well as a lot of the other members in the House, to have service under that agreement, with that phone company, and it still seems to be working.

So, as far as price goes, does the minister have any idea or has there been any examples as far as what the cost that these school divisions are going to be incurring in this endeavour?

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): Honourable Minister of Education and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Allum: Thank you, Acting Chair. Also nice to see you in the Chair, indeed.

Just by way of example-*[interjection]*-well, we're friendly folks here in the Legislature and good to see all of you here, including the other members across the floor.

By way of example, the-it's my understanding that Interlake School Division is currently in the

process of high speed-installing a high-speed Internet into the division. My understanding of that is that the estimated cost would be \$2.1 million for the undertaking of that on their own. As a result of this bill, the suggestion is that it may, indeed, save up to 50 per cent of that projected cost because one of the advantages that the bill allows for is that Interlake School Division will be, in turn, able to sell their excess capacity to others who are in need of this service. And so, consequently, it will help to defray-defer the actual total cost of it. Again, an interesting and, I think, a quite helpful by-product and outcome of the bill. And just adding, again, my understanding is that, quite supported by the school division as a helpful tool in order for them to fulfill their mandate.

Mr. Ewasko: So, when the school board or the school division goes through this agreement with a partner, that cost-sharing agreement, or contract, doesn't necessarily get approved, it does have to come to your office for final rubber stamping?

Mr. Allum: Yes, in essence is simple answer to the member's question. It does ultimately require the minister's approval. And what the bill requires of the minister in providing that approval is to make sure that the school divisions have followed the process that's underlined or outlined in the bill, that they've done a comprehensive canvassing of other public sector-potential public sector partners. And, following that, if that wasn't to be achieved for whatever reason, then that they had gone on to look and canvass whether they might be able to find a private sector partner.

But it's worth noting, I suppose, that you could get a wonderful public-public-private partner as well in order to make it all come together. So it may be that a school division with a public sector partner and a service provider find common cause and provide the very service that we're looking for.

And, in fact, as I said, but in basic answer to the member's question, yes, the minister does ultimately sign off on it.

Mr. Ewasko: So the school division goes through a process which is approved by the minister to try to find a partner, and we'll just say-we'll just use the example that the minister said. So Interlake School Division cost to bring fibre optic broadband into the school-school division, \$2.1 million. So he said that-or you said that costs could be reduced up to 50 per cent. Is that before it gets put in or is-are we talking existing lines that are there already or are we talking the 50 per cent savings would come in

afterwards, after the school division has it in place and then they would be able to sell it off?

The Acting Chairperson (Melanie Wight): I want to remind the member just to speak through the Chair. Thanks.

Mr. Allum: I want to reiterate, of course, I use the Interlake School Division as an example, so I want to make sure that he understands, and I'm confident that he does, that deals could come in many different and varied ways. And the essence of the minister's approval, as contemplated by the bill, is to ensure that the school division has gone through the process in canvassing public sector partners, and then, if in the absence of having finding a partner or only finding partial of a partner and they have gone out to canvass the private sector as well. And so what the intent of the bill and what's incumbent upon the minister—whichever happens to be sitting in this chair—is to make sure the process is followed to the extent necessary.

* (16:10)

In the case of the Interlake School Division, as I understand it, there's no line in the ground to date. That may happen, I think—in the—by the fall and, at that point, what the school division seems to be suggesting is that, as a result of the bill, they'll be able to develop an RFP to be able to utilize that excess capacity, find other partners who want to—may take advantage of the very service and, as a result, may save up to 50 per cent is what we've been told. And so we tried to use that by way of example to make it clear how it can play itself out, but I'd want to reiterate that the partnerships may come in many varied and interesting ways. We encourage school divisions to go out and investigate and then, in addition to that, the minister's primary responsibility with the bill is to ensure that school divisions have followed due process.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nice to see you back in the Chair.

What are the plans, Minister, with the—within the department to replace the work of COPSE?

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister of Education and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Allum: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Like the member, welcome back.

The decision to roll the Council on Post-Secondary Education back into the department was really a reflection of a couple of considerations, although the bill has not been tabled to date, but we have indicated our intention to do so through the budget. When you combine, as the Premier did in the resetting of the government in October, when you combine two departments into one and you're now concerned with that academic spectrum from kindergarten all the way to career, it was, in my estimation, important that the department be seen and understood to act more seamlessly than it could otherwise do with COPSE as the funding and regulatory arm of the government.

As the member knows, I was the former chair of the Council on Post-Secondary Education. I have enormous respect for the staff and the work that they did. I saw it up close and personal during my time as chair. I also know that the work of the existing board as well as board members in the past predating our time in government, back to when the COPSE was created in the latter part of the 1990s, I know those board members did fabulous work on behalf of the government, whether it was our government or your government in the late 1990s. But our objective, as he knows, is to try to operate more seamlessly from that spectrum of K—kindergarten on to career. We want the department to be speaking to itself more than they otherwise would have been able to do as two departments, and now they're one. In my view, our obligation is to provide the utmost quality education to a student whether they're in kindergarten or whether they're like my own daughter who's just finishing her third year at the University of Winnipeg or my other daughter who is—went to Brandon U and then graduated from teaching—with a teacher degree from Brandon U.

So we're trying to operate more seamlessly. We're trying to ensure high-quality education from kindergarten through to career. The decision to roll COPSE back into the department was really effectively not a reflection of the fabulous work done by staff and board members—I have the utmost regard and respect for those folks, but really to make sure that we're able to operate seamlessly in the best interest of students and parents across the province.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and Minister, for that answer.

As you rolled COPSE into the department, are we looking at any positions? So what's the change or

the structural change within COPSE then, if it is within the department—organizational change?

Mr. Allum: At this stage, the current complement of staff with COPSE simply will be rolled back into the department. As you can appreciate, the bill has not even been tabled, but we have signified our intent to do so through the budget and will be following through and will be tabling the bill shortly. So, as he, I think, can appreciate, there is still some organizational thinking going on about whether Advanced Learning becomes a division or however we want to characterize that, so that's ongoing discussion that will become self-evidently clearer in due course.

But, as I said, the fabulous work that council staff currently do is something that I take very, very seriously, having worked with them myself. As a former chair of COPSE, I know them to be a very dedicated and committed staff who have really superb relationships with our post-secondary institutions, have a deep understanding of the status of the post-secondary world, not only here in Manitoba but across the country. They have great expertise, great experience.

We want to make the most effective use of that now that we are two departments within one. And I know the member will appreciate this, that this is a pendulum. Sometimes the—you know, it goes back and forth in terms of two departments or one department or how these things get done. But I really want to make clear that, while there may well be some nominal savings to come out of it, in this instance—and as I said quite directly to the staff myself, I'm not trying to take them further away. I'm actually trying to bring them closer to other members of the department and so that we're able to communicate across the broad spectrum of education here in Manitoba from kindergarten to career.

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate the minister's answer to the question. As well as—you know, when we are looking at amalgamations or rolling in pieces of the puzzle into the department, I don't think, you know, we generally expect there to be any cost savings, even though it's said that there would be. And a good example is the amalgamations of the regional health authorities. So I'm not quite sure if we've seen any kind of a reduction in certain levels.

So, with that, though, I'd like to ask: How much of a role does the department play in expansion or new construction of post-secondary institutions? And we can start, you know, just sort of right across the

board, how much of a role does the department play in those decisions?

* (16:20)

Mr. Allum: I thank the member for his observations on that. I really think that if he has the time he might want to, you know, ask the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) about the savings made with the regional health authorities. My understanding is that they've been substantial, but I'd sooner leave it to her to speak to.

The department, of course, plays a direct role in capital construction in campuses across the province. We provide capital funding, of course, to support capital works on campuses. We often would partner with, of course, Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, who is the owner of assets on college campuses as well, and oftentimes the university and/or the college would also make some contribution as well in terms of the expenditures. I would say, in terms of the construction details themselves, I know that the department would have a role to play in helping to make sure that there were efficiencies, the best use of dollars, and also to ensure that whatever the capital construction happened to be, met the government's agenda as far as the education file is concerned, with a broader agenda with respect to jobs and the economy.

And so, you know, I guess, just in terms of a general answer to his question, of course, the department plays a significant role in the regard that I tried to describe, I hope, accurately.

Mr. Ewasko: I know that the minister has put on record a few times on the many conversations he's had with teachers, staff, professors, students, and, basically, all stakeholders in regards to education of the K-to-career spectrum. I'm just wondering some of the—in his new role, what are some of the new construction areas or facilities that he has had the pleasure of touring within the province, and which post-secondary education facilities those are.

Mr. Allum: I'm pleased to note that there's so much going that it takes a while to make sure that I have it all in order, so I'm going to just try with a very high overview. I think you were asking—the member was asking, Mr. Chair, new projects yet to come, if I'm not mistaken. He says no, so maybe I'll ask for just a clarification. I thought he was talking about projects yet to come since I would assume he was familiar with all the extraordinary number of projects that we've fulfilled since we've come into office.

Mr. Ewasko: Basically, without a whole lot of preamble here, I just want to know which facilities the minister has toured that are relatively new to the province within the last, let's say, five—within the last five years, I would stamp those with new construction projects that are actually already built and he can see, you know, the bricks-and-mortar type of thing within the province, post-secondary.

Mr. Allum: I thank the member for clarifying the questions. I have to reach back into the dark recesses of my mind of where I've been in the past five years on campuses as I've been to quite a few as he can appreciate. And, but, of course, starting with Red River. As a former proud employee of City of Winnipeg, I spent a lot of time at the Princess Street—Red River campus on Princess Street, and it's an extraordinary campus. I'm sure he's been down there. In addition—

An Honourable Member: I'll clear it up one more time.

Mr. Allum: Fair enough. The member's indicating to me that he'll provide some clarity, and he's not the first one to have to ask me a question a few times in order for me to get it right, so I'll take that.

Mr. Ewasko: No, I don't need his—I don't need the minister's history within the last five years. I'm just saying, any new projects of post-secondary institutions, bricks and mortar, that have been built or renovated in the last five years—as a new Minister of Education, in the last, you know, four or five months, which institutions has he had the pleasure of touring? Thank you.

Mr. Allum: Okay, even—I thank the member for that clarification—even testing my memory going back four or five months is a difficult challenge, but I can tell you that I've been up to Thompson and have seen the new campus expansion under way. It's a really exciting project. Of course, we have—there's still the formal announcement and formal opening yet to happen, but I have to say that, when I was up there for the installation of the new president at UCN very early on in my tenure as minister, and we had a chance just to do a look-see, I have to say that it was an impressive and extraordinary asset, I think, that will be not only a great addition to UCN but a significant asset to Thompson as well.

Of course, I've been, as well, out to the University of Manitoba and, as he knows, Project Domino—I think he knows Project Domino is something undertaken by the government a few years

ago to make sure that those incredible spaces of the—at the U of M have been brought up to standard, and, it's a, you know, I know he knows that, or I think he probably knows, that Taché Hall is one of those projects currently being undertaken, a variety of others. So I've had a chance to be up at the U of M, as well, if not to be through the—all of the facilities at least to have a chance to understand and appreciate the very important capital construction going on at the U of M.

* (16:30)

Of course, I've been through the fabulous Richardson building at the U of W—I think it's for science and the environment—and, again, a really extraordinary addition to the U of W campus. And, Mr. Chair, I mentioned earlier that my daughter's a third-year at the U of W, and I formerly used to teach part-time at the U of W. I would come over from my office at City Hall and teach a class, a Canadian history class, once a week, and it was an extraordinary experience.

But I have to say that I am really quite impressed and wowed by the campus expansion that's gone on at the U of W over these last number of years. It's a testament to, of course, to the leadership shown by President Axworthy. It's a testament to the terrific relationship and partnership between the government and the University of Winnipeg. It's a testament to the extraordinary work of alumni at the University of Winnipeg who have extraordinary pride in their institution.

So the campus build up at the U of W, I think, has been quite sensational, and a great example of that is the Richardson building for science and the environment. I think, maybe, just to sum up, I've been to ACC; I've been to the new culinary school—as well, also a nice addition. Great things are going on in the—at North Hill, the Len Evans Centre. I've been through that as well. And, you know, Len Evans—I don't need to tell the member—is an iconic figure and legendary figure in this province, and so the Len Evans Centre—it's also fantastic.

So, virtually, at every institution I've had the chance to visit, you've seen some extraordinary capital construction going on. It's probably worth pointing out that in total, since we were first elected, that actually reaches to about a billion dollars in capital dollars used to ensure that our students have 21st-century facilities here in Manitoba.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and minister, for that answer. I know that you referenced the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex, and I believe that \$32 million was put from the government towards the construction of that facility. I just want to see what your take of it was, since you brought it up, as far as touring it. Had the pleasure of touring many facilities as well, being the Advanced Education critic in the past, and I've—again, some fantastic buildings and some that a lot of money has gone into. So I'd like to know what the minister thought of his tour of the Richardson college.

Mr. Allum: Well, I guess on first—I'd have to say that, on first inspection, it seems like an architecturally fabulous building with great environmental energy-efficiency attributes about it. I had the chance to have dinner at Elements, and if the member hasn't been there, I encourage him to go there. I believe that's what it's called. It's—*[interjection]* It is really good food. The member from Burrows seconding that culinary opinion. But—so I—my own sense of it is that it's an extraordinary building and something to be proud of.

Certainly, when you think about the contribution that the U of W has made to that part of Portage and the reinvention and—of our downtown, I think, has been quite something. So I—I'm wondering if—and the member may well be looking for some kind of value-for-dollars analysis from me. I can only tell him what I see as a—someone who's toured through the building. It really looks like a very fine building to me and an extraordinary asset to not only to the students and the university community but, of course, to Winnipeg and to the province.

Mr. Ewasko: Again, I know that the minister has put on record a few times where he's had those conversations with all stakeholders in regards to education, and I'm just wondering if he's had the chance to talk to any of the professors who have the privilege of working at the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex, and if he's possibly thrown up any red flags from those conversations about the facility.

Mr. Allum: Yes, I thank the member for the question. The answer to that is, no, I haven't run into somebody who teaches there or, to my knowledge, that teaches there, and, consequently, no red flag or observation, good, bad or indifferent, to be perfectly honest about it, in terms of speaking directly to faculty about it, has been made to me.

Mr. Ewasko: So what I would—but I would agree that architecturally, the building looks fantastic, and the restaurant there looks great, even though I have not had the pleasure of eating there yet. But, when we get to the point of—I know that the minister is new in his portfolio, but at the same time, we've got the now Minister for Health was in Advanced Education and Literacy, we've got the past Education minister who's now sitting as the MLA for St. Vital in the backbenches of the NDP government. There are people at the table, staff with the minister, I'm just wondering if the staff have heard of any red flags being thrown up by the—whether it's staff or other people within the province, for the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex. And I know that the member from Gimli possibly has some questions for the minister, but I'm sure he'll wait his turn.

Mr. Allum: And just a couple of points here. First, to remember that some of the predecessors—my predecessors—that he mentioned, the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan), my friend from Gimli or Dawson Trail or, let's see—

An Honourable Member: Been so many.

Mr. Allum: Well, not that many. And of—I think I said St. Vital. There's 'somebod'—

An Honourable Member: Brandon.

Mr. Allum: Brandon—thank you, thank you, I appreciate that help—were, of course, Education, K-to-12, ministers, so wouldn't have been necessarily privy to post-secondary circumstances. Remember this is one department we're talking about now, and so I can't say that my predecessor would have been—the MLA for Lord Roberts, the honourable Dr. Diane McGifford, the minister for Advanced Education, as minister—might have been privy to the things that you're talking about. Just a moment—a point of clarity, I guess, about who would have had responsibility. And then, of course, the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) is the Minister of Health now and my immediate predecessor in Advanced Learning. The other observation and point of clarity is, to date, the council. The council continues to exist in its current form, has not received any official complaints, observations otherwise about the condition of the building, to date.

Mr. Ewasko: Just for clarification, Mr. Chair, I did mention the now-Minister for Health who was the minister for Advanced Education and Literacy from before, so I did reference the correct person, and I

was just wondering if the staff had heard anything from whether it's professors or students or anyone else about the—and I'll just restate what I'm talking about here—on the University of Winnipeg campus, the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex, which, yes, does have the restaurant Elements, which the minister said that he enjoyed a meal there—has the staff or his predecessor, the now-Minister for Health, mentioned anything to him? Say, hey, by the way, this is a red flag that's come up. This might give you some issues. Maybe you should look at it.

*(16:40)

Mr. Allum: Yes, I thank the member for that clarification.

As I said toward the end of my answer, and perhaps I didn't quite speak clearly enough, the Council on Post-Secondary Education, the funding regulatory arm of the government, the one that, to date, currently conducts that immediate staff interaction with the institutions, be it the U of W or any other, has not received any official complaint, to date, about the Richardson building.

Mr. Ewasko: So I believe the person that's with us today is Mr. Karasevich, one of your staff with the council, and—okay, am I correct? I'll start there.

Mr. Allum: You are.

Mr. Ewasko: So we're looking at \$32 million towards the construction of the new science complex and, to date, there's been no, and I just—again, third time's the charm—there's been no complaints or questions or red flags raised about that complex?

Mr. Allum: Three times isn't a charm, Mr. Chair. Three strikes and you're also out. So I don't know where we would go with that.

I'm advised by staff that, to date, there has been no complaints, officially or unofficially for that matter. It's a \$32-million, as he said, provincial contribution to that project. It was a 66—over \$66-million construction project in the first place. My understanding is that this was quite an incredible partnership between government, the university, between individual donors who—I think he knows—also contributed to the construction of that facility. I'm answering as plainly as I can on this point, that I'm advised that, to date, the council has not received any complaints, officially or, frankly, unofficially for that matter—hard to know what else to add to that.

Mr. Ewasko: So we're looking at \$32 million, almost 50 per cent of the total cost of the new Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex. COPSE has then signed over the cheque and have—and, basically, in their purview, the facility is absolutely state of the art and, as the minister has said, architecturally stunning to the eye as far as raising the bar, as far as for the best learning environment for our students attending there or for our youth attending there right now. In his view and in COPSE's view, that was money well spent and it was—everything's in working order.

Mr. Allum: The—I think it's important to remind the member, and he may know this, but remind him of—that the Province makes capital financial contributions to these—construction of these extraordinary facilities, but the management of the construction of these facilities is done by the institutions themselves.

Mr. Ewasko: So we—so as the Province goes, there—they sign cheques and they don't necessarily go and do any type of accountability on how the facility is built, how practical the facility is besides stunning to the eye and a fantastic meal?

The reason why I get into this is because, in September of 2013, a professor who teaches biology, and I quote, he says I had better research conditions in a remote field station in Kenya. Is this new information to COPSE and the Department of Education and Advanced Learning? Because I would think that as the minister has stated in the House, and I know some of his colleagues have said that the whole fantastic research team of Google, I would think that that would have popped up on Google for the minister's department.

Mr. Allum: Well, you know, I—a little perplexed by the member's line of questioning in relation to an article that maybe he should table or something just to help us try to be—tried to be very honest in saying that to date the council, the 'regulatory' funding arm of the government as it currently exists, the one that has the institutional relationships with each of the institutions—I have my own relationships of course—but has not received any complaints about the building in question, officially or unofficially. There may be anecdotal observations out there; I haven't had any person, faculty or otherwise, share any such observation with me.

The University of Winnipeg, to my knowledge, has not conveyed any information that they have

about some problems with the building or otherwise, they haven't conveyed that to the council to date.

I'm no architect, I can only tell you what I see, I can only tell you when I've been there what I've tasted, as he's referred to the restaurant a few times. I have been to also a number of events there, and I thought it really served the function very, very well. The university is responsible for the management of the project. We're a proud capital participant in the development of this project and others, not only at the U of Winnipeg but across the post-secondary sector.

And so consequently, you know, I think if the member has information at his disposal on this matter that he's raised over the last few minutes, I take him seriously and what he has to say and I'd appreciate it if he would table any information that he has and that would be very useful.

* (16:50)

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, the Deputy Clerk has advised me that you were making reference to a document there, quoting from it, and he would just like—we would like clarification what kind of a document it was, if it was a public document or a private document, et cetera.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Deputy Clerk, for asking for some clarification.

Basically, I've already stated the date, September 25th, Winnipeg Free Press. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I'm trying to get clarification from the member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, November 25th, Winnipeg Free Press.

Again, you know, anything to do with Advanced Ed or, you know, back then the member from Southdale, or the now new Minister for Health, basically, would have popped up. So I'm shocked that the 192 communicators from the NDP side would not have flagged this one, and I'm finding it tough. I know it's a new search engine that they might be privy to, but it is called Google and it's a Google Alert. And so, Mr. Chair, no disrespect, the article is the Winnipeg Free Press, November 25th, in regards—and the title, New science palace bugs entomologist, U of W prof decries water quality and restaurant. *[interjection]* So the minister's got some kind of question, answer.

Mr. Chairperson: I was asking for clarification. You still have the floor, sir.

The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Does that then clear us up?

Mr. Chairperson: Absolutely.

Mr. Ewasko: Okay, thank you.

So, again, the—with those concerns, you know after they were stated, you take a tour of the facility, and you basically walk in off of Portage and you can get to that wonderful restaurant, Elements. But, if you continue on—and I'm not sure if we just stopped—if the minister just stopped for a—what in the atrium or whatever else, some sort of announcement or something—but, if you actually continued on and you proceeded into where some of the labs are and that, you can actually have the public come in from the back parking lot and pass people with lab coats on. And I would hope this wouldn't necessarily happen, and I don't know if it has happened for sure, but it could happen; people of the public actually pass people who are doing lab experiments on their way to the restaurant.

And I would think that something like that would have raised some flags somewhere. And, if nobody in the department or, you know, the advanced education department has heard that—but don't get me wrong. I'm not totally surprised because of, you know, some previous questioning on Keeyask Centre and those types of things, where even larger cheques have been signed, and then nobody's gone out to see if these things are even thought of or are being built. This doesn't necessarily surprise me. But I'm just saying, for the betterment and for the good of our youth and our education process and, of course, the great facility of the University of Winnipeg, that I would hope that some of that maybe has been rectified. And now I'm bringing it to the attention of the new minister. And the article is, again, the 25th of September of 2013, and it actually was posted or whatever at 1 a.m. by Bartley Kives.

An Honourable Member: What newsletter?

Mr. Ewasko: It's from the Winnipeg Free Press. *[interjection]* So thank you. And I'm just wondering when we could maybe get some information on that. So what I'll do is I'll leave it at that for a quick second, and then I do have a few more questions—so.

Mr. Allum: I'm sure, Mr. Chair, there is a question in there somewhere. I'm not sure what that rambling thing that went from 'keesak' to the Richardson science building to people in lab coats. It was a tremendous linking together of disparate parts and disparate pieces, but trying to follow along as best I can. The member stumbled upon, at one in the morning, while he was doodling on the computer, some article that appeared to suggest there was or was not a problem with the Richardson building.

In all that I've really just tried to say, in all honesty and all humility to him without any sense of sarcasm or anything, is that, to date, to my knowledge, the council, the regulatory and funding—current regulatory and funding arm of the government, the one that has the—arm of the government that has institutional relationships with the institutions including the University of Winnipeg, have not received an official or unofficial complaint.

The—in his opinion, an observation made in the newspaper in the middle of the night is something that warrants great concern. As far as I can tell, there are great academic work and research going on in that very facility, and, in the absence of any kind of official or unofficial complaints or red flags or however the member would want to characterize them, I know that one item in the middle of the night might galvanize his attention and get him all jazzed for work the next day, whatever—I think, in our sense, we wait for information that is a substantive matter, that comes through the proper and appropriate channels.

I'd be—I advise him to be careful what he reads in any newspaper, and I know that he thinks critically as an upright individual. And he should, you know, think carefully about anything that he reads that might send him off in any one direction and maybe going somewhat too far about a building that I think is properly recognized as architecturally significant, providing great services to students and researchers alike, providing a great asset to the campus at the U of W, providing a great asset to the streetscape on

Portage Avenue, being a great contribution to, as a result, to downtown Winnipeg and the revitalization of downtown Winnipeg.

He's probably heard me say—tell this story before, but in the—when I moved here in the 1990s, it was pretty hard pressed to find anything on Portage Avenue, really. And, as time has evolved, you can take a very significant walk up and down Portage. You can actually start down Main Street toward the United Way and then keep moving up Portage Avenue, and you'll see the great Paterson GlobalFoods building and the old Union Tower as part of Red River College and how fabulously—what a fabulous asset that is. And then you start moving your way up Portage Avenue, and you see the new Manitoba Hydro building, and then you get up further up Portage, and you see the dramatic improvements that's been made to the U of W and—including the Richardson building.

My own sense is that downtown has come alive, and it's come alive in the last 15 years primarily because of capital investments that have been made by this government in partnership with many, many institutions, including the University of Winnipeg.

I personally take great pride in what I see, and I have to tell him I'm a little disappointed to hear him refer to one article that was—he read in the middle of the night some time ago in September. Take that as some kind of gospel. I'm telling him what we understand in our—in the department, to date, that we have not received any official or unofficial—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m. committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Petitions		PST Increase	
Provincial Sales Tax Increase– Reversal and Referendum Rights Friesen	1661	Friesen; Howard	1665
Beausejour District Hospital–Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability Ewasko	1661	Wishart; Howard	1666
Government Services Offices Closures– Public Consultations Briese	1661	Government Policies Wishart; Howard	1667
Tabling of Reports		Member for Elmwood Schuler; Swan	1667
Sustainable Development Innovations Fund, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2014-2015, Departmental Expenditure Estimates Mackintosh	1662	Employment Numbers Gerrard; Selinger	1668
Conservation and Water Stewardship, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2014-2015, Departmental Expenditure Estimates Mackintosh	1662	Manitoba Hydro Office Closures Gerrard; Selinger	1669
Justice, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2014-2015, Departmental Expenditure Estimates Swan	1662	Steinbach and Ste. Anne Gaudreau; Ashton	1669
The Public Schools Finance Board, Annual Report, June 30, 2013 Allum	1662	Flooding (2011) Briese; Kostyshyn	1670
Oral Questions		Members' Statements	
Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Program Stefanson; Selinger	1662	Big Brothers Big Sisters Bowl for Kids Sake Friesen	1671
Non-Residential Construction Stefanson; Oswald	1664	Governor General State Visit to India Jha	1671
		All Seniors Care Games–Shaftesbury Park Retirement Residence Stefanson	1672
		Outstanding Principal–J. Wayne Marche Pettersen	1672
		Acadia Colony Farms–Carberry Briese	1672
		ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)	
		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
		Committee of Supply	
		Health, Healthy Living and Seniors	1673
		Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	1686
		Education and Advanced Learning	1702

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>