

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 19, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 26—The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 26, The Adult Abuse Registry Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le registre des mauvais traitements infligés aux adultes, be read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, this bill introduces amendments to The Adult Abuse Registry Act in order to strengthen the protection of vulnerable adults and patients in the health-care system in Manitoba. Specifically, this amendment extends the reporting requirements of the adult abuse registry committee when it forms an opinion that a person's name should be entered in the adult abuse registry. The amendments will require the committee to proactively advise employers or regulatory bodies that an individual has been reported to the adult abuse registry.

This bill effectively enhances the protection of vulnerable adults and patients throughout the province.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

Government Communication and Fund Allocation

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government is diverting hundreds of thousands of tax dollars and hundreds of hours of labour away from infrastructure projects for a self-promotional sign campaign entitled Steady Growth, Good Jobs.

The signs are misleading because the actual rate of growth under this Premier is the lowest west of Quebec.

Since this Premier came to power, the average weekly wage of Manitobans has risen less than in eight other provinces.

The provincial government members have been quoted as stating they need a record number of signs to counter the public backlash against the PST hike and improve the government's public image and branding. This is evidenced by comments reportedly made by the member for Thompson: There might even be a record number of signs; and from the member for Minto who reportedly said, people will see that sign, they'll see the branding.

According to documents obtained through freedom-through access to information requests, the provincial government is not being upfront with Manitobans by allocating taxpayer dollars from the additional PST hike to projects other than strategic infrastructure, such as splash pads, gym storage rooms and golf courses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to, in the interest of accuracy, amend the signs and materials by adding the words in taxes and fewer, so that the sign will read, steady growth in taxes, fewer good jobs.

To urge that the Premier admit to Manitobans that PST funds are being diverted away from strategic infrastructure projects that develop and grow Manitoba's economy in favour of a self-promotional government branding and spending directed to non-strategic infrastructure spending contrary to the stated reason for the PST increase cited by this Premier and his government.

This petition is signed by E. Ginter, C. Ollson, S. Jarvis 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.

Rights of Manitoba Children

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Provincial government should uphold the rights of children set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by Canada over 20 years ago, to better protect and promote children and their rights and to ensure the voices of children are heard.

Instead, many children in Manitoba, especially those in the child-welfare system, reveal that they sometimes feel they have no say in what happens to them.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba's children and youth are falling behind on several indicators of well-being and in areas that would prepare them for better outcomes in life.

This year, the provincial government's education system was ranked last of all Canadian provinces in science, reading and math.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba also has the second highest rate of children using food banks of all Canadian provinces and the highest child poverty rate.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to ensure that the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and the opinions of children are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to correct the tragic systemic flaws that have failed Manitoba children in the recent past.

This petition's signed by K. Chartrand, A. Fletcher, G. Nobiss and many more Manitobans.

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by V. Carr, K. Curtis, G. Curtis and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Beausejour District Hospital—Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

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 K. Chornowski, T. Baranosk, L. Witoski and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

And this is the background to this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

* (13:40)

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

And this petition has been signed by D. Eisner, M. Windsor, C. Rooks and many, many more fine Manitobans.

**Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route—
Information Request**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing 'representated' the least intrusive option to the residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

This petition was signed by W. Penner, T. Friesen, W. Burr and many more fine Manitobans.

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

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by R. Falk, R. Falk, D. Dotoshek and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

And this is signed by L. Alexander, S. Alderson, J.L. Bell and many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

And the background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

This petition's signed by H. Fulman, J. Maloway and K. Leslie and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

And this is the background for this petition:

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

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

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

* (13:50)

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by A. Bouchard-Noble, D. Townsend, C. King and many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'd like to table the report and recommendations of the Judicial Compensation Committee.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today members of the Mamingwey Burn Survivor Society, who are the guests of the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau).

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

And also seated in the public gallery we have from École Selkirk Junior High 60 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Joan Cooney, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

NDP Political Advertising Campaign Costs

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): We have NDP waste threatening essential front-line services in our province, Mr. Speaker, and evidence of that, examples of that continue to crop up on an almost daily basis.

Last week we learned about millions of dollars of additional cost due to, allegedly, a politically motivated rush stadium project. We learned about two thirds of a million dollars of additional money that was paid to former friends of the Premier to leave the province and work somewhere else.

Last year, we know that the provincial government expended, under this Premier's leadership, over \$1 million on a self-promotional sign campaign called steady growth, but the numbers reveal that the province, since he took over as the Premier, is in steady decline. In fact, by all economic measures, we're ninth, closer to 10th than eighth, so that amounts to a false advertising campaign, Mr. Speaker. Even if it were true, it would be a waste of money.

So now this spendP is at it again. They've got another pre-election ad campaign going to promote themselves at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers.

How much will it cost?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for raising the issue of the economy.

We—the latest report from IHS Global Insight shows that Manitoba will have the largest increase in employment growth of anywhere in Canada, Mr. Speaker, 1.6 per cent. So various forecasters are predicting that Manitoba will be among the growth leaders in the country next year for economic growth. We now have a forecast in employment growth; we'll be one of the strongest in the country, as we know that our unemployment rate is among the lowest in the country, tied for second place, lowest rate of unemployment.

So we are building infrastructure. We are creating good jobs. We're ensuring young people get access to those good jobs, Mr. Speaker. And Manitobans have said they want to know what those opportunities are, and we're letting them know about those opportunities so that young people could take advantage of them, and we continue to have a positive growth story for the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier's been ninth since he became Premier, so sunny forecasts are nice, but the only place he can go is up.

So running a branding campaign on funds borrowed from our children and grandchildren is wasteful, and if you can't find the waste you create more, and that is apparently what this government is dedicated to doing. This Premier has doubled our debt, he has hiked our taxes and he has broken his promises to Manitobans.

And he seems to have lost his laser-like focus, Mr. Speaker. Is it on moving up from dead last in wait times in health care? Apparently not. Is it on reducing the number of kids who depend on food banks? Apparently not. Is it on improving our last-place standing in educational outcomes? Apparently not on any of those things.

Instead, his laser-like focus is pinned in the mirror, and he's decided he's going to take money from those children I referred to and use it so he can be the fairest of them all. And he's not being fair with this.

Now, we know that he wasted \$1 million last year on his vanity sign campaign. How much more does he plan to waste this year promoting himself and his party at the expense of working Manitoba families and seniors?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, just about all of the allegations the Leader of the Opposition put on the record are inaccurate.

Graduation rates for young people in high school have gone from 71 to 87 per cent—87 per cent, Mr. Speaker. That's a dramatic increase in the number of people that are completing high school.

Economic growth over the last 10 years, third best in the country, Mr. Speaker. Very strong last year, in the top three, projected to be among the top one or two this year.

Employment growth projected to be among the leaders in the country; according to this forecaster, the leader in the country, Mr. Speaker. More people working in Manitoba than ever in the history of the province.

And more people living in Manitoba: 16,000 more people came to the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Just a couple of weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition was on the radio, and people asked him,

what was his alternative be to our budget? What would his alternative be to the program we put forward to grow the economy, Mr. Speaker? And he referred them to his website where he said he had 36 promises. Nobody has been able to find them. Maybe he could let us know what they are.

Auditor General Review

Mr. Pallister: And as opposed to our Premier, we'll keep our promises, Mr. Speaker.

Only a Premier and a government with a record that deplorable, ninth over the last six years, would go to forecast to try to sunny up things. But now they raid our rainy day fund and tell everybody it's sunny. It makes no sense.

You know, promoting their party, Mr. Speaker, if they were using party money, is their business, but when they take taxpayers' money to do it, it becomes Manitobans' business.

In Ontario the Auditor General reviews all government advertisements to eliminate partisan advertising by governments before it costs taxpayers money.

I know and all Manitobans know that the NDP cannot run a lemonade stand. Mr. Speaker, last year that party grabbed over \$200,000 in unearned subsidies from taxpayers and still managed to post a net loss of \$100,000. Surely, their inability to have their own money and raise it in their party is no excuse for taking money from taxpayers and spending it on self-promotional advertising.

I ask the Premier: In the interest of fairness, will he support our call to have the Auditor General review his ad campaign and make sure that it's fair, nonpartisan and unbiased?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, one of the stronger economies in the country, record amounts of job creation, record amounts of young people graduating from high school, record numbers of people moving to live in Manitoba: a very strong story.

In 1999, when the members opposite were in government, they promoted their budget for the cost of \$239,000. Our budget for promoting what's in the budget this year, \$232,000, \$7,000 less than it was 16 years ago. Again, we see a double standard from the member opposite: one rule for himself, spend \$239,000; we spending less than that, and he's complaining about it, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is all governments put the message out of what their budget's doing. We've never exceeded the amount that the members opposite spent 15 years ago, Mr. Speaker. The member is again pursuing his double-standard policy in Manitoba.

Manitoba Hydro Rate Increases

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): This government has proven its desire for steady growth in hydro rates.

In a little under a week, Hydro will be asking for another rate increase because of the NDP waste and mismanagement, which means less for front-line services and higher hydro rates for Manitobans.

Will the minister stop the steady growth in hydro rates under this NDP government and stop the application for yet another rate increase?

* (14:00)

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member ought to remind us, too, that we have the cheapest hydro rates in North America.

I might also draw his attention to the many initiative projects that we have in northern Manitoba that include First Nations people who for the first time have an opportunity to capitalize and gain meaningful employment every step into the future.

Another opportunity I'll take is to mention the Minnesota-Manitoba line, which has been referred to as once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Manitoba, as it not only has strong support from Minnesota Power but is also shepherding through the US approval process but also getting support from the White House.

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

Mr. Eichler: Subsidizing Americans for their hydro certainly—hardly a path that we want to go down.

Mr. Speaker, in order to produce a profit, Hydro is dependent on rate increases. If this NDP government continues down this path of steady growth in rates, Manitobans will see a major rate increase, above more than doubling, by Manitoba's own forecast.

Will the minister today commit to stop the steady growth in hydro rates, yes or no, experiencing by this government?

Mr. Robinson: Let me be very clear. Mr. Speaker, maybe the member didn't understand what I said in my response to his earlier question. We have the cheapest hydro rates anywhere in North America.

And we're also talking about an opportunity with the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission line. Now, what this is going to do is three things. First of all, it's going to enable greater support for Manitoba to keep the lights on in case of drought or emergency outage and effectively double the market area into which Manitoba can sell its power and, thirdly, ensure Manitoba is in a good position to sell to the US should they decide to close their coal plants more quickly.

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

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, experts have identified that hydro rates will eventually take 1.5 to 2 billion dollars a year out of disposable incomes for hard-working Manitobans. That's what we call steady growth in hydro rates.

Will the minister today commit to stopping the NDP plan to continue steady growth in hydro rates that will see Manitobans have billions of—less to spend on the priorities that matter to them?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, while I have the opportunity, allow me to thank all the dedicated hydro workers who were busy over the weekend restoring power to Manitobans.

Now, the experts agree with our proven strategy that keeps rates affordable in the province of Manitoba. The Public Utilities Board approved Keeyask and a Minnesota line because of the unparalleled economic opportunities that provides Manitobans, and it should be clear that there'll be an economic benefit to the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, it's very simple. We have the lowest hydro rates anywhere in North America.

ER Wait Times Left-Not-Seen Numbers

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): According to a freedom of information request, there is steady growth in the number of patients leaving Winnipeg ERs without being seen.

Eleven years ago, almost 17,000 patients walked out of ERs without being seen; last year, over 25,000 left ERs without being seen. That's 8,000 patients more, and these numbers are exploding under this NDP government.

I'd like to ask this Minister of Health to admit that the steady growth in the number of patients leaving ERs without being seen is a sign of NDP broken promises and NDP mismanagement.

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

I'd like to assure Manitobans that we do track patients who come into the ERs so that if they do leave for whatever reason they are contacted to determine whether they still require medical attention.

We're focused on the things that matter most to Manitobans, including making sure that health care is better and improving emergency health care.

Emergency rooms are for emergencies, and that's how we expect them to be used. We are still making sure that some procedures that patients may schedule in an ER, such as abnormal lab values, removing staples, sutures or checking a wound, and we've got a number of measures being done through the WRHA to bring down the number of those scheduled visits. So it is about trying to accommodate care in all ways possible.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, these numbers are exploding under their watch, and this minister's spin is ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba patients have the longest ER waits in Canada. Last year, over 25,000 patients left the ER without being seen, and not all of them get a follow-up phone call. That's—in the last year, between last year and this year, 2,500 more have left the ERs without being seen in just a one-year period. These numbers point to a system in crisis, and this minister has ridiculous spin.

I'd like to ask this Minister for Health for the NDP to finally admit that her policies are making patients at risk here in this province.

Ms. Blady: Like I said, I would like to assure Manitobans that we have brought in a number of new measures to help take the pressure off of our emergency rooms. We've brought complete transparency on ER wait times for patients and families who can now access real-time waits for WRHA ERs

online, as well as explore a number of new alternatives to ERs.

We've met—opened the Mental Health Crisis Response Centre, which sees over 500 patients a month. We've also opened QuickCare clinics, which are fully staffed and have seen well over 100,000 patients. We've even launched the Emergency Paramedics in the Community program, which identifies a number of very frequent ER users and treats them at home, often allowing them to avoid a trip to the emergency room altogether.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, we've seen steady growth in ER waits to see a doctor. We've seen steady growth in numbers of patients leaving the ERs without being seen, contrary to the ridiculous spin by this Minister of Health who sounds clueless with her answers.

Mr. Speaker, how many patients' lives are being put at risk with the NDP ER crisis in Manitoba because this government is clueless about how to fix the ER problems?

Ms. Blady: One thing I can assure Manitobans of, that we've seen steady growth in, is the number of nurses and doctors in this province. We've had not only 665 new docs and over 3,000 new nurses, but it was really nice to be there last week at the white coat ceremony and welcome 107 new doctors. Steady growth, Mr. Speaker.

Fairford Water Control Structure Lake Manitoba Properties

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, this weekend saw significant flooding of property around Lake Manitoba, as pictures I table attest. While no one could've predicted the timing of the windstorms, anybody could've predicted that windstorms would come and as well as the impact of the NDP's poor decision making when they reduced flows through their Fairford water control structure.

Can the minister tell this House how many acres of property are now under water as a result of his government's mismanagement?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, we are constantly dealing with inclement events; this weekend is certainly no exception. Apart from, certainly, my area of the province, there were challenges in terms of windstorms. We're currently assessing what happened this weekend.

And I'm going to stress again that our staff, Emergency Measures staff, Mr. Speaker, were certainly working around the clock on the weekend, as were many municipalities.

Indeed, there were inclement weather events, and we're going to assess the damage and we're going to be there for Manitobans who were impacted by the—those weather events over the weekend.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, local landowner Mark Peters describes Lake Manitoba as a cannon always facing you in how you can lose everything all in a single day. He saw hundreds of acres of seeded cropland flooded this weekend, land that would have been protected had the NDP used the emergency channel as promised.

Can the minister advise Mr. Peters why his property was sacrificed because the NDP can't follow through on their promises?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I had thought that perhaps, for once, the members opposite were going to be concerned about the impact on individuals. But, clearly, if they want to talk about the politics of this situation, it was this government that built the emergency outlet. It's this government that's put—*[interjection]* Well, we are using it, for members opposite, under the approvals we receive from the federal government.

*(14:10)

It's this government that's moving ahead with the construction of both a permanent outlet from Lake St. Martin and from Lake Manitoba for the first time, and I would say it's also this government that's put in place the \$500-million budget.

Of course, all members opposite do, apart from criticize, is vote against the budget that will put in place the kind of protection that people and those lakes need.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, perhaps if this minister spent less time playing topple the leader and more time focused on actually flood mitigation, we wouldn't have these kind of problems.

Mr. Speaker, the minister warned last year, and I quote, of dire consequences, end quote, if that flood control structure wasn't used.

If the NDP can't be trusted to utilize their own current flood control infrastructure, why should Manitobans like Mr. Peters pay the price?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I can say one thing: I didn't quit provincial politics in the middle of a flood like the Leader of the Opposition.

And, Mr. Speaker, again, we're moving ahead with historic investment in terms of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. In fact, in addition to that, we've rolled out plans that will improve flood protection throughout the province, including in many of the communities that that member purports to represent.

So the real question, Mr. Speaker, that people should be asking in this House is, how come a member who stands up and talks like that about flooding just voted against the budget that's going to put in place the flood protection for his constituents and other Manitobans?

Number of Children in Care Effectiveness of Policies

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I certainly stood up and voted against the golden handshake of \$670,000 that was given to the political spinners that were let go by the Premier (Mr. Selinger), his leader.

One thing that was conspicuously absent in the million-dollar, self-congratulatory ad campaign was the growing—steady growth of children in care under this government's watch. That's not something any government should be proud of.

Will this government now admit that their policies continue to fail the most vulnerable children in Manitoba?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): What this government has done is we've tripled the funding to provide the necessary support for families and children across this province.

We supported the devolution of child welfare, so we are working with First Nation and Metis agencies across this province. We're working with four authorities and 22 agencies delivering programs on a daily basis to support families so they can provide the necessary support for their children in their communities.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But this is obviously a case of spend more and get less, and it's the children in Manitoba that are getting less as a result of the failed policies of this government.

Mr. Speaker, the number of children in care has increased since 1999 from 5,500 to 11,000 today. It's

doubled; that's twice as many children at risk today under this government's watch.

Will they just admit that they are failing more and more Manitoba children at risk?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I will speak about is our commitment to families across this province, our commitment to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion, our commitment to provide good quality housing, good quality child care, while protecting Manitoba's children.

Our No. 1 priority is the safety of children, and I will not apologize for that. But as we do that, we continue to build the safety net for all Manitoba children.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But the minister continues to fail to answer the question on why there's been such steady growth in the number of children in care. Mr. Speaker, the number has doubled under this government's watch.

Will she stand up today, stop with the rhetoric and indicate that children are more at risk today as a result of their failed policies?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I will tell the members across the way about what we've done to strengthen the system. Not only did we support and continue to support devolution, supporting First Nation and Metis people to organize and to support their own agencies, provide services to their own people, I will not apologize for that, and I take that—that is essential and that is important as we move forward.

What we've done is we've tripled the funding. What did they do when they were in power? Reduced it by \$4.5 million. Shame on them. I need no lecture from them. They also didn't stop there. They continued and reduced the funding to foster parents and then they stopped providing services to children over the age of 16. Shame on them.

EIA Housing Allowance Increase Timeline for Implementation

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, on March 18th, 2013, the PC Party, along with Make Poverty History, recognized the need to raise the EIA housing allowance, and I would table that press release. *[interjection]* I know you can't read it.

Too many people told us they had to steal from their food budgets to make rent, making themselves and their children using food banks to make ends

meet. We recognized this back in March 18th—on March 18th, '13.

When will this government take action and finally raise the EIA housing allowance, actually pay it?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Acting Minister of Housing and Community Development): Mr. Speaker, what this government did in Budget 2015 is we increased Rent Assist. We have funded it by \$22 million for median market rent. We are going to take that action. We have worked with it—with community members.

Let me remind the members opposite what David Northcott said. He said we are—moving to 75 per cent median market rent will have an impact on food bank use. That alone will make an impact on families. I love it.

Mr. Wishart: Well, where were they, Mr. Speaker? Our party supported Make Poverty History and their call to increase the EI housing allowance.

Support from the NDP was at best reluctant. First they said no, then they said yes but only if we get to phase it in, and finally they committed only in this budget to move forward. As of yet, that is not actually accomplished.

Why has this government—so reluctant to support those in need of an increase to EIA housing allowance? Why?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I ask the member across the way, why did he vote against Budget 2015 that increased the budget for Rent Assist by \$22 million and did just what Make Poverty History has been asking?

I have spoken many times in this House about our commitment to reduce poverty. Many of us have been working on this issue of poverty for a number of years, and since 1999, this government has—let me review—improved housing by developing more affordable housing. We are now working on 500 affordable, 500 social. What did the members across the way build? Nada, nothing at all, nothing. What we've been able to do—I should continue on what they did. What they did is they developed a welfare snitch line.

Please, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is we're creating more jobs, more opportunities for Manitoba families.

Mr. Wishart: Well, they—Mr. Speaker, they give with one hand while their other hand is in your pocket.

Those on fixed and limited incomes are particularly vulnerable to changes in cost. Increases in any taxes or extra fees leave them struggling to balance budgets. Simultaneously increase and expanding the PST has hit those on limited and fixed incomes particularly hard.

Why does this government continue to make life difficult for those on limited and fixed incomes?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of what this government has done to support the initiatives around poverty reduction and social inclusion.

This is the government who has made commitments to build 1,500 more affordable and 1,500 more social housing, and we completed that. We are now working on 500 more affordable and 500 more social and also developing more child-care opportunities, but we haven't stopped there. Our investments in public education, an 87 per cent graduation rate, we haven't stopped there. We are now investing in post-secondary, also including apprenticeship programs. We're creating jobs. We're supporting the economy. We're making a difference.

We know we have more work to do, but I have confidence that this side of the House will take on that challenge and continue to see the progress.

Health-Care System Management Record

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, today's NDP have been mismanaging Manitoba's health-care system ever since 1999.

The tragic ER-related deaths of people like Dorothy Madden and Brian Sinclair and, recently, Heather Brennan are a horrible reminder of today's NDP government's mismanagement of our—the emergency rooms and the facilities around them.

* (14:20)

We have reports after reports, we have inquests after inquests, and yet this reactionary approach, you know, the trademark of today's NDP, just can't seem to get it right.

I ask the Premier: Why has today's NDP government been so ineffectual in its approach to health care and emergency rooms in our province?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We've been, actually, quite proactive. We took the medical school enrolment from 70, which had been reduced under the members opposite, up to 110. We—so we've got 645 more doctors practising in Manitoba; 107 graduated last week from the medical school program.

We've increased the number of nurses in Manitoba by over 3,400. We've increased all the training opportunities all over Manitoba for nurses.

And now when it comes to ERs, whereas the members opposite would not report publicly, every single day there is a website that shows the number of people that are waiting in ERs, and the number has dramatically reduced, Mr. Speaker, dramatically reduced. And there's a management process in place to ensure that people are in ERs as short a time as possible with respect to their health-care needs.

We have made very significant improvements, Mr. Speaker, and I can only repeat that the member opposite needs to examine the facts before he renders judgment.

RHA Amalgamations Health Information Systems

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I see and others see the problems day after day, and, you know, maybe part of this is related to information systems too.

Sixteen years—sixteen years—of inefficient operations by today's NDP are unfortunately all too evident. They may think that amalgamating RHAs was a cost savings, but their lack of planning has left the new RHAs with multiple information systems that don't even communicate with one another, so that a health-care professional in one part of a RHA is not easily able to access patient information in another part of the same RHA. Today's NDP has created, in essence, a Tower of Babel where information can't be shared.

I ask the Premier: Why has he created such a disorganized health-care system where the parts, even one RHA, can't talk to one another?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): There's a dramatic difference today than there was when we came into office. There was no information at all, Mr. Speaker, none was reported. Now we have daily reports and accountability so—how many people are in ERs. There's an electronic health record now that never existed before. There is the ability to have telehealth

in Manitoba now, where a physician or a family practitioner in northern Manitoba and rural Manitoba can have direct access to a specialist and consult on the information that they've received through a diagnosis of their patients.

There's been very significant investments in information technology in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and they will continue to build an infrastructure which will allow patients to have family physicians close to where they live. Those family physicians will then have access through electronic technology to specialists and records, and other forms of information will be able to be moved, in a confidential way, to get the best diagnosis for patients as quickly as possible, as close to where they live as possible.

And all of those investments, every single time, the member for River Heights has voted against them.

Mr. Gerrard: And that's because this NDP system has had so many gaps, so much miscommunication.

An effective health-care system should make the best use of information technology, like, for example, the Emergency Department Information System, known as EDIS, a standard across Canada and in developed countries around the world.

Yet I table a FIPPA which shows that the northern health authority doesn't even use EDIS. It is not transparent as the minister is trying to claim. Indeed, the lack of this information system in Thompson makes it difficult to gather critical information needed to improve health-care delivery, as the FIPPA shows.

I ask the Premier: Why has the NDP, in 18 long years, consistently failed to ensure basic information—

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

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member opposite for the question.

Mr. Speaker, there have been very significant investments in northern health care in Manitoba. There never used to be a time when people in First Nations would have access to dialysis treatment where they live. We have now, through innovative measures, put dialysis treatment in First Nation communities where they will get support close to where they live so they don't have to jump on a plane to get dialysis treatment. We've supported personal-care homes being built in First Nation communities,

in partner with the communities and the federal government.

We have emergency medical evacuation systems which have been strengthened all throughout the province of Manitoba. And information technology, including telehealth, is now widely available throughout Manitoba.

I've seen it in action, Mr. Speaker. It makes a huge difference. A physician now can work in a rural or northern community and not be isolated. They can have access to the best advice from their specialist colleagues anywhere in Manitoba when they need it through telehealth.

These investments make a big difference. They keep people safe, they keep people at home, and they keep people healthy in their communities. That's exactly what we want.

City of Winnipeg Youth Recreation Programs

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Mr. Speaker, we all know that our investment in recreation programming can go a long way in helping Manitoba children develop skills and increase their confidence. Our government is proud to support programming like dance, sports, art classes and much more for children across the province.

Can the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities tell us about the announcements she made with the City of Winnipeg this morning to increase recreation opportunities for children?

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I appreciate that excellent question.

I was so pleased to be joined by the mayor this morning at Norquay Community Centre to announce the renewal of a \$1.5-million-over-three-years agreement between the Province and the City of Winnipeg. This funding helps create and maintain recreation opportunities for those youth living in the inner city, similar to the opportunities available to those living in suburban neighbourhoods.

Thousands of Manitoba youth will benefit from these programs every year, and they lead to healthier lifestyles, build confidence, help them learn important skills that they will transfer later into their work. And so we're also creating safer communities, Mr. Speaker, as we provide these opportunities.

We want all of the kids in Manitoba to be able to discover what their loves are and live—

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

**Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority
Hours of Operation—May Long Weekend**

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I asked some very serious questions to the Minister of Health on Thursday on behalf of my constituents, the visitors and the seasonal residents of the eastern side of the province.

Can the Health Minister confirm whether or not the ERs in Pine Falls, Pinawa and Beausejour were, in fact, open this past May long weekend?

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I can, in fact, assure all members opposite, as well as residents of those areas, that the ERs were open with some minor suspensions occurring.

Mr. Ewasko: In fact, Mr. Speaker, I know that there was a rollover on Highway 44 just east of Beausejour on Saturday evening and that the Beausejour ER was closed Saturday.

What was the state of the Pine Falls and Pinawa hospitals? Will the Health Minister admit that her NDP government's waste and mismanagement are hurting front-line essential services?

Ms. Blady: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. And, again, while there were some suspensions, I know that services were available and that I know that we are also, in fact, working with the rural communities in a way that is unprecedented compared to members opposite.

One of the things that we have done is we have worked, for example, with the University of Manitoba to ensure that we have seats allocated to students with rural roots so that they can continue to work in—they can return to their communities and practise there.

So we are investing in rural ERs, Mr. Speaker. And, again, we have more doctors practising than any other province west of the Maritimes.

Mr. Ewasko: Is—the fact is that what's unprecedented is how bad this management of our emergency-care services are happening in this province.

Mr. Speaker, 23-plus emergency rooms and operating rooms are closed in the province of

Manitoba. The Beausejour Hospital had no doctor on Saturday and Sunday. Pine Falls and Pinawa ERs were on divergence, and the Selkirk general hospital, right in the backyard of this Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), was on divergence as well this May long weekend.

Will the Health Minister just admit that the state of Manitoba's emergency care is in major crisis?

* (14:30)

Ms. Blady: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question and remind all Manitobans that when there isn't a physician available at a rural emergency room, our provincial EMS dispatch centre is made aware and adjusts land and air ambulance resources to provide the best possible response time. The best response time is within that golden hour, it's with the EMS providers, and it's about getting people to the right care regardless of whether that care is on their back door or at a more crisis-prepared location like the Health Sciences.

So we are investing in more paramedic resources, more doctors, more paramedics, more nurses, more care.

**Lake Manitoba Flooding (2011)
Multi-Year Compensation Packages**

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, in 2011 the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), the former Agriculture minister, promised a hall full of flooded-out agricultural producers from around Lake Manitoba multi-year compensation. In fact, to quote, he said, we are working on a multi-year compensation package, end of quote. Another broken promise from a dysfunctional NDP government.

Why does this current Agriculture Minister continue to mislead and make promises he has no intention of keeping?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development): Mr. Speaker, obviously the member opposite is well aware, much to the MLA individual from Morris had indicated, how did we know that weather conditions were going to be as bad as they are and how do we know that flood conditions are where we're going to have at 2011?

Obviously, there are circumstances that are—members opposite are quite aware of flood conditions that are beyond our control. That is why this government is putting forward \$5.5 billion towards infrastructure.

We talk about flood retention that—this side of the House is thinking proactive. They're talking about job cuts; they're talking about cutting the economy.

This side of the House is moving forward for agriculture and for the province of Manitoba's economy for the betterment of all of us that live in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, it's quite simple. All you have to do is look at the level of the Lake Manitoba, how these—this government has failed to act on building a second outlet out of Lake Manitoba in spite of promises to do so.

They have not done it, they have no intention of doing it, and they will not do it because it's just another broken promise from a failed NDP government.

Mr. Kostyshyn: The biggest fail is that side of the House when they decided to cut front-line services in the last time they were in government, and they continue to talk about saving \$500 million.

The sad reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we are working with the federal government of working on the secondary outlet out of Lake Manitoba to help out the situation. The sad thing is they don't accept the fact that the environmental regulations are also part of the regulations that we need to work with the federal government, but they choose not to, much like they don't choose to talk to their neighbours to the west that are giving us some financial or water challenges that they choose not to bring forward in addressing the situation that we have today.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been my privilege to address the issue.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

Ardith Mae Alexander 105th Birthday

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely honoured to rise in the House to congratulate and extend my heartfelt admiration for Mrs. Ardith Mae Alexander, who is celebrating her 105th—105th birthday today, and I'm just so pleased that she and her family are here with us in the gallery today.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Alexander was born on May 19th, 1910, on a farm in Pilot Mound. From a very young age she was involved in politics in Manitoba, following her father to every political rally and function in the area.

During high school she belonged to youth groups who volunteered their services in political campaigns. After high school she attended Normal School in Brandon where she received her degree in education and then went on to teach in the Snowflake district from 1930 to 1939.

In 1939, Ardith moved to Winnipeg where her involvement in politics continued to be a major part of her life. She was a constant presence at party headquarters where she spent countless hours assisting with day-to-day operations. She recalls that her greatest pride and joy during this time was her involvement with the Young Conservative Group to whom she served as a mentor.

In 2010, Mrs. Alexander was honoured for her dedication to politics when she received a lifetime membership from the PC Party of Manitoba.

Mrs. Alexander's personal life is equally as impressive as her career life. She was married 54 years and is the proud mother of three children, grandmother of five grandchildren and great-grandmother of three great-grandchildren. On top of all of her other activities, she assisted with the family business, was an avid curler—retiring at age 90—and to this day is a volunteer at the Deer Lodge hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have Ardith, her granddaughter Bettie Johnston, granddaughter Melissa Johnston, grandson Jamie Johnston, great-granddaughters Keira and Madison Karpowicz and niece Catherine Furvick as my guests in the gallery today.

I would ask that all members of the House join me in congratulating this incredible woman for all of her achievements and for setting an example for us all to emulate. Happy birthday, Ardith.

Run for the Burn

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, people who suffer from burns often have a long and difficult road to recovery. Members of the Mamingwey Burn Survivor Society know this and do everything they can to help. Thanks to the Mamingwey society, burn survivors have another great resource to support them.

When recovering from a burn, survivors deal with physical pain, long hospitalizations, disfigurement and emotional and psychological trauma. Many burn survivors also have to deal with changes in their appearance which can affect their self-esteem and make going out in public stressful and overwhelming.

Since it was founded in 2003, the Mamingwey Burn Survivor Society has organized the annual gatherings for burn survivors. These gatherings allow survivors to support each other and to help each other heal from the 'physical' parts of their injury. They also help run a support group which helps meet once a month and help members meet in small, informal gatherings throughout the year.

Members of the Mamingwey Burn Survivor Society, including Steve Haglund, are here in the gallery with me—with us today. Steve is a good friend of mine and perhaps one of the most positive people I've ever met. When Steve suffered a burn, he overcame big odds and went on to be a machinist in a hot and dirty environment, which is something the doctors thought that he shouldn't do and couldn't do, but he never let the doctors and experts tell him and let him get him down. Steve is a role model to so many of us, including myself.

Members of the Mamingwey burn society certainly go above and beyond every day to help others on the recovery journey. They are able to do what they can because of the dedication of so many volunteers who dedicate their time. It is no wonder that they were the recipients of the 2004 Premier's Volunteer Service Award.

Thank you to the Mamingwey burn society to turning a traumatic experience into an opportunity to help others.

Ian MacKenzie

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, Portage la Prairie lost a pillar of the community just before the new year when former Portage Daily Graphic owner and publisher Ian MacKenzie passed away quietly on December 30th.

MacKenzie, 91, grew up in Ontario, but for 70 years he called Portage home and many of its citizens friends.

MacKenzie came to Portage in 1946 after serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force as an aircraftsman during the Second World War, and

when fellow soldier and friend Wilfred Vopni invited him to join in the newspaper business with him.

Vopni sold the business in 1970 to MacKenzie, who was advertising manager at the time. MacKenzie continued the company's expansion by purchasing the Gladstone Age Press in 1981. He upgraded the printing presses in '72 and again in 1990-'84, making the Daily Graphic one of the first dailies in Canada to convert to the offset method of printing.

Under MacKenzie's stewardship, the newspaper earned the largest number of community journalism awards in its history, both provincially and nationally. For many years, the Daily Graphic was one of the few independently owned newspapers in the community, as most were controlled by media conglomerates.

MacKenzie was the first director to establish Portage Community Cablevision, now known as Shaw Cable.

It was in 1990 that MacKenzie decided to take his personal interest in politics to the public by running and winning a seat as a city councillor, and went on to serve eight more years as Portage's mayor.

He worked hard to normalize the relationship between the City and the RM, and was quite successful in doing that and certainly set the tone for all of the different things the City and the RM have done together since, including the PCU Centre.

* (14:40)

MacKenzie's affinity with people was obvious in the many leadership and membership awards he held and—he held in the city, such as the Portage Lions Club, the RCAF veterans association, the Portage Elks Lodge and the Royal Canadian Legion, to name a few.

I would just ask that all members join me in recognizing Mayor Ian MacKenzie and congratulate this great Manitoban on enriching the lives of so many others through his long-standing contribution to community service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): On May 17th, 1990, to the great relief of families everywhere, the World Health Organization declassified homosexuality as a

mental disorder. This past Sunday marked 25 years since this historic moment. It also marked the 11th year of International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia celebrations.

The IDAHOT, as it's known, began in 2004 with the aim of drawing the attention of community leaders, media, policy makers and the general public towards the issues that many individuals in the LGBTIQ community face every day. Whether it is violence or discrimination, these issues are present both here at home and in places around the world.

In Manitoba we've taken many important steps toward building an inclusive society, where diversity is respected and celebrated. Our government passed Bill 18, to make sure that students can establish gay-straight alliances in their schools to make them safer and more inclusive. We've also passed legislation to support transgender Manitobans by making it easier to change sex designation on government documents.

It's up to every one of us to take up this cause and make it our own. Whether or not you identify as part of the LGBTIQ community, you can be an ally and you can support human rights for all. As an ally, I had planned to show my support by attending the Rainbow Resource Centre's Spring Fling Gala along with many of my NDP colleagues, as well as all of the Pride events I can get to during the month of June.

We are joined today by Mike Tuthill, the executive director of the Rainbow Resource Centre, which has been a strong ally of our province, helping to make inclusive change. We all need to keep our voices loud and proud so we can continue to create change, both here and abroad.

Thank you, Mr. Tutthill, and thank you to the Rainbow Resource Centre.

Shooting Skills Day

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): For the last number of years, the Seven Oaks—or Seven Sisters Wildlife Association has hosted an annual Shooting Skills Day. On May the 9th, I had the opportunity to attend this event with some of my colleagues at the Seven Sisters shooting range. Many participants, young and old, attended the event and practised their shooting skills. The event introduced shooting to new hunters, male and female, and provided valuable training and gun safety.

Hunting is popular in Manitoba. The shooting skills—they brought together individuals of all level

of skills from other parts of the province to practise in a safe facility.

The Seven Sisters Wildlife Association is a branch of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation, the oldest and largest conservation organization in Manitoba. The Manitoba Wildlife Federation is a registered charity that is dedicated to the conservation and 'sustainable' use of fish, wildlife and habitat resources in Manitoba. The MWF works to ensure healthy fish stocks and wildlife populations in Manitoba through advocacy, education and conservation programs.

I would like to congratulate the Seven Sisters Wildlife Association for hosting another successful annual Shooting Skills Day, and for contributing to the advocacy and education of Manitobans in order to protect our valuable natural resources.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we could resolve the House into Committee of Supply in three sections, including the Legislative Building, room 255 and room 254.

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

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

FAMILY SERVICES

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): All right, will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Family Services.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): I do.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): All right.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Our plan ensures that services to families that are most vulnerable will not be compromised. We must ensure that quality services are delivered in the most effective and efficient means possible. The overall budget for Family Services for 2015-16 has been increased by \$45.6 million, or 4.1 per cent. The increase of 4.1 per cent places Family Services seventh in overall percentage increase compared to other departments.

As the minister responsible for poverty reduction strategy, I am pleased to say that in the 2015-16 the Province of Manitoba will invest over \$1.2 billion in initiatives to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion. This includes \$21.5 million this year to bring Rent Assist to 75 per cent of median-market rent. It also will ensure that we have 1,000—work towards building 1,000 more housing units. We will be launching the new Manitoba youth job strategy, as well as 900 child-care spaces and, as well as that, also increasing minimum wage.

Child safety is a priority for all of us and we have recognized this in the 2015-16 budget by investing a further \$19.7 million into Child and Family Services. We have more than tripled the budget for Family Services since we formed government. We are working on the implementation of all of Commissioner Hughes 62 recommendations and have already made significant progress on 23 of those recommendations.

We know that strong families are the best protection for kids. Budget 2015-16 priorities will provide an additional \$2 million to provide early intervention services to families in Manitoba. The \$19.7-million increased investment in 2015-16 represents a percentage increase of 4.2 per cent to make sure at-risk children are safe and not at risk in the community.

Highlights of the funding include support to mandated CFS agencies in providing protection, prevention and early intervention services, including increasing the funding for youth who are over the age of 18 and are transitioning out of care by over

24 per cent; the Manitoba Foster Family Network to support foster parent training and mentorship activities; and Voices, a Youth in Care network to expand its services.

Less than one and a half years ago, in December 2013, the accessibility for Manitobans, the AMA act, was enacted. I am pleased to report that we are now approaching the finalization of the first standard under the AMA in the area of customer service. We are making significant progress on the proposed standard; we have finished final consultation as of Monday of this week and are well on the way for moving the AMA from the development phase to implementation. The Province will train effected sectors about their obligations and raise public awareness about how accessibility benefits us all.

The budget 2015-16 will allow us to continue successfully helping vulnerable adults to safely live in and to more fully participate as active members of the community. The investment in helping people with intellectual disabilities will continue by providing an addition \$17.1 million to support and provide services to disabled adults in 2015-16. The increased investment of \$17.1 million represents an increase of 5.2 per cent over 2014-15 in Community Living disABILITY Services.

We continue to invest in wages for workers within the sector. The wage enhancement fund will raise the starting wages of support staff in residential-care facilities and agencies funded by Community Living disABILITY Services to between \$13 and \$14 per hour by 2017. This funding will support a range of day and residential services aimed at providing adults with an intellectual disability with the opportunity for independence and community setting, to the extent possible for each individual. CLDS supports include: residential services, day services and related support services.

The 2015-16 budget will allow us to continue to strengthen families so they can better support children with developmental and/or physical disabilities in their own homes and allow them to thrive in their communities. The increased investment of over \$0.6 million in children's disabilities represents an increase of 2.1 per cent.

The budget provides \$300,000 in new funding for the Children's Therapy Initiative to fund up to eight new therapy positions serving children across the province. CTI improves service co-ordination

through regionally based central intake systems and enhances the delivery of occupational and physiotherapy in speech.

Additional funding of \$200,000 is provided for the delivery of family supports for children with disabilities and their families and caregivers who may need assistance with some of the extraordinary demands of caring for a child with a disability. Supports may include respite, child development services, home and vehicle modifications, summer and after-school programs, and supplies and equipment.

The budget also provides \$100,000 to deliver the Building Independence pilot project in partnership with community organizations. Building Independence will support up to 50 adolescent and young adults with autism spectrum disorder to develop appropriate work behaviours, increase their independent living skills and prepare for future employment and social pursuits. This program has been identified as a priority in Thrive, Manitoba's five-year plan to help Manitobans with ASD and their families.

In 2015-16, the budget will provide an additional \$7.8 million for early learning and child care for the next year of our commitment to Family Choices, Manitoba's plan to expand early learning and child care. The seven point million increase will invest—investment in 2015-16 represents a percentage increase of 5.3.

We established a child-care commission to look at ways to redesign Manitoba's early learning and child-care system to guide future plans, including developing options to create universally accessible early learning and child care for all Manitoba families who need it. Over the course of Manitoba's previous multi-year plans, early learning and child care has grown and developed to help meet the needs of children and families across the province. We have tripled the annual funding to child care to more than \$160 million. We funded more than 14,340 child-care spaces, an increase of over 90 per cent. We've committed to funding and to build or expand more than 100 child-care centres as well as increasing wages and a development of a pension plan for the workers. We've also introduced an age-appropriate curriculum and we have kept Manitoba child care the most affordable in Canada outside of Quebec.

This—I know this was lengthy, but I needed to put on the record the accomplishments that we've

made and what budget 2015-16 does for all Manitobans.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I thank the minister for those opening comments. I certainly recognize that there have been a number of funding initiatives particularly recently. And we look forward for the opportunity to actually get into details on what will be done in some of those funding initiatives.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pass along a message to the staff of your department, who I know work very hard in trying circumstances and, I think, are underappreciated by many Manitobans who do not understand the complexity that they work within.

We will be looking at, in detail, on several areas and the minister has made several references to some of the pilot projects that are coming out, and we're certainly interested in discussing those with her. There'll be some questions regarding Child and Family Services and how some of the communication processes are working or not working, and want to continue what I started last year, which is a bit of an exploration as to how the relationship between Family Services and Jobs and the Economy works on delivery of the EIA program. And, in particular, I'm very interested in the new initiatives related to disability.

So I thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

* (15:00)

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): Thank the critic for the statement.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 9.1.(a), contained in resolution 9.1.

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

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, I am very pleased to be joined by the hard-working folks of the department, and there are many people that are not here that

continually invest their time and their expertise to making sure that we have a strong child-welfare system across the province.

So I am joined by Joy Cramer, the deputy minister of Family Services; Diane Kelly, she is the acting ADM for Child and Family Services; Jennifer Rattray, ADM for Community Engagement and Corporate Services; Wayne Pestun, the director of Financial and Administrative Services, CFO responsible for Estimates and budget; and Aurel Tess, who was—well, he, right now, is the ADM for Administration and Finance in the Justice Department, but his—was the former ADM for Family Services. So he's just moved over the last—in the last month, so we wanted to bring him back so he could share his good work with us.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): Thanks to the minister.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mr. Wishart: We would have a global discussion.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): Okay. Agreed? [*Agreed*]

Thank you. It is agreed, then, that questioning for this department will proceed in the global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wishart: I'd like to start initially just to go over some of the organizational chart issues, make sure that I understand where everything is. In particular, Community Service Delivery, whose responsibility would that be now, because I understand that Charlene has moved to another position?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes. The previous ADM, Charlene Paquin, has taken on the responsibility as the Ombudsman in the Province of Manitoba, so we're very excited about that opportunity for herself. And in—she just left, like, I think it was two weeks ago. So we have an acting ADM, Michelle Dubik, in that position.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, thank you very much. And I noted that there's a fair number of people in the organizational chart that are in acting positions. Is—are you working towards permanent placement there, or are you advertising, or what is the status here?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, all of the above. Right now, we're dealing with some sick leaves, so we're trying to manage that internally but, yes, we want to make sure that these positions do become permanent, and some of them will be advertised in the very near future.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that. So do you have a static vacancy rate that is the target for government and your department in particular?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the target that we've been given is 10.6 per cent. Because we're still in the process of hiring, our vacancy rate is higher than that.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Your current vacancy rate is higher than 10.6. Do you know by how much?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: By about 4 per cent.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much. And going to page 10 in the book—and I noticed that there's been some substantial changes from year to year from the previous one, in terms how structure is being done and in particular, things like community service delivery are dramatically different this year than they were last year in terms of dollars, and I wondered if the minister would offer some explanation as to what has been done in terms of restructuring.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So I'm going to do my best attempt, and, hopefully, I can answer your question fully. And, if you have any further questions or clarifications, we will try and answer them for you.

All right, so during the fiscal year '14-15 we announced that we were going to do an internal organization. So, as part of that reorganization, the division of Community Engagement and Corporate Services was created in place of the former disability programs in Early Learning and Child Care division. The Community Living disABILITY Services programming was moved out of the Community Engagement and Corporate Services and into the Community Service Delivery division to better align the program with the service delivery arm of the department and support the CLDS program improvement. The newly consolidated division will lead the community engagement work with clients and stakeholders, and will link these efforts to programs and to centrally provide corporate services that include our strategic planning and policy development functions.

Following the move of CLDS, other public-facing programs that the department delivers was

looked—were looked at and consideration was given to the benefits of realigning them under the CECS division. The following programs area were pre-existing prior to the divisions restructuring: Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care branch; Children's disABILITY Services program; the Family Violence Prevention Program; Strategic Initiatives and Program Support branch; disability access co-ordinator; and the Office of the Vulnerable Persons' Commissioner.

As part of the reorganization the CECS division will now be responsible for the following: Disabilities Issues Office; the Social Services Appeal Board; Fair Practices Office; the Manitoba Status of Women; Legislation and Strategic Policy and corporate services, which include French language services, emergency social services, business continuity planning, Workplace Safety and Health, provincial training, human resource renewal and space planning.

So I hope that that answers your question.

Mr. Wishart: I thank that minister for that.

And that is quite a major reorganization as the minister indicated. I'll probably come back to some of those for greater explanation, but I think I need, because of the use of the acronyms and—yes, I think I'm going to have to review that and perhaps come back at a later day. I know we'll have time to do that.

I did want to touch on a few other items on that just to make sure I understood them. There's always some confusion about transfers of functions, in particular, things like Housing and Community Development. The programs which were there in '14-15 and are no longer there, have they been moved with housing or where have they gone?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, they have.

Mr. Wishart: I'll try and keep things in order here.

Also Jobs and the Economy, quite a significant difference there as well and transfers of function. And, of course, many of us do find it difficult to get the Jobs and the Economy and the finance—or sorry, Family Services connections working properly. Can you explain what the transfer is in this case to Jobs and the Economy?

* (15:10)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It was the program and policy division for EIA.

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

And further, the allocation to Finance, which is quite substantially different than it was in the previous year, why such a major increase in that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: May I have some clarification, please? Are you—you're referring between 2014-15 and 2015-16?

Mr. Wishart: That would be correct.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will do my best to explain this. ACRS, which is the rent that we paid, that was all centralized in government, so we're no longer paying rent for space anymore. Okay, I got the nod.

And the not-for-profit strategy, the reducing red tape strategy, that was moved into the Finance division.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that. I will attempt to try and reconcile that in greater detail.

And, I guess, sort of overall, on page 10, the estimates of expenditures for '14-15 are up a little bit, and I didn't figure that out in percentage, but the minister did indicate the increase in her opening statement. Are you, in fact, performing exactly the same functions as last year after the transfer, or there's been some that have been lost to your department in regards to that total estimate?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There has been no program loss at all in the department. We actually took on the responsibility of the NPO strategy. We kept it.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, thank you. I appreciate that.

Moving on from then, I did want to talk a little bit about salaries and benefits. And there's some differences in there, and the minister 'increted'—indicated she had 10 per cent, I think, was vacancy, but the actual reality was a little bit higher. The saving from that, where will that show and where will that be attributed to, assuming that it's carried through the year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It will show through a number of salary lines among all of the divisions. *[interjection]* Yes.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that comment, and, as she said, it will be distributed amongst the various departments.

Just a little clarity on capital grants, which are more or less the same as they've been, I don't recall exactly what those were for.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That would be for the child-care program where we have built over 100 new child-care facilities across the province.

Mr. Wishart: And while we're still on that, that's the same amount for each facility as it has been for a number of years; you haven't changed the amount.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That has been—the \$2.5 million has been the—or I should say \$2.8 million has been a constant number. What that does is that permits us to fund community-based child-care centres up to \$600,000. And so that's helped us to either renovate some or build new ones.

And then we also have the PSFB capital fund that we do because we have a commitment that whenever you build a new school that there will be a child-care centre attached to it. And so we have that, and I think it's—I'm—approximately 20 that we will build within the next five years with that program as well.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

Perhaps while we're talking about this particular point, exactly what is the process by which you decide which of the child-care facilities are funded and which ones get capital grants? Could you enlighten me a little bit on the—on some of the details on how that process is done?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll start with this—I think there's more coming my way.

All right, so as I said, that our Family Choices Building Fund, we have the \$25 million that is with the public schools financing board, and we cover 100 per cent of those capital expenditures. Then we have the \$2.8 million that is an annual funding for the community-based not-for-profit, where we have the maximum of \$600,000.

The intake process for the school-based projects under the Family Choices Building Fund was completed, and to date, one project has been approved and the rest are being assessed.

The 2014-15 intake for community-based projects is completed. And those projects still are under review right now. And the—or the community-based project is available on an annual basis. So there is an opportunity for people to apply every year to it.

There's also—we also develop projects in surplus school space as well. We'll help fund those initiatives as well.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that. I was curious, the community-based funding one, how is the approval process—what are you looking for in terms of desirable projects in that area?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's several criteria that we use: that the project is going to increase the number of licensed spaces, with a higher valuation for the creation of infant and preschool spaces—because that's where we really have some significant work to do, are the infant spaces, I'm sure you've heard that from your own constituents; also about meeting community needs, so is this a community where there really is a need for centres, a new centre or new spaces; readiness of the project to proceed to construction; the status of the remaining required funds and/or if they have financing in place; the financial viability of a finished centre; and the ability of the centre to meet the staffing and other licensing requirements. If they—we do a review of health and safety issues, as well as any licensing exemptions present in the current physical space, so this would be a project or a child-care centre that wants to expand, that we would look at what's their history like. So that's really the criteria that happens.

I have to say that we've made some significant progress as far as the development of child-care spaces. But we hear loud and clear that we still have a lot more work to do. But I think with this plan and the investment that we're going to make, that we're going to see that it is going to make a difference.

Just for the record, I'd like to put on, since 2008, 56 child-care projects have been completed in community-based, so that's non-school, sites. And in—and since 2008, there are 16 more that are still in progress.

So—and I think this is a really good time to acknowledge the volunteerism that goes into the development of new child-care spaces. It is a very, very important task that many community and parent groups take on. But it's onerous in lots of aspects. And so the department works really hard to help people with—develop the application and fill the application out, but also when it comes to approvals and then the construction and implementation, we're there to help support them. So I think we should acknowledge the great work that happens in the department and outside in the community with the

child-care co-ordinators that we have that are supporting the number of child-care facilities.

* (15:20)

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister, and I certainly recognize the challenge that many communities have in terms of finding enough child-care spaces and how that impacts so many different aspects through the whole system, whether it's retraining or whether it's the ability to get back in the workforce and the supports around that. And the minister's certainly aware that we have quite a substantial number of people that are looking to use child care and there simply isn't enough available.

Looking—in terms of community criteria, in particular, is there an income qualifier, or is it—the need base that you referred to, could you put a little more detail around what—how you measure the need?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That would be the need that's in the community. There are some communities that have a number of child-care facilities, and then there's some that have very few spaces, so it's looking at what is the need. And we use our child care—our online child-care registry to help dictate to us what is the need for the particular area and try and make decisions based on that.

Mr. Wishart: That does help a little bit. Certainly, we wonder sometimes why certain communities are successful and others are not. Is—I mean, the online registry is there in terms of the numbers. Is there any regional sorting of that that is available to third parties to look at?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll have to take that under consideration—not under consideration, but you know—

An Honourable Member: Advisement.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Advisement, thank you. I'll—by the end of this, I'll have all the lingo already back in my mind—take it under advisement, and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

I just had one correction I'd like to put on the record, if you don't mind. We also neglected to talk about the disability issue office being transferred to the Department of Finance within Family Services, so that also accounted for some of the financial changes in that line.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, thank you very much and I'll look forward to the answer.

I just wanted to maybe fill that question out a little bit, because what we're looking for here is often we get groups coming to us as MLAs that are looking at the opportunity to do this. It's a substantial amount of work going through the whole process, as the minister recognizes, and it's very difficult to give them any advice as to whether there's good likelihood, poor likelihood, and so we're looking for something to add to that criteria so that we can give them some advice before they knock themselves out in the paperwork to a disappointing result in—which often—you know, they seldom come back a second time around, especially if they're a new initiative. Yes, so that's what we're looking for is a little more detail in that area.

Okay, now, we'll go on to the rest of the question: In terms of the Social Services Appeal Board, I'd like a little explanation as to what they will hear and what they will not hear. We occasionally get people coming to us that we put through that process, and it's not always really clear as to what they will hear and what they won't.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, so the Social Services Appeal Board hears appeals on a range of social service including various financial assistance programs, licensing of child care, residential care facilities, as well as other programs and services. So it might be medical eligibility. It might be health needs. It might be special needs or overpayments—I think that would be related to the EIA component—and shelter costs as well. Those are a few examples of the appeals.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman and the minister, because we—it is a way out to help resolve some of the issues which we certainly need to define in some cases.

I guess going on from there, I noticed that you had increased the funding and the number of people in the family violence 'protench'—protection—sorry—prevention, and certainly something that we support. What traditional activity services are we—can we expect from the increase in that area? It's the same staff, I guess.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Family violence protection. It's the same, yes. It's the same number of people.

Mr. Wishart: And I appreciate the minister's indulgence because as we noted, there's fairly substantial restructuring and it's making it a little hard to

do a comparison, side by side here, as is often the case.

I did want to ask a couple of questions about the Manitoba development centre, as I represent the area in particular, and, of course, we know that the numbers of residents continues to fall slowly. And I do see that the staff positions have probably reduced to reflect that somewhat, and I think if we go back to the organizational chart, we will find a acting director as we've had a recent retirement in regards to that, and we all wish the previous director well in her retirement.

I just wondered if there's been any additional discussions regarding the future of this facility.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As the member will know that there are constantly ongoing conversations about what the future is, and I'd like to just put on the record my appreciation for the decades of support that Cynthia provided MDC and the leadership and how she will be dearly missed, but we wish her all the best in her retirement.

So, yes, there are ongoing conversations. There are a number of people that want to see the facility close tomorrow, and there's a number of folks that also want to see the facility remain open. So our government has been working really hard at trying to find that balance, but also being very true to the Human Rights Commission and our obligations about the number of people that will be going back into the community, and we've seen some progress in that.

There have been some challenges. I will not lie to you that it's taken us a while to get some of the resources built up to the level we need them to. There's also a number of families, and I think it's around—approximately around 50 families who have signed waivers and have asked that their family members not be out—moved out into the community. So we're working with all of those individuals.

* (15:30)

There's also still the issue for your community, which I don't have to tell you, it's one of the largest employers with over 600 staff that are hired there and do really good work, quality work, to support the residents and make sure that we maintain the buildings that we have.

So I wish I had a more concrete answer for you, but it's really working with all of our stakeholders, and as I've always put on the table for you—I hate to

refer to you as the member from Portage—but I have put that on the table, that we will have ongoing conversations and you will be included in some of the debates that we have and how we move forward because it will truly impact, either way, your community.

And it was very interesting, I was at a meeting in December, and I can't remember what the committee was called, but it's a committee that has met for a number of years and has debated what will be the future of MDC, and the same divisions that started when the committee began are still in existence today. So it's how do we bridge the differences, how do we make sure that we're providing the care that needs to happen for a number of the individuals that are living there as vulnerable people. We know that there are many stories, success stories of people who have gone out to the community and who have found a new life and the excitement of buying groceries and planning meals, and we know the value of that. But we also know that there are stories of men and women who have gone out to the community, but have been returned because there have been some issues.

So we need to make sure that when we—as we make a decision, that we make one that we keep the person in the centre and that it is about what their needs are and how do we support them, but also in co-operation with the city and the municipality of Portage la Prairie as well as the other elected officials and the unions and the families and the clients and the residents themselves, we all have to do this. But I have to tell you, when I did my tour at MDC I was very pleased at the care that I saw and the relationships between the staff and the residents and how they've done their best to make it feel like home for many of the people.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

I—particularly glad that she notes that—how much effort the staff go to to try and make the residents feel at home. And I recognize that this is a complex issue and one that there are some entrenched positions in and, certainly, it is a significant issue for our community both in terms of the service provided to the individuals, but also in terms of the significance to the community. It is a major economic factor in the community, and we do have—besides this, we have a large number of group homes, many of which are populated with former residents of MDC. And we do have, in the community, a bus service that picks up some people from

group homes and brings them back on a daily basis to the MDC—well, maybe not every day, but most days.

An Honourable Member: For the day services.

Mr. Wishart: Yes, for the use of the activities.

One of the things that we have particularly noted, though, and I guess I'm looking for what the minister and her department is thinking in regards to this, is that many of the people in the group homes, like all of us, are aging. And we have had a few cases where they are no longer able to be cared for in group homes because, as the minister knows, many of them are really just converted houses and don't have a wide range of accessibility supports available to them. And, once you've been out six months, I believe, it's still impossible to get back into MDC. Is there any consideration being given to, as they age, changing that policy?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'd just like to make sure that we put on the record that we take it very, very serious about the quality of care that we provide to individuals that are in the community or in a residential program or a group home. So we are constantly looking at how do we adapt our programming. We know that there has been a jurisdiction which has applied an Aging in Place initiative around people with—that are involved in the Community Living system. What we continually do is talk to our partners in Health around what are the options and what kind of services do we need and what kind of services do the—does the resident and the patient need, and so we work together to address that.

Mr. Wishart: I do encourage—I want to encourage the minister to continue pursuing that as much as possible.

And I'm going to let my colleague take a few questions here, if she would.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I'm pleased to be here to participate in the Estimates for Family Services.

And I'm wondering the minister might just indicate who her senior staff are in the department. Have we got an org chart somewhere in here?

An Honourable Member: Yes, we've done that.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Oh, have you? I didn't know.

An Honourable Member: I'm sorry.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay, maybe I'll ask a question then and now my colleague has asked me just to—

An Honourable Member: I might want to answer that first question, though.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay.

An Honourable Member: I'll wait for your second one. No, no, no.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I was just—yes, given that the Department of Housing has become a separate department now, and it was amalgamated with Family Services and Housing last set of Estimates, I believe, could the minister explain how staff split and who went to Housing versus who stayed in Family Services?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I can tell the member for River East is that we, yes, the two departments were managed by the same minister but still remained independent departments. I don't know if that's the right—the correct word, but they still functioned independently so there was no staff exchange between the—once the Minister for Housing and Community Development (Mr. Saran) was appointed, it was a direct transfer back.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Okay, thanks for that clarification. And then was there a separate deputy minister for both Housing and for Family Services last year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, there was.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And are they still the same deputies then?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The Deputy Minister for Housing and Community Development now is Mr. Craig Marchinko.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks, and did that happen just a result of the separation, or was he the deputy before there were two ministers?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: He was the assistant deputy minister; I think his title was around Community Development and Strategic Initiatives.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Maybe I could just ask whether we went through the staff in the minister's office. Was that part of the discussion? Okay.

Could the minister indicate to me who the staff in her office are, how many secretarial support and who they are, and how many political staff or political support there are and who they are?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: If I get this wrong, I'm going to get in big trouble.

Okay. So, the front of the house is Christie Lysack, Jacqueline Pikta, Kelly Davidson, Jaimie Kuhn. And for political staff, I work with Sahla Mitchell and now Denise MacDonald.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Can the minister indicate, and I know the names will be on the record, but of the two political staff, one—the first one was Sahla. Can the minister explain what their roles are in her office?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, right now, we—Denise MacDonald has just joined us, so it's—we like to take a co-operative approach to the office and so it's really around every-day functioning, from the mail to preparing speaking notes, preparing for different kinds of public engagements that we might be doing, as well as doing some problem solving around some particular issues, and working with the media as well or helping to get the media messaging together. So it's—they take on a lot of responsibility and I enjoy working with them very much, and it's not easy work, as the member knows—from River East—but every day we come to this great building and put our best foot forward to ensure that we're providing the best quality of service for Manitoba families.

* (15:40)

Mrs. Mitchelson: The minister indicated that there was a communications function for the two staff in her office. Are there any other communications people within the department that work with the minister on issues management?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It wouldn't necessarily be communication as in direct contact with media; it's when Cabinet communications gets a request for a statement or interview with me, they help support me to get the information. So it's really not a direct communications person, but I think that it's a really important role that they do that—I would work with Denise and Sahla, for both of them.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Then, is there someone in Cabinet communications that's responsible to the minister alone, or this—do the people in Cabinet communications have several ministers that they're responsible to?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The person that I work directly with is Rachel Morgan, but she does have responsibilities for other departments as well; she does not work just solely with Family Services.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Do the two people that are in the minister's office, then, deal with all of the case specifics, the cases that come in, or who has that responsibility?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, they do, but, as the member knows, we cannot interfere in cases of child protection. What we do is we ask that the department make direct contacts, whether it's with parents or grandparents or foster parents, and that they have that responsibility.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So then what comes—when a case specific comes to the minister's office, what happens when somebody calls in, then, and has an issue with a child that might be in care or an agency that might—that they may have an issue with or a concern with? How is that kind of request handled?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It is referred to the department.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Could the minister be a little more specific? Is there an intake person within the department, or who or where in the department do these issues get dealt with?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So it really depends. There isn't one particular intake person for the entire department. So, depending whether it's community living, child care or family services, there's a direct contact that that information is shared and they're asked to directly contact that family or that foster parent.

Mrs. Mitchelson: So, at no point, then—is the minister telling me that at no point, right through her department, that there is no sort of ministerial responsibility for what is happening? We look at child-care issues, for instance. I mean, what issues come to the minister? Does the minister ever correspond with any organization or group out there on any issue, or is it all departmental responsibility?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: To the horror of some people in the department, I'm in the community a lot meeting with service providers, and in some cases I'll meet with parents as well. But I just want it to be made very clear that I do not interfere in any decisions that the professionals have made in the front line. So there are a number of issues that I am involved in and making, working with the department, working with community agencies to ensure that we're providing the best service possible for Manitoba families.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much and appreciate the little break and thank you for—from my colleague here.

I wanted to go back and talk a little bit about agency accountability and community initiatives in particular. Talking a little bit more about the red tape reduction strategy, which is, according to the notes here, in phase 2, I wanted to know what the nature of this has turned into and what success you've had in that area.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So the NPO strategy, when we first launched it—I'm going to throw out numbers and I want to have approximate in front of all of them—I think there was around 35 agencies that we engaged from all different sectors in the not-for-profit group from across the province. And we have seen remarkable changes with some of the agencies because we've been able to give them one point of contact, and it's worked out really well for agencies that have funding from multiple departments. So they have one person that they talk to, one report that they have to file.

We have been working very diligently on trying to figure out some stuff on the Web and to ensure that they're able to do some applications and file reports on the Web. That hasn't come as easily as I thought that it might, but we continue to work with the agencies. We do have a very active website that provides information around what's happening in the sector, what are some dates to be looking forward to.

But, overall, what the NPO strategy was, was about multi-year funding. So many of the not-for-profit organizations, living year for year is very, very difficult. So being able to sign multi-year contracts—and yes, it was 35 agencies—has been very, very helpful. And a single-window application has been the website that we've been working on.

As well, as—we have worked on the ability to save money by sharing resources. For many of the organizations, they're too small to have, you know, finance people and HR people, but together, if we were able to provide those services collectively, we were able to do that. So there's been some initiatives at the United Way that's—that have provided that.

We are now working on phase 2. And there was an application process that closed on April 20th, and we invited other not-for-profit organizations to apply to be a part of the next phase. So I ask that you stay tuned for the next announcement.

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

And I see from the general restructuring going on here there's been a significant increase in accountability in terms of—in particular, related to the

agencies the minister referred to. Perhaps she could give us a little more detail on how she plans on putting in place a strong accountability program to deal with some of the issues that have come up, for example, in the last year with the hotel situation.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: For the agencies that we are involved with, we sign service purchase agreements which help direct the service that their responsibilities as well as our own internal responsibilities. So the agency accountability in this support unit, it really is around undertaking financial reviews of our funded agencies. And it's a routine business that we do.

But also, if there are concerns that are raised by external parties or board members themselves within the agency, or if we are—in oversight we see that there is some concerns, because it's public money that is going into these agencies, we feel that it is important that we sit with them and identify what the issues are.

* (15:50)

I think that there is some really good examples of financial issues that groups were experiencing, and the accountability unit was able to sit down with them, review their budget, talk about what their challenges are and help them come up with a go-forward plan to ensure that they're able to provide the services to Manitobans that is very, very valuable. So it's really an opportunity for us to—we want to make sure that we are being—that people are being accountable for the public funds, but also I see that it is very much a co-operative effort of working with the agencies and providing them with support. If it's board development they need, that's what we will do. If there are concerns that are raised around a particular agency or service that we're receiving, we'll ask them to go, as well, and evaluate.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, thank you very much, Madam Minister. So, in regards to some of the service delivery agencies, there's a financial oversight. Is there quality of service oversight provided as well, and how is that done?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So, the quality question is really program specific, so we would have a program director go in and evaluate the quality of the service that's being provided. But that also can happen within co-operation with the accountability unit. Sometimes there's a financial review that goes on with the quality review, and it happens in co-operation.

Mr. Wishart: So, in the case of the service delivery that was providing care—and I know there were a number of them in hotels—who was doing the quality of care oversight in regards to that? How was it done?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: You're referring to the fixed rate contract review that we announced that we were going to be doing and that we completed. That happened through the accountability unit, that we worked with a consultant and we did the reviews.

Mr. Wishart: The accountant did the quality of service review?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The consultant. We worked with a consultant who was part of the—hired through the accountability unit. There was a very short time frame, and we needed to get the work done as soon as possible.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the minister for that. I know that we heard—repeatedly heard some concerns from the public and individuals in the industry about the quality of the work as being offered, and it's hard to get a feel that there was a level of accountability here that was being met.

When you sign these agreements, is there not a lot of detail around what services must be—much—be delivered?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, it is. It's very specific about what services are to be provided for the dollars that we are providing them with.

Mr. Wishart: And so when, for example, complete care was having issues with their level of service in the hotels, was there a hold back or was there something done to bring things up to standard? Was it just we change contracts in the future? What was the result?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There was ongoing conversations around what we expected and their responsibility to fulfill them. Partly that's why we had the fixed rate contract review was to evaluate that relationship and that SPA and look what we needed to do in the future to ensure that the quality of service that we expected for the children was there.

And you'll remember in November I made an announcement with the service providers about hiring 200 more staff and creating more specialized placement. That is a priority, and that was a way so we could have some more direct accountability and also have direct training for the individuals that are providing the care for the children.

Mr. Wishart: And I thank the minister for that and, while we're touching on that, the new service providers would be, in fact, staff for your department; is that what your announcement covered?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, that they would be—yes.

Mr. Wishart: And, I guess, following on that would be could the minister update us where she's at now that we're in a new financial year?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We can say that we have 71 individuals hired. In that pool of 71 is what we heard from the front line. What was needed was some strong supervision and so we've hired supervisors to provide some oversight to the system as well as the front-line workers themselves. And from that announcement in November we can also say that we've developed—I'm going from my mind; I hope I'm correct—50-plus specialized units for children.

Mr. Wishart: Could you describe what a specialized unit for children would constitute and how it would be staffed?

An Honourable Member: I'll—

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): Honourable Minister.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Sorry.

I'll have to wait a few minutes to get the staffing complement for specialized units. But what I can tell you is—just to give you some examples. I think you recall us talking, I think that was in November, as well, for our high-risk victims, girls, how we were able to develop six or eight beds, six beds, maybe, for the HRV girls. I know that there is a high staff complement because of the complex needs of these youth and the services that they require and the protection that they need. So that is an example.

There also was an example in the November announcement around a partnership with Marymount and looking at redevelopment of new space with them and ensuring that we have the psychological services that are available, if that's necessary, for the trauma that they've experienced. So it's a whole combination and continuum of services. I think, also, you know, you can look at Macdonald Youth Services and New Directions, and they have particular units that they provide specialized placements as well. Knowles Centre is another good example, and Knowles Centre has foster parents that they train specifically to work with some of the complex children so they can be in the community and integrated as much as possible.

So those are some residential programs that we have. I think that today I'd like to just to put on the record that I had the opportunity of visiting the COACH program, which is a really unique program. It provides services for 15 children between the age of 5 and 12 and it's in partnership with Macdonald Youth Services as well as Winnipeg School Division, and it's one-on-one mentoring. It's—they provide them with an education, but also with the social and emotional support that they need to be successful. They have mini milestones that they celebrate, but the ultimate goal is full integration of a child into a—back into the school system academically and socially and emotionally. And they have—there are some great statistics that have been provided to us about that ability of COACH to provide that necessary support not only to the child, but also to broaden it to the family as well and help support and see growth for the entire family and integrate back into the community.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that, and we'll probably come back and touch on, in particular, the schools, and attendance rates is an issue that we wanted to look into as well.

But, in terms of transitional programs, I know that there's an extension of care program available to youth in CFS that reach 18. How many kids are in that program and do you have facilities that are designed to assist them in that regard?

* (16:00)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm going to give you the right answer because I have a guesstimate. I'm going to play a game in my mind and see if I'm right. I don't want to be wrong.

I wasn't too far off. We have around 542 youth that are in extension of care. I think it has to be said that a child can be an extension of care for multiple reasons. Sometimes it's—there needs to be some more transition planning that is co-ordinated for them. Sometimes it's transitioning a youth from the Family Services division to Community Living. Sometimes it's a youth—a young person who is taking advantage of the bursary program that we have and going back to—or going to university and obtaining their post-secondary, so there's multiple avenues why a children is on extension of care.

We have—some of them will stay with their foster parents and get continued support. Some of them may be in a group home setting as well. We are—have seen a marked increase of extensions of

care over the year, and that's partly because of awareness of the program being available to the young people and also the willingness of the young people to continue to work with us. But it's really—they can stay in extension of care until they're 21 years old, and we see that it is an extremely invaluable opportunity for the youth.

Soon after taking the responsibility of this portfolio and having a conversation around extension of care, I was challenged if I would have turned my children out, my two sons out, when they were 18 years old, and I am proud, I think, to say that Kaleb and Ethan still live with mom, and they're 21 and 20, and as far as they're concerned, they're never leaving. So that was a really good reality check for me, right.

Like I think that Family Services—we are a system and, fortunately or unfortunately, we become the parent for some of the kids, and we have a responsibility that extends past 18, and when a child or a youth wants to take on that responsibility in an extension of care, we need to be there for them. We need to work with the agencies and with the other parts of our department around transitions though as well. So we have a lot of work to do, but there are some successes.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the minister for that. I recognize that there's probably a range between 18 and 21, and we won't talk about failure to launch; that's another problem.

But, if you could perhaps enlighten us, we talked in terms of the wide range of different options that you have available and you are developing some more that will be probably more heavily supervised than some of the existing ones, what staff qualifications are you looking for in the high-risk category, in particular?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I certainly don't want to misrepresent what criteria we're hiring under. I have it in my mind but I want to be very accurate. So if you may indulge me, we'll get that information for you as soon as possible.

Mr. Wishart: Perhaps, related to that, you do have quite a complex range of sites available, and I'm sure there—that some are very unique and add to the situation and some are more common. How do you manage the—with all of the different agencies that you have available, and the needs that are there might not match that particular agency, how do you

manage to fill all of these spots to the best efficiency in the system?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: May I ask for a clarification? Are you talking about staffing or are you talking about clients and families that we're working with?

Mr. Wishart: Sorry, I'm talking about particularly the children that are in CFS system and placements in the various agencies. How is that managed and how are—how do you track the vacancies in the system and the—try and match the needs of the child to the capacity that you have?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So I'll try and answer it and if I'm off in left field, tell me.

So we have a centralized EPR placement for when a child comes into care. And so that would be a group home or a foster parent placement that could happen immediately. So that's centralized right now, so all the agencies working within Winnipeg or working with this EPR system in making the placements. Our foster-parent program, we're looking now at centralizing that and working in partnership with the authorities and the agencies.

And right now what happens within our system, the member from Portage la Prairie is quite correct, that there are agencies and authorities that manage their own foster parents, and we need to be bringing those resources together, and we have started that process with the hotel reduction team. Each authority has put staff on the hotel reduction team and we're working collaboratively to ensure that we are—we're, you know, eliminating the use of hotels, but also looking at how do we expand that to foster-home placements. Because you're correct in saying that one agency, their homes might be full, but agency B may have some spaces and how do we cross-purpose that and how do we work with foster parents. So I think that there is some opportunity to do that and I have heard loud and clear from the foster families that I have the opportunity to sit with and to talk with, about what their—some of their challenges are around placements. And we hope to address that as soon as possible.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the minister for that.

In terms of recruitment, then, of foster families and foster parents, is it still, then, in the hands of the agencies or are the authorities now taking a more active role in recruitment?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So there's—I think the—we have the 1-800 number that if parents or people are interested

in fostering, that is managed by the Manitoba Foster Family Network and then their information is referred on—if there's a particular authority or agency that they want to work with is then referred on.

We're right now looking at how do we restructure that to maximize our resources as far as orientation and mentorship. I don't have to tell you fostering is a lot of work and the folks that do it within our system are extremely gifted. They are giving and committed, but they need support. And so we have identified that a mentorship program will be vital to support the foster parents as we move forward and ensure that they're—and we also want an orientation program that's put into place to ensure that there's some continuity about what information is being shared.

So I think that as you see us move forward, that you're going to see more centralization, but still always in co-operation with the authorities and the agencies as well.

Mr. Wishart: Okay, when I'm talking to foster parents, I mean, we hear a wide range of issues that they bring up, but one that has been persistent, I guess, and one that gives me great concern is—one of the issues that they often bring forward is the delay, particularly when they have someone come in to give them a break and the delay in payments around that.

Could you comment on that problem? It doesn't seem to apply to every agency but it is a common complaint and, of course, foster parents are, as you indicated, are a valuable resource in the system, one we don't want to jeopardize over bookkeeping.

* (16:10)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I think that the member refers to child maintenance payments and the delay in that. And, yes, I, too, have heard that with horror, hearing foster parents having to take loans out so that they're able to provide for the children that they have so graciously taken under their care. So we call it child maintenance billing, and yes, there was a delay. There was a delay up to eight months at one period. I can tell you now that it is to a 30-day return that we're able to provide their funding.

There are some times where there is some controversy, or we need to, you know, sort of understand what some of the costs are. So there'll be some—there could be delay on some of them, just for clarification.

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the minister for that. And, certainly, I would be quite concerned if—with that kind of a delay, because these are valuable resources in the system, and we certainly don't want to lose them from the system over financial issues, because an eight-month delay would be difficult for many individuals to handle.

But we do seem to find some agencies that are far more common in terms of the complaint than others. In terms of your oversight group, do they—is that part of their mandate as well, or are they limited specifically to the service providers?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just, if I may put some comments from the last question that you asked, just to clarify, that at the time a child goes into foster placement, 85 per cent of the money that is owing to a foster parent is paid immediately, and it's the 50–15 per cent, one five, that's held back until we can sort of look at the bills and consolidate what the payment will be.

The HRT that I referred to, the hotel reduction team, that team isn't looking at specifically at the payments made by agencies. It is something that the officials in the department are very aware of, the CEOs of the authorities are aware of too, and so we are consistently trying to work with them to share the information with the 22 agencies around what are the expectations and what are the standards, not only for care for the children and youth that they have responsibility for, but also the responsibility to the foster parents.

Mr. Wishart: So the financial oversight, then, remains the agency's responsibility? Or is it now at least partially done out of the authority?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's with the authority.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you very much for that answer.

If I might ask a few questions while we're talking about the hotel reduction team. Clearly, it's a high priority for us all. You've given it, I assume, a fairly wide-ranging mandate. What initiatives are they working on besides the one that has previously been mentioned, in terms of hiring additional staff and providing specialized facilities? Are there any other options that are being considered?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There is a combination of responsibilities that they have. The No. 1 responsibility is, when a child comes into care, working with the agency and the staffperson around placement of that particular child, but then also building a system that

is going to be able to meet the demands so we can keep children out of hotels. And so that is, again, around staffing and creation of more resources, or, as we call it in that system, more beds.

So that's really what they're working on. And it's about that co-ordination with the agencies and with the authorities. And I think that we need to commend the authorities for releasing their staff to work on this initiative, and see the benefit of it. And I'm extremely pleased with the work that we have to date. We have a lot more work to do.

And even after June 1st, it will continue to be—all efforts will have to be in place, whether it's in the agency, the authority or in the department, to ensure that we're able to maintain our directive of no children in hotels after June 1st.

Mr. Wishart: I thank minister for that. So, working towards that June 1st deadline, it is the responsibility of this hotel reduction team to put in place everything to make sure that when you get to that June 1st deadline, that does not occur. And who, beyond that point, monitors the situation?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The hotel reduction team is responsible for it, but they are working very closely with the director of child welfare, as well as the deputy minister of Family Services, to implement it. The hotel reduction team will continue to stay as a group, functioning and working towards—we'll have to change its name maybe—working towards keeping children out of hotels. We are for many, many reasons committed to this and know that it's very important that we're able to meet the demands, provide the children the support they deserve and require.

Mr. Wishart: So, just to be clear, ongoing there will be a new entity, assuming you change the name, that will be responsible to make sure that this doesn't happen again? Because, as the minister knows, this is not the first time this promise has been made, and follow-up seemed to not happen the last time, being generous. What is in place to make sure that the follow-up continues on an ongoing basis here?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So there has been a new name change already as we speak—the centralized placement team. So they'll be working with the centralized EPR and the centralized foster parent placement program. These—it's not—this team is vital to ensure the oversight is happening and that we are addressing the issues around keeping children out of hotels, but it also is working with the community-based

organizations across the province and looking at what are some of the prevention services that they can provide to families.

So, by the time a child comes into care, that family's in crisis. What can we do as far as prevention and interventions to prevent that child coming into care? That could be our best tool around hotel reduction. But knowing that there are children that are at risk and they may have to come into care or have to come into care, that the hotel or this central placement team will continue to work with all of the agencies around addressing what their needs are and looking at options for placements other than hotels, which would be a combination of some—in the short-term EPR placements, the emergency placement resources, but also looking at foster home placements as well. And in some cases, because of the needs of the child, looking at the specialized resources. So this is ongoing.

We realize—we see the statistics as you do about where there are some times where there are peaks within our system, where there's the volume is increasing drastically, and so we are monitoring those peaks as well as trying to do the best we can to project what the needs are.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the minister comments, and I know this is an ongoing challenge. So they will be the ultimate authority. What will be different in terms of them having access to information related to the capacity of other agencies? Will they have a more open process to get access to spaces in other agencies as well, or are we actually creating a parallel system here?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Okay, I got part of that question, so I'll do my best. That, no, we're talking about a centralized placement desk. Now, are you talking about parallel systems between EPR and foster homes, or are you talking about agencies and—

An Honourable Member: Agencies.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No, once we get the buy-in and the support around the authorities and the agencies, we will be putting all of our resources together. So everyone that has a foster home that's been approved will be part of our placement desk, and it will be—individuals will assess what the need of the child is, match it with the foster parent as soon as possible.

Mr. Wishart: Thank you, Madam Minister, and I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You used the word individual; this is surely not one person that is doing all the placements. It's got to be a group of individuals. One person, 24-7?

* (16:20)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Okay, so, around EPR there is a group of individuals that do the EPR placements. The centralized placement desk will be a new initiative; there will be a group of people that will work on that. We have not defined what the hours of operation are. We do have after-hours services that are being provided by ANCR, and they are provided with the emergency placement resources on Fridays so that they know where there are placements that they can access for their individuals—their children that they may take into care.

Mr. Wishart: And so EPR will not be within ANCR? It's within the department?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mr. Wishart: I've got to ask then: How will the co-ordination between ANCR and the placement desk be done?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The ANCR is already a 24-7 service. They have their after-hours service. So what I was referring to is on—at the end of the day, the EPR placement desk shares with ANCR, these are the resources that are available. And they will do it every evening, and they will do on Friday for the weekend and make sure that they have the resources that they need.

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank you, Madam Minister. I see the need for a very real co-ordination here, and I hope that that's something you can achieve. It still seems to me that we're getting a bit of two systems touching bases but not necessarily operating together. And is, I think—is that a fair comment? Are you keeping them separate for a reason?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I think what we have to consider is the family situation when the child is brought into care. The EPR system is for emergency placements. It's apprehensions that may happen late in the day. They may happen on the weekend. We need a placement for this child, and the EPR placement is a short-term placement.

The foster home placement will be longer term. In some situations we're able to put resources in a family, and the child can be returned home. In some cases we're able to identify a family resource or

another parent that may be able to provide that care; we're able to return them home.

So in—they are separate systems. They need to co-ordinate—I do not disagree with you at all—but they need to remain separate. I think that assessment needs to happen sometimes in the EPR: evaluation about the family, the child. What are the needs? What is the plan? And then, if there is a necessity for a long-term placement, that—we need to start looking at the foster home as an option. So I think that they can work very well together. It will be new, but I have a lot of confidence that it will provide better service to children, and that's really what this is all about.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just want to follow up on some of the comments. So the emergency placement resources is looking to all of the agencies and the authorities to provide the information to a central location on what resources are available for children should they need intervention in—at any time of the day. Is this just—this isn't just after hours and on weekends, but this is at any point in time. So is—am I correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The EPR is just that, emergency placement resources, but it can happen at any time of the day. It happens because of—sometimes there's a breakdown in a current placement. It could be the number of siblings have been apprehended. So it does happen throughout—excuse me—throughout the day.

There are some agencies that have foster placements, and a child may be apprehended and may not even go through the EPR. But, in some instances, because of resources, they need to go through EPR.

So it's an important resource that we have. It helps co-ordinate services for the children and the youth, and I think that when we apply the new initiative around centralized foster homes, that I think that it's going to really complement the EPR system.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Could I just ask, then, where the centralized foster home placement process is at? Have we got an inventory of foster homes from all agencies that are part of a central pool that any agency can use in a crisis situation?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It—right, we do not have that list as of yet. I think that what's happening is we're just in the phase of construction of the centralized foster

placement desk, so that is a commitment that we've made and the authorities and the agencies will be working with us on that.

Mrs. Mitchelson: When does the minister expect that to be in place, and when will we see that kind of co-ordination and sharing of resources and services?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm hesitant to give a timeline. It is a priority, but right now really what we are focused on is our centralized placement team and working towards the development of the additional resources around EPR. It is a priority. We've been talking to the authorities, to the leadership council, that this is the direction we want to go into. There is support for it. Right now it's, as I have mentioned before, the member knows that this is a system that is under a great deal of pressure and we have to be very careful how we stage in new initiatives.

So people realize this is the direction we are going. There will be an announcement that will be happening in the very near future, and, hopefully, at that time, I can give a concrete answer about when that would happen. You know, for centralized placement and the benefits of it, what I think to be the benefits about providing better co-ordinated services for parents, or for the children, but also providing better support for the foster parents around what are the standards, what are the expectations, dealing with some of the billing issues that have been occurring. I think that it's a win-win. I certainly would like to see it up and running within this fiscal year, but that's as far as I'll be able to tell the member for River East, and if I'm able to come up with a more specific answer, I will certainly put that on the record in the upcoming days.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But isn't the success of the centralized placement unit dependent upon the co-ordination and the co-operation of all agencies to share information so that if there is a placement available for a child or a family in crisis, that that is—so I guess I can't see one being a priority over the other. It's fine to have a centralized placement unit in place, but if they don't have the resources in a co-ordinated fashion kids are going to suffer.

So I guess I'm asking the question on, you know, why is the unit more important than having the resources available at the same time?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just to clarify for the member, as we're working towards our June 1st commitment, we have called agencies in Winnipeg and the rural and the North and we've asked for them to share the

resources that they have available. A number of them have provided us with resources, so it is happening in the preliminary phases. As far as it happening in the centralized placement desk, I cannot give you a date responsibly because we need to co-ordinate it and get it right rather than just rushing to put it together. But there is that co-ordination that is happening at the agency level that is helping to support our June 1st commitment.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And then just one final question: Is the June 1st deadline a realistic deadline when we don't seem to have full co-operation to make the system work?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I don't want to mislead the member from River East, and I don't want to leave on the record that we don't have co-operation because we do have co-operation. There are authorities that have placed their staff on our centralized placement team to work towards the June 1st deadline. We have agencies that are providing us with the resources that they have available and sharing them with us. There is a level of co-operation.

I guess the challenging part for us is the volume, and also the other challenge that we have are the sibling groups. It is—has happened on frequent occasions where we've had, you know, families of six or more that are being apprehended, and how do we, with our principle of keeping families together, how do we do that?

So we are committed, as far as agencies and authorities and the department, in moving forward and seeing our commitment of June 1st to be a reality, and that's the direction we're going to work in.

*(16:30)

Mrs. Mitchelson: And just—that just leads to one final question, I think, and that is: What percentage compliance do you have from the agencies and the authorities? Can you give me a ballpark figure on how many have come on board?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, 100 per cent of the authorities are part of our central placement team, and around the agencies, I'm not sure, out of the 22, how many of them have provided their resources. I know that there is a commitment to see that we—the practice of hotels is discontinued.

So I'll have to—I cannot answer the question around the agencies; I can tell you 100 per cent of the authorities.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Then I guess I just—and I will be turning the floor over to the member for River Heights, but just one follow-up, then.

You said that there's 100 per cent compliance from the authorities. You haven't really—you can't give me a number on the number of agencies that have indicated compliance. Do the agencies have the ability on their own to place children in hotels without coming—getting departmental approval for that?

So I guess the question is, I mean, if there's an agency that hasn't come on board and they have decided that there's a family in crisis or a child in crisis that needs some sort of protection and they don't have any resources available, do they have the ability on their own to put that child in a hotel room?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The directive is for authorities and agencies not to use hotels. However, there is the question of a child at risk and how do you make that decision. We don't want a child left in a situation that is not safe for them. With our legislation saying that the safety of children is paramount, our No. 1 responsibility, that's why we're working very diligently to ensure that we have the resources available.

So there is a commitment to develop more resources across this province, as well as the qualified staff to supervise and support—to support the children.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But I don't think that answers my question. My question is: Do they have the ability and do they have the authority to place children in hotels should there not be any other resources available, or do they have to report in to some central location or desk to get permission to place a child in hotels, or can they still do that?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The directive in place right now is that there are to be no children in hotels on—after June 1st. We have seen a lot of progress with the agencies to date, and I'm confident that, working together, building a system that is able to address those issues, that we'll be able to do that.

It is a standard that's been put in place. If a agency chooses not to follow that standard, they can—I guess they can choose to do that. However, it is a directive, an expectation that, at all costs, children are not placed in hotels.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I've got some questions around group homes. In your annual

report, you report as of March 31st, 2014, there were, of all the children in care, there were 810 in residential care. What number of that 810 are in group homes versus other forms of residential care?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right. When you read the footnote, it says that there are—810 of those youth are in a group home or an owned-agency group home or a residential treatment centre. So there are 810 that are in specialized placements.

Mr. Gerrard: So there are group homes, but there's also mention of residential treatment centres. Are there residential treatment centres which are not group homes?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, member for River Heights. So they're going to help get the answer here, so we can ask it—answer it correctly around what is the definition of residential treatment centres. But there are examples that are residential treatment centres that do their treatment within group-home settings. Macdonald Youth Services is an example of that, as well as Knowles Centre is another example. So there are—we have 150 licensed residential-care facilities and we have 190 residential child-care-facility beds and 176 specialized foster-care beds.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, there are—are there group homes for children, right, which would not be—which would include children who are not in care?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So it depends on what you're referring to, what part of the department. There are some children that are in group home settings under Community Living, so they may not be a child in care. Around Family Services, if a child is in a group home, they would be a child in care. We would have to have a—either it's a voluntary placement or it's an apprehended placement.

Mr. Gerrard: What I'm trying to get at here is that we were bringing forward, or I was bringing forward, some information last week which showed that there was a dramatic increase in the number of children being reported missing from group homes. And this number was 50 in January 2008 and up at 250 in a month in July 2014, which is a fivefold increase. And I'm just trying to understand whether all those would be children who are in CFS care or whether a proportion of those would be children who are not in CFS care, by trying to understand exactly what is a group home.

* (16:40)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The information that you tabled in the House was information that was provided to you from Winnipeg Police Service. And, since that's been tabled, I've had conversations with them around can you explain to me this data, the information that I received from them was that it was raw data, that their analyst was unavailable to give us the specifics of it.

But I do know that we take missing children very, very seriously. But how you presented those numbers, and how the numbers were presented to you, I think there is some interpretation that needs to happen. There are a number of youth that, because of their complex needs, are consistent runners and can be reported hundreds of times running, and that person can be counted as one time—or every time they run is one person, in a sense.

So I think that we have to be very careful how we use the statistics, but I want to assure the member that missing children—one missing child is too many and that we are working with all of our partners, utilizing the great resources from StreetReach to bring the children home, to identify who they are, to develop relationships with them. So, if we need to go out and to find them, that they're willingly coming with us. But then we also need, at the other end, to ensure that we have the resources available to them, and that's why the specialized-treatment resources are so important, as well as the HRV unit or the High-Risk Victims Unit that we have established for girls. But we are working very diligently with StreetReach, with other community-based organizations, as well as Winnipeg Police Service, to come up with solutions, so children are not at risk because of the issue of running.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean, the fundamental problem here is that we would rather not have children missing for whatever reason, and so—but understanding—and the goal here surely should be to stop the children from going and being reported missing in the first place. And so, although StreetReach may be doing some good things, that the emphasis surely should be on understanding why these children are being reported missing.

Can the minister—can you tell us, you know, why these children are being reported missing and what's happening with these children, and are they running away or are they just being—wandering away or are they—what's happening?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: So it's—there's not one reason why a child is missing or running away. It's very complex.

These kids are high-risk children. They have experienced trauma in their life. They need the supports that are necessary. I think that it would be not fair for me to label them with any one particular issue at all, that just to understand that there are some very good people that are working in the community to help keep these children safe, and I certainly do not want to blame the youth themselves, or the agencies, or the authorities, because these kids are running. And, yes, that's an issue, and we need to work with everyone, and the youth themselves, to find out what is the solution and what do we need to provide them, and what is the help that they are seeking or needing, and how do we best support them.

There is a policy within our group homes which is a standard of practice which is hands off, you're not allowed to physically restrain a child in our group homes if they're leaving. And so, you know, you'll hear stories about children coming in the front door and leaving the backdoor because they don't want to be there.

But I agree with you that it's sitting down with the family, if they're available, with the youth themselves, and coming up with a plan that we can support and provide them with the necessary resources.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean I think that the concern here is that we're in a situation where the department or the minister doesn't seem to have a very good idea as to why these kids are leaving and it's pretty disturbing when you've got a situation where the kids are running away from the place that's supposed to help them. And, I mean, I'm sure because I've talked with people that, you know, that there are some—and many, many people who work at the group homes who are very passionate, dedicated, do wonderful things, but it seems to me that one of the problems here may be the policies that this government has had with respect to how group homes operate, that—has there been a change in those policies since 1999?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We will look at that question that you ask about the policies in group homes. I know that there haven't been any changes since I've been having this opportunity but I want to make sure that we provide you with the correct answer. So we will look to see if there have been any policy changes.

But I really—these young people have complex needs. Some of it's related to mental health, some of it's related to addiction. Often, it's related to the trauma in their life and abuse, and really what our responsibility is is to connect with those youth,

whether it's in a school program called COACH, whether it's in a drop-in centre called RaY, whether it's a front-line worker that is making contact with StreetReach, whether it's our partner at Winnipeg Police Service making that contact, I can tell—I'd like to put on the record that StreetReach made contact with over 2,000 youth last year and we were able to return over 400 of them back to a safe place. They may run again once we find that safe place, and again we will go after and we will find them and we will try to connect with them.

I cannot stress enough that no one feels comfortable when we have these high-risk youth that are so vulnerable on our street for predators, that we have a responsibility to bring them home, to connect with them. And then for some of the youth, they just keep testing us. But we keep going back and the workers in the group home keep going back. They want to provide that support to them. They need to provide that support.

We have many agencies and community-based organizations; Ndinawe is one in the North End that provides a drop-in program. We have developed a 24-7 drop-in centre now with Ndinawe. That drop-in centre is providing a safe haven for a number of young people. So we're going to continue to do that, and we're going to keep looking for those kids.

I think one of the things that—statistics are statistics; it's actions that count, and the fact that we're on the ground looking for the children, I think the policies that we've developed about reporting missing people, that's one policy that I'm going to look at and see if there's been any significant changes in that policy. I think that that's really important that we are calling on our partners to make sure that if we have a missing child that they're aware of him or her, too, and working with us to bring them home.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean statistics may be statistics, but when you can look at statistics and see that you've gone from 50 children reported missing in a month in 2008 to 250 children reported missing in a month in 2014, that something dramatic has changed and that there is a very significant problem.

And clearly the answer to addressing this problem is not just to go out and bring them back, but the answer has to be in what we have to do as the overall policy toward group homes that will make a significant change in what's happening because clearly it is a big problem.

Now, let me ask a question relates to this. To what extent are children running away at night as opposed to during the day? Is it happening both?

* (16:50)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's happening at all hours of the day, and you're very correct. We have the statistics that we have developed from StreetReach gives us sort of an outline of some actions that we can take, and I think that they're extremely valuable. The research that we have from the Missing Persons Unit is very helpful. It is a matter of making sure that the young people, that the youth know that we're not going to stop looking for them. You may think that going out and getting them and bringing them back and doing it again and again and sometimes, in some cases, 100 times over, is insignificant, but we might be the only people that are looking for them, and that we consistently go out there and support them. And at one moment, we may make a connection with that young person and we may make a difference.

I'm going to tell a story, and this story is about a young man that every morning I went to wake up. And I went and I knocked at his door. His mother grudgingly let me into the house, so I could knock on his bedroom door and say, okay, it's time to go to school. I could never get that kid to go to school. I did that for over a year, but I didn't stop. I went every day to his house and knocked on his door. I bumped into him a couple of years ago and I thought that I'd made no difference for that young person. He thanked me and he ended up going through GED program and graduating and getting an education and now is working in an apprenticeship program.

So there is those stories that are out there. And we need to keep fostering those relationships. For these youth that are in crisis, the No. 1 thing that they need is a relationship, a consistent relationship, a trusting relationship. And for the people that are working on the front line, that are being sworn at, that are being threatened, that are being hit, they keep going back to support that young person.

And it is a very—it's a system that hasn't been raised—that hasn't been developed to raise children. It's families that raise children, and we need to make that relationship with that young person. And so we'll keep looking for them and keep providing them with the supports, keep having the conversations about, we are here to help you, what can we do.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, we were told, in the response to a freedom of—access to information request about a

year and a half ago, that the department was not tracking the school attendance of children who are in care. Is that still the case, or is the department now tracking the school attendance of children in care?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It certainly is an expectation. We know the value of a good education for our young people, and, yes, I remember those questions that you asked about the importance of education and the statistics that you provided to us at that time. We do not have—we're still not collecting that data to date, but what we are doing is working closely with education at ways of engaging the young people into the system.

There's a very good example called COACH, which I spoke about. I don't think you were in the room.

An Honourable Member: I was listening.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Oh, you were—thank you very much. The COACH program, where they provide support for 15 youth over the year, but they also are able to transition those youth back into the school system, so there are examples out there. I think that there are alternative programs that our young people are also engaging in. At Argyle school is an example, for one.

But we value education, but for some of the individuals that we're working with, we need to stabilize them. They need to—we need to give them the resources for their social and emotional development before they're prepared to access the education system in a productive way. But education is very important. We need to ensure that they are accessing that, educational programs for their future.

Mr. Gerrard: Is the minister and her department going to start tracking the education—the school attendance of children in care? *[interjection]* Is the minister and her department going to start tracking the school attendance of children in care?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It certainly is a topic of conversation that we can have with our authorities and with our agencies around that information. As the member knows very well that our system is devolved and that we work with four authorities that include 22 agencies, and so it would have to be a part of a go-forward plan. We're making—we're—as we're developing our new system called Cúram, our technology that we are investing in and doing our project scoping, we are making all attempts to ensure that we can track school attendance with that technology. So there is something that is happening.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean, even if initially not every child in care was tracked, it would certainly be worthwhile and easier, right, to track all the children who are in group homes so that you know whether they are attending, and collecting that tracking.

Is the minister and the department collecting data on the proportion of children who've been in CFS care who graduate from high school?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are not—we do not have that data collected in one place. I think that it happens at the agency level. But, again, this would be one of those facts that we would see happen on Cúram—or the new Cúram, that we would be able to track it as well. I can add that to my conversation with the CEOs.

Mr. Gerrard: I think this is a significant goal, to have children graduate, and surely if that is the case, it would be very worthwhile to be able to track that, and I hope the minister will attend to that.

What are the policies with regard to, for instance, group homes and access to, you know, say, mood altering drugs, whether they're prescription drugs or other drugs?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We'll gather that policy for you so we make sure that we accurately reflect it. I would assume that you're talking about prescription drugs from professionals that the—that would be working with the young person. But I can—I'll gather that information. I just wanted to put on the record that, of course, we are very committed to ensuring that there is a good education for the young people and that we will work with them to provide that bridge if that's what they need to get into the education system. So we take it very seriously.

Mr. Gerrard: What are the qualifications required for people, individuals, working in group homes?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That was a question that I received earlier. I'll be tabling that information hopefully by tomorrow for you.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Thank you, Madam Minister. Just listening earlier to a question for—or the answer to the question by the member from River Heights, you said you have 150 treatment centres within Manitoba?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: To clarify for the member, it's 190 residential child-care-facility beds and 176 specialized foster-care beds. There are a total of 78 prevention and intervention foster care for residential-care-facility beds for specialized

placements for sexually exploited youth under Tracia's Trust.

Mr. Ewasko: Question, then, how many treatment centres—residential treatment, voluntary or apprehensive treatment centres do you have that have four or more beds?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Four beds or more? So we'll have to—we'll gather that information for you because it would not necessarily—there'll be some treatment beds that are here within Family Services, but there also may be some treatment beds that are within Health and Healthy Living. So we'll have to gather that information for you too.

Oh, time's up.

The Acting Chairperson (Matt Wiebe): The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

FINANCE

* (14:50)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Finance.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): I do, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much. I want to just congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your election to your position, and I know you'll do a great job overseeing the proceedings in this department.

I want to welcome everyone to the Finance Estimates. This is actually the very first time that I've ever been involved in this seat in Estimates—for many years, I was an opposition critic and had a chance to raise issues—the first time I'll have a chance to answer issue—questions.

I want to talk a bit about how the—how our province is doing, how the economy is doing here in Manitoba, how we compare to other jurisdictions and the approach that we've taken in Manitoba to deal with uncertain times.

We know the—that the Conference Board of Canada has predicted that Manitoba will lead the nation in 2015 and 2016 in economic growth. We know that the Bank of Montreal, as well, released a report in the last number of weeks which predicted that Manitoba will be one of the strongest economies

in Canada. We know that the economy has produced over 20,000 jobs in the last year, which was a record. And we know that those people who are working are getting paid more, almost \$2,000 more per individual, which they can use to, obviously, support both their families and they can do things to support our economy.

In our budget this year, we—which was tabled and passed just last week, we focused on growing the economy. We realize that even in these uncertain times that there—we have a plan. Our plan is to continue to invest in infrastructure.

We have a \$5.5-billion five-year plan which is producing results: 12,000 jobs this year, 60,000 jobs over the term, over the five years; it'll see an increase in the GDP of \$6 billion; and it'll see improvements in our infrastructure, obviously. I mean, even last year, you couldn't really drive anywhere in the province and not encounter a construction crew, and you'll see the same thing this year.

We're partnering with the municipal governments, the City of Winnipeg and all the different municipal governments outside of the capital area. We've—you'll see an improvement in roads and bridges and flood protection. You'll see an improvement in urban streets. I know, Mr. Chair, your constituency and others will see an improvement as we partner with the City of Winnipeg. This year we provided them with \$50 million—or more, actually, close to \$60 million to help the City of Winnipeg with their infrastructure needs. We've partnering with communities such as Selkirk and St. Clements to do likewise there as well.

And you look at what other provinces have done, we've taken a different approach. In British Columbia, they went to war with their teachers. We did not do that here. In Alberta, before they saw the light, they brought in a health-care premium and they were—brought in increased taxes and they had a \$5-billion deficit. Saskatchewan decided to cut their funding to their major university, University of Saskatchewan, by \$15 million. We increased funding to our universities here in Manitoba.

Ontario, they—again, they're fighting with their health-care sector. Quebec downloaded their deficit to their municipal governments. We did not do that here. New Brunswick decided to lay off or fire 250 teachers. We hired 50 more teachers here in the province. And nova—Newfoundland and Labrador, they had to raise—decided to raise their HST by

2 percentage points from 13 to 15 points, and they're running a billion-dollar deficit, \$1 billion dollars.

As I was saying, I met the Finance minister when I was in Ottawa last fall, and he said he, you know, he woke up one morning and he had a \$300-million deficit and he went to bed and it was \$900 million. It turned out to be a \$1.1-billion deficit in Newfoundland and Labrador. And that's what happens when you rely upon one source of revenue.

We have a different approach here in the province. We have variety. Our sources of revenues are widespread and our economy is resilient. Our economy is not based on one sector. Our economy is strong because it's diversified. Right now you seeing the United States recovering. I think it's a very tangible recovery, and it's helping us. Because of the low Canadian dollar and the strong exports to the United States, you're seeing Manitoba on fine footing in the years ahead, and that's what the Conference Board of Canada reflected when they made their projection that we will be leading the economy.

And we made these decisions as well with the support of the business community. We worked with labour, municipal governments and families; we worked with the educational institutions to see what they had to say. We—I had met with about 20 different groups in my office. We also had a telephone town hall where close to 10,000 Manitobans participated in offering up their advice to me. So—and they told us, too, to continue to grow the economy, to protect front-line services like we're doing, and it really is—it's proven.

I want to just say what a great pleasure it is to work with the staff in my office, obviously highly dedicated staff, who work for Treasury Board, who work for taxation, who work for the corporate services, labour relations. And centralized services, of course, is now a part of our department, the accommodation services, VEMA procurement; and business transportation—excuse me, transformation and technology are also now part of the Department of Finance under the Treasury Board Secretariat.

And I look forward to a good discussion with my critic. I know he's—he takes his responsibilities very seriously and I know that he's an honourable person, and I look forward to discussions that we'll have on the next several days and weeks. Thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (Jim Maloway): We thank the minister for these comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It is my pleasure to be back here in Estimates with the new Finance Minister, and I do want to welcome him into his role. I was looking around the room and I would suggest that the deputy minister himself is quite new in his role, and the minister is quite new in his role, and suddenly I've become the veteran around this table, which hardly seems right because—and the Chair, indeed, is new as well in his role.

So I certainly haven't been a critic of Finance for that long, but I do look forward to our discussions and I do welcome the minister into his new role. I know that he's had probably a very steep learning curve, and I can only imagine, day to day—our offices are across the hall from each other, and a lot of people coming in and out and giving briefings in the last number of months because there's certainly a lot to take in, and the departmental Estimates, again, reminds us how big of an enterprise this actually is and an important one for our province.

Certainly, I do want to also thank the deputy minister and his key team, as well as the department and the many staff who work—who are dedicated to this work, and so we do thank them as Manitobans for their expertise, for their attention to these critical areas of operation and for the stewardship that they give to the finances of our province and to all aspects of that.

* (15:00)

And, indeed, the challenge has gotten bigger because there are new areas of responsibility that have now come inside Manitoba Finance, and so, certainly, I will welcome the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the decision to bring Central Services inside Manitoba Finance and then to ask questions pertaining to how that will—how it will affect the other departments within government.

I would say this. I believe that, you know, the minister has taken the time to offer what he thinks is the context of these discussions, and I would take the same opportunity. I'd say that context for Manitobans is that the fundamental indicators of the Province of Manitoba finances are that it doesn't seem to spell out the same rosy situation that the minister describes. And the minister is aware that the deficit that is posted for this upcoming year is \$422 million, and that is \$65 million more than last year's budget anticipated. And that is a concern, especially coming

from a government that indicated that at this time they would be done with deficits.

So we know that there are challenges, significant challenges, and all kinds of groups are watching with interest and concern to see this government go in the right direction with respect to reducing the size of the deficit, matching revenues to expenditures and returning the Province's books to balance.

On the subject of revenue, I would indicate, again, that the revenues for this Province are healthy. It's not as if this government is revenue starved. The revenues this year are reported as \$334 million above where they were last year, personal income taxes, corporate income taxes and other taxes and fees all working together to create healthy new revenues for this government. But I think that the context, then, becomes this, that the government is choosing to look to increase taxes and fees even in a context of steadily rising revenues, and that, certainly, is a concern, should be a concern to all Manitobans who have to pay more as a result. And we'll have a chance, I know, in the next number of days, to discuss some of the new tax hikes in specific and talk about their impact on Manitobans.

I would also take the opportunity to say, as well, when we say that the government is not going to be in balance this year, we have to consider, again, that the government made promises in the 2011 election to be in balance by this time.

In fact, the former Finance minister had said they were on track and ahead of schedule to balance by 2014. And then, after that, even in 2014, this Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) said, it is the goal of our government to return to a surplus in 2016-17, and that was when he was just new to the role. And yet it is obvious now that this government does not intend to return to surplus in 2016 and '17, kicking that target even farther down the road. And that is a concern to all Manitobans.

As a result of the government's inability to get into balance, they are going and looking for additional sources of revenue, but also we must consider that the government pays to service the debt that they've taken on. And those debt servicing costs are now estimated to be \$842 million this year. The debt of this province has grown remarkably, now exceeding \$33 billion or thereabouts. Actually, I believe that the most recent estimate is projecting the deficit to be at \$36.3 billion, and that indicates a staggering increase in the debt of this province in just

the space of the last 10 years. And so I will welcome our discussions on that subject as well.

I did remark that last week, the minister in question period made some statements about the net debt-to-GDP ratio, and I would remind him that even that is a concern to other groups. As a matter of fact, BMO's provincial comparisons has cited the concern about the increasing debt-to-GDP ratio which now, even in these favourable economic times, stands at 30.9 per cent. We are a high-tax region, paying some of the highest taxes in all of—certainly in western Canada, but some of the highest in all of the country. And it is disappointing that even under this new budget and with these tabled Estimates the average Manitoba family is paying no less in income and sales tax, paying thousands of dollars more than the same family living in Saskatchewan. So I will welcome our conversations around affordability and household after-tax income.

I would end my comments by simply pointing to the fact that there are those who are carefully watching the progress of this government on its—on the financial files. As a matter of fact, Moody's Investors Service, of course, warned last year that, without fiscal discipline, Manitoba's credit rating might deserve a downgrade, and they said, a loss of fiscal discipline leading to a continued and sustained increase in debt and debt service ratios beyond projections could exert downward pressure on the rating. This would be evidenced by a reduced likelihood that Manitoba can reduce—return to balanced budgets by 2016-17 and reduced commitment to stabilize its debt burden in the medium term. Moody's Investors Service made that comment on August 18th of 2014, and I would remark that the conditions Moody's listed as reasons that the Province's credit rating might receive a downgrade have now come to pass. Manitoba will not return to balanced budget by 2016-17 under this government. There is a reduced commitment to

As I've already referenced the fact, the debt is skyrocketing to \$36.3 billion. There is every evidence of a loss of fiscal discipline, and the continued and sustained increase in debt and debt service ratios beyond projections is obviously still of a concern.

So we have to understand that there are dark clouds on the horizon. And while the minister can point to forecasts, after 16 years in office, we are concerned. The opposition party is concerned about the state of the economy; it's concerned

about the increase in debt spending and in the—moving in the wrong direction instead of the right direction when it comes to reducing the deficit. So I welcome the conversations we will have in the next number of hours of Estimates, and I thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Chairperson (Jim Maloway): We thank the critic for the official opposition for these remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of the line item 7.1.(a), contained in resolution 7.1.

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

I would now like to call upon the minister to introduce his staff.

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Chair, it's my pleasure to introduce Jim Hrichishen, he's the Deputy Minister of Finance; Barb Dryden, secretary to the Treasury Board; Lynn Zapshala-Kelln, she's the ADM, Fiscal Management, Capital Planning, Treasury Board Secretariat; Ilana Dadds, assistant deputy minister, Corporate Services Division.

* (15:10)

The Acting Chairperson (Jim Maloway): Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mr. Friesen: I would recommend that we have a global discussion with respect to the Estimates.

The Acting Chairperson (Jim Maloway): Thank you. It's agreed that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Friesen: Well, I like to start at the top and so I would like to begin with a discussion around schedule 2 on page 6 of the Estimates, especially in lieu of the fact that there are some significant changes to the way the department is organized this year. Perhaps we'll start with some general questions and then I'll ask some additional questions relating to the changes in the organizational chart on that schedule 2.

First of all, could I'd like to ask the minister just to indicate a list of all Cabinet committees served by the minister?

Mr. Dewar: Of course, Treasury Board, the Planning and Priorities Committee of Cabinet and the Compensation Committee of Cabinet.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that answer.

Would he also provide a list of all the political staff, including the name and position and the full-time equivalency of those positions in his office?

Mr. Dewar: Monique Rowson is the scheduling co-ordinator; Anoosh Shinnan is the correspondence secretary; Chantel Bage is the special assistant; and Jeannine Kebernik is the project manager.

Mr. Friesen: I'd like to ask the minister: What is the role of a project manager? What duties would be assigned to the project manager?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I was very ably assisted by Ms. Kebernik and the—over this whole budget process. She was co-ordinating the budget. She worked with the Treasury Board secretary. She worked with the Finance Department. She worked with the Planning and Priorities. She worked with Issues Management in the co-ordination of the whole budget process. She worked on the budget consultation process and she does general research and she does—she'll do special projects as assigned.

Mr. Friesen: I might have missed it, but could the minister also indicate—were all the four positions that he indicated full time?

Mr. Dewar: Yes.

Mr. Friesen: And further to that, are there any vacancies at this point in time in the minister's office with respect to his political staff?

Mr. Dewar: I just want to clarify, of course, that both Monique and Anoosh are not political staff. They work for the—I think they work for the civil service. They're there to provide support to the minister, where the—both Ms. Bage and Ms. Kebernik are political staff who assist me, and there are no vacancies.

Mr. Friesen: I'm just looking at an order-in-council from March 2015, and I actually just located this in my files here, and I see the temporary appointment of Ms. Kebernik to the position of project manager. Now, this is current as of March 25th. Could the minister indicate whether this was a salary step or whether she occupied a

different position in his office prior to this order-in-council notice?

Mr. Dewar: Ms. Kebernik was my special assistant and she then became the project manager, and there was an increase in her salary but I'm not certain what it is or what it was.

Mr. Friesen: Further to that same question, I notice that the appointment—or, yes, the appointment to the position of project manager is a temporary appointment. I guess one question is, is that normal, and how long will this appointment go until it ends?

Mr. Dewar: It's still a temporary position, and we'll make a decision in due course as to whether that will become permanent or not.

Mr. Friesen: I would just ask the minister was there another individual who previously held the position of project manager to the Minister of Finance or was this a new position created for Ms. Kebernik?

* (15:20)

Mr. Dewar: The project manager is a new position. There was, when I came into the position, a—Jean-Guy Bourgeois was the special adviser to the minister. He served the previous minister and he served me until he resigned towards the end of December. So then it was decided that we would offer the position—a similar position, not the same, to Ms. Kebernik to help us with the budget process, and she accepted that and has done incredibly well.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister indicate what the difference would be, then, between the terms project manager and special adviser?

Mr. Dewar: Well, the positions aren't comparable. The—we'll see what—how the project manager's position will evolve. It could evolve into the special adviser's position. But there's—they're not the same. Jeannine's job was to work on the budget and Jean-Guy's was to give more strategic advice.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister, then, also indicate whether the position of special adviser has been held as vacant at this point in time, or has that position been removed?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I'll have to take that question as notice to get the specifics to the member. But it's a different position, as I said, and what currently—Ms. Kebernik is currently doing, she's working more on the budget and the postbudget exercise, whereas Mr. Bourgeois was offering more strategic advice.

It may, she may—like I said, her position may evolve into that. But we can get some more specifics for the member and we'll return as soon as we can, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Friesen: I'm going to take the opportunity to ask the minister a question about these proceedings and how we will exchange questions and answers, and I think it's good to come up at the top of these discussions. So the minister says that he will take the question I just asked under notice. I know that last year, during the Estimates, I did ask his predecessor to wherever possible then bring that answer back the next day or at the earliest opportunity, not only for the information of the opposition party, but also for posterity, so that the answer can be heard within the context of the departmental Estimates.

I wonder, would the minister indicate, can he bring that question tomorrow to the Estimates?

Mr. Dewar: My staff informs me that we can. But, of course, it depends upon the complexity of the question the member will realize. This one we believe we can return tomorrow with the answer.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that answer.

I wanted to go back to just one other thing pertaining to the new position of project manager. The minister indicated that that project manager had been instrumental in issues management leading up to the budget, and I know that issues management is one of those terms that we tend to throw around in this business and in this building, and no doubt there's a lot of work there, but would the minister say a little bit more about what were the types of issues? Or could he give examples of some of the issues that that individual would have managed in the period leading up to the delivery of the budget?

Mr. Dewar: I just want to clarify for the member that when I said that she worked with issues management, which is a branch of the—I think—the, probably, the part of the Executive Council, and she worked with them and that was her role.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that clarification. Nevertheless, though, I believe that as the project manager, then, she would have—I believe he made some reference, I'll go check later on in the text—but I think he made some reference to the fact that she was working to resolve issues, and could he say a little bit more about what those things were? I guess what I'm getting at is, would she have facilitated stakeholder meetings? Would she have been present in that meetings? Did she direct which

groups the minister did and did not meet with in advance of the budget? Just—I would appreciate a little bit more information about the type of service that that individual rendered in that role of project manager.

Mr. Dewar: She did assist me and meeting the stakeholder groups. She did attend the—many of the meetings I had with stakeholder groups. She was also, she did attend the budget consultation meetings that I attended in Lorette and Arborg and Flin Flon. She did attend the sessions when we did the very successful telephone town halls.

And the minister—or the member said—it wasn't her job to decide who I was to meet or not meet, because I think I just about met with everyone who came, who offered. We, in fact, sent out notices to individuals to come and meet with us, and we did. We had 20, 25 different individuals and groups who took their time to come and meet with me here, and I certainly appreciate their input. And their input was reflected in the budget. We had a variety of individuals who came forward. And I certainly want to thank them for that. But she did participate in that, and she—but as—that was one of her assignments, to facilitate the consultation process.

* (15:30)

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for the clarification he gave earlier about the staff in his office who are actually members of the civil service. Then just to clarify that, I wanted to ask, were there—are there any other political staff in his office working there at all besides the ones that he mentioned earlier?

Mr. Dewar: Just those two. And, of course, I have an executive assistant who works in the constituency. But she does not work out of the Finance Minister's office; she works out of my Selkirk constituency office.

Mr. Friesen: And are there other—any other types of secondments that would happen whereby maybe there would be an individual working in the minister's office but wouldn't be considered to be there directly employed by his office? Would there be any circumstances in which would there be a secondment, someone working in that respect in his office?

Mr. Dewar: The—no. The answer is no. There is no one else assigned besides Ms. Bage and Ms. Kebernik.

Mr. Friesen: And could the minister also provide a list of all staff in the deputy minister's office, name, position and FTE?

Mr. Dewar: Rachel Lamirande, which is the executive assistant to the deputy minister, and Cheryl Devaney, who is the administrative secretary, works for the deputy minister; she's a maternity leave replacement.

Mr. Friesen: Just a clarification to the minister. Just two staff members, then, who work in the deputy minister's office?

Mr. Dewar: Yes.

Mr. Friesen: Okay. And then I would like to ask as well—oh, and first of all, a clarification. He mentioned two individuals, but I don't think he indicated the FTE. Could he indicate, are they both full-time positions? I may have missed that.

Mr. Dewar: Yes, they are.

Mr. Friesen: Now, I realize that on schedule—let me just take a look. I've been marking up this Estimates book a lot in the last few days. Oh, schedule 5, page 12. Just looking at the staff employed in the department, could the minister, then, give me an update or confirm the number that is printed on that page and indicate how many staff currently employed in the Department of Finance?

Mr. Dewar: We have 1,222.55 FTEs in the Department of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you to the minister for that answer. And, of course, I realize that there's a lot for us to unpack here because, of course, last year the department looked quite different with a total FTE of 480 positions, and so we will have time, I know, in the coming hours and in the coming days to get a better sense of what functions have been moved inside the Department of Finance.

With respect to this question, though, I did want to ask—I know I asked a similar question last year—could the minister indicate how many of the positions he just described are currently vacant?

Mr. Dewar: As of the end of the last fiscal year, March the 31st, 2015, there's 170.85 vacancies, which is a 14.32 per cent vacancy rate in the Department of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: Now, this is where it's going to become hard to compare apples to apples, of course, because with the new Central Services it'll be difficult to compare. Perhaps the most accurate question with

respect to the number that the minister has provided, would be: How does that vacancy rate compare to a year previous?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I regret to inform the member that we don't have last year's vacancy rate here, but it's one of those things we can get to—get for you as soon as we possibly can.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for committing to get that information to us.

While members of the department are looking at that, I would also ask for the minister's agreement that they could search out the number, both the aggregate number compared to last year, but perhaps if they could also determine a number of vacancies if they removed the new Central Services from that and provide the calculation both ways.

I don't know if it's possible with the way the new functions have come into the department, but I'm trying to get just a sense of comparing last year's number to this year's number. So I would ask if the minister would agree to provide also that information to—basically in terms of the appropriations to remove 7.5 and provide the number for 7.1 through 4.

Mr. Dewar: We could do that for the member.

* (15:40)

Mr. Friesen: Perhaps the next question I would ask the minister is in terms of staff who have been hired. Now, here we have to be careful as well because of the new—the creation of the new central service. Could the minister—I guess, first of all, could the minister clarify—I'm paying attention to page 8, the reconciliation statement, and there's a number of allocations from different departments, allocations of funds from everything from Aboriginal and Northern Affairs right on down to Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection.

Could the minister just take a moment to help me understand, in terms of the constituting of the new Central Services? This is now a whole new area; it's a whole new appropriation under Manitoba Finance. Do I understand correctly, then, that the allocation of funds from—with the listings there provided on page 8, do those make up the complete transfer of responsibilities particular to the delivery of those services, Accommodation Services, Procurement Services, and Business Transformation and Technology? Is that what that number refers to or does the number refer to that plus other function?

Mr. Dewar: Well, we're not recovering the cost of occupying space from the departments. We're going to manage the control in the Department of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: I'll invite the minister to give a more full description of the decision to do so and what led to the decision to locate this function within the Department of Finance rather than allow the function to continue to be housed in those various departments.

Mr. Dewar: The—I'm sure the member will remember that it was a commitment we made in the Throne Speech that it was a government decision to centralize and manage these services throughout—through the Department of Finance. And part of the rationale was to reduce costs, and one of those, of course, is the government's footprint which we've been successful to do, if I'm not mistaken.

Again, sorry, Mr. Speaker—or, Mr. Chair. As I was saying, we achieved a total space reduction of over 140,000 square feet in which we exceeded our target by 40 per cent. The purpose, as I said, of the—of this centralizing of all these services is to provide Manitoba with a more efficient government. As I said, we were able to achieve that and we're—continue to look for efficiencies within the system, and we're confident we'll find additional savings as we proceed.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that answer.

I have a number of questions that stem from his response, but still on the macro level, I would ask the minister just to point out—so previous to this activity to bring these functions under Manitoba Finance, could the minister indicate: were these functions, as I see on these pages of the Estimates reported under Central Services as Accommodation Services, Procurement Services and the Business Transformation and Technology—would they have reported separately under each department, or were they, previous to now, actually allocated to another department, perhaps MIT? Would I have seen allocation of funds from these departments to MIT previous to today—previous to today's Estimates.

* (15:50)

Mr. Dewar: Well, prior to this, each department had a budget for accommodations. We've now put all that into Finance with the goal, of course, of providing a strong corporate management system to the operation.

Mr. Friesen: That seems to be a partial answer from the minister, and I accept what he said. So I believe that he's stating, then, that prior to now, Accommodation Services would have existed in each department; they've now been centralized.

Could the minister also comment, then, on Procurement Services and on Business Transformation and Technology? Were those also functions that were housed in individual departments that have now been centralized under Central Services?

Mr. Dewar: The answer is yes. For example, Accommodation Services was previously located in Infrastructure and Transportation; Procurement Services—Infrastructure and Transportation; Business Transformation and Technology was previously located in Jobs and the Economy; Material Distribution Agency—Infrastructure and Transportation; VEMA, which is the Vehicle and Equipment Management Agency, was Infrastructure and Transportation and MERLIN, which is the Manitoba Education, Research and Learning Information Networks, was part of the Jobs and the Economy. They are now part of the Department of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that response, and I thank him for that information he's provided.

Now, when the minister indicated this is part of the—of his government's commitment in the Throne Speech, and he reminded me that he said he mentioned this in the Throne Speech, I would remind the minister I don't think he made any allusion to lean processes in his budget speech, but we'll have to go back and both check the record on this and we can see.

But I would ask the minister, then—he made reference to footprint, so I had previously thought that perhaps this was just a transaction on paper to on paper move this function inside, but does he actually, then—if he could clarify, is he saying that, as a result of moving these services, offices will be recombined, workers will be moved to new physical environments and there will be an, perhaps, an effort of government to reduce the physical size and space that they take up as a result. Indeed, that would, I guess, fall under Accommodation Services and go to the people who are in charge of that particular area.

But is that what he is saying, that not only will this change on paper and within departmental

Estimates, but there will be an effort to relocate staff and perhaps reduce workforce as a result?

Mr. Dewar: I do want to remind the member that I did reference this in my budget speech. I also—maybe it was one of those moments where he was—anyways—and I also referenced in the budget speech the fact that we made a commitment to reduce the size of the civil service by 600 and we also met that—we met that target.

Not only did we meet the target of reducing our footprint by 100,000, we exceeded it by 40 per cent. And some of it is to reconfigure existing, some of it deals with space that we own, some that we lease. It's all physical space. And it is—as the member would probably surmise, it's an ongoing project. It's something that, I think, we're—we should be proud of. We were able to accomplish this. Not only—as I said, not only did we—made a commitment to reduce it by 100,000, we were able to reduce it by 140,000 square feet. And, as I said, it is—it's an ongoing project and we'll continue to update the House and the members as we move towards this goal of reducing the size of the provincial government's footprint.

Mr. Friesen: My question for the minister: If this is indeed part of a co-ordinated effort to realize savings within government, I point him to schedule 3, page 7 of the Estimates, and ask why it is that the Estimates expenditures are indicated as approximately \$4 million higher this year—indeed, as it points out in the Estimates, 2.9 per cent increase from the previous Estimates of expenditure to the current Estimates of expenditure.

Mr. Dewar: Hopefully, I can clarify the member's concerns.

Some of these savings won't be realized until the full year of 2016-2017. The—there was an increase in the cost of the Churchill Town Centre but, over the long term, costs of the lease base will be going down.

* (16:00)

Mr. Friesen: So the minister is saying that, even though the cost is up, the cost will be down? And could he provide a little bit more explanation of how it is that the up will go down?

Mr. Dewar: There was a net increase of, as the member pointed out, of \$1.4 million. Almost \$900,000 of that was due to increases in property taxes, increases in grant of—in lieu of taxes, and general operating cost increases. But [*inaudible*] that

would, I would think, emphasize the necessity to continue on with our process, so we can lower and decrease these costs, the accommodation costs, over time. And that is our goal.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister indicate why under subappropriation 7.5(a), the actual expenditure for salaries has decreased under the line total salaries and employee benefits, for essential services from last fiscal year to this one, on estimate, by about \$2 million?

Mr. Dewar: As the member—as we agreed to at the beginning of the—of this—the Estimates, that we would proceed on a global basis, we don't have the staff here from Accommodation Services who could answer such specific questions. So we could either—I guess the best solution would be to—as we know, we'll be here for several days and weeks ahead, that we can come back at another time when he can let us know when he would like those questions answered and we can make sure that we have the appropriate staff here to provide that level of detail to the member.

Mr. Friesen: Now would the minister be willing to commit to relay that request for information and bring it back to Estimates the next time we convene?

Mr. Dewar: Well, we certainly could answer that question specifically, but if you want to have a broader discussion about Accommodation Services we could bring in the ADM tomorrow and we can have a very detailed discussion about this if that's what the member chooses.

Mr. Friesen: I would be agreeable to both of those things. Thank you to the minister for that answer, and the reason I raise it, of course, is because even though, and this is just for reference, even though there is no reduction in the FTE indicated on that page 87, under Central Services, for subappropriation 7.5(a), even so, there is a reduction of almost \$2 million in total salaries and employee benefits. So there might be—it might be the case that there are vacancies that are being managed within that area. I'm not certain, but that would be the kind of question I'd be looking to have an answer, and I would welcome members of Accommodation Services to bring those answers and provide us with that information.

Further to my questions about Central Services, well, perhaps what I'll do is I'll wait with some of those questions until we have those people at the table to assist us, and perhaps for right now I'll

continue with my questions pertaining to staff in the department, and then, if time allows, perhaps we can get a better sense of the updated organizational chart and the changes that have occurred from the previous Estimates that were tabled a year ago.

I believe that I had not yet asked the minister about the names of staff that were hired in 2014-15. Could the minister provide names of staff who have been hired in the Department of Finance for the year 2014-15?

* (16:10)

Mr. Dewar: I'll—in terms of the Department of Finance, there were—between April the 1st, 2014, and March the 31st, 2015, open competitions, there was 25; closed competitions, there were eight; internal competitions, there were five. So total positions filled through compositions—competitions, 38.

Direct appointments, acting status to regular, three; term to regular, seven; temporary appointments, four; order-in-council acting status, one; order-in-council technical appointments, six; others—and this includes employment equity initiatives, reassignments, reasonable accommodations and difficult to recruit—eight. So, total direct appointments were 29 within the Department of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for providing that information; it's good, detailed information. It's almost as if he knew the question was coming, but I do appreciate that level of detail in that response.

We already talked about the number of vacancies currently held. I did not ask this question about vacancies—and, again, it is one that might be difficult based on the fact that the appropriations have changed within the department. Is the—I may have asked this question, I'll have to beg his patience if I did already—is the vacancy rate currently in the department markedly up or down from previous?

Mr. Dewar: So I have the information for Finance. Last year's vacancy numbers were 79—17.06 per cent. As of March 31st, 2015, equivalent vacancy rate is 17.2 per cent, and that is 81. So it's virtually the same.

Mr. Friesen: Thank—I thank the minister for that answer.

Could he indicate just to—in way of clarification, in what circumstances a competition for a position would be an internal one as opposed to open or closed?

Mr. Dewar: Internal competitions are for positions that are very technical, require a technical skill that's very difficult to find. And I'm informed that we're fortunate enough that we have ample individuals, ample amounts of individuals within the government that qualify, that we have—our competition is internal, and when you look at the numbers, out of the 38 only five are internal and eight are closed. So—but generally, it's because of the specific skill that's required and, as I said, we're—we have within the—or fortunate to have within the government individuals that have those skills, and that's why it's done internally.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister, then, also provide a listing of all the vacant positions with the title of those positions are?

* (16:20)

Mr. Dewar: Well, the—as I stated earlier to the member, there's 170 vacant positions within the Department of Finance. We're hoping to provide the member with a list of the positions. Of course, there aren't any—well, there aren't any names attached because they're vacant. But there are, throughout the department, Corporate Services, Comptroller, Taxation, Treasury Board Secretariat, Priorities and Planning, Central Services, Accommodation Services, Procurement Services. Maybe just one second, Mr. Chair, if I could just ask my staff what would be the best way to proceed with this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. My staff informs me that we can provide him with this list tomorrow.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that, and that would be fine. Also on the subject of positions, the minister indicated when it came to internal positions that internal contests are reserved for those specific instances in which there is a very technical skill set that is required, and I understand that. I guess the question that proceeds from that, then, is does the department also employ contractors for specific activities or initiatives, and what would be—how many contracts would the offices have in this current year?

Mr. Dewar: As far as I know, we have no employment contracts, but we'll double-check to make sure that we have the accurate information for the member.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, and I will bring that question back at a later time as well. I wanted to ask the minister because we're looking at such a significant new workforce housed in a department

going up from an FTE complement of 480 to over 1,200 as a result of this major undertaking, how many positions will be relocated, if I could ask that to start, and the second question I would ask with respect to that is, will there also be relocation as a result of this exercise from rural to urban or from northern to urban?

Mr. Dewar: Well, their functions are—it's—no, I guess the bottom line is that we're not planning on relocating any staff from rural to urban or from urban to rural. The reporting is different, that's what's—they'll find different in their employment, but in terms of their location, it's our plan to leave them where they are.

Mr. Friesen: Now I asked that previous question particularly with respect to essential services. Now I would just ask the minister, within the department, in the last operating year, have there been, aside from essential services and all the implications of that major move, have there been positions moved urban to rural—or rural to urban or northern to urban?

Mr. Dewar: No, not that we're aware of.

Mr. Friesen: The minister alluded before to the lean practices that the government is trying to employ to bring efficiencies to the operation of government, and he indicated at one point, he says that the full effect won't yet be felt until later down the road. And I wondered if he could comment then, I—with respect to the FTE—the FTEs that are stated on page 12 under schedule 5. And does he anticipate, as a result of those lean practices, further workforce reductions or staff reductions as a result of the move to bring essential services in department and then to recombine staff?

Mr. Dewar: The—this initiative is, of course, not about reducing the present workforce; it's about finding efficiencies. As I said earlier, we were able to reduce our footprint by over 140,000 square feet, which was a goal that we outlined—a commitment that we made in the Speech from the Throne. We were able to meet that. In fact, we were able to—the result was 40 per cent higher than what we originally estimated. So, but it's not about reducing the workforce. We made a commitment to reduce the size of our civil service by 600. We've met that target and as of now, there's no plans to make any further reductions.

* (16:30)

Mr. Friesen: I'm just going to invite the minister to bring further clarity to that statement he just made

because I hear him say that from time to time and I just want to ask for a clarification. He says that it is not an initiative of the government to reduce the workforce, and yet they clearly set out in the budget a target of 600 positions which he says he's met. Can he speak further to that, to just bring clarity? It would seem that it is indeed an intent of the government to reduce the workforce by 600, a target which he says he met. Was it ancillary or was it an actual initiative that he undertook?

Mr. Dewar: The government in 2012 made a commitment to reduce the size of the civil service by 600. And we've now met that target. But the mandate of the new Central Services Division is to focus on optimizing the execution of day-to-day operations to deliver the best value for money in these areas.

Mr. Friesen: I'm on page 17 of Budget 2015 and it makes reference on that page to the work of the Lean Council, and included in that section of the budget is the government's commitment to reduce the size of the civil service, as he said, by 600. And an additional sentence is added there where it says: "Measures will continue to carefully review the staffing of positions while protecting the services that Manitobans need." So it would appear from the wording that the work is ongoing.

I would ask the minister: Is that also the work of Central Services on an ongoing basis, to look for those efficiencies when it comes to a review of the staffing of positions?

Mr. Dewar: Well, every department looks carefully at its operations when it's staffing and finding initiatives. This one is no different than any other department within the government.

Mr. Friesen: I'm sure we can come back to that. I'll have further questions as well with respect to the Lean Council and the lean initiative of government, and we'll have time to pursue those things. I'm keeping one eye on the clock because I know the minister would agree with me that time just flies when we're in these proceedings.

But I did want to get, in the time remaining to us this afternoon, to the organizational chart of Manitoba Finance on page 6, which is provided as schedule 2. And keeping one eye on that page and then keeping one eye, of course, on the same chart provided in the previous year's Estimates, just for comparison, we had provided—or we had spoken briefly about the extensive changes that have taken place within Manitoba Finance to locate Central

Services. And I have some questions pertaining to that.

But, first of all, could the minister just comment briefly in general about the changes between the organizational charts from one year to the other?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I'll draw the member's attention to the chart, I think he probably has it in front of him. But the whole—of course, the whole Central Services Division is new and the Public Utilities Board is new and the disability secretariat is removed from Finance. It's now a part of the Family Services Department.

Mr. Friesen: In the minister's explanation he didn't make allusion to the Lieutenant Governor's office. Could he make a comment on that as well?

Mr. Dewar: I believe the—yes, the member is correct. It is part of the Accommodation Services and it falls within the Department of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: What was the rationale to bring the LG office inside Manitoba Finance?

Mr. Dewar: It was part of the old accommodations. When Accommodation Services was part of the Infrastructure and Transportation, it was part of the department, and so when it moved, it moved to Finance as well.

Mr. Friesen: And just a clarification then: the LG aspect moved from Infrastructure and Transportation, could the minister just confirm that?

Mr. Dewar: When the office of the Lieutenant Governor was part of the Infrastructure and Transportation division and when that became part of the Department of Finance, the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the three staff that are employed there and, I believe, the building and the grounds are also the responsibility of this department.

* (16:40)

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister provide a similar explanation for the Public Utilities Board and the reason to locate it here in Finance as well? Where would it previously have been identified?

Mr. Dewar: Prior to the new arrangement, the Public Utilities Board reported to the Minister of Tourism and Heritage and Culture and Sport, and it

was a decision made by the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to have it now report to the Ministry of Finance. So the member could ask the Premier in his Estimates why he made that decision. But I believe the—I believe there was—eight staff are now responsible and report to the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: Could the minister indicate who is now the secretary for Priorities and Planning Committee of Cabinet?

Mr. Dewar: Well, I'm pleased to report back that Thomas Garrett is acting in that role.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that response. I'll ask further questions about that later, but while we're at it, I want to then also ask the minister if he could indicate who the new executive co-ordinator would be for the Premier's Economic Advisory Council. That information was provided last year, but I see it's not provided in this year's organizational chart.

Mr. Dewar: I'm also pleased to report that Pat Britton is still the chair of the Premier's Economic Advisory Council.

Mr. Friesen: I see that we have in the room with us today other ADMs and directors, and I wondered if the minister would take just an opportunity to kind of run through the org chart and introduce us to some of the other people who might be joining us in the room today.

* (16:50)

Mr. Dewar: We have Richard Groen, ADM Taxation, economic intergovernment fiscal research. Richard, maybe you can put your hand up—there he is. We have from the Treasury, acting ADM Garry Steski—there he is. Taxation ADM, Barry Draward—yes, don't forget Barry. The comptroller is Betty-Anne Pratt—there she is. ADM Analysis and Strategic Management, Chris Roed.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that response, and I welcome all the other ADMs and directors this afternoon.

I wondered if the minister would also comment in the time allotted to us if—I noticed, according to the organizational chart, francophone affairs has moved a little bit, and I was wondering if they could comment. It seems to be located just in a different space on the organizational chart.

We're just looking for a clarification of whether that was a move up or down, or just it—that's the way it appears on the organizational chart?

Mr. Dewar: No, there is no change in terms of how they report.

Mr. Friesen: I also noticed according to the organizational chart there used to be more detail provided under the deputy minister's Finance area. Now, part of that is probably due to the fact that those things won't all fit in the page anymore with the new Central Services, so I'm sure those decisions are probably more pragmatic than strategic.

But would I be correct in assuming then that there is no organizational change to the activities that exist under those various areas of the six sub areas of Finance? In other words, under Corporate Services, what I saw last year—being Corporate Policy, Finance and Administration, information communication technology—that would all be the same as indicated last year? I'm looking for just a clarification from the minister.

Mr. Dewar: No, there is no change, as the member is quite correct in terms of the desire to save space. The only difference is the Disability Issues Office, as I previously said, is now part of the Family Services, and the Public Utilities Board is added, and that reports directly to the minister.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the minister for that clarification.

And yes, I also see as well that the disability office, which I believe was added under his predecessor, has now returned to Family Services.

Now, I noticed that with essential services coming into the department, it appears on paper to create a lot of work for the Treasury Board Secretariat secretary, as if that individual was not busy before. Am I correct that these essential services reports to the secretary of Treasury?

Mr. Dewar: You are correct.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you to the minister for clarifying that.

We only have a few minutes left, so I will put on the record that I'll invite a conversation with the minister just after these proceedings this afternoon. I recognize that we have a lot of staff members here, a lot of assistant deputy ministers, and perhaps what we'll try to do is collaborate to try to see if we can arrange somewhat the questioning and the structure

of these Estimates in such a way that people can still go about their work. And we thank them for their attendance here today, and we'll try to make good use of their time when they are at these proceedings.

But also, then, another clarification I'm looking for before today's proceedings end, and that has to do with the way Estimates are printed. And I'm looking for the minister's help on this one. I asked this question last year. I know at the back of the Estimates there is an explanation that is required as to how the Estimates are restated and adjustments made to the Estimates. And I noticed that when I compare the 2014-15 Estimates to the 2015-16 Estimates, the most recent Estimates copy always includes a column for the Estimates expenditure from the previous year. The numbers, of course, aren't always consistent with the numbers from last year's Estimates. And I wondered if the minister could just then, again, report why it is that we see that variance in those numbers. I believe the explanation is somewhere towards the back of the Estimates guide, and I'd ask him to just provide a clarification. I believe it's from page 152, but there's probably additional information he can provide.

The Acting Chairperson (Jim Maloway): The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:00)

Madam Chairperson (Jennifer Howard): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

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

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I do. Yes, in terms of my opening statement, Madam Chairperson, the Estimates of Exec Council are similar to last year. Staffing levels there are roughly comparable to last year. Three years ago we decreased the budget for Exec Council; we remain at that level since. In '15-16 spending will be about \$2.6 million, the same amount budgeted for last year.

Funding for the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation is from Enabling Appropriations but is administered by Executive Council. The amount has increased twice in the past several years from 500 to 750 thousand dollars in 2006 and then to \$1 million in 2009. We are

maintaining the core grant at that level in Budget 2015.

From time to time we have also provided funding to Manitoba Council for International Cooperation to distribute to member agencies dealing with disasters or charitable works overseas. Most recently, the Manitoba government committed to \$200,000 in humanitarian assistance in Nepal following a devastating earthquake there.

Over the years we have provided assistance to the following countries and regions: \$400,000 in 2009-10 to Haiti, \$200,000 in the Philippines, \$100,000 in Chile—\$100,000, \$400,000 in 2010-11 to northwest Pakistan, \$200,000 in Japan—\$200,000, \$300,000 in 2011 and '12 composed of \$200,000 for Somalia and \$100,000 for the Philippines, and \$150,000 in '12-13 to the Philippines and India, \$100,000 to the Philippines and \$50,000 to India, and \$300,000 in '13-14 for the Philippines and \$250,000 in '14-15 for West Africa.

I also wanted to put on the record some important information about our economic plan. The focus of Budget 2015 is to build on our plan of steady growth and good jobs. It is a plan that is working. The Conference Board of Canada forecasts Manitoba to lead the country in economic growth in 2015 and '16 combined. Our province is creating jobs faster than any other province in Canada. According to the StatsCan's labour market report just last week, total employment growth of more than 18,000 over the same time last year. That is No. 1 in Canada. We are also No. 1 in private sector job growth at 15,500 jobs over the last 12 months.

We continue to invest in core infrastructure in this budget. It's a five-year, five-and-a-half-billion-dollar plan to create jobs for young people to stay and raise their families in the province. It continues to grow our economy, and it protects the services Manitoba families count on like health care and education.

Industry has told us this is not the time to put the brakes on the economy. Our balanced approach means that we're finding ways to save government money and to save Manitoba families money. One of the best ways to support families is to ensure Manitoba has strong public utilities that keep our cost of living one of the lowest in Canada. In fact, when it comes to home heating, electricity, and auto insurance rates, Manitobans paid over \$2,000 less than the Canadian average. That is a Manitoba advantage, and we will continue to make life more

affordable by eliminating property taxes for another 6,700 more seniors.

While working to save Manitobans money, we are also taking meaningful steps to make government more efficient. In our Throne Speech we committed to reducing government office space by 100,000 square feet. We are now on track to exceed that target by 40 per cent.

We committed to reducing the size of the civil service by 600 and met that commitment, and our debt servicing costs are down from more than 13 cents on the dollar in '99 to 5.6 cents on the dollar today.

Our net-debt-to-GDP ratio is down from 32.9 per cent in 1999 to 30.9 per cent in Budget 2015. We have a fiscal and economic plan that is working.

Now is not the time to make reckless cuts that would destroy our economic growth. It is—our economy is forecasted to grow faster than any other province over the next two years according to the Conference Board of Canada. We must continue to protect what matters most to Manitoba families. Budget 2015 sends a clear message to Manitoba families: we are on their side.

And that concludes my opening comments.

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

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition have any opening comments?

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'd just like to welcome the Chair—oh, may I?—

Madam Chairperson: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Pallister: —welcome the Chair to her new responsibilities and also say that, of course, since we last spoke in Estimates, the—I know that the Premier and his family have endured a historic series of events which, no doubt, have placed some additional stress onto an already demanding life, and I respect the fact that the Premier has risen to whatever those challenges may have presented in his life and in his family's life, and I wish him well with those challenges on an ongoing basis.

I—really, Madam Chair, I just wanted to put those things on the record and also to say a word of welcome to, as well, the new MLA for The Pas who, I know, will continue the fine family tradition of

service to the people of that area that was established by her father before her.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the honourable Official Opposition Leader for those comments.

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 2.1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 2.1.

At this time, we invite the First Minister's staff and staff from the official opposition to join us in the Chamber. Once they are seated, we will ask that the staff in attendance be introduced.

If I may ask the honourable First Minister if you would like to introduce your staff.

Mr. Selinger: So I have Clerk of the Executive Council Milton Sussman and Chief Executive Financial Officer Giselle Martel.

Madam Chairperson: And the Leader of the Official Opposition, if you would like to introduce your staff.

Mr. Pallister: I have with me Mr. Rob Pankhurst, who is a policy analyst with our staff.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Selinger: Yes, just before I thought we'd start whether it's global or chronological, I just wondered if the Leader of the Opposition might want to indicate what his plan is for these Estimates in terms of time and number of days.

Mr. Pallister: I don't want to give such an indication. It depends on the results of the discussions as they proceed, so, impossible to predict.

Madam Chairperson: So is it agreed that we'll proceed in a global manner? Is that agreeable?

Mr. Selinger: It's not agreed at this stage. I thought we could have a—just a reasonable discussion about the best way to proceed. I'm prepared to go global and answer a wide range of questions, but I wanted to get some indication. Last year, we had times when the member wasn't available, and I was—took the time to address questions from other people, and we had a—sort of a broad understanding of how long

would it take and where we wanted to go with it, and that's always subject to amendment, of course. But I thought we could have a little more discussion on that before we decided on whether it's chronological or global.

* (15:10)

Madam Chairperson: I'm informed by the Clerk that the way we usually proceed is we need folks to come to some kind of agreement or consensus on how we want to proceed, whether it be chronological or in a global manner. So I don't know if anybody else has any thoughts on this that they want to share or if there's a way to come to that agreement.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson, and welcome to your position.

I think it's been pretty common practice at these Estimates process to go with a global-type discussion, and, you know, I would hope that the members opposite would agree to that. I think more often than not we have done it that way, and of course we go to the line by line later on, once we're getting closer to the end of the process, but I would hope that members opposite would agree to a global discussion surrounding the many issues that there are facing Manitobans today.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I have frequently agreed to a global discussion and we've usually done that in the context of sort of the overall amount of time we're thinking about spending on this. And I should say that there's a very strong possibility I may need to attend a funeral later on this week, so I was trying to get some gauge of what the demands would be so I could make the appropriate arrangements.

Mr. Pallister: I want to assure my colleague that there is no—would be no concern on our part should he have a reason to attend a funeral. I respect his judgment in these things. If he is unable to be available because of family or personal issues, that's—I'm perfectly willing to be as accommodating as can be for—to allow him to attend those events if need be.

But, as far as the total time of the discussion, I wouldn't even want to speculate as to that. I think it would depend on the nature of the discussions that unfold on a number of very, you know, complex, detailed issues, and so I think we should just proceed with our discussion and—with the understanding, of course, that if he needs to attend a funeral or some other event of importance to him that I would certainly, through our House leaders, communicate

our full support for him should he need to be at another event.

That would not be limited. I don't mean to imply that would be limited just to personal—a funeral or a family event but also for official events that he may need to attend as well. I would put that on the record so that it's clear, the understanding is clear.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I appreciate that. It would be a non-family-member event, but somebody that has played a very significant role in the public life of our community. So I appreciate that.

What I would, then, agree to is that we start on global, and we'll take it day by day as to whether we want to revert to a line-by-line chronological review of the Estimates.

Madam Chairperson: Is that agreed, that we begin the discussion today in a global manner and that if we want to revisit that in the future, then we'll be able to do that?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think we can agree to that, Madam Chair. And, you know, I think we just agree to go global until someone wants to question otherwise, I guess.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'm agreeing to go day by day to get the ball rolling, and I appreciate the offer to be flexible if there's an important funeral that comes up later on this week, which I understand there will be. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: So, if I might suggest, then, we commence in a global fashion and if there's a time when that is—there's a desire to revisit that, then we can entertain that discussion at that time.

All right. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier alluded in his opening comments to finding ways to save Manitobans money, and I don't think that it is a good example to support that with respect to the severance payments that were made, and I want to start with that.

I wonder if the Premier could just outline for us— from media reports, I—and, of course, these, you know, can be, you know, can be seriously questionable at times, often containing errors not only of the fact, but of judgment on occasion, but that being said, how many staff have, to this date, received severance payments? Could the Premier outline that for us and, if possible, could he include

the names of the staff that had received severance payments and the amounts?

Mr. Selinger: It's—the number of employees was seven and the aggregate amount of severance was \$670,000.

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry, the amount again was?

Mr. Selinger: Six hundred and seventy thousand dollars.

Mr. Pallister: Have there been staff added to replace each of these and could the Premier outline for us the names of the staff who've replaced each of these?

Mr. Selinger: The people acting in some of these roles some—there's been some modifications as well. There's a new chief of staff, Jeremy Read. There is a new acting director of Cabinet Communications, Naline Rampersad; and an acting director of Issues Management, Peter Dalla-Vicenza; and Susan Budnik Pilon is handling scheduling in the office, and those are some of the positions that have been filled by people in acting roles.

*(15:20)

Mr. Pallister: Maybe just to help me understand more fully, the—this, and I—I'll review—unless the Premier can table a list that he has there. If that's possible, that'd be helpful. Just if there was a list of the folks, otherwise I can just wait for the transcript, I guess, Hansard, on this. But maybe I—maybe we could, just in the interest of time, just quickly run through the seven and, if possible, just tell me. I don't—I'm not asking for a detailed job description or anything, I just want to know basically what each of the seven did, if I could get that information. I believe we could start with Mr. Martin, I think, was chief of staff. Sure.

Mr. Selinger: Chief of staff, I think, is the role the member's familiar with and the head of Cabinet communications, I think the member's familiar with that role. Issues management—daily issues that come up that need to—work done on them to provide information for Executive Council. And scheduling speaks for itself. Those are some of the positions I've mentioned.

Mr. Pallister: I thank the Premier for that.

Now what did Meaghan Dewar do?

Mr. Selinger: In issues management.

Mr. Pallister: Issues management. And was it—is it Sully Houser? Is that the correct pronunciation?

Mr. Selinger: Sally was working in Cabinet communications. That position has not been filled.

Mr. Pallister: And then Matt Williamson?

Mr. Selinger: That position was Cabinet communications, and I indicated Naline Rampersad was acting in that capacity. *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, Madam Chair.

That—so just to be sure I'm clear, Sally Houser's position is vacant, but Matt Williamson's position has been taken over on an acting basis by Nadine Rampersad?

Mr. Selinger: Correct—Naline.

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry. Naline.

Jen Anthony. What was her role?

Mr. Selinger: She was laterally working in issues management.

Mr. Pallister: And is then—has Ms. Anthony been replaced by somebody at this point?

Mr. Selinger: I don't believe that specific job has been filled at his stage.

Mr. Pallister: Alissa Brandt? What was her area of responsibility?

Mr. Selinger: Scheduling. And I indicated that Susan Budnik Pilon was filling that role.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, if you could just repeat that name one more time.

Mr. Selinger: Susan Budnik Pilon.

Mr. Pallister: Anna Rothney?

Mr. Selinger: The person in an acting position there is Tom Garrett.

Mr. Pallister: Madam Chair, Anna Rothney's job was what?

Mr. Selinger: Co-ordinating the policy secretariat of Cabinet.

Mr. Pallister: What does that work entail exactly?

Mr. Selinger: Policy secretariat is a body that helps a Cabinet committee on planning and priorities identify key issues that need to be addressed on an Executive Council basis and provides policy analysis and recommendations with respect to those issues, some of which cut across many departments.

Mr. Pallister: Now, there was some—there was, I recall, some media commentary about secondments. What staff members have been seconded who are presently in the Premier's office, and where have they been seconded from?

Mr. Selinger: Last year, I indicated that the clerk of the Executive Council was a seconded position, and also the executive assistant to the clerk of the Executive Council's a seconded position, and the chief of staff is a seconded position from the University of Winnipeg. The first two are seconded from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and the deputy principal secretary Paul McKie is seconded from Unifor.

Mr. Pallister: Is—so is it Heather Grant-Jury—is that the name of the person who is the chief of staff now, or am I confusing two positions? The Premier can help me with that. *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: —Executive Council.

Madam Chairperson: Maybe I'll ask you to repeat that. I recognized you late in your answer.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, that individual's not working for Executive Council.

Mr. Pallister: So when was Heather Grant-Jury hired and when did she depart?

Mr. Selinger: November of 2014 to the end of March 2015.

Mr. Pallister: And where was Ms. Grant-Jury—she was seconded from somewhere, was she? And from where?

Mr. Selinger: That was a secondment from the United Food and Commercial Workers, UFCW.

Mr. Pallister: And did she receive any severance when she left?

Mr. Selinger: No.

Mr. Pallister: And was that part of the agreement when she was seconded in the first place and, just to save time, was that also part of the agreement with each of the other staff that the Premier had mentioned who were seconded—that they don't receive severance when they leave?

* (15:30)

Mr. Selinger: The clerk of the Executive Council is eligible for a severance payment, as well as the executive assistant. And the secondment from Unifor

is not eligible for a severance payment. Neither is the secondment for the chief of staff from the University of Winnipeg.

Mr. Pallister: And is that because of an agreement, an employment contract of some kind that's negotiated at the outset of the employment period? Is that the reason for the difference between them?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the arrangements were made as the people were seconded.

Mr. Pallister: So the—it was negotiated at the time of the employment arrangement being made under a contract of some kind that severance would not be in play for Mr. Read or Mr. McKie. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Correct. But in the case of the executive assistant to the clerk of the Executive Council, it simply is the severance that was part of her role as a member of the WRHA.

Mr. Pallister: Sorry, just for clarity on that, so the severance is coming from the WRHA? Is that the—

Madam Chairperson: Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, the—in the case of the executive assistant to the clerk, it's—was part of her standard employment agreement with the WRHA.

Mr. Pallister: So the—I'm not clear. The severance is paid by the WRHA at some future point when departing the employ of the WRHA, or there is additional severance to be paid when the person departs the employ of the Premier's staff or office? I'm just not clear. If I could just get clarification on that.

Mr. Selinger: There was no specific secondment severance attached to coming to work as the assistant to the clerk of the Executive Council.

Mr. Pallister: When the Premier refers to severance—the employee being eligible for severance, he's referring to the terms of the previous employment contract with the WRHA and not to an additional employment contract signed with the—his staff? Just to be clear.

Mr. Selinger: That's my understanding, yes.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, so just for further clarification, then, when the Premier says that the chief of staff who is seconded from the University of Winnipeg, I believe, and Mr. McKie from Unifor are not eligible for severance, is that because there's an employment contract with those two gentlemen that spells that out?

Madam Chairperson: The honourable First Minister—sorry, I recognized you too soon. I ask that your mic be turned off 'til you indicate that you're ready to answer.

Mr. Selinger: Secondment agreements for the individuals that the Leader of the Opposition mentioned are strictly secondment agreements with no specific new additional severance attached to them.

Mr. Pallister: Because there's no specific severance attached to them, does that rule out the possibility that additional severance could be offered to them at some future point?

Mr. Selinger: There's no provision for that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, then the severance paid to these other employees must have been specifically referenced in an employment contract of some kind. Could the Premier table us a contract which blacks out the relevant personal data that he might like to exclude so that we could have a look at a copy of the employment contract to see what it outlines for severance?

Mr. Selinger: Those have been treated as confidential agreements.

Mr. Pallister: Why?

Mr. Selinger: That's the understanding with the employees—or former employees.

Mr. Pallister: The understanding of the former employees when they left or when they came in?

Mr. Selinger: That was the understanding the former employees had when they left.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'm not asking about the agreement that they signed when they left. I'm asking about the agreement they signed when they came in when there was no understanding of confidentiality in that respect. So I'm simply asking for the Premier to table a copy of the contract, the employment contract they signed when they started employment when there was no understanding of confidentiality based on what he just said.

Mr. Selinger: I'm advised that we're operating on the understanding that was between the former employees and the government at the time that they departed, and that's the understanding.

Mr. Pallister: I'm puzzled as to how an understanding on retroactive confidentiality benefits the people of Manitoba. We have rules that require

disclosure of salaries of 50 grand or more, and I don't understand how it benefits anyone to not understand what the rules were at the time that they came into employment. I want to be clear: At the time they came into employment, what the rules were around their severance, what they negotiated in their contracts at that time is pretty pertinent, I think, so I'm, again, I'm wanting to understand under what basis, besides some desire not to see the contracts themselves or, at least, the terms of the contracts with relevant personal data excluded, on what basis those would be excluded from the public record.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I'm simply providing information based on the legal advice we've received with respect to these matters.

* (15:40)

Mr. Pallister: Well, not being able to question the lawyer in respect to the quality of legal advice, I can't really go much further on that front, but I am puzzled as to how it can be that we have to do a freedom of information request to get information on the severance pay for Mr. Martin, that we wait a considerable length of time; we receive a response; the response gives us the information, and then on all subsequent we receive no information. How could it be that Mr. Martin—is Mr. Martin somehow in a separate category from the other six that he didn't mind having his information in the—FIPPA'd and provided and the other six did? It surprises me. I'm curious as to why it's—the rules are different for one than for the others.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'm simply providing information based on the legal advice we've received.

Mr. Pallister: So, let's be clear, then. The legal advice that the Premier's been given is that no details of contracts signed by his staff can be made available to the public. Is that the legal advice that the Premier of Manitoba's been given by his legal counsel?

Mr. Selinger: I can confirm I'm providing him the information based on legal advice that we've received.

Mr. Pallister: Table the legal advice, then. It must be in writing. I would assume it wouldn't be a verbal thing. Lawyers tend to like their stuff in writing. Would the Premier table the legal counsel that he was given whereby he was advised that he should not release copies of contracts signed with employees of his office to public view? Could he table that?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'm advised that legal advice is not normally tabled. It's provided in a confidential manner to Executive Council.

Mr. Pallister: Name of the lawyer? Is that confidential too?

Mr. Selinger: We'll confirm whether that information is available.

Mr. Pallister: When? *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: —question?

Madam Chairperson: Would the Leader of the Official Opposition like to put that question again?

Mr. Pallister: I asked the Premier when that answer would be provided. *[interjection]*

Mr. Andrew Swan, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The Acting Chairperson (Andrew Swan): Mr. Premier, can you repeat that?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, thank you. We'll get the time frame when we receive that legal advice for the member.

Mr. Pallister: So, just to be clear, what we've established is that the Premier received—sought and received legal advice that he's going to undertake to provide us with the name of this thus-far anonymous legal adviser. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Yes. I indicated we would verify whether that is something we need to disclose and should disclose, and I will provide it to the member as soon as I've verified that.

Mr. Pallister: Can the Premier verify that he did not seek legal advice prior to signing the employment contracts with the departed individuals?

Mr. Selinger: Yes. Employment contracts are, as a matter of course, entered into with the advice of our HR people and they seek legal advice as required.

Mr. Pallister: So, just to be clear, then, legal counsel is only brought in at the end to give advice to the Premier on whether to release the information or not, but at the start of the process, legal counsel is not brought in, so that you sign an agreement at the outset based on HR advice and then you make available later the information based on legal counsel advice. Is that how that works?

Mr. Selinger: As I said earlier, information is provided—advice is provided by HR, they seek legal advice as they feel necessary. And that can be at any point in the process.

Mr. Pallister: I just want the Premier to clarify, then. So employees were hired; they signed a contract. He has stated earlier that there was no expectation of confidentiality in the signing of the contract initially but that somehow, based on legal advice at the tail end when the severance agreements were signed, part of that, according to legal advice he received, part of those conditions, I suppose, of that agreement were that it be kept secret. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: Actually, I didn't say that. I said that we get advice from our HR people. They get legal advice as they believe is necessary as they proceed through these matters. And all the other information I've put on the record, and Hansard, will record what I've actually said.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'm assuming the Premier knows the contents of the employment agreements that were signed by the people, and maybe I'm wrong in that. But, if he does know the contents of the employment agreements that were signed, he must have had some basis for making the statement earlier that there was no expectation of privacy at the point of signing the agreements initially. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: We should check Hansard on that, but I don't believe I said what the member is claiming I said at this stage. I said we received advice from our HR people, and they seek legal advice as they deem necessary.

Mr. Pallister: Were there clauses outlining the severance expectations of the employees when they signed the initial agreements or were there not?

* (15:50)

Mr. Selinger: My understanding is that employment agreements are confidential matters between the employee and the employer.

Mr. Pallister: So it's a secret; whether there was an agreement initially made on severance or not is a secret between the Premier and his staff. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: As I said, employment agreements are confidential matters except for the statutory requirements to report the amounts, which we've indicated will be reported.

Mr. Pallister: Just in the interest of transparency, which, of course, the—requires some time frames to be actual transparency. When does the Premier plan on making transparent the amount of severance paid to each individual and when does he plan on making transparent the terms of the contracts that were signed by the employees at the outset and at their departure?

Mr. Selinger: The amounts are reported in the Public Accounts, which come out usually on September 30th of each calendar year.

Mr. Pallister: So we'll have to wait for a few months to determine, apart from—I think there was one or two of these that were publically reported already for some reason—we would have to wait, then, a few months before we would know what the answer to my question is, is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: As I indicated, they'll be reported in the Public Accounts, September 30th, 2015, or if it's after April 1st, September 30th, 2016.

Mr. Pallister: Is that a—that's a requirement, is it, that the payment has to be reported by those dates the Premier outlined—if it is made, it has to be reported in the Public Accounts at a September date? Is that a requirement that the Premier has to comply with of some kind?

Mr. Selinger: My understanding is under our legislation we report salaries over \$50,000; that's been in place for—since the mid-'90s, I think, '96 approximately, and that's—those legislative requirements have to be complied with. Now that—the specific date of September 30th, that's usually when they're tabled.

Mr. Pallister: So we can look forward to the Premier being legislatively required to be transparent at that future point in time, but today he just doesn't want to answer a simple question about the agreements or the nature of the severance that's paid because he got legal advice that told him to keep it secret until September?

Mr. Selinger: Again, the statutory requirement is for tabling of public sector compensation over \$50,000 by September 30th of the calendar year that it's recorded in and paid out in. And we will obviously comply with the legislation; that's what it's there for and that's part of the process and the legal advice I've already commented on.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that's part of that process, but this is another process. And this is a process where I

ask the Premier questions and he either avoids answering them or answers them. So let's be clear he's avoiding answering this question, and I don't think that's a reflection of any real commitment to transparency whatsoever.

Now, the agreements that the employees signed when they departed that the Premier referred to receiving legal advice on, how was the amount determined then? If we don't know—if we can't see the agreement and we don't know the amounts themselves, maybe the Premier could outline for us how the amounts that were paid to these employees to leave were determined.

Mr. Selinger: The—we received legal and HR advice on the final settlements and that provides guidance as to what the final settlements are.

Mr. Pallister: Well, given that that settlements are outrageously large, given any precedents I'm familiar with, could the Premier outline on what basis they were so determined?

Mr. Selinger: Again, they're on the basis of what our legal and HR people recommended to us as being their best opinion on what was necessary.

Mr. Pallister: You just used the phrase there, what was necessary. So, on their best estimate of what was necessary, I believe he said. Necessary to do what exactly? Or did they want to stay?

Mr. Selinger: All settlements were arrived at through mutual agreement and that was how it was proceeded with.

Mr. Pallister: That pretty much describes every agreement. It wouldn't be agreed to if it wasn't agreed by mutual agreement, so I don't know if we're getting anywhere here.

I'm going to try again. How was the amount determined specifically, based on the legal advice the Premier has said he received? I need to know what kinds of criteria the legal counsel suggested should be considered in determining the amounts. In other words, why did they vary? They must be a reason they vary from one another. What did his legal adviser, the nameless and faceless and anonymous counsel that I can't get—make accountable today, how—what did his legal adviser say was necessary to consider, in order to determine this negotiated settlement?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we get HR—human resource and legal advice and that's given to us and we apply that and that's applied to the specific individuals in

question, and that's the basis upon which mutually agreement—mutual settlement agreements are arrived at.

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, that's good talking points, but that's not getting us any closer to understanding how these amounts were determined, so let's try again.

Would the length of time that the person was in the employ of the Premier's office be one of the criteria, for example?

* (16:00)

Mr. Selinger: These—there's confidentiality that's been advised with respect to these agreements, so I can't give him specific criteria relevant to specific individuals. But, on a broad basis, usually severance agreements have to take some account of matters like that, but I can't give him specific information with respect to specific individuals.

Mr. Pallister: Let's be clear: I didn't ask any specific information on specific individuals. I asked the Premier a broad question. What criteria are considered when determining the amount of severance? He's said that time is one that may be, but there are others. I'm sure he'd like to outline for purposes of clarity and transparency, at very least, what some of those other criteria might be that must be considered when negotiating a severance payment.

Mr. Selinger: And, Mr. Speaker, I answered that question, and I gave him a broad response to that. And without getting into specifics, there are a variety of variables that—length of service is one that's—would not surprise anybody if it was part of the discussion.

Mr. Pallister: About the previous earnings levels of the employee, would that be another?

Mr. Selinger: And again, Mr. Speaker, you know, these—each of these agreements had a—we've been advised of a confidentiality requirement, but I think the member can identify possible criteria that might've been considered, and that may be one of them.

Mr. Pallister: Well, let's be clear on this confidentiality issue. We're talking about numbers that are going to come out in the Public Accounts in a few weeks' time anyway, so what other aspects of the confidentiality agreement would we be broaching here by talking about general criteria for determining a severance contract? Does the confidentiality and contractual agreements that the government signed

preclude the Premier answering basic questions about what determines a proper severance payment?

Mr. Selinger: As I said to the member, the specifics are confidential, but in broad terms, some of the criteria he's identified would not be unreasonable considerations when you look at people's employment contracts.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we all understand that there's an agreement that was reached, and the Premier's talking points assure us that we'll hear a lot about that mutual agreement, but we also understand that if you put enough money on the table, anybody will leave your employment.

So I want to ask the Premier: Did these people want to leave, and when did he know that they wanted to leave?

Mr. Selinger: And again, the member's asking for disclosure of confidential information, and I'm advised not to disclose that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we all understand that these are staff who chose not to support the Premier in his attempt to remain Premier. We all understand that; I think that's a matter of public record. We also understand that the Premier assured these people that they would not be fired, that they were safe in their jobs.

Would the Premier like to comment on the degree to which that assurance would influence the amount of severance requirement to be paid? Would his assurance some weeks earlier that this—these staff would not be fired, which was made very public and, I believe, in writing as well, would that result in a higher severance payment or a lower severance payment to the departing staffers who were given that guarantee of employment?

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Selinger: Yes, and again, the member's asking for disclosure of confidential information, and that's—I'm advised not to disclose that.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the Premier's alluded to getting legal advice. He has said that he got legal advice to determine what amount of severance—or to help him in the preparation for the negotiation with the staffers before they arrived at their severance arrangements. He got legal advice to help him determine which is now that legal advice, of course, is now at this point, something that we can't learn any more about because it's confidential. We can't learn the name of the lawyer. We can't learn—we can't see a copy of the

contract even with the relevant personal data removed from it. All of this smacks pretty heavily of cover-up.

But I have to ask the Premier: Since he's so big on consulting with legal experts at the tail end of these deals, before he made his promise to the staff that they wouldn't—they would have their jobs back, did he consult with legal counsel before making that promise?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, the—Deputy Chair, you know, the member's reading a lot of his own views into the statement, and I don't think that he should take those as necessarily accurate reflections of what in fact transpired.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I think I'm stating a matter of fact, and if the Premier wants to dispute the facts, I welcome him doing that.

I believe it was publicly reported and well understood, certainly by these staffers, that he assured them they could have their jobs back. Did he or did he not assure them that they would have their jobs back?

Mr. Selinger: Deputy Speaker, the member's making a lot of assertions. People were provided with certain guidelines as to their participation and those guidelines were used to provide people an opportunity to participate.

Mr. Pallister: I'm just not clear on that last response. Did the Premier assure staffers that they could go and work for another candidate if they wanted, or participate in the leadership process, or did he not give them that assurance? Which is it?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, guidelines were provided for people's participation and they were broadly respected.

Mr. Pallister: So is the Premier answering the question? I'm not sure, Madam Chair. I'm going to try again.

Was it not the understanding of these staffers that they would be able to have their jobs back after they participated in the NDP leadership contest? As a result of the Premier's office's own statement, was it not his intention to give assurance to these staffers that they could participate in the process without fear of losing their jobs?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, there were guidelines provided for people. Those guidelines were respected and that is apart and

separate from confidential employment severance payments which were mutually agreed to by everybody.

Mr. Pallister: But we're not on the confidential—supposedly temporarily confidential 'til the public accounts severance payments right now, Madam Chair.

I'm simply asking the Premier, did he or did he not give assurance to these staffers that they could participate in the leadership process of the NDP without fear of losing their jobs? Did he or did he not give that assurance to those staffers?

Mr. Selinger: As I said earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, the guidelines were provided to people as to the participation that they could engage in with respect to the leadership contest, and they were respected.

Mr. Pallister: Would the Premier table the guidelines, then?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, we'll take that under advisement.

Mr. Pallister: So there were guidelines and they were respected by all, the Premier's said. I just want to be clear on that.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I've given him my answer on that more than once.

Mr. Pallister: I don't think he has. In fact, he referenced guidelines and said they were respected by all. I'm asking him to put on the record that the guidelines that he issued were respected by all.

Mr. Selinger: And I've put that on the record.

Mr. Pallister: I'm asking him again. I don't believe he has put it on the record. We can review Hansard tomorrow if we want, but I'm asking him again. If he put it on record, what's the fear of putting it on record again?

He said that everyone concerned respected the guidelines. I'm asking for the guidelines. He's offered—he's undertaken to give them to me. I'll wait with bated breath.

On the issue of the agreements, I'm not talking about the severance payments now. I'm talking about the Premier putting on record a guarantee to his staff that they would not be fired if they chose to participate in the leadership process for the New Democratic Party. Many of them elected to do that. I believe they did that with a full confidence that they would not lose their jobs as a result of doing it.

Now I'm asking the Premier, who's just, I believe, has said they were respected by all, but I want him to restate that. Respected by all, is that what he said?

*(16:10)

Mr. Selinger: We can check the Hansard tomorrow. The member's asked me that question more than once and I've answered it for him more than once.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that's nice. Okay. Did the Premier respect the guidelines?

Mr. Selinger: And, again, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, I've answered that question. [*interjection*]

Madam Chairperson: Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: —copy from the chief of staff dated December 9th, and I read from that document, and it says: Let me assure you that, as is the case currently, all staff will continue to have the right to involve themselves in any type of political activities outside of regular working hours leading up to the convention.

Is that—was that the Premier's understanding that any—exactly as is written here by his chief of staff, was that his undertaking?

Mr. Selinger: I would ask the member to table that document, so I can verify it.

Mr. Pallister: Happy to do so. Yes, sure.

And I—if I may?

Madam Chairperson: Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like it noted that I'm the only one that's tabling any documents here today. Document's gone now, so I can't read from it verbatim anymore, but I'll do that when it gets back. But, again, the intention as I understood it, and I believe as the staff would have understood it, was that they had the chance to participate in the leadership process outside of normal working hours and, if they did that, they wouldn't suffer any repercussions because of it.

And so I go back to this, that if the Premier made those assurances in—his chief of staff—through his chief of staff, did he first receive counsel from a legal adviser in order to do that, to give that assurance?

Mr. Selinger: And, again, I'm going to wait to see the document and verify it, and then I'll attempt to answer the member's question.

Madam Chairperson: Okay, for the information of honourable members, they're just making copies of the document. So we can wait, or if you have other questions, you can ask those.

Okay, we'll—okay, the honourable member for Lakeside.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): First of all, congratulations on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. We certainly want to express our congratulations to you. I know you'll do a fine job.

I want to, first off, say thank you to all the Hydro workers that worked overtime over the weekend ensuring that Manitobans had power. And we know that they do a great job of looking after their customers, and, of course, the real owners of Manitoba Hydro, the public of Manitoba.

My first question for the First Minister is, what is the now-estimated cost of Bipole III?

Mr. Selinger: I'll undertake to get the latest figure on that for the member opposite from Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Eichler: Thank the First Minister for that.

We know that, ballpark, originally in 2011, was \$2.2 billion in regards to that cost. And the last one that I believe that we had—and that's why I'm asking for it—is \$4.6 billion for those.

Now, we know that those numbers changed based upon agreements, you know, and tendering processes, so we'd like to try and get the most accurate cost possible for that.

Also, the—what is the new estimated cost for building Keeyask?

Mr. Selinger: I just want to confirm, is the member asking me the latest numbers for building Keeyask?

Mr. Eichler: That is correct.

Mr. Selinger: I'll get the most current information on that, but I believe there was a number put on the record recently and I'll confirm that that's still the number for the member.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you.

In regards to the completion of Bipole III, we know that we've seen a large labour force move in clearing bush, preparing pad sites, those types of things. What is the planned completion date for Bipole III?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'll have to get that number for the member opposite, that date. I do have a number in mind, but I'd like to confirm it. I don't have that information in writing in front of me. That's—usually those issues are canvassed at the standing committee where Hydro reports. But, if the member wants me to provide it through Estimates, I will get it for him. I'm remembering a number of 2019, but I'd have to—I'd like to confirm that date before I put it on the record.

Mr. Eichler: I appreciate your co-operation on that. As we all know, committee don't get called all that often in regards to Manitoba Hydro. So the general public, I'm sure, have asked me from time and time again what the current numbers are, and I think they would be appreciative of the answer so that the general public will have their opinions based on the numbers that comes forward from government on that.

In regards to the Minnesota-Wisconsin line, do we have an estimated cost on that project at this time? I know that number has changed substantially as well, if he would undertake to get that information for us as well.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I will undertake to get the updated—up-to-date information on that. As I said earlier, I don't have Hydro documents in front of me right now or information, but will undertake to get that information.

Mr. Eichler: When the 2011 election was under way and the First Minister went out and talked about the cost of the Minnesota-Wisconsin line, they had said that the cost of that line would be part of the price that would be negotiated and taken into those that were going to be buying that power, and we now understand that that is not the case. What went wrong and how did that come about as a result of the 2011 election where it would be included by—in the cost of the project and be borne by the buyers of that power, and now Manitobans are on the hook for that power.

Mr. Selinger: I think the member might—the export revenues generate reduced cost for Manitoba consumers of power. So, when a new transmission line is put in place and it facilitates export of hydroelectricity into the American market, the profits that come out of that reduce the cost to Manitobans of the power. And so the former CEO of Manitoba Hydro indicated that that's why, in effect—and I can get him the quote on that that the former CEO put on the record. He was indicating that those export revenues will pay down the cost of additional

transmission and, in part, to the cost of new generating facilities, and that will allow it to be paid for through export revenues even if it's put into the rates that are put in place by the Public Utilities Board. The point is is that it's the export revenues that keep our rates among the lowest in North America.

Mr. Eichler: We know that Manitoba Hydro has expansion of no doubt, we get that and we understand that. What our concern is is also the rate that's being charged for those US customers as opposed to the cost that it cost to actually generate that electricity. Would the First Minister be able to tell the public of Manitoba the cost of which it is to generate that electricity based upon also those costs and then the cost of what we're actually getting for that power? So what is the difference between the cost of generating the hydro as opposed to the cost of selling that hydro that we're receiving back from those sales?

* (16:20)

Mr. Selinger: Again, since 2010, I believe there have been nine—roughly \$9 billion of export contracts that have been signed by Manitoba Hydro, and I believe they're projecting \$29 billion of export revenues over 30 years, if I recall correctly. And so Hydro is of the—believes that the export contracts will be profitable and will generate benefits for the utility, which will be passed on to the consumers in Manitoba of that hydro and allow them to keep among the lowest costs in North America.

Mr. Eichler: When calculating the cost of generating that hydro, as well, is the cost for transmission included in those costs, or is that a separate line that would be used by Manitoba Hydro in that calculation? And if so, how would that be determined by Manitoba Hydro for the average Manitoban to understand?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I would have to get that specific information for the member. I think what they do is they indicate—and as I indicated earlier, they indicate that the export revenues reduce the costs for all of the facilities that they have available in Manitoba, whether it's generating or transmission, and allow the rates to be among the lowest in North America.

Mr. Eichler: Well, the—Manitoba Hydro has made it very clear that hydro rates will double. I mean, that's not our words; that's their words. And we know very clearly that Manitoba has appreciated the cost of

hydro being very competitive across this great nation. We also know that a number of issues are coming about in regards to science, and we know that solar power is also another one of those major issues that's coming forward.

What protections have been put into place for selling of hydro-generated electricity through dams and that? As a backup plan, what is the government's plan to ensure that Manitoba Hydro rates will stay low once solar powered or natural gas—we know North Dakota has a abundance of gas as well? I know, in consultation with them, they are going to be building gas-fired plants, and so what's our backup plan in order to protect Manitobans that they're not on the hook for these extra costs?

We know very clearly that California has just talked about a flat fee for hydro customers that are using solar power. We know that that's something that may come our way, so I want to know what the government's plans are to protect Manitobans for those types of changes coming forward.

Mr. Selinger: The procedures that we have followed before there's been a proceeding with new generation or transmission facility—generation facilities is what they call a need for alternatives review, and that was done by the Public Utilities Board. And, when they talk about a need for alternatives, they look at hydro compared to other sources of energy and make recommendations on what they think is the best way to proceed to provide hydro in the most effective and cost-effective way to Manitobans. And in their need for alternatives report they did canvass other sources of energy including new technologies and recommended that Keeyask proceed at this time.

Mr. Eichler: On the Minnesota-Wisconsin line, could we get some clarity on ownership in regards to that. At one point, we were under the impression that Manitobans would own that line. Now our understanding is that that's not so. Would the First Minister care to describe to us the scenario of how that looks now in regards to ownership of that line?

Mr. Selinger: I'll get him—I will get the member an update on that. I believe there are—ownership relationship that has been entered into—a joint-ownership relationship, but the specifics of that I will undertake to get for the member.

Mr. Eichler: I appreciate that. I know that—and the cost, of course, maintaining that line will have to be borne by Manitobans as well. And also the line, once it's in the United States, who would be then

responsible for maintaining that line, erecting that line, and what type of benefits are going to be derived for Manitobans as a result of the sale of the power in Wisconsin and Minnesota?

Mr. Selinger: I mean, we're talking global here. We don't have notes on this specific item here. We'll have to undertake to get him that kind of information from Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Eichler: In regards to the PUB, the First Minister made reference, what are the names of the members of the PUB?

Mr. Selinger: I'm sure if the member goes to the Public Utilities Board website, the member—the names of the members of the Public Utilities Board will be there for him.

Mr. Eichler: I believe these are appointed by the Executive Council. If I'm correct on that, it's interesting that he wouldn't know them, but we can certainly do that as well.

Based upon the qualifications of the PUB members, how is that determined, and is there a written policy in regards to the qualifications for those members that sit on that board?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, again, if the member wishes to discuss the individuals who on the PUB and what their qualifications are, we can do that once we get the names.

But, broadly, people are picked for an ability to make a contribution to public policy with respect to rate setting, and in the case of need-for-alternatives review, to bring some ability to provide some insight as to what the need-for-alternatives should look at and provide reasoned advice on that.

So, you know, it's—there's a broad array of people on the Public Utilities Board, and many of them have public policy experience, some of them have specific academic credentials which are worthy, contributions to those kinds of debates. So it's a broad cross-section of people to reflect the different talents and expertise that we have within Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: The turnover of the PU members on that board, how often have—do they change, and what's the experience of this government in regards to those turnovers, say, in the last five years?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, again, I would have to get that information for the member.

But the Public Utilities Board is under the responsibility of the Minister of Finance

(Mr. Dewar). He's currently in Estimates and might be able to answer those questions more directly in terms of his information that he has available than I do.

But, if he wishes me to find out for him, I can endeavour to do that.

Mr. Eichler: I would appreciate the cost of those and, of course, the information back to us that we can share in this House.

The expenses to date on Bipole III, would we be able to get the expenses to date on Bipole III that's been spent by Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Selinger: We can make those inquiries.

Mr. Eichler: I would also like to see the cost to—the expenses to date on the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line as well, if that would be suitable for the First Minister.

Mr. Selinger: Again, we can seek to get that information for the member.

Mr. Eichler: I know that the Minnesota government, the Wisconsin government's been working on approval for the line to go through those two states, and what is the feedback that Manitoba Hydro has been receiving in regards to those, and what's the anticipated timeline for those decisions to be made?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, could the member repeat the question?

I just received a list of the Public Utilities Board members and I believe a couple of the—a couple—there's been a couple of changes, so I'm going to try and update it for him.

But, in the meantime, could he repeat that question?

* (16:30)

Mr. Eichler: Yes, the question was in regards to the expenses on the Minnesota—not the expenses, the status of where the Minnesota-Wisconsin states are at in regards to getting an approval for those and what is the timeline anticipated for those to be approved?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we'd have to seek information on that. I would encourage the member to have that discussion with the responsible minister if he wants to move on that more directly, but if he wants to continue those questions here, we'll have to seek out the information for him.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, I prefer that we continue on the line here of questioning rather than through the other minister.

In the recommendations in regards to decide-demand side management from the PUB, what steps have been taken by the government to deliver on those recommendations from the PUB?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, those recommendations have been carefully reviewed and are being considered by the government. I do note that the utility has a very vigorous demand management program and have put out new indicators of what they would like to achieve with that and are offering a wide suite of programs to Manitoba consumers and customers on demand management, but the government is carefully considering those recommendations and seeking advice on how to proceed with them.

Mr. Eichler: Part of the follow-through on that same question in regards to the staffing, and I know the First Minister's got letters from a number of those employees that's working on the decide-side management, of course, and they're fearful of their jobs and how that might look. What guarantees do the government have to protect those employees that are currently working on the side management and how would that look for them going forward with a new plan?

Mr. Dave Gaudreau, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Selinger: Yes, again, any plan that would follow up on recommendations made by the Public Utilities Board would certainly take into account the employees and ensure that they are—their needs are considered in terms of wages and benefits, and all of that would have to be carefully considered as part of any changes that might be forthcoming.

Mr. Eichler: In regards to the Bipole III, we know there's a lot of farmland, and I know the First Minister being Minister of Hydro, at one point, understands the impact that those lines have on farming operations, in particular Bipole I and II, I know he's very familiar with. And as we know better ideas come out, there's a better mousetrap built every day and now we know that there has been a pole that's been designed to carry transmission lines down the side of a highway. And has the government undertaken a study on those to understand whether or not they'd have to still go ahead and expropriate that land on the farmers and run that transmission line

down the roadside allowance rather than cross a farmer's land?

Mr. Selinger: Again, we'd have to get a response from Hydro on their recommendations as to where the best siting of the transmission lines is. I understand they did extensive public consultations on that, and I understand that they received feedback on that and have tried to accommodate as many of the concerns as possible while maintaining the ability to add additional transmission capacity, first and foremost, for the reliability of our energy supply in Manitoba, which is of great benefit to all Manitobans in terms of energy security and energy reliability and, on the other hand, to ensure that there's additional capacity for future export contracts. But, first and foremost, the additional bipole was recommended for reliability of the energy supply within Manitoba given past experience where the two existing bipoles were so close together that they could be lost at the same time, which would put the Manitoba economy at risk. And, you know, with a \$66-billion economy, to have those bipoles shut down even for a week could approach \$1 billion of forgone economic activity in Manitoba.

So the additional bipole was first and foremost recommended for reliability purposes and sited in such a way that it had the least amount of impact possible on people whose property it goes across. And so I know that there's been many, many hearings on that to try and find a practical way to address that on the ground, and modifications have been made as a result of those public hearings in terms of siting the location of the transmission line.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, just for the record, again, Mr. Chair, I know when the First Minister was the minister for Manitoba Hydro, I asked a question in the House—of course, the member didn't realize it at the time, but farmers that were impacted by Bipole I and II had the opportunity to farm that land around those towers, but at their own liability.

The First Minister was good enough to help those farmers at that time and say there was no need for a tender process for them to have to rent the land from Manitoba Hydro. That has since now changed.

I want the First Minister to know that they have—Manitoba Hydro has now went forward with a contract for those farmers in order to farm and maintain that land underneath the towers. It's very expensive. I think it's a bad decision; those that decide not to will have to maintain the weeds—or Manitoba Hydro will, which is going to very

expensive for ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro. When we look at the cost and the farmland that's been taken out of production in regards to Bipole III, will be significant as well.

I may be so bold to suggest that the First Minister talk to Manitoba Hydro, because I know he was very much onside in regards to Bipole I and II in regards to those farmers not having to have a contract. Now they not only have to maintain that property, but they have to pay for it as well through a tendered process with Manitoba Hydro.

So I just want to put that on record. I don't know if the First Minister wants to respond or not.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, my understanding is that compensation for easements for hydro transmission lines are 150 per cent of market value for property, plus additional payments for structure impact, construction damage and ancillary damage, and that producers will still have full use of the land; that arrangements can be made for them to continue to use the land for their purposes. So the easement requirements are subject to negotiation, and when negotiation fails, as a last resort, Hydro has proceeded with expropriation.

But, again, the—and in terms of public engagement, it looks—my information is that since 2008 there have been over 400 meetings with landowners, municipalities, First Nations communities, stakeholder groups, and that the route selected has the least impact on agricultural land among the three alternatives that were presented at public meetings in 2009. And based on recommendations from the Clean Environment Commission, 74 route adjustments were made to accommodate some of the concerns that were raised by people that were consulted.

And the president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro has said that Bipole III is a critical reliability project. It is necessary to ensure the supply of electricity to southern Manitoba in the event of a catastrophic failure of either or both existing bipole lines or the Dorsey Converter Station. Such failure has happened before and could cripple the Manitoba economy and put public safety at risk, especially if it were to occur during the winter months.

* (16:40)

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Just a question to the Premier, then, as he's reading off that statement about easements, and given that he was minister responsible for Hydro for many years, under that

easement agreement, who is responsible for liability should there be damage to a tower on a land where there is an easement in place?

Mr. Selinger: I just want to clarify, should there be what to a tower?

Mr. Pedersen: Sorry, Mr. Chair, I will get it right yet.

If there's damage to a tower—that goes across—there's a tower that—on farmer's land. The farmer has signed an easement with Manitoba Hydro. Who is responsible for damage—for any damage occurring to a transmission tower on that property in which an easement exists?

Mr. Selinger: I would ask a question of clarification. Who committed the damage in his question?

Mr. Pedersen: Does it matter?

Mr. Selinger: I would have to verify whether it matters or not, but I'm wondering if he's identifying who he thinks, where the damage occurred and by whom?

Mr. Pedersen: Our understanding under this easement, and I am very familiar with your easement that you are quoting there, but under the easement agreement there is no allowance for any damage happening to a tower on—because the landowner actually owns the land. Under an easement, the landowner owns the land that that tower is sitting on. He maintains title. He/she maintains title to that property. Therefore, under our assessment of this easement—and this is from the landowner group looking at this. We've asked Manitoba Hydro this. We have not got clarification from Manitoba Hydro on this. And I'm just taking from your years of experience with Manitoba Hydro, who is responsible for the liability of that tower? Because it is not—while the tower may belong to Manitoba Hydro, the property in which it sits on is located on private property.

So the question remains there, who is responsible for liability on that tower? And, to date, the word we've had is that it is the landowner that will have to carry additional liability insurance whether it is he who—he/she—the farm happens to strike a tower or whether a vehicle driving off the road runs into a tower—a quad, a snowmobile, or anything. I'd like the First Minister to clarify who is actually responsible for liability on these towers on an easement.

Mr. Selinger: I have to get information for the member on that. But, if the member's asking me to, once again, ask what Hydro's views on this matter are, I will endeavour to get that for him.

Mr. Pedersen: In the history of Manitoba Hydro, how often have they had to expropriate land in order to either do a transmission line or build any Manitoba Hydro equipment?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to find out the historical information on that. We have two bipoles in Manitoba that go—currently go very close to each other, and this additional bipole has been recommended for many years as a form of additional reliability for Manitoba customers and citizens in terms of having a secure reliable source of hydroelectricity to the benefit of all Manitobans and the economy of Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: The former CEO of Manitoba Hydro, Bob Brennan, stated in committee, just before he retired, that Manitoba Hydro, in its entire history, had only expropriated one piece of property. Would the Premier care to comment on whether the former CEO was correct or not?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'm assuming that the former CEO would have put the most accurate information he had on the record.

Mr. Pedersen: When did the Premier and/or his Cabinet order Manitoba Hydro to proceed with expropriation on land that was involved in this Bipole III transmission line?

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to get the accurate information as to when the recommendation was proceeded with by Executive Council.

Mr. Pedersen: So why would the Premier/Cabinet order Manitoba Hydro to use expropriation to obtain the property?

Mr. Selinger: As I said earlier, we would have received recommendations on how to proceed to ensure that we provide additional reliability for electricity supply to the customers and citizens of Manitoba, and, based on that advice, Cabinet or Executive Council would have deliberated on that and taken that advice into account in their deliberations.

Mr. Pedersen: So is this correspondence, and I'm assuming this is correspondence, and correct me if I'm not accurate here—is this correspondence from Manitoba Hydro to Executive Council

recommending that expropriation take place? Is that the process that happens?

Mr. Selinger: Broadly, recommendations usually come through the minister responsible based on advice that that minister has received from the Crown corporation.

Mr. Pedersen: So is that recommendation public information?

Mr. Selinger: Usually, Cabinet submissions are confidential for a specified period of time in law.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm not talking about a Cabinet submission. I'm talking about a piece of correspondence that comes from Manitoba Hydro, whether it came from the CEO or whether it came from the board of directors or both of Manitoba Hydro to what you're telling me is the minister of Hydro, responsible for Hydro. Is that recommendation public information?

Mr. Selinger: Any information in front of Cabinet would have been by way of a Cabinet submission, which is confidential information, and advice to a Cabinet minister is often confidential information. If the member wants to ask whether there is information on the public record, I would have to see that. I'd have to check that for him. But, normally, a Cabinet submission is a matter of confidential information for a specified period of time under the laws of Manitoba. And I think that time frame has actually been reduced from what it used to be, but it's still, you know, like, I think it's in the order of 15 years, but I'd have to check that. But, usually, Cabinet documents are confidential for a specified period of time.

Mr. Pedersen: I understand about Cabinet confidentiality. My question was, is correspondence from Manitoba Hydro confidential from the public?

Mr. Selinger: I'm unaware of any specific correspondence that the member's identifying. I'm simply saying—he asked me a question, when did Executive Council or Cabinet make a decision, and I indicated they would have made a decision, and I'd have to verify when that was made based on advice they'd received through the minister from the Crown corporation.

Mr. Pedersen: So whatever the process was, then, this secret Cabinet—secret communication from Manitoba Hydro to the Executive Council to proceed with expropriation, so why did the Premier—or Executive Council, I should say, pass an

order-in-council to bypass notice of intent to landowners, because under The Expropriation Act, a notice of intent goes to the landowners and then expropriation proceeds. But, under this, the Cabinet, the Executive Council passed an order to bypass that notice of intent. Why was that done?

* (16:50)

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check the facts on that on how it proceeded. But as I indicated earlier, I understood that from my information that 400 meetings had been held with landowners, municipalities, First Nations communities and other stakeholder groups. And that was broad public engagement to find the most efficacious route for additional transmission for increasing the reliability of the supply of energy to Manitobans.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm assuming the Premier, as part of Executive Council, there must have been some discussion. And I realize we're not ever going to be privy to that discussion, but what would be the purpose of waiving a notice of intent? Under expropriation law, you are to give notice that you're going to expropriate, but the Premier and Executive Council passed a notice of intent to bypass that. Why would they do that?

Mr. Selinger: As I said to the member from Midland, I'd have to check the facts on that and verify with him that. But I can tell him that my information is that Hydro held extensive public consultations starting in 2008, over 400 meetings. And based on those consultations, and based on negotiations they had for voluntary easements, would have then made recommendations subsequent to that for those that did not wish to enter into voluntary easements.

Mr. Pedersen: I would like the Premier to go back in his records, either as Premier or as on Cabinet, and I'm quite willing to have him bring the answer back another day, but I want to know, when was the last time Executive Council passed an order-in-council to bypass notice of intent for expropriation on any other matter, whether it's MIT, Conservation. Pick your department. I want to know if there ever was a time that the Executive Council used the—to waive the notice of intent? Will he commit to doing that?

Mr. Selinger: If the member's asking, has there been a notice of intent waived in other expropriation proceedings, I can endeavour to find that out for him.

Mr. Pedersen: And that's what I was asking.

So, in your 400 meetings, was expropriation mentioned in those 400 meetings?

Mr. Selinger: Again, I'd have to verify the content of those meetings. I'm assuming the meetings were those related to siting and location of the transmission line, and offering people in the communities affected, a chance to respond to that.

Mr. Pedersen: Why is the Executive Council—Premier/Executive Council, ordering Manitoba Hydro not to meet with the landowners group under—that's assembled under CAEPLA, the Canadian Association of Energy and Pipeline Landowner Associations? They have steadfastly refused, ordered Manitoba Hydro not to meet with this group of landowners. Landowners have a number of legitimate concerns about placement of this line, about liability, about insurance, about a lot of things, about—but yet Manitoba Hydro has refused in writing to meet with this group on behalf of the landowners.

Mr. Selinger: Again, there's a lot of assumptions built into that question. If Manitoba Hydro has refused to meet with this group, presumably that's based on the method that they proceeded with in terms of negotiating with individual landowners, compensation agreements and any other accommodations that they believe are appropriate, given the circumstances of that individual landowner.

Mr. Pedersen: So the Premier/Executive Council, decided to intentionally bypass the notice of intent, and the Premier's telling me, he doesn't know why? He doesn't—is it you don't remember or, like, tell me what's going on here. You've signed an order to bypass a notice of intent, and you're telling me you know nothing about this now?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, I think what the member's saying doesn't bear any relationship to the answer I provided him. He asked me whether there was an order to Manitoba Hydro not to meet with a specific organization, and I indicated in my response Hydro would have made its own decision on whether or not to meet with that organization, likely based on the fact that they had been engaged in individual discussions with individual landowners about specific compensation arrangements relative to their land for issues such as easements, market value of the property, additional payments for structure impact, construction damage and any ancillary damage, and had proceeded on that basis specific to each landowner. That's what I indicated.

Mr. Pedersen: Oh, Mr. Chairman, through you to the Premier, he signed a notice of intent to—bypass a notice of intent to landowners. Are you, do you not remember doing this or is this something that you're choosing not to remember, or is—like tell me what is going on here that you've, your government signed this, you are responsible for this. When do you start taking responsibility for your actions here? Because landowners are very honest people, and they, to find out from only when they went to land titles and saw that the title had been changed in the dark of night without even prior notice of intent to do this—that's not how landowners operate; that's not how they do business. And yet you're telling me you don't remember doing this? And I believe it's somewhere around 140 landowners that you did this to, and you don't even remember this?

Mr. Selinger: The member is reading a lot of assumptions into his question. My understanding is Hydro offered compensation for an easement amounting to 150 per cent of market value for property, plus additional payments for structure impact, construction damage and ancillary damage. And, if there was, and after they had proceeded on that basis with as many landowners as they could enter into voluntary easements with, they made, gave advice to the minister on further proceedings in order to complete the transmission line throughout Manitoba to provide increase reliability for Manitoba consumers, including the people through which the easement agreements were being proposed.

And so the recommendation would have come through the minister to Cabinet based on advice

received from Manitoba Hydro, based on their consultations and their discussions with specific landowners.

And, in any expropriation proceeding, there is an ability to have an appeal on that, and if there is any belief on the part of the landowner that there is some unfairness in that, if they think that they're not being offered sufficient compensation, that they have the right to appeal that. And I believe they have the right to appeal it to the Land Value Appraisal Commission.

Mr. Pedersen: So now the Premier is remembering that the minister brought the discussion up to Cabinet table because he's saying the, Manitoba Hydro contacted the minister who then brought it to the Cabinet table, but yet the minister—or the Premier seems to have no recollection of this.

Like, I fail to see, you don't understand what is going on here? Do you not take responsibility for what your government is doing here? You deliberately passed a—bypassed a notice of intent on Manitoba Hydro—when Manitoba Hydro was not able to get landowners to sign an easement, you expropriated. There's an action in here. Why did you take that action?

The Acting Chairperson (Dave Gaudreau): The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 19, 2015

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